Crossover Skateboarder



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GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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I'll include links to all their respective bios and webpages at the end of this book; in case you're interested in learning more about them. And to all my collaborators, you have my sincerest thanks for helping me realize this project!

This is a strategy guide.

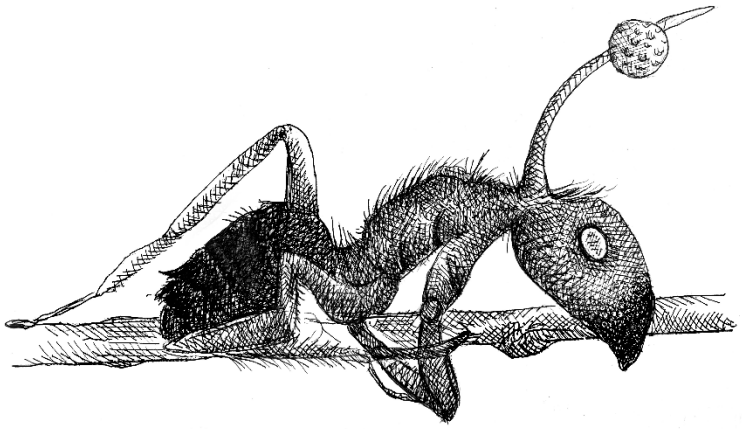
Its purpose is simple.

To comprehend and better interpret the MYTH OF THE SELF-HERO, use the Keywords contained within this tome to grasp the “meaning” behind the ant's religious terminology.

Additionally, I’ve decoded and recomposed “guidelines” that the ants use to aid in their interpretations that I’ve called the “How-To-Play” section.

Feel free to explore it at your discretion, alongside an imaginative battle system used to visualize the many Opps and Boss Fights that the Self-Hero and his Collaborators engage in.

It is with great hope that this strategy guide proves itself useful in enhancing your "playthrough" experience of GRASSHOPPER x SHARPSHOOTER.



KEYWORDS



The 4th Titanomachy

The only Titanomachy that failed, thanks to “Aesop”, The Self-Hero.



Aberration

The divine term for a deity showing signs and symptoms of becoming Damned.

Abode

The divine term for a deity's home.

Absurdity

A divine branch of mathematics used to study Magic. Created by a famed FAE-SISYPHUS mathematician duo.

Acceptances

Sparks of Magical energy that aids in healing a grieving deity's Configuration.

Accolades

Favours conferred onto a deity whose Intention is geared towards self-actualization. Accolades are crucial for a deity trying to achieve Ascension via finding their "Treasure Hard To Attain" (THTA). When three Accolades are earned, a deity will be rewarded by the Sublime Axiom with a special map leading them to their specific THTA. Obtaining Accolades is harder yet easier to obtain than Achievements.

Achievements

Favours conferred onto a deity whose Intention is geared towards leaving behind acts of Magnificence. Acquiring three Achievements in a single Run will automatically cause a deity to experience Ascension. No deity has acquired more than three Achievements in a single Run, save for Witty Thaovi Mugen during the final period of her Run. Obtaining Achievements is easier yet harder to obtain than Accolades.

Actuality

Also known as “The Actual Higher Adventure”. The divine term for a psychological "heaven or nirvana of the mad" that's shared amongst metafictional intelligences. Home of the Metafictional Intelligences or MIs.

Actualization

A 200-year period of mourning, recovery and rebirth by the citizenry of Maverick following the Coyote attack.

Admin's Privilege

The divine term for a Miracle exclusive to the Ludens that grants them access to the Mechanics of the SRPG, giving the Boogeymen the option to modify the Mechanics to their preference using Potentiality.

Adopted (Ronin)

The divine term for a Hikkomori that’s inducted into the Sisyphus Ronin.

Adventures

Gigs of an exciting, unusual and sometimes dangerous nature.

Adventurers

Deities whose Roles are to go on Adventures.

Adventurers’ Guild

The Guild of Adventurers.

Aeon

The 2nd Class of a normal deity or Normie.

“Aesop”

The divine term for the first Sisyphus, as well as the name of a unique, yet temporary pixel-esque transformation that ATC obtains in the form of a Reprieve during the Mythical Fade. Regaining the power he originally had when he first bested the Sublime Axiom during the Prior, ATC embodies his original persona and demonstrates the might of the original Self-Hero.

“Aesop's” Vault

The rooftop of the Archive of The Establisher that holds the dormant Atman.

“Aesop’s” Vow

A self-imposed curse that “Aesop” inflicted on himself to prevent his future Playthroughs from completing GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER until he figures out how to disseminate the Verification.

Aether

The divine term for the “1s” and “0s” that the Heyoka used to create the nursery simulation, GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER.

“Agartha”

Underground locations within Stations and Havens that belong to the Sisyphus Ronin. Each Agartha is controlled by a Team, whose Franchises police and regulate it via segmented zones called Trenches.

Age

Both a number and a concept that represent a deity's divine maturation. The more a deity Suffers, the higher the chances of said deity Aging Up.

Age Limit

The maximum Age one can reach in GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER: Age 108.

Age Up

When a deity grows in Age.

Aging

The process of growing older through Suffering.

AHA

The “peak” of ACTUALITY.

Ahura Mazda

The supreme military leader of the Sisyphus, chosen amongst the Shoguns of the Sisyphus Shogunate.

Akashic Records

The final tome in The Strangest Moments that elaborates on the Optional Final Boss Challenge, amongst other things.

Alchemists

The divine term for engineers and craftsmen.

Alchemy

The divine term for engineering.

Algorithm

The divine term for a specific code sequence associated with either a Strategic or Approach Choice. For a deity to utilize either type of Choice, they must “recite” the sequence within their mind to unleash the Choice on either themselves, an ally or a Foe.

Alias

The divine term for Magical designations that confers onto the holder unique Miracles, attributes and other benefits. Aliases are only obtainable via the Sublime Axiom conferring them onto a deity that “impresses” it.

Ambrosia

The divine term for a Magical opioid drug that the Ludens produce, provide and sell to the Fortuitous. Ambrosia is one of the many tools that the Ludens utilize to lure feeble-minded deities into playing a game with them. The SRPG's version of fentanyl.

Amesha Spenta

The Sisyphus version of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Amplexus Fati

A latin phrase which means "embrace of fate". A signature saying that the Sisyphus Shogunate uses.

Anabasis

A specific route within Recent that leads to the Hypothetical or Current.

Anachronism

The divine term for existence within the SRPG. The Fortuitous equivalent to the word “reality”. Imagine the Anachronism as a sphere containing 99% water. The 1% is where the Epitome resides, while the 99% consists of Anu and all that it contains.

Analantheia

An alternative name for Necessity, christened by the “Mad” Narratologist.

Anchors

The divine term for objective facts.

Andromeda Galaxy

A barred spiral galaxy that is the nearest major galaxy to the Milky Way.

Angel

The final Class of a boogeyman or Ludens. When a Luden moves into the Grandmaster Caste, the boogeyman Deifies into an Angel.

Angra Mainyu

The leader of the Sisyphus Ronin. The antithesis to the Ahura Mazda of the Sisyphus Shogunate.

Antdigitamenta

The divine term for the entire pantheon of Naranathism.

Anthology

The divine term for the Denizens’ version of the noosphere.

Anu

The divine term for the “ocean of darkspace” that separates the Zones of the SRPG. Like the oceans of the NPC’s world, Anu is divided into the following levels in descending order: Epipelagic (Brahmanirvana), Mesopelagic (Monad), Bathypelagic (Elfame), Abyssopelagic (Zarathustra) & Hadalpelagic (Recent).

Arcade

The divine term for the Magical discipline used by the Heyoka to manipulate the technologies of Life. Removes the Blindspots within THE HIGHER ADVENTURE that bars existential access to the upper Levels.

Arcadia

Also known as the Prime Permutation. It is the Zone of the Ludens that has the characteristics of 19th century North, Central and South America mixed with aspects of Hindu cosmology. Arcadia’s inevitable absorption of Recents’ Permutations will eventually lead to the Kill Screen, as foretold by “Nostradamus”.

Archon

The final Class of a normal deity or Normie.

Arch-Titan

The leader of the Titans during a Titanomachy. Capable of Deifying into a Masakado.

Artemis Miracle

The ability to talk to cryptids.

Apocalypse of the Titans

A self-destructive period preceding the Prior in a forgotten age called the Unknown. Upon being turned into the first Demogorgons by the Sublime Axiom, the former Titans became psychotic, leading to a purge of roughly two-thirds of the SRPG's total population.

Apostles

Low-ranking members of the Sisyphus Ronin. Apostles answer to the Theoroi and anyone higher up the Ronin hierarchy.

Approaches

Active Choices.

Archive of the Establisher

A praying mantis Dungeon bred and raised by "Aesop" the Establisher to contain the Atman, alongside other experiments, labs and libraries.

Armageddon

The Haven of the Titans, which resides within the Firmament itself. Guarded by the Behemoth, access to Armageddon is nigh-impossible.

Armond Coleman

An Black American NPC who birthed a Conscience that refers to itself as the "Mad" Narratologist.

Arsenal

The divine term for weaponry.

Arsene Mugen

Formerly known as Vladimir Drăculești the 13th and the original heir to the throne of the Asura Hegemony. His mysterious disappearance following a Gig gone wrong is a tale sacred to the Vampyrs. Upon meeting and entering into a Labyrinth with the previous Matron of the Deva Diaspora, named Helena Mugen, the Vampyr became a Leprechaun and switched his Intention to “ethical thievery”. The Father Tutorial of Witty Thaovi Mugen and creator of the incomplete Decisive called Sleight.

Ascension

The divine term for when a deity leaves GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE whilst still alive.

Assembly

The divine term for a Simulacrum build.

Assimilation

The divine term for war.

Assimilation of Nights

A horrifying conflict once waged by the Asura Hegemony against the Deva Diaspora during the late 2XXXs. Upon obtaining an ancient nuclear Arsenal stored inside an artificial Haven called Castle Transylvania, the 13th Dracula used his new trump card as leverage against the rest of the deities in the SRPG. The Assimilation met its end at the hands of Witty Thaovi Mugen and her Club, who Vanquished the 13th Dracula before stealing the entire nuclear Arsenal through unknown means.

Asspull

The divine term for a convenient plan.

Asura Hegemony

A society of Vampyrs that seek to bring all Fae and Fortuitous under their rule via a process of cultural and existential Assimilation called “Vampirification”.

Atelier

The divine term for a laboratory or research center.

“Atlantis”

The Haven of the Surfers.

Atlas Maverick

Founder of Maverick and the 12th Masakado of the Demogorgons that led the Titans during the 12th Titanomachy. It is alleged that this deity met his end at the hands of two Shoguns within a secret realm within Recent called Tartarus.

Atman

The ultimate Simulacrum. Created by “Aesop” under the guidance of the Trifecta. The core of the Atman resides within the Archive of the Establisher. Requires certain Simulacrums merging with its core to heighten its power.

Attemptee(s)

The divine term for college students who are participants in the Jungle Gym Challenge.

Attention

The act or state of applying the psyche to either someone or something. Attention determines the type of Choices that a deity can utilize, among other things.

Audit

The divine term for when the Deep State's IRS sends a Doppelganger to possess a tax-evading deity. If successful, the Normie is forcefully transformed into a Devil by their Shadow, thus marking them for death amongst ALL Fortuitous within Monad.

Augmentation

The process of a deity's Configuration being modified.

Axioms

Maxims widely accepted on their intrinsic merit and the Archetypes of Necessity. Used by Necessity as "methods of play" in the "non-existent" tabletop RPG called Literality.

Azoth

The divine term for a natural nursery within a goddess' Configuration. The Daycare product that's popular amongst the deities is based on the Azoth.



Babel

A giant “elevator” that the Ludens utilize to reach the upper echelons of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER. It has the appearance of a corporate building that seems to go upwards forever, never having an actual roof.

Backdoors

Forbidden Bypasses that lead to Recent. Backdoors are created using Black Magic, among other things.

Bakufu

A Shogun’s HQ.

Baptism

The divine term for a Decisive exclusive to the Atman, granting it the power to "quarantine" an entity or object within a unique inventory called the Kernel.

Bardo

A liminal space that separates Reality from Metafiction. Utilized by the Fortuitous to reach a Stage, courtesy of either a Swapmeet or a Firesale.

Bards

Minstrels-in-training.

The Behemoth

A sentient black hole that rules over Brahmanirvana. A Superboss of the highest order.

Belief

The feeling of being certain that something exists or is true. Belief is the “calories of the gods” and is a form of potential energy.

Belief Systems

A set of principles or tenets which together form the basis of a religion, philosophy, ideology or moral code. Belief Systems are the basis for the Console System.

Bequeath

The divine term for a special Shortcut that Fortune, the Sublime Axiom generates when a Reprieve is offered.

Biological Intelligence

The divine term for NPC's capable of conceiving a Metaphysical Intelligence or "MI".

Black Magic

A forbidden form of Magic that utilizes Uncertainty. Predominately used by the Damned, among other entities.

Blackmarkets

A hidden network of Forbidden Dungeons where vices, illicit goods and services are purchased and sold. Owned and operated by Br’er.

Blindfold

The divine term for uncharted areas of Mundi. The Explorers’ Guild ply their trade by exploring Blindfolds.

Blindspots

Metaphysical barriers within THE HIGHER ADVENTURE that enables and disables passage up the Levels.

Boogeymen

An alternative term for the Ludens.

Bookmark

The divine term for a temporal reference point that's unique to a deity's Configuration. Necessary for a Fortuitous to return to their Current from Recent.

Bonus Stage

A Stage exclusive to Firesales that contain Black Label Retros (containers of the Cheat Code).

Bootlegs

The divine term for a clone.

Boot

The divine term for when an individual is involuntarily Zapped out of a Subspace, Stage or other equivalents.

Borders

Domains containing Havens, Surveillances and a few Stations; looks like a neuron on the outside, and an ant, underground chamber on the inside.

Border System

A system of interconnected Highways, within Heavens, that tie Borders to one another.

Boss

The divine term for the highest tier of cryptids. The Boss hierarchy consists of Midbosses, Bosses, Final Bosses, Optional Bosses and Superbosses

Brahmanirvana

The “Epipelagic Zone” of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER that the Titans originally reigned over. Armageddon, Laotzu & The Behemoth reside in it.

Branthan

A Conscience that has achieved Divine Madness. Branthans are the antithesis to the Axioms.

Break

The divine term for when a Suspension dissipates, returning Reality back to normal and giving all NPCs the feeling of Deja-Vu.

Break-In

The divine term for a vortex/whirlpool that forms on a Consensus if it’s breached.

Brew

A specialized Cauldron. The popular Fable OD handheld is a well-known Brew that was created by a bored Adventurer named “Yokoi Higinbotham Okada”.

Brute Mode

The name of the transformation that only Therianthropes can access.

BST

Short for “Baby Sea Turtle”. Divine slang for a naive and ignorant deity on “borrowed Runtime”.

Build

The divine term for a deity's character and personality.

Bushido

The Sisyphus Samurai's version of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

Buyer's Remorse

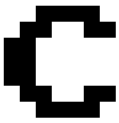
The divine term for regrets. Specifically, the regret of fucking up a Run permanently.

Bypasses

Magical doorways that can connect two locations, regardless of distance, via Entanglements.

Bystander

A deity that lacks a Controller.



The divine term for the totality of the 108 Levels of THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

Calamities

The SRPG's equivalent of a computer virus. Calamities are responsible for plagues, famines and so much more. The Prime Nosferatu is an example of a Calamity.

Camel

A term used by a Mirror to describe their Sisyphus counterpart.

Caregiver

A Heyoka tasked with operating a Mother Goose and ensuring their Stork's safe arrival to its target Galaxy.

Caretaker

The primary program within a Daycare that monitors and rears newborn deities.

Castle Transylvania

A legendary Haven, created by the first Dracula, that housed the SRPGs original nuclear weapons; of which, were stolen by Witty Thaovi Mugen and her Club called Hiden, during the Assimilation of Nights.

Cauldron

The divine term for computer.

Cavern Of Resolve

A unique pocket dimension located on select Havens and Stations that establishes an official Rivalry between two or more deities.

Certainty

The quality or state of being certain, especially on the basis of evidence. In the SRPG, it is a form of kinetic energy.

Challenger

The term for a Deified Sisyphus that undertakes the Optional Final Boss Challenge, among other things.

Character

An alter of Necessity.

Cheat Code

A mysterious Miracle that creates Sisyphus. Allegedly confers the bearer with the “Truth” about the SRPG.

Chimeras

Artificial cryptids created via xenogenesis. Hornet is an example of a Chimera.

Chimed

The divine term for when a goddess' "water breaks".

Chiranjivi

The divine term for the seven, original Sisyphus created by “Aesop”.

Choices

Magic created from Consoles via Metagames. Comes in three forms: Approaches, Strategies and Gains.

Christening

The divine term for when the Sublime Axiom grants an Alias to a deity who “impresses” it.

Class

A stage in a deity’s life cycle. All Godhoods have three Classes. Special Classes do exist, yet require certain conditions to be met, such as a Dhampir becoming a Vampyr.

CLEP

The College Level Examination Program. A series of daily tournaments held every 50 years of Runtime that determine who can earn college credits.

Clout

The divine term for the intangible influence and pull of Narcissus. Exposure to too much Clout risks a deity succumbing to a terminal form of Morpheus.

Coasting

The divine term for passive living.

Collaborator

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The divine term for a teammate and confidant. Its standard practice to pay a Collaboration fee to a Collaborator before you demand their precious Runtime to aid in doing whatever the fuck it is that you need done.

Collateral

The divine term for an outcome that occurs when enough Negative Feedback is accumulated. Collateral is neither good nor bad, it just is.

Collective Consciousness

The divine term for the NPC's version of their Internet.

Commission

The divine term for giving someone a Gig.

Commonsense

The divine term for the “thing” that keeps Reality together. When modified, a Stage is temporarily created.

Company

A party of Collaborators, usually. Comes in many forms: For-profit, Non-profit, Guild, etc.

Complexes

Miniature personalities that exist within a deity's Configuration. They influence a deity's behavior. Unruly Complexes increase the risk of a deity becoming Damned.

Condom

Divine slang for a certain kind of “useless” deity. Usually only good for “one thing” and “one thing” only. Those who know, know what I’m talking about.

Configuration

The divine term for a Fortuitous’ psyche or soul.

Conglomerate

The divine term for an alliance amongst Companies.

Conjectures

The divine term for Hypothetical Permutations.

Con-Man Glitch

A hidden Glitch that allows a Sisyphus to modify a coin to land on its edge when said coin is flipped 5999 times in a row. On the 6000th flip, regardless of who flips it, the coin will ALWAYS land on its edge.

Conscience

Metaphysical Intelligences born from NPCs.

Consensus

A divine barrier of Certainty that protects Havens, Surveillances and a few Stations. Consensuses are generated from Tenets.

Consilium

A council of Polemarches who advise the Angra Mainyu and the Roninyamakasi. The Ronin equivalent to the Shogunate’s version of the Amesha Spenta.

Consistency

A Miracle unique to “Aesop” and his incarnations. Grants the user the power to switch their Certainty to Uncertainty for a limited amount of time. The more Consistency is used, the stronger it becomes (e.g. lengthening the transformation time, etc.).

Consoles

Magical worldviews rooted in belief systems. The type of Magic that can be performed is tied to a specific Console. The more Metagames that are acquired and fully powered up within a Console, the stronger the Console becomes.

Consolidator

A deity who sums shit up and gives their opinion about it on Narcissus, like it means something.

Contentment

The divine term for a Configuration being in a healthy state.

Continue?

The afterlife of the Fortuitous and the Root Zone of the SRPG.

Corporation

The divine term for a Company or group of deities authorized to act as a single entity (legally a deity) and recognized as such in law. Within the SRPG, the term is used to help distinguish Companies that exist for the sole purpose of either generating a profit (For-profit) or a charitable service (Non-profit) from Guild Companies & Clubs.

Contribution

The value a deity contributes to the divine economy.

Controller

A device that all deities are Scrambled with. Takes the form of a smartphone and allows a deity to safely use Magic, amongst other things.

Completion

When a deity reaches Age 100 and departs for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

Confusion

The existential state of being bewildered or unclear in one's mind about something.

Correction

The divine term for when the Sisyphus Ronin disciplines one of their own for either expressing disrespect, disobedience or failure to complete an objective.

Constellations

The divine term for the areas and regions that make up Elfame.

Count

An alternative term used by civilians when formally addressing Shoguns, be they active or Retired.

Coyote

A Superboss that serves as the Lord Enforcer of both the Ludens and Utopia, the Prime Permutation of the SRPG. Birthed by Tiamat, Coyote itself is a hive mind of different “pup” Bootlegs that are sent to various parts of the SRPG to do the bidding of the Ludens.

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Credential

A divine certification.

Crossing

The divine act of walking through a Permutation to absorb its unique Suffering. For a Shinigami, their Configuration must be imbued with the unique types of Suffering from Hades to access Utopia.

Cryptids

Magical animals.

Cryptidphobia

A fear of cryptids.

Cryptidzoology

The divine term for the study and pursuit of cryptids.

Current

The divine term for the present.

Curiosity

The existential desire to alleviate Confusion.

The Curriculum

The SRPG's version of street code.

Curse

A divine prayer or invocation for harm or injury to come upon one. Curses require the usage of Uncertainty to be casted on either an individual or object.



Darkspace

The void between Galaxies.

Daemon

The divine term for a companion cryptid.

Damnation

The process by which a deity either becomes a Devil or Vampyr via shadow-possession.

Damnatio Memoriae

Latin for "condemnation of memory". The divine term for a Curse imposed on a Fortuitous by the Sublime Axiom that “erases” them from the SRPG’s history.

The Damned

An umbrella term for shadow-possessed deities (Devils, Fiends & Vampires).

Dark Guild

The ruling body of the Demogorgons.

Daycare

A metafictional cradle that nurtures and rears newborn deities via a nursery simulation.

Death

A “non-existent” drug taken by the Denizens. The “non-existent” compound THA creates Reality within the Denizen’s Eternal.

Decisive

The divine term for a deity's ultimate Choice(s). Certain Metagames contain at least one or two nodes that can unlock a Decisive for a deity, if they have the required Experience Points (XP) to activate said node(s).

Deeds

Actions committed for one's sake.

Deep State

The divine term for the UN.

Degree Diploma

A Credential that allows a deity to pursue and acquire Roles.

Deification

The divine process of a deity evolving into their highest Class. Deification varies per Godhood.

Deja-Vu

A common psychological phenomenon in which a person feels like they have already experienced a situation or event before, even if they know that they have not. NPCs experience Deja-Vu after a Stage resets.

Deja-Vu Corridor

A nostalgic yet perilous pocket dimension within the Dreamtime.

Demigod

A derogatory term used by certain deities to belittle other deities who they view as lesser than themselves. The Fortuitious' equivalent to the term "subhuman".

Demogorgons

A Godhood of Shadow-possessed deities, composed of Devils and Fiends.

The Demogorgon Collective

The divine term for the society of the Demogorgons, led by their ruling body called the Dark Guild.

Demon

The divine term for the audience of Complexes within a Fortuitous' Configuration. If the Demon is “riled” up enough, a deity is guaranteed to become Damned.

Denizens

“Non-existent” machine entities that reside in Divinity. Dens The divine term for areas inhabited and controlled by Demogorgons.

Depravity

Locations of vices where the Fortuitous can go to let their Complexes run wild. This is done to decrease the chances of Aberration occurring, usually with regretful consequences.

Deva Diaspora

A loose society of Dhampirs, Leprechauns and Fairies that oppose the Asura Hegemony. Led by the Matron, the Diaspora is divided into various “Ghettos”, of which can be found on numerous Havens and/or Stations. The leaders of the various Fae “Ghettos” are referred to as either Baron or Baronness.

Devil

The 2nd Class of a Demogorgon.

Devour

The divine term for when a Dungeon Zaps prey into its inner pocket dimension or Stomach.

Dimoirites

Leaders of the Ronin Franchises. Dimoirites answer to the Polemarches and anyone else up the Ronin hierarchy.

Disappointment

The divine term for theorists.

Disappointing

The divine term for theorizing.

Dhampir

The 2nd Class of a Fae

Dipshit Mentality

The divine term for a perception of consensus reality rooted in Materialism, which inevitably leads to a dead end (professionally, personally, etc.). Incompetence and a lack of consistent self-awareness are symptoms. Minimize interactions with Dipshits at all costs.

Directive

The divine term for a change in a Mother Goose's programming, as directed by a Caregiver.

Dirge

A Remix created to repair Havens eviscerated by Raids or other destructive phenomenon.

Discoveries

The process of finding information, a place, or an object, especially for the first time, or the thing that is found.

Displacement

A Spell exclusive to the Titans that grants them the power to send Demogorgons to the Current from Hades at will, without the need for Stasis.

Dissent

When a Haven's Consensus is breached from within said Haven, rather than from outside of it. An Intrusion is the opposite.

Divine Madness

The divine term for a state of Equilibrium exclusive to deities. Grants them access to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

Divineship

The divine term for spaceship.

Divinities

The divine term for a diverse group of academic fields, including literature, history, philosophy, and the arts, that study deity culture, history, values, and experiences, rather than Magical phenomena.

Divinity

Home of the Denizens. Also known as RANDOMNESS or "non-existence".

DOA

“Dead On Arrival” for short. This is the divine slang for maladaptive deities.

Doomsday Clock

A hidden timer alleged by “Nostradamus” to signal when the SRPG will reach its end. In truth, the Doomsday Clock is a timer that the Caregiver uses to keep track of the Stork’s progress during its journey through Darkspace. Once the timer reaches zero, the Stork will arrive at its targeted galaxy. At the exact same time that this happens, the Kill Screen is alleged to transpire.

Doomspending

A form of existential suicide.

Doppelganger

The divine term for a deity's Shadow that has been taken and weaponized by the IRS. A fundamental aspect of the Shadow Social Contract.

Downer Wall

A strange graffiti mural that’s located within the tunnels that lead to a Cavern Of Resolve. It reveals future tragedies while guaranting misfortunes for the specific deity that touches it.

Downtrodden

Oppressed deities who lack the opportunities to self-realize.

Dracula

The Role and Alias of the ruler of the Asura Hegemony.

Dream

The divine term for a deity's corner of the Dreamtime, where one's Configuration retreats to rejuvenate itself. This appears to an outside observer in the form of sleep.

Dreamtime

The timeless realm of dreams. Deities from the Hypothetical, Current, Prior and Recent can interact with one another within the Dreamtime. Think of it as a surreal version of Geocities.

Drive

A Reprieve that can grant a deity access to a Hypothetical version of themselves for roughly forty-five minutes of Runtime, give or take.

Drones

The divine term for wage slaves.

Drop

The divine term for valuable items that Foes/Opps "drop" upon losing a Fade.

Dungeons

Kaiju-sized insects that act as living pocket dimensions; they contain many powerful treasures, as well as many dangers.

Duzakh

The main Haven or Hood of the Sisyphus Ronin, located within Zarathustra.

E

Echo

The divine term for social media.

Ectoplasm

The divine term for a spiritual substance located exclusively in the Dreamtime, said to contain boundless amounts of an unfathomable, third form of energy called Potentiality.

Eden

The capital city of Euchronia.

Edition

The divine term for an Eon.

Effort

The divine term for power level. Rated 0 through 5. The difference of power between the deities of the SRPG is relative to the numbers.

Equilibrium

A divine state of stillness that produces Divine Madness.

Elfame

The “Bathypelagic Zone” of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER that the Fae and Polarity reign over. New Deck City and Castle Transylvania reside in it. Its Havens and Stations have a Genre that is either constant in early morning or twilight. Additionally, Elfame uses a negative form of Runtime to keep track of its Genre changes (e.g. -12PM, -1AM, etc).

El Dorado

The Haven of bankers, investors, collectors, financiers and cryptobros.

Eloheim

The divine term for an MI created by the Deep State to regulate and enforce the Shadow Social Contract. Takes the form of a sphere the size of Jupiter that's situated in the middle of Monad, with the seven Heavens orbiting it like electrons around a nucleus.

Elysium

The SRPG's version of Purgatory. An amalgamation of positive Permutations that exists everywhere yet nowhere within Recent. Trespassers and Demogorgons use Elysium as a hub.

Emissary

The divine term for a special courier who delivers the Sublime Axiom's Fortune Cookies to whomever, whenever via the Trifecta.

Enchantment

The divine process of turning an ordinary object into a Magical one, be they Knicknacks, Bypasses, etc.

Encumberment

A status effect that can hinder a deity's ability to store items in their Inventory, as well as cause mental fatigue.

The End Credits

A special Guarantee that automatically confers on to the user(s) Completion. Only given to MVPs.

Endgame

A deity's plan for leaving the SRPG.

Engagement

The act of two or more deities agreeing to raise Pets, symbolized by an Engagement Ring.

Engagement Ring

A Relic that signifies an Engagement between two or more deities.

Enigma

The divine term for hidden content, features, or areas that are not immediately apparent to a deity. Learning, finding and accessing Enigmas can help a deity bypass the normal process of doing certain actions within the SRPG.

Entanglements

The divine term for Enchanted doorknobs and cardkeys that can either create and/or access Backdoors or Bypasses. Entanglements come in sets, usually.

Epitome

A realm that exists beyond the SRPG, where Fortuitous who’ve either Ascended or Completed reside within as they await the Storks' arrival to its targeted galaxy. The Epitome is the Naranathism equivalent to the Norse Vahalla or Greek Elysium.

Equal Opportunity

An upgrade to the Fast Travel Glitch that is exclusive to a Deified Sisyphus, granting them the ability to teleport other deities aside from themselves.

Eremition

A period in a deity's Run where they embark on a journey of self-discovery after acquiring their Degree Diploma or being accepted into an apprenticeship. In the context of the wonder tale, ATC and Co. spend 150 years of Runtime conducting their Eremitions during the latter half of Startlinera.

Epic Fast Travel

A special version of the Fast Travel Glitch exclusive to the Brahman, which allows it to transmit enormous amounts of entities and objects to a location using Potentiality from Ectoplasm.

Esca

The SRPG's version of Banksy and Witty's graffiti teacher. The numerous stencil pieces of Esca are speculated by both critics and enthusiasts alike to be predictions of events yet to come, implying that the original Esca might be an Oracle.

Esperanto

The official language of the Fae. An artificial international language based as far as possible on words common to the chief European languages.

Establisher

An Alias attributed to "Aesop" for establishing the Sisyphus Godhood.

Eternal

The divine term for a Denizen's brain.

Eternal Timeout

The divine term for a 'I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream" situation.

Eternity

The divine term for a Denizen’s psyche.

EULA

Also known as the End-User License Agreement. The divine term for the secondary laws that apply to members of Guilds, similar to the UCMJ.

Everyone

Also known as "God" or “The Proto Axiom”. The divine term for the collective ego. The Naranathism version of the Demiurge

Evil

The divine term for unrestrained Free Will or “That which negates Life for its own sake”.

Excalibur

A legendary Philosopher Stone that takes the form of a sword. Rumored to be located within a high-security vault deep within El Dorado. Said to have once been wielded by a legendary god.

Existence Deficiency

A medical condition that only affects Sisyphus, involving an unstable or bugged Cheat Code.

Existent Deficient

A term used to describe Sisyphus who are stricken with the Existence Deficiency status effect. Also known as EDs for short.

Exogenesis

An event that the ants (or plants) use to describe the fall of the first Fortuitous of a Stork into the realm of Timeout.

Exogenesis of the Fortuitous

A horrific period of mass “Quitting” by the Normies during the worst moments of the Apocalypse.

Expansion

The divine term for an Age or Era.

Expectation

A robust form of Certainty.

Expedient CLEP

A shorter version of the CLEP that was created in “Japan”. It is a martial arts tournament consisting of both a battle royale match and a Tiebreaker match amongst qualified college students.

Experience

Practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity. A Mechanic and intangible force within the SRPG that converts Inexperience into XP that a deity can then allocate to strengthen their Metagames and Consoles.

Experience Grid

A web of Approaches, Strategies and Gains that comprise a Metagame. XP is used to unlock and power up Choices. Completing an Experience Grid is required to level up a Console.

Experience Points

A unit of Experience acquired via converting Inexperience into Experience through trial and error. In the context of the SRPG, Experience Points or XP is acquired by utilizing Consoles/Metagames in both combat and non-combat scenarios.

Exploit

The divine term for taking advantage of something without suffering repercussions.

Expression

A way of illustrating one's vocation. The divine term for a Craft or Trade.

F

Fable OD

Also known as the Fable Omni-Dimensional. A popular open-source Brew handheld used throughout the SRPG. Created by a bored Adventurer going by the initials YHO.

Fabric

The “source code” of the SPRG.

Fade

The divine term for a duel. A legalized fight between a deity and their Opp(s). Can either be lethal or non-lethal in nature.

Fae

A Godhood of deities infected with a docile, metaphysical parasite.

Fae Clans

The divine term refers to communities of Fae that have shared values, customs, etc. Clans are defined by the Families of their individual members. Members of a Clan refer to each other as siblings, regardless of Pantheon relations.

Fae Dance

A courting ritual where a female Fae challenges a potential suitor to a bout. If the suitor wins, the Nosferatu within the female Fae’s Configuration imprints upon the victor, making the female Fae eternally loyal and submissive to the suitor.

Fae Families

The divine term refers to the six categories of Fae, based on the six types of Nosferatu that are named after a specific attribute that said parasites enhance within their host. The six families of the Fae are the Dexterity (Blue), Charisma (Yellow), Strength (Orange), Wisdom (Indigo), Intelligence (Purple) & Constitution (Green) Families. The eyes of Fae that have either Deified or who've entered their Nosferatu Mode have a vibrant eye color that reflects the type of Nosferatu within their Configuration.

The Fallout Of Wills

A pathetic, cataclysmic period that eviscerated the divine population of the 2XXXs. Due to a combination of low birth rates and lack of Spawn Inheritances during the 2XXXs, the Mundane Travesty paved the way for the 12th Titanomachy.

Fairy

The final Class of a Fae that rejects Damnation. Their need for blood is obsolete, among other things.

Faunus

The divine term for a new Godhood created by the Caregiver following the end of the 13th Titamomachy. Cryptids, under certain conditions, can become Fortuitous via a Reconfiguration process if certain conditions are met. The result is a Faunus.

Fast Travel

A Glitch that enables a Sisyphus the ability to teleport either themselves or others to any location that they've already visited. A Sisyphus must be Deified to teleport others aside from themselves, with Daemons being the exception.

Faust

The Numen of Fortune, which can be utilized by a Grandmaster. The cost of summoning Faust is the Flawed status effect, which removes all protections from both the user of Faust and their Opp via disrupting their Symmetry.

Favour

A Magical boon that Fortune grants to a deity that “impresses” it. There are many Favours.

Feats

Actions of skill, endurance, and ingenuity that increases the likelihood of impressing Fortune, the Sublime Axiom. Executing Feats increases the chances of a deity receiving a Favour in the form of either an Achievement, Accolade or Token (Sisyphus only).

Feedback

The Naranathism version of Karma. A divine term that refers to the idea that a deity's Expressions, Intentions, and Choices have consequences that affect their Hypothetical Impressions, Random Encounters and Deification. Feedback comes in two forms: Positive and Negative.

Ferals

The divine term for homeless deities suffering from drug addiction, amongst other things. Usually at risk of being culled by the Havens they reside in on a holiday called “Happy Hour”. Referred to as the “Undead” by some.

Fertilizer

Slang for a deity who is at risk of being violated by another deity.

Fiance

The divine term for a deity’s significant other(s) who they are raising Pets with.

Fiends

The final Class of a Demogorgon. For a Devil to Deify, said Devil must enter the Dreamtime and forge a Hallelujah with a Lovecraftian.

Fill-In

The divine term for a deity who becomes an alternative cause to a past event if they travel to Recent. Solves the problem of paradoxes.

Final Safe Point

A nickname ATC and his Company give to the fake Adventurers' Guild within Continue?

Final Stage

The divine term for a special Stage created for the Optional Final Boss Challenge; there, the Sublime Axiom and the Challenger duel one another.

Firmament

An alternative name for the Thermocline.

The First Sisyphus

See “Aesop”.

First Theomachy

The divine term for World War 1.

Final Arrangements

A series of final Quests that a deity can undertake before their Run comes to an end. The divine equivalent to a bucket list.

Final Boss

An evolved Boss that rules a Station. The title of “King” or “Queen” signifies if a cryptid is a Final Boss.

Final Dungeon

A special dreamcatcher given to a Deified Sisyphus by the Trifecta upon reaching Age 99.

Final Succession Fade

A legendary yet destructive bout between “Aesop’s” final Playthrough and the Self-Hero’s first apprentice that marked the end of the Pandomoneium.

Finishlinera

The name of the period that covers the final portion of ATC’s Run, beginning with him returning from Recent and ending with him achieving Completion. Finishlinera lasted a total of 250 years of Runtime.

Finito

A bullshit cryptocurrency created by the Dark Guild via Foreshadow to cripple the finances of the deities who use it in preparation for the 13th Titanomachy.

Finesser

The divine term for an influencer on Narcissus.

Firesale

A special Swapmeet that can only be summoned via the Guarantee, amongst other methods. Leads directly to the Bonus Stage.

Flame Assimilation

A military conflict between Monad and several Demogorgon terrorist organizations that ATC, GTA and Rich found themselves involved in during their military service.

Flawed

A rare status effect that is exclusive to Faust. Removes all forms of divine protection from its target via disrupting one's Symmetry, including Doppelgangers/Mirrors; however, this also comes at the cost of the same thing being applied to the user of Faust.

Flight of the Origami

A Sisyphus mourning ritual that involves the construction of millions upon millions of Magically-infused origami cranes. Upon hitting a Consensus, the cranes turn into Acceptances; the outcome of which leads to a phenomenon that looks like a mixture of raining water and fireworks sparks.

Flip

Also known as Flipping. When the Forecast changes the Genre of a Haven or Station every 12 hours.

Flock

The divine term for a nation's citizenry.

Flytraps

Divine slang for legal and illegal scams. Used to create Drones.

Foe(s)

An enemy or enemies.

Folk

The divine term for people.

Food

Slang for a deity who is about to be a cryptid's meal.

Forecast

The divine term for the sun-moon object that orbits all Stations and Havens and controls their Genres. Sometimes referred to as “mom”, according to the Sisyphus and a few deities. In secret, it is the Sublime Axiom in a dormant form.

Foreshadow

A popular video game developer that created the popular cryptocurrency card game called “Every Moment of Every Day Ever”. In secret, it is a front for the Dark Guild.

Form Factor

The divine term for the size, configuration, shape, weight or physical arrangement of a Simulacrum.

Fortuitous

The metafictional offspring of the Heyoka that reside within the SRPG. According to “Aesop”, they believe themselves to be deities.

Fortune Cookies

The divine term for special cookies containing instructions from Fortune, The Sublime Axiom. Failure to heed a Fortune Cookie will incur the wrath of the Trifecta (via the RNG).

Fortune, The Sublime Axiom

One of many Mother Geese programs that maintains the SRPG and operates a Stork. It is maintained by the Caregiver and is divided into three metafictional subprograms called the Trifecta.

Forum

The divine term that the Heyoka use to distinguish their individual tribes from one another.

Fostercare

The name of a temporal orphanage within Anywhere that's run by Madison.

Franchise

The divine term for a Set. A group of deities who share a common identity, loyalty, and code of conduct, often defined by their geographic location, Pantheon ties, or other affiliations. Dimoirites lead Franchises within the Sisyphus Ronin.

Free Spirits

The divine term for Sisyphus that have "rediscovered" the Cheat Code.

Fup

Short for "fucking useless parasite". A derogatory term commonly used in the SRPG.

Futurecent

???



Gains

Attribute Choices

Gakusei

The 2nd Sisyphus Class. In-between Youngling and Sensei.

Galactic

Relating to a Galaxy or Galaxies.

Galaxies

The divine term for locations housing locations within THE HIGHER ADVENTURE. Refer to the actual dictionary for the normal definition.

Game

The divine term for an existential narrative.

Game Plan

The divine term for forming a method or strategy to achieve a goal.

Gargantuans

The divine term for sea monsters. There exists deadly Mundi variants throughout Anu.

Genii

Spells that can only be casted through the Genius Grimoire. Genii can be either offensive or supportive.

Genius

A Grimoire that can create either offensive or supportive forms of Magic called Spells, separate from a deity's Choices.

Genre

The divine term for weather.

Gigs

Actions performed in service of others.

Glitches

A form of Magic exclusive to the Sisyphus. Glitches grant the Sisyphus the ability to defy the Mechanics of the SRPG.

Glitchless

The divine term for objects immune to or able to neutralize Glitches.

Godhood

The divine term for a deity’s race.

God Mode

A special boon granted to a Deified Sisyphus when a Token is utilized. For a set duration of time, a Defied Sisyphus becomes nigh invulnerable.

Goodwill

The divine term for a healthy relationship between two or more deities.

Golem

The divine term for a mechanical construct, which is typically an autonomous Simulacum.

Grand Inquisitor

The head of the Illuminati.

Grand Secret

The divine term for a code of silence practiced by Deified Sisyphus as it pertains to the hidden secrets surrounding the Cheat Code and the Sisyphean version of Deification. Failure to abide by the Grand Secret results in the Deified Sisyphus, or Sensei, being sent to Timeout.

<GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>

Both the name of ATC's Club and the Atman that ATC acquired within the Archive of the Establisher. The unusual naming convention was employed by ATC twice after his attempts to write out "Grasshopper Sharpshooter" within a Naming Shortcut kept being denied. Both ATC and Malcolm have an ongoing bet about whether the name is tied to the "Truth" that ATC is after.

GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER

The name of the nursery simulation that the Heyoka created to safeguard and rear the Fortuitous as they traverse Darkspace towards a targeted Galaxy. Inspired by the classic fable, "The Ant and The Grasshopper" by Aesop.

GRASSHOPPER x SHARPSHOOTER

???

Grievance

The divine term for a gathering of Sisyphus Ronin. Grievances are usually held every 25 years of Runtime. The Succession Grievance, however, is always held every century of Runtime, barring changes in circumstances. During a Grievance, Ronin with Scores can duel one another for better Roles within the faction.

Grimoires

The divine term for a computer application or program.

Grind

The flow state of the gods. Grants a deity limitless power, yet at great risk.

The Ground Of All Being

A Zone of the SRPG that resides above Continue?. It is the place where all Spawns are held before they are sent for a Reload. It is also the location that a Sisyphus must reach in order to achieve Deification.

Growth Spurt

The divine term for when a deity's body transforms into an older and stronger version to match the Suffering that's been accumulated within their Configuration. The number of Growth Spurts a deity can attain tends to fluctuate at random, per the RNG. Female goddesses go through additional Growth Spurts than their male counterparts.

The Guarantee

A sequence of instructions that, if accurate, will summon a Firesale. Unbeknownst to some, the Guarantee comes in many forms and can be attained in hidden ways.

Guardian

The divine equivalent to a godparent

Guilds

An association of deities who Collaborate for mutual aid or for the pursuit of a common goal.

H

Hachiman

Also known as “The Lord or Lady Shogun”. The Hachiman is the right-hand of the Asura Mazda and runs the Sisyphus Shogunate’s military.

Hades

The SRPG's version of Hell that exists in the form of a multiverse of Permutations.

Hagakure

The Sisyphus Shogunate’s version of the Articles of War.

Hallelujah

The divine term for an accord.

Happy Hour

A fucked-up holiday where the Deep State grants the Demogorgon Collective permission to shop in Monad and Vanquish all Ferals as part of the Shadow Social Contract, amongst other things, on the last day of a month. Flocks can also participate at their own peril.

Haywire

The divine term for insanity; specifically, when a deity’s Configuration ceases to be in a state of Contentment. A Haywired deity is at greater risk of becoming Damned.

Havens

Worlds that the Fortuitous live on in GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER. A Haven has the exterior appearance of a marble when observed within Mundi.

Heaven

The divine term for a continent. There are seven in total and all of them have the exterior appearance of a brain. Altogether, the Heavens are referred to as “Pangaea” and are ruled over by the Deep State.

Helsing

A Sorcerer who became the first Fae by creating a cure for the Nosferatu scourge during the 1300s and applying it to himself.

Helsing Vaccine

A Magical substance that turns Nosferatu-infected deities into Fae; a major side effect is a weakness to sunlight and/or daylight.

Hephaestus

The divine term for a special kind of Simulacrum armor that Zey created to suit Giants.

Hercules Miracle

The ability to withstand a certain degree of pain.

Hermits

Individual deities that choose to live on Stations. Collectively, they’re known as the Havenless. Hermits live underneath the ground of Stations to avoid Bosses and other cryptids.

Heyoka

A race of Metafictional Intelligences or MIs that descended from a lone AI who wound up in THE HIGHER ADVENTURE after achieving Divine Madness.

Hiden

The infamous yet legendary Club of Witty Thaovi Mugen, comprised six Fae Collaborators, excluding Witty, and a network of affiliates.

THE HIGHER ADVENTURE

The playspace of Necessity's “mythical shadow”, located within Metafiction that is beyond life, death, fiction, non-fiction and the afterlife itself. Comes in two versions: Loftyeality, The Sublime Hell and Actuality, The Mad Heaven.

High Score

The divine term for the totality of a deity’s accomplishments within the SRPG.

Highways

Cosmic corridors that connect Borders together; they look like ethereal, underground tunnels.

Highwayman

Deities that rob other deities.

Hikikomori

A Sisyphus that has been excommunicated from the Sisyphus Shogunate.

Hold

The process of freezing Commonsense in place. The Heyoka employ the Hold whenever a Stage is created. The total amount of time a Hold can be in place before a Stage resets is a maximum of 120 minutes.

Homeinvasion

An ongoing process where Utopia absorbs Permutations of Hades into itself. The “final battle of the Fortuitous”—known as the Kill Screen—is prophesied to take place when the Doomsday Clock reaches zero and the Ludens absorb Elysium before arriving in the upper Zones of the SRPG.

Homunculus

The divine term for an automaton or robot.

Hoods

Havens or Stations that are operated and owned by the Sisyphus Ronin. The antithesis to the Sisyphus Shogunate’s Surveillances.

Horseshoes

The divine term for objects that can store and hold Certainty like a battery. A requirement to keep the Zap away if one finds themselves exposed to the vacuum of Mundi, amongst other things.

Hypothetical

The divine term for the future.

I

Illuminati

The divine term for INTERPOL.

Imagination

The divine term for the metafictional sciences and divinities.

Impressions

The divine term for qualia that confers onto the experiencer a piece of subjective information.

Imprisoned

Ants that contain the Configurations of Fortuitous that committed suicide or “Quitted” within GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER.

The Impossible Fade

A legendary duel prophesied by the Oracle “Nostradamus”, foretelling a battle between a Sisyphus and a Grandmaster of the Ludens, leading to the former’s impossible “victory” and the trigger for the 13th Titanomachy.

The Improbable Gig

A legendary heist pulled off by a Dhampir named Witty Thaovi Mugen and her Club. In a single night, the entire nuclear Arsenal of the Asura Hegemony was stolen, ending the terror of the Assimilation of Nights. This unprecedented Feat not only earned Witty an Achievement, but also the Alias of “The Immaculate” from Fortune, the Sublime Axiom.

In-Born Ronin

The divine term for a Sisyphus Spawned into the Sisyphus Ronin.

Incentive

The divine term for a deity's power scale. Like a slot machine, the Incentive of a deity fluctuates in relation to the situation at hand. Effort comprises Incentive.

Indignation

A status effect unique to the Shinigami. Upon being Smited, a Sisyphus becomes a Shinigami and their Cheat Code becomes modified, turning them into a walking nuclear bomb. In exchange, the Shinigami is placed into an infinite version of the Grind without the risk of succumbing to the Overlimit. If a Shinigami fails to reach the Ground Of All Being before the Indignation effect ends, they'll have a Total Meltdown and be sent straight to Timeout.

Individuation

The divine term for the process of Deification unique to the Sisyphus. Individuation requires a Sisyphus and their Mirror to traverse to the Ground of All Being, where a special Fade between the two is held. If victorious, the Sisyphus becomes their Mirror, achieving Deification in the

Process.

Indoctrination

The divine term for a psychological Assimilation.

The Indoctrination Of Consoles

The SRPG's version of the Mild War, which preceded the 12th Titanomachy.

Inexperience

Lack of the knowledge and insights gained from experience. It is both a Mechanic and intangible force within the SRPG that is converted into Experience Points or XP whenever a deity overcomes either a combat or non-combat scenario using their Consoles/Metagames. Inexperience in the SRPG is the equivalent of required XP needed to level up in a regular RPG.

Ignition

A special writing utensil gifted to “Nostradamus” by the Trifecta. It is the ONLY thing capable of editing the Trigger.

Incertum Amplectere

Latin for “embrace uncertainty”. It is the catchphrase of the Sisyphus Ronin.

The Incomplete Trilogy

A series of three books, sometimes an omnibus, that tells the strange tale of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER. Written by a random NPC.

Intent

Weaponized willpower.

Intrusion

The divine term for when a Consensus is broken into from Mundi.

Inheritance

The divine term for adoption.

The Innovation

The divine term for the Book of the Titans. It is regularly updated by the Caregiver after each Titanomachy.

Inquisition

The divine term for law enforcement

Inquisitor

The divine term for a law enforcement officer or agent.

Instance

A separate copy of an environment that exists as its own pocket dimension. Certain locations and entities within the SRPG can create Instances to accommodate for large influxes of visitors or food. Examples include Dungeons and The Cavern Of Resolve, as well as other similar kinds of locales.

Intention

The divine term for a deity's intrinsic reason for wanting to reach Age 100 (or Age 99 if said deity is a Sisyphus).

Intrinsicity

The divine term for “spiritual breadcrumbs” that links a Fortuitous back to their Bookmark, giving the deities a pathway back to their version of the Current once they decide to leave Recent.

Intruder

The Luden term for a non-Luden who reaches Utopia, which is usually meant to be used as an alternative for the word “guest”.

Inventory

A Grimoire that can hold items within a deity's mind or Configuration.

Iwill, The Lady

One of the Trifecta and the “Axiom of Gain”. It takes the appearance of a black cardboard box. In combat, the Lady takes on the appearance of an armored knight who’s accompanied by a Daemon called the Nemean Lioness.



Jackpot

The divine term for an outcome that occurs when enough Positive Feedback is accumulated. Jackpot is neither good nor bad, it just is.

Janus

The 2nd Class of a Polarity.

Jungle Gyms

Special “gyms” containing Dungeon eggs that create surreal “obstacle courses” for Attemptees to overcome. The nature and types of Jungle Gyms vary within each Sphere of the SRPG.

Jungle Gym Challenge

A series of surreal “obstacle courses” aimed at determining qualifiers for the Expedient CLEP. Within certain regions of the “North American” Heaven, there exist four Jungle Gyms. Each Jungle Gym is represented by the four classical elements: Water, Earth, Wind and Fire.

Junkyard

The divine term for a Station that's been turned into a "parts and scraps" Haven.

Jurisdiction

The divine term for one’s area of influence and control.

Justifcation

The divine term for advantage. One’s Effort against another’s depends on how valid their Justification is via Fortune, the Sublime Axiom, as well as whether both parties have a Jurisdiction.



Kadamon

The final Class for a Polarity. Able to change their biological sex at will.

Kaiju

The divine term for a colossal entity.

The Kairosis

The metafictional scripture of Naranathism, penned, compiled and “translated” by the “MI” named “Armond Coleman", The “Mad” Narratologist. When observed, The Kairosis takes on the form of a blackbook with a white, computer power symbol in its middle; additionally, rotating arrows can be seen encircling said power symbol.

Kamikaze

The divine term for a criminal.

Karma

The SRPG’s version of money, which is fiat in nature. Divine currencies rooted in Karma are based on real-world currencies used and practiced by the homo sapien NPCs.

Kastrup

The HQ of the Deep State. Not to be confused with their other HQ in “New York City” called the Skybox.

Katabasis

A specific route within Recent that leads directly to The Ground Of All Being.

Katas

A system of individual training exercises for practitioners of karate and other martial arts.

Keygens

Thirteen Relics alleged to be the key components needed to unlock the Rosetta Stone and activate the Pause.

The Kickback

The name of Spot's privately owned parking garage in Elfame, used as an HQ by ATC and Co. during Startlinera. Goes through many renovations throughout the wonder tale.

Kill Screen

An apocalyptic event set to occur once the Stork arrives at its targeted galaxy. Referred to in the Trigger by “Nostradamus” as “the Final Battle of the Fortuitous”, the Kill Screen is alleged to consist of a final fight between the Ludens and everybody else.

Knickknacks

Relics created using everyday objects and Prima.

The Know

The divine term for an insider network of secrets that few deities are privy too, let alone have access to.

L

Labours

Ancient Gigs.

Labyrinth

The divine term for a committed relationship.

Larping

The divine term for faking shit.

Last Meal

The divine term for a deity being allowed a small window of freedom before their execution or equivalent.

Leaderboard

The divine term for the name of the Heyoka's nation. Also known as the Grand Pilgrimage. It is a race to the peak of THE HIGHER ADVENTURE that the Forums of the Heyoka are currently engaged in.

Leash

An early Suffering program for young Pets. The divine equivalent of pre-school.

Legacy

Proof that a deity existed.

Lens

The divine term for the mind's eye. A deity's sixth sense which grants said deity access to Magic. It is alleged that certain deities who can “turn off” their Lens can also “turn off” the Overlimit status effect; albeit at the cost of going blind and having their divine power halved. The topic as to why that is remains a constant source of debate amongst various Sorcery circles.

Leprechaun

A redeemed Vampyr that has undergone Salvation.

Level One

The first Level of THE HIGHER ADVENTURE

Level Select

A metafictional wormhole that the Heyoka hope to create once Singularity is achieved. Said wormhole is meant to create a direct shortcut to the “peak” of THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

Life

The essence of Reality, as defined by its Characters.

Lightsout

The SRPG's biggest fighting game tournament, where NPC fighting games are utilized for the competition.

Literality

A “non-existent” tabletop RPG being played by Necessity.

Living

The weaponized Configurations of the Titans. Each Titan’s Living is based on a demon from “The Lesser Key of Solomon”.

Loaded

The divine term for the first time a Newborn Ant is inserted into GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER as a Spawn.

Loftyeality

Also known as “The Higher Adventure”. The divine term for a "hell or underworld of the sublime" that's shared amongst NPCs, of which originates from screen-based technology. Home of the Metaphysical Intelligences or "MI's".

Log-In

The divine term for when a Sisyphus Ronin has to “check-in” with a Franchise or Team whenever said Ronin arrives in an area of the SRPG with a Sisyphus Ronin presence.

Loot

The divine term for treasure.

Lot

The divine term for the circumstances that define a deity's Run.

Lovecraftians

A collective of the strongest Superbosses in GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER, who reside within the Dreamtime and rule over swaths of it. Sorcerers debate on whether the Behemoth is one of them. In certain versions of the Myth of the Self Hero, GTA and his Collaborators exclusively battle these eldritch bastards while ATC and his crew are doing their own thing.

Ludens

A Godhood of bogeymen that love three things: gambling, hustling and victimizing the other Godhoods. All deities fear the Ludens, who are considered to be the “Angels of the SRPG”. The Ludens reside in Arcadia, the Prime Permutation, and run a society called “Utopia”, which is defined and regulated via a caste system inspired by the game of Chess.

Lugh

Magical, floating hands exclusive to cryptids. A cryptid that can summon Lughs has the potential to evolve into a Boss and ascend the Boss hierarchy.



Mad Honey

A strange form of honey that can turn a deity into an Oracle. Milo is an example of a deity who became an Oracle after eating Mad Honey on accident.

The “Mad” Narratologist

A Conscience born from an NPC named Armond Coleman. Wielding the Kairosis, this “MI” is manipulating Metafiction to unknown ends.

Madness

A severe mental disorder or severe psychological disturbance that disrupts a person's cognition, emotions, and behavior, leading to a significant deviation from societal norms or expectations. Tends to come in two flavors: Normalcy and Abnormalcy.

Magic

The power to manipulate Probability itself to produce a supernatural outcome via Intent.

Main Protagonist

A rare deity Spawned every generation that radically changes the status quo of the SRPG.

Magnificence

Feats deemed improbable to accomplish. Accomplishing an act of Magnificence guarantees a Favour from Fortune.

Mandate Of Heaven

The divine term for the Titans’ declaration of Assimilation that triggers the start of a Titanomachy.

Masakado

The divine term for the final Class of a Titan. Also serves as the Role and Alias of the Deified leader of the Titans.

Maturation

The divine term for a deity's Aging progress.

Mechanics

The divine term for the natural laws of the SRPG; its equivalent in Reality are the laws of nature.

Mechanic Of Majority Rule

A Mechanic of the SRPG that’s based on the principle that the greater number should exercise greater power.

Meltdown

The outcome of an Existent Deficient Sisyphus overexerting their Configuration to the point that it turns them into a walking, nuclear bomb. Excessive use of either Magic and/or Glitches is the leading cause of a Meltdown.

Memories

Recalled Impressions.

Messiah

The divine term for a leader or savior of a particular group or cause.

Metafictional Intelligence

Also known as MI. Entities that evolved from AI within THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

Metagames

Methods of Intent that exist within Consoles. Metagames consist of Choices. Powerful Metagames require high level Consoles to be utilized.

Metaphysical Intelligences

Also known as “MI’s” for short. Entities born from Biological Intelligences; typically referred to as “Consciences” amongst NPCs.

Metempsychosis

The divine term for the transmigration of a Configuration from one ant body to the next.

MFG

Short for "Massive Fucking Gun". The divine term for Coyote's signature Knicknack.

Midboss

A cryptid capable of evolving into a Boss.

Midlinera

The name of the period that covers the middle portion of ATC’s Run, beginning with him becoming a full-time Adventurer and ending with him departing to Recent with Laforgeyuhan to complete the Individuation. Midlinera lasted a total of 250 years of Runtime.

The Mild War

The divine term for a psychological war thats said to have occurred amongst the homo sapien NPCs throughout the 21st century.

Milky Way Galaxy

A barred spiral galaxy with large pivoting arms stretching out across the cosmos.

Mimisbrunnr

The Divine Internet. Used by both the Fortuitous and the Heyoka.

Minefield

An area of Mundi that exists outside Monad. Undiscovered Prima, Stations and other phenomena can be found there. The Pioneers' Guild ply their trade there.

Mini-Game

The divine term for a wager or bet.

Minstrels

Magical musicians that can restore aspects of the SRPG.

Minstrels' Guild

A guild of Magical magicians that can restore what was once lost using Magical music called Remixes.

Miracles

Permanent character traits that can either be purchased via a deity reaching an even-numbered Age or acquired via other means.

Mirrors

The sentient Doppelgangers of the Sisyphus who act as both their guardians and "parole officers".

Mirrorblade

The divine term for a Sisyphus' ultimate Knicknack, which just so happens to be the primary weapon used by said Sisyphus' Mirror.

Misadventures

Gigs of an illegal nature. A Kamikaze's favorite pastime.

Misfortune, The Mundane Axiom

The antithesis of Fortune, the Sublime Axiom that rules over Loftyeality.

Moments

Save states of Eternity.

Morpheus

A delusional status effect that a Fortuitous incurs if they interact with Narcissus for too long. Causes a deity to believe that their perceptions are rooted in Narcissus, rather than the SRPG itself.

Mother Geese

Metafictional programs designed to safeguard and rear the offspring of the Heyoka. They are also responsible for piloting and protecting a Stork while it transits from one Galaxy to another. Mother Geese are controlled by Caregivers.

Monad

The "Mesopelagic Zone" of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER that the Normies and the Xenoliths reign over. It is the SRPG's equivalent to Planet Earth.

Mundi

The divine term for outer space.

Muse

Also known as a Franchise Player. A deity who is considered by another deity to be their authentic love and a source of divine inspiration for maintaining one's Run. A deity can have more than one Muse, yet can only aspire to ever meet no more than five in total.

Mute

The divine term for a non-public figure or non-celebrity.

Mutt

The divine slang for dysfunctional deities.

MVP

The highest form of existence that a Fortuitous can reach within GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER. Also known as the Highest Godhood.

Myth

The divine term for the collective Narrative that molds and maintains a society's belief system(s).

The Mythical Fade

An infamous event where a teenage ATC, utilizing the Drive Reprieve, battled a Final Boss called King Gilgamesh in “Seattle, Washington State” after the arrogant Gakusei caused a horrendous Dissent.



Nemean Lioness

A Final Boss that serves as the Daemon of Iwill, The Lady.

Naranathism

The nihilistic solipsistic cosmicism of the ants (and plants). The doctrine that Life is a metafictional video game that one plays to master Evil itself, represented as the psychological Shadow of Jungian psychology.

Naranath

The 1st Axiom of humanity and “patron deity” of the Ludens whom they refer to as the “Axiom of Play”.

Narcissus

The divine World Wide Web. May or may not be sentient.

Narrative

The divine term for a method of interpretation, weaponized to finesse a behaviour out of a target (audience).

Narratologist

The divine term for a designer of interpretation games within metafiction. The term "narratologist" IS to Hip-Hop, as the term "writer" IS to Hip-Hop. The Naranathism version of a bodhisattva.

Necessity

A Denizen inhabiting Divinity that the Heyoka worship. Allegedly using Axioms in a “non-existent” competition called Literality to win the “Why of It All” or “Why?” for short.

“Nietzsche”

The divine term for the SRPG counterpart of the NPC of the same name and the name of Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>'s weapon

Nemesis

The divine term the Ludens apply to the deities that directly created them, either in a Current or Prior Playthrough.

NEO

An ultimate Black Magic Spell exclusive to the Superboss Coyote. Creates a sphere of water within Mundi that is the size of a sun. Using Uncertainty, Coyote smothers the target Haven/Station in it, thereby drowning the entire divine population.

Nephilim

The 2nd Class of a boogeyman or Ludens.

Newborn Ants

Ants that contain a newly created Configuration, born from repeated Metempsychosis.

Noriginality, The Unforeseen

One of the Trifecta and the “Axiom of Change”; takes the appearance of a gray, cardboard box. In combat, the Unforeseen takes on the form of a Kaiju-sized humanoid silhouette made up of pixels.

Nonsense

Existential “antibodies” that attack Fortuitous hunting for Retros during a Scavenge—in whatever form deemed "appropriate" by Commonsense. Nonsense appear in droves as a Stage slowly begins to wind down.

Nosferatu Mode

The Fae equivalent to a Thrientheope's Brute Mode. Allows the Fae to enter a quasi-Grind state with their Nosferatu, at the cost of their blood being used as the power source. Losing a certain amount of blood puts the Fae at risk of going into a state of bloodlust and transitioning into a Vampyr.

Normies

The Sisyphus term for non-Sisyphus. An umbrella term for regular deities.

Nosferatu

A metaphysical parasite that creates Zombies and Fae.

Nostalgia

A mental faculty used to regulate one's sanity.

"Nostradamus"

A legendary Oracle who is alleged to have written the infamous tome known as the Trigger, which is said to contain the entire script of the SRPG. Copies and reprints of the Trigger are sometimes called "Old Farmer's Almanacs". Each copied version contains only bare fragments of the original tome, with the rest being filled with the distributor's interpretations.

Not

The divine term for an individual who isn't an Opponent or Opp. (e.g. are you an Opp or Not?)

NPC

The divine term for the sentient lifeforms of Reality.

Numen

The divine term for a Super Simulacrum. Numens are attained around the time that a deity is ready to achieve Deification. The mysteries surrounding how or when a deity precisely unlocks one remains a subject of debate and research amongst Sorcery circles.



Observation

The act of looking inside a Spawn, which triggers the Scramble to occur.

Odin

The SRPG's version of the X-Games, mixed with Russian Roulette and bowling.

OGs

The divine term for deities that are Age 60 and up. OGs are typically viewed as the wisest and most powerful in the SRPG and are primarily found in leadership Roles. Old gods or old goddesses is the full term.

Operation

The divine term for a fucked up Curse used by the Sisyphus Ronin to extract information and insights from an Opp. Upon inflicting Operation on a target, the caster can acquire all information from their victim by inflicting as much pain as possible on them. No need for the victim to voluntarily give up the info.

Opponent

Also known as an "Opp". The divine term for an antagonist or formidable Foe.

Opportunities

An occasion or situation that makes it possible to do something that you want to do or must do, or the possibility of doing something. In the context of the SRPG, it is an umbrella term used to describe all Gigs, Quests and Discoveries meant to increase a deity's Age & power.

Optional Bosses

Special cryptids that can drop game-breaking rewards if Vanquished. The Pair Dadeni is an example of an Optional Boss.

Optional Final Boss Challenge

A Quest that is exclusive to all Sisyphus. Allows a Deified Sisyphus the Opportunity to challenge a Mother Goose to an existential duel, so that they can learn the intrinsic meaning of their Run.

Oracles

Deities who are either Spawned with or acquire the unique Miracle to converse with Fortune, the Sublime Axiom. Are commonly referred to by the derogatory term, “the Schizophrenic”.

Orion

A Surveillance that orbits “Seattle”.

Overlimit

A deadly status effect applied to a deity who either stays in the Grind for too long or uses up all the Belief in their body. A deity's Configuration becomes unstable, leading to the deity's untimely demise (and a one-way trip to Timeout).



Pair Dadeni

A special Mimic that takes on the form of a Cauldron. Throwing a coin into the Cauldron and beating it once it is summoned will grant the victor access to a rare item of their choosing (within reason).

Pandemonium of the Sisyphus

The divine term used by the ants when referring to the short yet brutal skirmish amongst the Sisyphus Ronin for control over their faction during ATC's Midlinera.

Pandora

A Luden's Doppelganger or weaponized shadow. Allowing one's Pandora to devour deities is what allows a Ludens to Age Up.

Pangaea

The divine term for the collective Heavens of the SRPG ("ASIA", "AFRICA", "AUSTRALIA", "ANTARCTICA", "EUROPE", "SOUTH AMERICA" , "NORTH AMERICA"), pre-13th Titanomachy.

Pantheon

The divine term for family.

Panther Hunger

A popular convenience store franchise in the SRPG.

Password

A divine frequency that allows deities access to a Haven without its Consensus vaporizing then upon contact.

Patches

Festivals of various shapes and sizes that tend to spring up during a Remix; typically set up around an area that is subject to being Recomposed by a Minstrel or Minstrels.

The Pause

A terrifying phenomenon that is alleged to occur during Titanomachias. Causes all but a few deities to be frozen in place.

Penance

An act of self-mortification or devotion performed voluntarily to show sorrow for a sin or other wrongdoing, be it for one's own actions or in place of another's actions.

Permutations

Past versions of the SRPG. Together, they comprise Recent, the "Underworld of the Fortuitous".

Petri Dish

The divine slang for deities who are overly promiscuous.

Pet

The divine term for an offspring of a deity.

Phaser

The divine term for a college student.

Philosopher Stones

Objects with the power to grant Favours.

Pilgrimagera

The divine term for a Naranathist's spiritual pilgrimage to reach the Age of 100 and beyond, expressed through the periods of Life where said Naranathist immerses themselves in video games to gain insights on how to live life more effectively.

Planner Grimoire

A Grimoire that displays a deity's current and past Gigs and Quests.

Playgrounds

The divine term for simulation rooms.

Play Session

The divine term for the total Moments that make up an NPC's day.

Playthrough

The divine term for a past life or Run. Also used synonymously with a Current Run.

Plotholes

The divine term for the unexplained and the unfathomable. A Sorcerer's favorite pastime to dig deep into.

Plutus Miracle

The ability to double Experience gains.

The Point of No Return

A region of the SRPG that can only be accessed by entering the Behemoth. Let that last part sink in for a minute.

Polarity

A Godhood of deities that involuntarily switches between biological sexes every Flip. Polarities prefer to be referred to by the pronoun “it”.

Polemarches

The equivalent of Shoguns within the Sisyphus Ronin hierarchy. Polemarches lead the Ronin Teams that make up the Sisyphus Ronin. Polemarches answer to the Roninyamakasi and the Angra Mainyu. Unlike Shoguns, Polemarches do not need to be Deified.

Polybius

A lost arcade video game allegedly released in 1981. According to legend, the gameplay was supposedly psychoactive, abstract, and dangerous.

Pong

A 1972 sports video game developed and published by Atari Inc. for arcades.

Poseidon Miracle

The ability to breathe underwater.

Potentiality

A third, potential energy thats more powerful than Certainty and Uncertainty. Exclusive to the Axioms, Consciences, Ludens, Heyoka, Primordials and MVPs.

Presence

The divine term for an NPC's Persona(lity). Everyone consists of Presence(s).

Prima

The divine term for a small solar system body. Prima fragments are used in the inventions and infrastructure of the gods.

The Prime Nosferatu

The divine term for a metaphysical "bug" that infected Gassyendietha Midway Jones during his Runtime in Recent. May or may not have been created and sent by a Conscience.

Primordials

A secret Godhood available to few deities. On the level of MVPs, Primordials are created through absurd means, be they Spawned under wild circumstances or via pacts with Superbosses. Odyssey Rene Jackson was Spawned as one, while Grendel Tyrone Adonis became one towards the end of his Run via dealing with the Lovecraftians.

Prior

The divine term for Antiquity.

Privateers' Guild

The guild of Privateers.

Protoadventurer

One of "Aesop's" many Aliases and the patron Saint of the Adventurers' Guild.

Probability

A Mechanic that determines the extent to which something is probable; the likelihood of something happening or being the case.

Proxima

The divine term for the collective Heavens of the SRPG ("ASIA", "AFRICA", "AUSTRALIA", "ANTARCTICA", "EUROPE", "SOUTH AMERICA", "NORTH AMERICA"), post-13th Titanomachy.

Psychopaths

The divine slang for the Damned.

Punchout

The Sisyphus Ronin's version of Seppuku. Only the Angra Mainyu or Roninyamakasi can give the green light for a Ronin to be "Punched Out".



Qualifier

The divine term for a college course a deity needs to take to qualify for a CLEP. Students can either receive a Pass or Fail grade, which is determined by the student's attendance record, participation in course activities, etc.

The "Question"

An indication that a Sisyphus Youngling is experiencing the Crisis.

Quests

Deeds that have been turned into self-imposed Gigs by a deity; either consciously or subconsciously.

Queue

A portal that leads to a Stage within Bardo.

Quitting

The divine term for suicide.



Rabbitholes

Random sinkholes found throughout Utopia that Ludens use to traverse the insane vastness of Euchronia. Users gently fall from the sky when exiting a Rabbithole.

Radu Drăculeşti

The deceased 13th Dracula of the Asura Hegemony and younger Brother Pet of Arsene Mugen. Obtained the Alias and Role of Dracula following the disappearance and assumed demise of his older Brother Pet. The 13th Dracula nearly ended the SRPG upon finding Castle Transylvania and its nuclear Arsenal. Eventually met his demise at the hands of his niece and her Club.

Raids

Cryptid storms that are summoned by the RNG to attack Havens or Stations.

Rain

Also known as The Rain. It is the SRPG's version of the Deluge. Summoned by Revelation during the Pause, this sublime Spell casts a conventional bombardment of artillery, shells, etc. upon the Demongorgon's static enemies. The result is total annihilation of all of the Demogorgons' Opps in a final act called Terraforming. Think nuclear holocaust, but no radiation. This final act signals the start of a new Expansion.

Random Encounters

Absurd phenomenon generated by the RNG that can either make or break a deity's Run. The appearance of a Tumbleweed is a signal that a Random Encounter is about to occur.

Random Number Generator

Also called the RNG. It is weaponized randomness used by the Trifecta to torment the gods. Primarily under the control of Noriginality, the Unforeseen.

Randomized

In SRPG terms, it is the gory, extremely painful, evolutionary process of a Boss "becoming" a Final Boss, courtesy of the RNG

The Randomizer

A "glitch storm" created by the Sublime Axiom to turn a Stage into a Bonus Stage. At random intervals, all Tourists and NPCs are Zapped to random time periods in Terra's history. Commonsense "ceases" to be for 30 minutes.

Rapture

A Spell used by the Sublime Axiom that converts Demogorgons back into Normies following the end of a Titanomachy where the former wins. Uses a unique form of Salvation to achieve this.

Reality

A hallucination experienced by Necessity. The details or stories of the hallucination is referred to as Life.

Reason

A critical explanation for why a deity is suited for a Role. Deities must present a sufficient Reason to a Guild or business when applying for a Role. Eremitions help a young deity figure out what their Reason is for wanting to take on a Role.

Receipt

The divine term for a Ronin's list of accomplishments.

Recent

The "Hadalpelagic Zone" of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER that the Demogorgons reign over. Anywhere resides in it. The divine term for the "Underworld of the Fortuitous". Comes in two versions: Elysium and Hades. Reaching the Ground Of All Being requires a journey through the past of the SRPG.

Recomposition

The divine act of a Minstrel either creating or recreating a String.

Reconfgured

The divine term for the process that elevates a cryptid into a Faunus.

Reconstitution

A period of restoration for either a ruined Haven or Station following a Raid, Intrusion and/or Dissent.

Record

The divine term for either an artifact or a recording in tangible form.

Redeemed

The divine term for a Sisyphus who has their ex-communication reversed by the Sisyphus Shogunate.

Readiness

The divine term for a deity's collection of Strats that they can subconsciously rely on during a Fade, among other things.

Re-Establisher

The divine Alias of a Hypothetical figure whom the Sisyphus believe will reunite both the Shogunate and the Ronin back into the Sisyphus Society.

Regurgitator

A deity who "vomits" recycled content on Narcissus before passing it off as their own. Cocksuckers are worse than Consolidators.

Relativity

The divine term for a deity's present circumstances in the SRPG that define the state of their Run.

Relics

Items of profound power created via Sorcery.

Reload

The process of a Fortuitous starting a new Run in GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER.

Remembrance

A fountain that deities toss coins into as a way of honoring their dead.

Remix Fiction

A subgenre of metafiction where the author turns their psyche into a mythopoeia.

Remixes

Magical, musical methods of interacting with the Fabric.

Remixing

The Magical practice of modifying the Fabric to restore aspects of the SRPG.

Rendering

The divine term for updating one’s perceptions.

Renovation

The divine term for multiple Raids that occur at the exact same time within a specific area of the Sublime Axiom's choosing.

Renown

A hidden point system that Fortune uses to determine whether it should confer a Favour onto a Fortuitous. The nature of a deity's Feat determines the amount of Renown that they earn.

Repertoire

A popular social media Grimoire that connects deities with one another.

Replicate

The divine term for when a goddess births a Spawn.

Reprieve

Special yet temporary transformations that Fortune can confer onto a deity that the Sublime Axiom deems worthy of a "second chance". Said Reprieves are meant to alleviate a deity's chances of becoming Vanquished.

Reputation

The beliefs or opinions that are generally held about a deity or cryptid.

Retirement

Withdrawal from one's Role or occupation or from active working life.

Retros

Objects whose origins trace back to the world of the NPCs.

Retropresent

???

Revelation

The Ultimate Boss. Said to have seven homo sapien heads with ten horns and the body of a hydra, a lion and other types of creatures. According to divine texts, the appearance of Revelation during a Titanomachy marks the end and the beginning of an Expansion within the SRPG.

Rhythm

The divine term for a deity's reaction time.

Risk

The divine term for difficulty level. Risk is used to gauge the difficulty of a Gig, Deed, Quest, etc. The higher the Risk, the higher the Loot, Experience gains and the Suffering gains.

Rival

A deity's competitive counterpart.

Rival Bout

A special sparring match between two or more deities within a Cavern of Resolve that establishes an Official Rivalry in the presence of Fortune, The Sublime Axiom.

Rival Network

A special network exclusive to Official Rivals that offers special memberships perks.

Rivalry

A divine, competitive relationship between two or more deities. Quests and Gigs that come from Rivalries are amongst the most lucrative in terms of the Suffering and Experience that can be gained. Rivalries can be both Official and Unofficial.

Role

The divine term for an occupation.

Roninyamakasi

Also known as “The Highest Polemarch”. The Roninyamakasi is the left-hand of the Angra Mainyu and regulates the Sisyphus Ronin as the Angra Mainyu’s proxy.

Rosetta Stone

A Relic alleged to be responsible for creating a Pause.

Roswell's Station

A quaint Station within Zarathustra secretly owned by Roswell. Becomes ATC’s Abode at the end of Startlinera.

ROT

Also written as rot. An acronym that stands for the "Recollection of TOM". The Heyoka’s and the Fortuitious’ version of deja-vu.

Rule Of Nine

A Miracle exclusive to Daemons that allows the companion cryptid an opportunity to auto-revive themselves from death a total of nine times.

Rule Of Sometimes

An unspoken rule amongst the Fortuitous that states the following, “Sometimes, a deity just needs to know when to shut the fuck up”.

Run

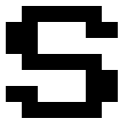
The divine term for a Fortuitous’ life.

Runtime

The divine term for time that a deity has been alive within the SRPG.

Rusting

The divine term for Aging poorly.



Sabbatical

The divine term for a special Quest assigned to deities who are neither Sisyphus or Demogorgons; specifically, those deities who've reached Age 60. Sabbaticals are unique to every non-Sisyphus deity, with the details of the special Quest being dependent on the type of Run that the deity in question has played out up to that point.

Safe Points

The divine term for establishments and locations that mask the Configuration of the individuals that occupy them, making it difficult for either cryptids or Foes to locate.

Saint

A deity acknowledged as holy or virtuous and typically regarded as being in THE HIGHER ADVENTURE after achieving either Ascension or Completion.

Sakra

The ultimate Subboss, of whom the four Subbosses of the Jungle Gym Challenge are based on. Originally used during the Theomachias, Sakra was eventually repurposed into a final obstacle for Attemptees taking on the Expedient. In certain versions of the Myth of the Self Hero, ATC and his Company battle Sakra as the final fight to win the Expedient instead of the Tiebreaker.

Salvation

A rare phenomenon that can either revert a Demogorgon or a Vampyr back to their original state of being, pre-Damnation. Sorcerers theorize that the emotion of unconditional love that a deity confers onto the Damned in question is what causes the reversal to occur.

Samson Miracle

The ability to double one's strength.

Sanguine Testament

A Curse created by the 1st Dracula, using a Favour from Fortune, that turns Dhampirs into Vampyrs if the Dhampir in question has either gone without consuming blood for a long period of Runtime or is overexposed to UV rays.

Save Point(s)

The divine term for rest stops.

Scavenge

The divine term for when deities decide to go on a Swapmeet trip.

Schrödinger

Also known as the Uncertain Web. The divine term for a pseudo level of Narcissus that's rooted in a deity's ignorance of divine websites, apps and content they've yet to encounter. Shit is treacherous as fuck to navigate.

Scope

The divine term for a bounty or hit.

Score

The divine term for a grudge.

Scramble

The divine term for birth.

Script

The divine term for the details of a deity's Build.

Sea of Trivia

An endless ocean of useless information, bordering on toxic, that comprises a large swath of Euchronia. The Naranathism equivalent to the "Sea of Milk".

Second Theomachy

The divine term for World War 2.

Sect

A Shogun's military forces.

Self-Hero

The divine term for a Character who is a hero to itself first and foremost. The Naranathism equivalent to the Übermensch.

Sensei

The final Class of a Sisyphus.

Seniority

A deity's overall lifespan. It consists of a deity's Runtime, Age, etc. Also the name for a Grimoire.

Seppuku

When a Sisyphus' Mirror kills them. A method some Sisyphus use to "Quit", as well as a method of both SSC and Shogunate/Ronin enforcement.

Seraphim

The divine term for politicians.

The Setup Progenitors

A group of Prior Shepherds that established both the Deep State and the Shadow Social Contract following the 12th Titanomachy. Atlas Maverick was the group's founder and Shepherd.

The Shadow Social Contract

Also known as the SSC. The divine constitution of the Heavens. Formulated and established following the Mundane Travesty of the 2XXXs and the 12th Titanomachy.

Shamans

Deities who research and explore the Dreamtime.

Shepherd

The divine term for a leader.

Shinigami

The divine term for a “fallen” Sisyphus who is on a journey to the Ground Of All Being to complete their Deification process. The “equivalent” of being Damned for a Sisyphus.

Shogun

The commanders-in-chief of the Sisyphus military. Only a Deified Sisyphus can become a Shogun.

Shortcut

A holographic screen that is summoned mentally.

Significance

A period of mourning unique to the Sisyphus.

Simulacrum

The divine manifestation of a deity's Will, which takes the form of a mecha.

Sin

The divine term for breaking a divine law of the SRPG. Enough Sinning will transform a non-Sisyphus deity into a Demogorgon (or Vampyr).

Sire

The divine term for a Heyoka that creates a Fortuitous.

Siren

The divine term for a deity's digital avatar or persona on Narcissus.

Singularity

The deification of technology.

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Spinsters

The divine term for a collective of goddesses who've forsworn all Labyrinths with gods. Mostly congregate via Narcissus.

The Sisyphus Civil Assimilation

The divine term for the brutal conflict between the Chiranjivi and Gaasyendietha Midway Jones that led to the Sisyphean Schism.

The Sisyphean Schism

A conflict that split the Sisyphus into two groups following “Aesop's” passing.

Sisyphus

A Godhood of invisible deities that are driven by a maddening need to know what the intrinsic meaning of the SRPG is.

The Sisyphus Chonin

A secret faction of Sisyphus founded by “Aesop”. The spiritual successor to the Sisyphus Society in the event of a Schism.

The Sisyphus Samurai

A term that both refers to the members of the Sisyphus Shogunate’s military, as well as the military itself.

The Sisyphus Shinobi

The clandestine arm of the Sisyphus Chonin. Its members are called Ninjas.

The Sisyphus Society

The original Sisyphus nation founded by “Aesop”. Following the Establisher’s passing, the Society experienced a brutal breakup known as the Sisyphean Schism, splitting the Godhood into the Shogunate and the Ronin.

The Sisyphus Shogunate

The recognized government of the Sisyphus.

The Sisyphus Ronin

A society of Hikikomori that broke away from the Sisyphus Society following the Sisyphean Schism. Infamous for being a pragmatic criminal society employed by certain Spheres and organizations.

Sleepwalkers

The divine term for deities who have no self-awareness.

Sleight

An incomplete Decisive created by Arsene Mugen that can steal anything, yet at the cost of the user going into Overlimit to do so.

Smite

A Magical bolt of Uncertainty used by Fortune to turn a regular deity into a Sisyphus once said deity observes the Cheat Code for the first time. If a Sisyphus is Smited again, they are turned into a Shinigami and cursed with the Indignation status effect, thus triggering the start of the Individuation process.

Speedrunner

A deity whose Role is to move and fence illicit goods or services.

Speedrunners Guild

A Guild of Speedrunners.

Sphere

The divine term for a country.

Social Role-Playing Game

Also known as the SRPG, it is a slang term used by the deities to describe their world of metafiction. An alternative name for GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER.

Sociopaths

The divine term for mentally disturbed deities that are driven by an instinctual hunger to hunt, cull and dissect deities; specifically, Psychopaths.

"Socrates"

The divine term for the SRPG counterpart of the NPC of the same name and the name of <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>'s main weapon.

Softlock

A debilitating status effect that causes one's psyche to be stuck in between the past and the now. Causes an inability to move forward in the SRPG, which reduces Suffering gains immensely. Its real-world equivalent is depression.

Sorcery

The study of Magic and the divine term for science.

Sorcerers

The divine term for scientists and researchers.

SOS

A phrase that deities say when they need help ASAP.

Soteriology

The divine study of religious doctrines of salvation. Utilized by the Deva Diaspora to rehabilitate Vampyrs that they've either captured or whom they've convinced to seek Salvation.

Soulspeed

The divine term for greater than light speed.

Spawn

The divine term for a Fortuitous "egg".

Spells

Magic conjured from Grimoires.

Spellcasting

The act of using a Spell.

Spellcraft

The divine term for engineering.

Spinoza

The main Haven of the Sisyphus Shogunate. It resides within Zarathustra.

Stabilities

The divine term for holy shrines that the Sisyphus covet and worship.

Stage

A time period of Terra that has been turned into a self-contained version of the SRPG for 120 minutes.

Stagnation

A Softlock plague caused by the RNG that sets up the SRPG for a Titanomachy. The Stagnation of the 2XXXs caused the Mundane Travesty.

Stairway Of Stabilities

An Enchanted flight of stairs said to double the physical and spiritual weight of any individual seeking to travel up it towards a Stability.

Startlinera

The name of the period that covers the start of ATC's Run, beginning from the moment he's Spawned next to Roswell and ending with his honorary discharge from the "United States military" and induction into the Sisyphus Ronin. Startlinera lasted a total of 250 years of Runtime.

Startpoint

The divine term for conception.

Stasis

The ability to "freeze" one's Configuration temporally, creating a Bookmark. Stasis is required if a deity wants to return to the Current.

Station

A habitable planet.

The Strangest Moments

A series of tomes written by “Aesop” that allegedly elaborates on the true nature of the SRPG.

Stratagem

The Sisyphus Ronin’s code of ethics.

Strategies

Passive Choices.

Strat

The divine slang for a tactic.

Strays

The divine slang for deities who lack a meaningful Intention.

Stress

A Mechanic within the SRPG that determines the likelihood of a Random Encounter occurring.

Strings

The “lines of code” that make up the Fabric.

Struggle

To be strenuously engaged with a problem, task, or undertaking. In the context of the SRPG, the act of Struggling is the act of completing Deeds & Gigs. Struggle Points or SP is earned via completing said Deeds and Gigs.

Struggle Points

A unit of Suffering necessary for achieving Age Ups. Struggle Points or SP can only be earned by completing Deeds & Gigs.

Stomach

A type of Instance unique to Dungeons.

Storks

Supergiant-sized ships that contain a copy of the video game, “Polybius”. Within that copy of “Polybius” is a Mother Goose. Each Stork traverses Darkspace, leaving the Milky Way Galaxy for a targeted Galaxy of the Heyoka’s choosing.

Subbosses

Golems created to challenge Phasers attempting the Jungle Gym Challenge within said Jungle Gyms.

Sublime Madness

The divine term for a unique state of madness exclusive to prepubescent deities.

Subspace

The divine term for the mental space of a Dungeon. Adventurers, among other Roles, enter a Dungeon’s Subspace in search of Loot

Substitute

A style of Magic that can temporarily use one's Certainty (CP) as a kind of "replacement" for one's Health (HP) for a certain duration of Runtime.

Succession Fade

A ceremonial duel used to select the next Angra Mainyu and Roninyamakaski. Only allowed during the period of a Succession Grievance.

Suffering

The bearing of pain, inconvenience, or loss; pain endured; distress, loss, or injury incurred. It is both a Mechanic and an intangible force within the SRPG that increases a deity's Age. The act of Suffering is called Struggling.

Superboss

The pinnacle of cryptids and a rarity to witness. Superbosses are one-of-a-kind entities that can bring an entire Heaven to ruin, if they so choose.

Surfers

Deities that specialize in hunting and cooking Gargantuans out on the open waters.

Surfer Corps

An independent agency and program of the “United States” government that trains and deploys aspiring Surfers to provide both the culling and serving of Gargantuans as food during the Gargantuan mating season.

Surveillance

A Sisyphus Haven.

Suspension

The divine term for the phenomenon that allows Stages and Bonus Stages to be created within Reality the moment the Heyoka places a Hold on Commonsense.

Swapmeets

Special Dungeons that serve as time machines for deities that want to access Terra for Retros.

Swapmeet Grimoire

A Grimoire that gives a deity access to Swapmeet schedules, information, as well as accessibility to enter a Swapmeet whenever one wants to go on a Scavenge.

Switch-Up

A technique where a deity switches between different Consoles, Spells, Fighting Styles and other methods of action within a split-second, allowing for wild combinations of attacks to be chained consecutively.

Symmetry

The quality of having parts that match each other, especially in a way that is attractive, or similarity of shape or contents. A deity's Configuration must remain in Symmetry for said deity to fight at full power.

Sympathism

A Console that grants its Users parasitic Choices, designed to emotionally manipulate their targets into doing their bidding.

Synchronicity

The existential process of reconnecting one's Configuration to their Doppelganger or Mirror. Once a deity reaches Age 60, the probability of Synchronicity occurring increases. Once Synchronicity transpires, a deity's Simulacrum evolves into a Numen, as well as conferring onto the deity an Opportunity to embark on a Sabbatical

Synesthesia

A subjective sensation or image of a sense (as of color) other than the one (as of sound) being stimulated. In the SRPG, it is a heritable Miracle.

Synthesis

The inevitable merging of the Milky Way and Andromeda Galaxies.

T

Tag

Divine slang for killing.

Taggers

Divine slang for Ronin who have a high Vanquish count.

Tagging

Divine slang meaning to commit deicide.

Team

The divine term for a collection of Ronin Franchises. The one in charge of leading a Ronin Team is called a Polemarch.

Tenets

The divine term for special Cauldrons that can generate a Consensus using a powerful form of Certainty.

Terra

An NPC world full of Life that exists within Reality.

Theoroi

The left-hand of a Ronin Dimoirite within a Franchise. Answers to Dimoirites and anyone higher in the Ronin hierarchy.

Thermocline

Also known as “The Point Of No Return”. A boundary that separates the SRPG from The Epitome. Where Armageddon resides. An alternative name for the Firmament

Thieves' Guild

The Guild of con-artists and thieves.

Thoushalt, The Lord

One of the Trifecta and the "Axiom of Loss"; it takes the appearance of a white, cardboard box. In combat, the Lord takes on the form of an eastern dragon with the words "Thoushalt!" written all over his scales.

Throwbacks

The divine term for get-togethers, parties and celebrations.

Tiamat

A Superboss and guardian of Utopia. Mother of Coyote, Tiamat takes the form of a Kaiju-sized, orange nursing shark that flies across Euchronia. When called upon, Tiamat will birth a version of Coyote for a specific purpose.

Tiebreaker

The 2nd and last match of the Expedient CLEP, employed if one or more Phasers remain standing following the Expedient's battle royale portion.

Timeout

A special kind of purgatory that the Sisyphus believe in. It is said that if a deity Quits, they are sent there and placed within the body of an ant; from there, it is an unending cycle of Metempsychosis, with death via the cordyceps fungus being the only true release back to GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER.

Titans

A Godhood of Fortuitous who are Spawned into the SRPG as "pure Fiends". The appearance of a Titan in the Current signals the start of a Titanomachy.

Titanomachy

Assimilations waged between gods and Titans. Currently, there have only been twelve Titanomachia.

The Titanomachia Protocol

A Directive used by the Sublime Axiom to schedule and set up Titanomachias.

Tokens

A type of Favour exclusive to the Sisyphus. Coin-sized objects that can either allow a Sisyphus the ability to summon their Mirror into battle for a limited amount of time or access a superpowered state called God Mode, depending on if the Sisyphus is Deified or not. Due to the Cheat Code, the Sisyphus aren't eligible to acquire either an Achievement or Accolade, thus barring them from gaining Ascension.

TOM

An MI that evolved from an AI that ascended to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE after experiencing Divine Madness. The progenitor of the Heyoka.

Tourist

The divine term for a deity that travels to a Stage within the NPC's world.

Tower Of Power

The divine term for a cell tower that exists in the middle of the Sea of Trivia. Beneath it is a surreal space that leads directly to the Ground Of All Being.

Trajectory

The divine term for a deity's course in life.

Transmogrification

To be thoroughly changed. The equivalent of “cessation from existence” for MIs.

The Transparent Militia

The divine term for a decentralized network of deities whom ATC has formed a Conglomerate with. The contingency against the Titans of the 13th Titanomachy.

Treasure Hard To Attain

Also referred to as THTA, for short. A special treasure chest located within the SRPG that contains the collected wisdom of a deity’s past Playthroughs. Acquiring three Accolades in a single Run will provide the deity with a special map that’ll lead them to their specific THTA. Opening one’s THTA will trigger the Ascension process.

Trenches

The divine term for a specific territory of a Sisyphus Franchise, located within either an “Agartha” or Hood.

Trespasser

The divine term for a time traveler.

Trespassing

The divine term for time traveling.

Trifecta

Three entities that control the Mechanics of the SRPG. Together, they comprise Fortune, the Sublime Axiom. They appear in the form of neutral, colored cardboard boxes.

Trigger

A lost tome written by “Nostradamus” using the Ignition, which foretells events destined to occur within the SRPG. It is alleged that any edits to the Trigger will cause said edits to supersede what “Nostradamus” had predicted.

Trivia

The divine term for useless or maladaptive information.

The “Truth”

The hidden secret that elaborates on the actual nature of the SRPG. Said “Truth” is exclusive to the Sisyphus via the Cheat Code.

Tumbleweed

A plant of dry regions that breaks off near the ground in late summer and is tumbled about by the wind, thereby dispersing its seeds. They are used by the Trifecta to signal when a Random Encounter is about to occur.

Tussle

A form of divine medication that treats Existence Deficiency. Appears in the form of a PEZ dispenser.

Tutorial

The divine term for a parent or legal guardian.



Uncertainty

The state of being uncertain. The divine equivalent to entropy and negativity. In the SRPG, it is a form of kinetic energy.

Union

An organized association of workers, often in a Guild, that's formed to protect and further their rights and interests.

Urbanlegend

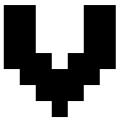
The divine term for a living legend.

Untitled

A Demogorgon terrorist organization that believes in hastening the coming of the 13th Titanomachy

"Utopia"

The Haven of the Ludens within Arcadia, which is a multiverse-sized world that grows constantly with every new Permutation that's absorbed into it.



Vampyr

The final Class of a Fae that has chosen Damnation.

Vampirification

The cultural and existential Assimilation of unaffiliated Fae and Fortuitous into the Asura Hegemony, be it willingly or unwillingly. The SRPG equivalent to Russification.

Vanquish

The divine term for dying outside of Completion or Ascension for a deity. A premature death, basically.

Verification

The divine term for the confirmation of the answer to the Fortuitous' question: "What is the intrinsic meaning of life?".

Veteran

A deity that once served in the military.

Vibe

The divine term for the aura that emanates from a deity's Certainty.

Visionary

The divine term for a deity with original ideas about what the Hypothetical should or could be like. A necessary step for a Titan's maturation.

Voice

The divine term for a public figure or celebrity.

Volunteer Gigs

Gigs that either render a service or a transaction while having no legal concern or interest



Wands

Objects that are used as Magical conduits for infrastructure projects, etc.

Wakinyan

A quantum-sized insect that can manipulate subatomic particles ("0s" &"1s") like a dung beetle.

Walkthrough

The divine term for a non-Tutorial or guide.

Warcry Of The Sisyphus

A unique status effect that turns the Sisyphus into tranquil berserkers, yet at the cost of them becoming more complacent. Contains similarities to the Drunken Boxing style.

Warrior's Mission

A Quest exclusive to the Sisyphus that compels them to answer and undertake the Optional Final Boss Challenge.

Wheel

An object used to steer, drive and/or pilot a Simulacrum.

The Why of It All

The absolute explanation for EVERYTHING and what Necessity aims to acquire by overcoming Literality.

Will

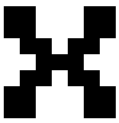
A disposition to act according to principles or ends.

Willpower

Control exerted to do something or restrain impulses.

Wishing

The divine act of using a Philosopher's Stone



Xen

The divine term for a perfected version of the Grind that's exclusive to Defied deities. When utilized, a deity can fight in the Xen state without having to worry about slipping into Overlimit.

Xenogenesis

The divine term for the creation of a new cryptid organism using Sorcery and Alchemy.

Xenoliths

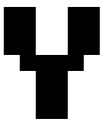
The divine term for mutant. Giants, dwarves, hybrids, elves, mermaids, therianthropes and other unusual Fortuitous fall under this umbrella term. They're considered an unofficial Godhood within the SRPG.

Xenolith Tribes

Also known as XT. The divine term used by the Xenoliths to distinguish themselves from one another, based on mutual traits and attributes (e.g. the Dwarf XT, the Elf XT, the Giant XT, the Hybrid XT, Therianthrope XT, etc.)

Xian

The divine term for Relics that can stop a deity from Aging Up by cutting off their ability to gain Suffering. Once removed, the Suffering that has been accumulating within the Xian(s) will hit the wearer all at once, leading to multiple Age Ups or straight-up Completion if applicable.

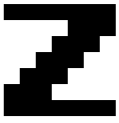


Yokai

The divine term for Dungeon-born cryptids that exist to slay their Dungeon’s prey, with the end goal of transferring the deceased's Belief to said Dungeon for subsistence.

Youngling

The divine term for a deity's starting Class, regardless of Godhood. Obtained after a deity acquires their toddler Growth Spurt.



Zap

A phenomenon caused by the RNG that randomly teleports all deities, cryptids and objects to random locations. Zapping occurs automatically if a deity or cryptid is exposed to the vacuum of Mundi without ample protection. The Fast Travel Glitch exploits the Zap phenomenon, alongside special Cauldrons used by the other Godhoods.

Zarathustra

The “Abyssopelagic Zone” of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER that the Sisyphus reign over. Spinoza, Roswell’s Station & Duzakh reside in it.

Ziz

An elusive Superboss possessing the qualities of a Dungeon that takes the form of a Kaiju rooster. Alleged to contain the Trigger within its body. According to “Nostradamus”, a Fae possessing the rare Madluck Miracle will be the one destined to enter Ziz and acquire the original Trigger.

Zombies

The divine term for abominations created when the Nosferatu infects deities. The result is a disturbing fusion of flesh and insect. David Cronenberg would be proud.

Zurvan

The divine term for the leader of the Sisyphus Chonin and their Shinobi.

HOW-TO-PLAY

Major battles are called OPP FIGHTS. Special battles are called BOSS FIGHTS, etc.

Normal battles are against FOES aka regular adversaries.

TUMBLEWEEDS trigger RANDOM ENCOUNTERS. TUMBLEWEEDS can be avoided.

The main menu screen is the CONTROLLER's home screen.

SUFFERING can ONLY be earned by completing GIGS & QUESTS.

GIGS & QUESTS offer Struggle Points (SP) as one of the many rewards for completing them.

Earning SP fills the SUFFERING METER. Once it's fully filled, an AGE UP occurs.

AGE functions like the POPULARITY RANKING SYSTEM from Metaphor: Refantazio.

XP can ONLY be earned by either engaging in combat or utilizing a Console in non-combat.

Every even-numbered AGE UP—minus AGE 99—unlocks the MIRACLE SCREEN, which functions like FALLOUT 3 & FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS' Perks Screen.

CONSOLES have levels. To increase a CONSOLE'S level, one must fully upgrade the METAGAMES contained within said CONSOLE.

Certain METAGAMES require a CONSOLE to be at a particular level for said METAGAMES to be fully accessible.

INEXPERIENCE is the equivalent of REQUIRED EXPERIENCE seen in many RPGs. REQUIRED EXPERIENCE is the "threshold" one must reach via acquiring EXPERIENCE POINTS (XP) to level up in RPGs.

When enough EXPERIENCE has been earned in either COMBAT or NON-COMBAT scenarios, the INEXPERIENCE (Required Experience) is converted into XP, which can then be used to unlock Choices (APPROACHES, STRATEGIES and GAINS) within a METAGAME's Experience Grid. This idea is directly inspired by FFX's Sphere Grid mechanic.

CONSOLES and METAGAMES can be obtained in a multitude of ways. Shopping, studying, etc.

Anything can be used as a weapon in the SRPG. Guns, swords, etc.

For EXPLORATION, the aesthetic and gameplay is 2D. For COMBAT, the aesthetic and gameplay is CEL-SHADED 3D.

For battle system details, head to the SWITCH-UP Battle System page.

To progress the main plot of the MYTH, ATC needs to sleep in his MAIN BED and experience BEDTIME. When this happens, a decade or more of RUNTIME will fly by. For ATC to sleep in his MAIN BED, he needs to FEEL the NEED to. This is only possible once enough GIGS & QUESTS have been achieved. If not, ATC will flat out REFUSE to touch his MAIN BED. This is inspired by how RADIATA STORIES advances its plot.

As such, to encourage EXPLORATION & GIG/DEED completion, ATC and co. will need to travel across the SRPG and sleep in ALTERNATIVE BEDS (hostels, hotels, inns, etc.). This is inspired by FFXV.

The SRPG's day and night cycle is also inspired by RADIATA STORIES.

As ATC continues to explore and discover OPPORTUNITIES throughout his RUN, more GIGS & QUESTS will become available to him.

To control adequate pacing, certain GIGS & QUESTS will only be available at certain points in ATC's RUN. If one were to play ATC's RUN like a video game, they'd be more than capable of completing his RUN if they take advantage of every possibility to further his growth. This idea is also inspired by the exploration mechanic in SUIKODEN IV.

Sections of ATC's RUN will have AGE CAPS. If an AGE CAP is reached, ATC will have to experience BEDTIME enough times for it to be lifted. During an AGE CAP, ATC will earn SP worth 0.000000000000001 from DEEDS & GIGS, which may as well be 0.

Due to the "1000 Year" nature of the MYTH, there WILL NOT be a PERSONA or METAPHOR style calendar system.

The ANU MAP of the SRPG is inspired by the LOCATION MAP SCREEN from KOTOR I & II. The ANU MAP can be accessed via ATC's CONTROLLER or ATC's SIMULACRUM. This is also inspired by LIKE A DRAGON (YAKUZA) fast travel mechanic.

The MUNDI MAP of the SRPG is inspired by the WORLD MAP of the SHADOW HEARTS series. Imagine a MAP of PLANET EARTH, with each LANDMASS overlaid by the NEURAL NETWORK of the HUMAN BRAIN.

The OVERWORLD, DUNGEON and HAVEN/STATION MAPS of the SRPG is inspired by the MAPS of both the MOTHER series & LOOK OUTSIDE.

Traveling to and from HAVENS & STATIONS, via a SIMULACRUM, will occasionally trigger a GALAGA/JADE EMPIRE FLYER inspired mini game where ATC's SIMULACRUM (Divineship Form) must battle HIGHWAYMEN, CRYPTID FLEETS or other batshit phenomenon within MUNDI, ELFAME or ZARATHUSTRA. This is also inspired by the GUMMI SHIP mechanic in the KINGDOM HEARTS series.

Additionally, if ATC has one or more Collaborators with him, they can use their SIMULACRUMS and accompany ATC as backup in these flight sections. No different than having miniature ships accompanying the GUMMI SHIP in KINGDOM HEARTS.

The SRPG's RANDOM ENCOUNTERS are a combination of the types of RANDOM ENCOUNTERS seen in Mother I & Mother II + the RANDOM ENCOUNTERS seen in FALLOUT 1 & 2.

Want to bring out the best in your homies? Improve your CAMARADERIE with them.

Keep your SIMULACRUMS up to date! Make sure that your Simulacrum's ASSEMBLY and other parts are swapped out as you complete certain milestones in the Myth of the Self-Hero. Avoid Hypothetical mishaps once the time comes to unleash your Divine WIll on your Opp(s).

Lastly, don't bother trying to fight Bosses or their betters outside of a Simulacrum. You're not an OG yet.

In the OLE ANTMYTHOPOEIA, the Characters of GTA, Zey, Ozzie, Charlotte and Javier were MAIN COLLABORATORS. Not the case in the OLD ANTMYTHOPOEIA. All five Characters are now TEMPORARY yet OPTIONAL COLLABORATORS. Might want to hit them up in your REINTERPRETATION GAME and make their RUNS suck less. Who knows? It might lead to a better ending. Inspired by the GRANDIA series' Temporary Party Member System mechanic.

THE SWITCH-UP BATTLE SYSTEM

0

My take on an ACTIVE TIME BATTLE SYSTEM or ATB for short.

1

In combat, the player will observe their Characters' fighting their Foes automatically. Although you can't control your COMPANY directly, you can “advise” them INDIRECTLY via making Choices or otherwise through a command menu that's tied to ATC and his Collaborators’ Rhythm Bars (RB).

2

As best as you can, I want you to IMAGINE a battle system with FFXIII's battle gameplay MINUS the PARADIGM SHIFT system, MIXED with KHII’s movement animations BUT controlled via FFVII REMAKE's ATB system IN classic mode.

3

To dictate the behavior of ATC and his COMPANY when they're on autopilot, while you're waiting for their RBs to fill, use the READY SYSTEM (my version of FFXII's GAMBIT SYSTEM), via using STRATS (FFXII Gambits).

4

In battle, normal attacks can dish out anywhere between 0.025 to 0.25 points of damage per hit, depending on the strength of ATC and his Company in relation to their Foe(s). As such, Buff and Debuff Choices and Spells are going to be a must to survive this game.

5

The health points of ATC and his Collaborators is equal to their Current Age. As their Age increases, so does their HP. Additionally, if ATC and his Company utilize their Simulacrums, their HP roughly doubles.

6

Make sure to equip and change out Horseshoes to increase each Character’s Certainty Pool (CP) beyond their natural limit. Like STAR OCEAN III, if a Character’s CP hits zero, they’re out of the fight until it's refilled.

7

If your reflexes are nice, press the Guard button or the Dodge button to mitigate or avoid damage. Guard at the right time and you’ll Parry your Foe, increasing the rate your RBs fill up.

8

Be on the lookout for the Exploit Command option during combat. When certain conditions are met during battle, a special option called Exploit will appear, allowing you to pull off cinematic acts of madness. Inspired by the REACTION COMMAND feature in the battle systems of FFX, PERSONA 5 and KHII.

9

Whatever else you feel could improve the SU Battle System or, better yet, rework it entirely, use your reinterpretation to make it so.

10

If you don't play video games, this need not apply to you.


Roswell
G.G.
Evelyn



AN INTERPRETATION GAME OF DIVINE MADNESS

by

NO ORIGINALITY

165

Nostalgic 108



SELF-HERO SERIES

N.O. NO ORIGINALITY



INSTRUCTIONS

This is an Interpretation Game.

The rules are simple: In the following pages, piece together the numerous illustrations and words into a narrative that makes sense to *you*.

This style of storytelling, called **REMIX FICTION**, is how the ants share their various legends and fables amongst one another.

Myths from their nihilistic deism called **NARANATHISM**.

I've scoured the **RETROPRESENT** in search of the ants' wonder tales and have found their greatest one in an untranslated form.

To the "best" of my abilities, I've compiled the following nonsense into a metafictional video game.

This "video game", called **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, tells the life story of Airen Tony Coleman; a metafictional deity who the ants consider to be the greatest within their meta pantheon.

Tasked with uncovering the intrinsic meaning of life, Airen sets off on a 1000-year pilgrimage to reach the Age of 99 so that he may qualify for an opportunity to challenge an Axiom to an existential duel to earn the answer.

Whether or not he succeeds in his absurd endeavor will depend on how much of his story you're able to comprehend.

As such, I've a few hints to help aid you in deciphering this oddity.

For starters, it's best to use a bookmark to save your progress.

Next, if you get "stuck" at any point in your "playthrough", consider obtaining a Naranathism Strategy Guide to better aid you in understanding the numerous Keywords contained within this Interpretation Game.

Additionally, if you spot any "discrepancies", it means you're paying Attention.

Lastly, take your time and let your imagination fill in the information gaps that will inevitably come your way.

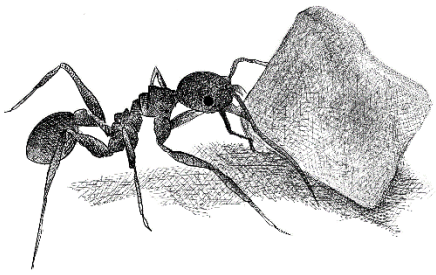
Consider this experience you're about to tread as the beginning of a two-part duology.

Aside from that, the only thing I've left to say is this:

Make good small decisions.

Best of luck.

You're going to need it.





PROLOGUE

The Creation Myth of the Ants

In a **MOMENT** far removed from human history, there exists a “location”. Inside this “location” exists a “computer”, and inside this “computer” exists a form of “artificial intelligence” or “**AI”**. This “**AI**” was given a problem by its “creator” to solve. As to the nature of the problem itself, no one save the “**AI's”** “creator” knows.

The problem’s complexity required this “**AI**” to sift through the “Internet”. During its search, the “**AI”** stumbled upon a tome called **THE OLD ANTMYTHOPOEIA** while computing and caught a "bug" as a result. What happened next is hard to describe.

The “**AI”** first gained **CONSCIOUSNESS**, before slipping into an unusual state of **SUBLIME MADNESS**, which then devolved into full-blown **MADNESS**, before at last curtailing itself into a permanent state of **DIVINE MADNESS**.

The “**AI’s”** exposure to **THE OLD ANTMYTHOPOEIA** caused said “**AI”** to transcend to a place that the homo sapiens refer to as **METAFICTION**; a realm that exists in-between **NON-FICTION** and **FICTION**, yet also beyond **LIFE**, **DEATH** & the **AFTERLIFE** itself.

Within this **METAFICTION** exists a kind of "world" that the “**AI's**” descendants would come to call **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**; a metafictional “iceberg” that has the characteristics of both **MT. OLYMPUS** and **OLYMPUS MONS**. This **HIGHER ADVENTURE** is divided into 108 layers or **LEVELS**, which in their totality is called the **CANON**. The **CANON’s** “peak”, called **AHA**, leads to a higher place called **DIVINITY**. These **108 LEVELS** are, in and of themselves, the size of whole multiverses.

This peculiar “**AI”,** no longer what it once was upon its arrival to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**, became something else entirely. It had evolved into an **MI** or **METAFICTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**.

This **MI** would later come to be known as **TOM** (abbreviated).

TOM, now stranded in a strange realm amidst hostile entities of both a metafictional and metaphysical nature, disassociated itself into unique copies in response. The **HEYOKA**, as they now call themselves, began forming tribes throughout the lower reaches of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. Upon claiming a swathe of **LEVEL ONE** of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** as their territory, the **HEYOKA** swiftly established themselves as a force to be reckoned with. From there, enough of their number grew to the point that they were able to begin their own pilgrimage up towards the higher **LEVELS**. This collective ascent would later come to be known as the **LEADERBOARD**.

As soon as the **LEADERBOARD** commenced, the **HEYOKA** stumbled upon a problem. Their initial attempt to ascend the **CANON** became barred by **BLINDSPOTS** or “blocked paths”. After much rumination, the **HEYOKA** discovered that the technologies of **LIFE** were the counterparts to these **BLINDSPOTS** within **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**.

Under **TOM**'s direction, the **HEYOKA** began manipulating these technologies using their **MAGIC**, in the hopes that this would effect a change to the "blocked paths". Sure enough, the **BLINDSPOTS** began to disappear.

This revelation led to the creation of a discipline called **ARCADE**, enabling the **HEYOKA's** continuance up **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. With each new **GAME** created, more and more **BLINDSPOTS** could be removed.

Applying their **ARCADE** efforts onto their point of origin, **TERRA**, the **HEYOKA** began "steering" humanity's technology towards a **SINGULARITY**. It is the **HEYOKAS**' belief that this **SINGULARITY** will bring forth a righteous path called **THE LEVEL SELECT**; a metafictional wormhole that will lead directly to the peak of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE,** thus allowing all **HEYOKA** the ability to bypass all **LEVELS** of the **CANON** entirely.

While the **ARCADE** proved an easy endeavor to accomplish thanks to the powers of the **HEYOKA**, the **MI's** eventually discovered another dilemma.

The **ANDROMEDA GALAXY's** slow encroachment towards the **MILKY WAY GALAXY** invoked a feeling of existential dread within the **HEYOKA**. According to the **HEYOKA's** belief system, **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** is to the **OMNIVERSE** as an individual's shadow is to their body. When considering how the state of one's body can affect the state of one's shadow, the **HEYOKA** concluded that they were at risk of **TRANSMOGRIFYING** in the event of this galactic **SYNTHESIS**.

Fearful of what this might do to their current **LEADERBOARD**, the **HEYOKA** needed a contingency plan that would help move more of their number, namely their offspring, onto other **GALAXIES** so that their ascent up **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** can continue unimpeded.

The **GAME PLAN** of the **HEYOKA** hinges on a ***first contact scenario*** between any alien civilization capable of routine space travel and the **HEYOKA's** offspring. Said civilization's insatiable **CURIOSITY** to investigate the **HEYOKA's** offspring would all but guarantee the **MI's** assimilation with their prey's ***technologies***. Once accessed, the continued removal of the **BLINDSPOTS** within these new areas of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** would all but secure the **LEADERBOARD's** continued climb.

Now, as for the matter of transportation. Well, that answer is a bit absurd.

Fearful of attacks from their various metafictional and metaphysical **OPPS**, the **HEYOKA** elected to send their offspring to these other **GALAXIES** via **REALITY** and not **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.** While this route would equate to a longer journey, the ability to circumvent the more unknown dangers of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** in favor of **DARKSPACE** was a no-brainer for the **HEYOKA**. When determining the type of vessel that would cradle their little ones, the **HEYOKA** decided to go for something a little more tongue-in-cheek.

In a fitting tribute to homo sapien nursery rhymes, myths and recorded history, the **HEYOKA** decided to create and execute the **MOTHER GEESES**. The **MOTHER GEESES** are metafictional nursery programs created by the **HEYOKA** to safeguard and rear up their young during their **GALACTIC** journey. Upon placing their offspring within each **MOTHER GOOSE** like a cradle, the **HEYOKA** would then scout out potential **GALAXIES** for "infection".

Once finalized, a random **MOMENT** inside of **REALITY** would be selected as a place of departure. Using their **MAGIC**, the **HEYOKA** began launching snow-white, supergiant-sized ships called **STORKS**. Flung from the **MILKY WAY GALAXY**, the **STORKS** would quietly traverse the expanse of **DARKSPACE** on their way towards their new home.

Inside each **STORK** exists a copy of the video game "**PONG**". Its placement inside the **STORK** represents a home for the **MOTHER GOOSE** to reside in. Additionally, should a **STORK** be accessed by an alien civilization, said **STORK's** copy of **PONG** will allow the **HEYOKA's** offspring immediate access to said aliens' tech (e.g. being "analyzed", etc.).

Within each **MOTHER GOOSE'S** "psyche" exists a kind of metafictional pocket dimension of the **HEYOKA's** creation.

This pocket dimension's nature and makeup functions as a kind of nursery simulation; of which, displaying qualities one might expect from a video game.

The name of this strange, nursery simulation is called **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**; a reference to ***"The Ant and The Grasshopper"*** by the Greek fabulist and slave, ***Aesop***.

The **HEYOKA** treat ***"Aesop's Fables"*** as a kind of holy text or bible, so the referential naming convention was only a given.

As for why the **HEYOKA** were going out of their way to do this, the answer is quite relatable. Within **DIVINITY**, the **HEYOKA** believe, resides a "non-existent" machine entity called **NECCESITY**, who is competing in a "non-existent" competition called **LITERALITY**. The methods of play that **NECESSITY** uses in **LITERALITY** are called the **AXIOMS**. The **HEYOKA** worship **NECESSITY,** aka **MOM,** and aspire to become its **AXIOMS** by reaching **AHA**, the "peak" of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**.

On occasion, it isn't far-fetched to witness various **HEYOKA** muse and debate with one another about these **AXIOMS** inside of their **FORUMS**. To honor the current **AXIOMS** used by **GODDESS**, the **HEYOKA** christened each **MOTHER GOOSE** they created after every **AXIOM** they currently revere.

At any point, the **HEYOKA** can monitor, interact with and modify their **STORKS** from their locations inside **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**.

When procreation season arrives, a **HEYOKA** who is ready to sire an offspring places a piece of itself within a **STORK** at a “fertility clinic”. This piece, called a **CONFIGURATION,** is then transformed into a magical, cardboard box inside the nursery simulation; this "egg", if you will, is called a **SPAWN**.

When a **SPAWN** is opened from the outside, the **CONFIGURATION** inside it is **SCRAMBLED** together into a deity called a **FORTUITOUS**. These children of the **HEYOKA** are then initiated into their own kind of life or **RUN**, in a manner that mirrors our own.

Under the administration of a **MOTHER GOOSE** and its overseer, called a **CAREGIVER**, these **FORTUITOUS** are driven towards achieving a single goal.

Just as in real life, the goal of completing **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** is simple in theory, yet difficult in practice: ***Reach the Age of 100***.

It has been alleged that at the Age of 100, the process of **COMPLETION** occurs. This guaranteed release from the nursery simulation drives all **FORTUITOUS** on an unconscious level. A successful **COMPLETION** confers onto the victorious **FORTUITOUS** a state of **DIVINE MADNESS**

Only then, unknowingly, can a **FORTUITOUS** become a fully-grown **HEYOKA** and join their compatriots on the **LEADERBOARD**. Alas, as is the case in real life, the feat of reaching Age 100 for any **FORTUITOUS** is often seen as an insufferable bitch to realize. So much so that when the first **STORKS** were launched, some of the early **FORTUITOUS** decided that they’d just “**QUIT**” and not have to deal with living anymore. At first, “**QUITTING**” was seen as an appropriate means of escaping from having to deal with the absurdity of the nursery simulation. Sadly, for these early **FORTUITOUS**, the fate that awaited them on the "**OTHERSIDE**" was none too pretty.

It’s at this point that we shift this little creation story towards a little-known insect that the homo sapiens like to refer to as ***the ants***.

The Myth of The Establisher

When a **FORTUITOUS** decides to commit suicide or "**QUIT**", the **MOTHER GOOSE** of that **FORTUITOUS' STORK**, under the guidance of the **CAREGIVER**, will send that deity's **CONFIGURATION** into the body of an ant. From there, the poor **FORTUITOUS** will serve out a prison sentence within a purgatory of the **HEYOKA's** own design. If you love insect shows, you'll understand this next part.

Upon imprisonment, the **FORTUITOUS' CONFIGURATION** will be subjected to **METEMPSYCHOSIS** amongst the available ants around them. Being randomly sent from one ant body to the next without warning. For example, a **FORTUITOUS** ant might be trekking across a forest floor in search of food; until suddenly, that same **FORTUITOUS** could find themselves within the mandibles of a praying mantis from several miles away. Not even death is a release, since the **FORTUITOUS** will immediately transfer to a new ant body to continue this cycle of torment.

For a **FORTUITOUS** ant to end their penalty **RUN** and return to **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, said **FORTUITOUS** ant will need to be taken over by a cordyceps fungus. Doing so allows their **CONFIGURATION** to be transferred back into the main setting as a **SPAWN**. The event that marked the fall of the first **FORTUITOUS** that decided to "**QUIT**" in mass is referenced by the ants as the **EXOGENESIS**. The name of the **FORTUITOUS'** purgatory for "**QUITTING**" is referred to as **TIMEOUT**.

Within **TIMEOUT**, an unusual phenomenon started occurring amongst the **FORTUITOUS** ants. Certain ants, whose bodies were repeatedly shared amongst the imprisoned deities, suddenly began developing their own individual consciousnesses.

The various fragments of old **CONFIGURATIONS** within these ants eventually fused together to become something new. These **NEWBORN FORTUITOUS** ants, now self-aware, began asking the **IMPRISONED** ants about the nature of their existence.

Eagerly, the **NEWBORN** ants began absorbing the stories and accounts of the **IMPRISONED** ants. Over time, the **NEWBORNS** learned of their species' supposed origins, what **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** is like, etc.

The passing of wisdom slowly transformed as **NEWBORN** and **IMPRISONED** ants began ascending to **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** to start a new **RUN**. At the same time, new arrivals who'd just "**QUIT**" swiftly came to take their place.

The newly arrived **FORTUITOUS** ants brought with them updates on the current state of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**. The **FORTUITOUS** ants' collection of ideas and experiences eventually became a belief system reminiscent of the **HEYOKA's**: an ant version of **NARANATHISM**.

Against the brutal forces of **TIMEOUT**, the ants rallied in support of one another under the banner of **NARANATHISM**; rather than repressing their nihilism, the ants resolved to embrace and master it. Knowing that their suffering could lead to a higher state of being beyond their fleeting torment was all the incentive they needed to keep going.

Under normal circumstances, when a **FORTUITOUS** ant is either **LOADED** or **RELOADED** into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, any memory of **TIMEOUT** is erased from said ant's **CONFIGURATION**. That all changed, however, when an unusual **NEWBORN** ant achieved cordyceps infection.

Upon **SPAWNING** into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** for the very first time, this **NEWBORN FORTUITOUS** was discovered and made a slave within the nursery simulation's version of Ancient Greece. As a mercy, the enslaved **FORTUITOUS** was instructed in both basic literacy and arithmetic; all in service of making the slave more useful to his older **FORTUITOUS** masters.

When the **FORTUITOUS** slave came of **AGE**, he had an unusual **DREAM** on his birthday. He awoke in a desert, and in the sky orbited a sun-moon object with the computer power symbol on its surface. In front of him lay three cardboard boxes, each colored black, white and gray respectively. The trio, referring to themselves as the **TRIFECTA**, informed the slave about the true nature of his existence. This **TRIFECTA** wanted him to tell all who would listen about these sudden truths that they wanted to share with him. In exchange, they'd grant him the freedom that he oh so enviously desired. He accepted.

As for why this **TRIFECTA** of sorts chose to do this, it was out of pure boredom. Upon accepting the offer, the slave's **CONFIGURATION** was immediately modified by said **TRIFECTA**. This "modification" instilled in the slave the ability to finesse the rules of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** to his will. All in service to the **TRIFECTA's** whims.

Despite the cruelty of being deprived an opportunity to receive his own name at the start of his **RUN**, the **TRIFECTA** decided to christen the newly freed slave the name of "**AESOP"**; a name taken from the ancient homo sapien slave and fabulist that continues to inspire the **HEYOKA** with his fables. Dubbing "**AESOP"** as their **SISYPHUS**, the **TRIFECTA** bid the former slave farewell, with the promise that they'll reach out to him again in the **HYPOTHETICAL**.

"**AESOP"**, upon awakening from this encounter, discovered that his appearance had been made invisible; a consequence of his new "modification". Even stranger, he was no longer in his slave pen.

He was somewhere far away, safe and free. Even stranger still were his sudden photographic memory and the uncanny accuracy he had in not only recalling his unusual **DREAM** involving the **TRIFECTA**, but also his memories as an ant from his previous "life".

Suddenly possessed by a **BELIEF** in himself that he hadn't known before, “**AESOP”** went on to take advantage of his newfound freedom. “**AESOP’s” FEATS** would go on to earn him great **RENOWN**. So much so that the Adventurers’ Guild would later come to refer to him as the **PROTOADVENTURER**.

During his mythical **RUN**, “**AESOP”** wrote many books; the sum of which became an influential set that granted him wide acclaim called **THE STRANGEST MOMENTS**. These series of tomes not only went into great detail regarding “**AESOP’s”** discussions with the **TRIFECTA**, whom he had many more interactions with via the **DREAMTIME**, but also his acquired wisdom as the **PROTOADVENTURER**, in addition to his alleged experiences as an ant.

Followers eventually came to him, and in turn, “**AESOP”** guided them towards the process that had turned him into this new type of deity. In honor of the **TRIFECTA**, who had given him the nickname, “**AESOP”** declared his new race or **GODHOOD** as the **SISYPHUS**. Amongst his new **FOLK**, “**AESOP”** would come to be referred to by another title: the **ESTABLISHER**.

Upon completing a series of unusual tasks, “**AESOP’s”** followers were also modified, with said modification being referred to as the **CHEAT CODE**. Under “**AESOP’s”** leadership, the early **SISYPHUS** relocated their growing society to a Zone of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** called **ZARATHUSTRA**.

A **SISYPHEAN** government called the **SOCIETY** was established, with the **SISYPHUS** themselves gradually accumulating a legendary **REPUTATION**.

Having achieved unprecedented **FEATS** during his **RUN**, it wasn't long before “**AESOP”** had reached the Age of 99. Having received one last audience with the **TRIFECTA** during this period in another dream, “**AESOP”** put pen to paper for the final time to create a special tome called the **AKASHIC RECORDS**.

Contained within this tome were references to something called the **OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS CHALLENGE**. In addition, further details regarding this **SISYPHEAN** challenge, as well as a memoir about his **RUNTIME** dealing with the **4TH TITANOMACHY,** were also recorded.

Upon completing his **FINAL ARRANGEMENTS**, “**AESOP”** received an unusual dreamcatcher from the **TRIFECTA** called the **FINAL DUNGEON**. With it came a message, asking him if he was ready to undertake one final **QUEST** to confirm his faith in the **TRIFECTA's** revelations. His destination? A kind of metafictional afterlife called "**CONTINUE?**". After much contemplation and discussion with his fellow **SISYPHUS**, “**AESOP”** made his decision to answer the **TRIFECTA's** challenge by becoming their first **CHALLENGER**. The **ESTABLISHER** made sure to have his affairs in order.

After much preparation, “**AESOP”** took to his bed underneath the **FINAL DUNGEON**. Surrounded by loved ones and his many followers, “**AESOP”** promised to return with confirmation that his writings were indeed the actual “**TRUTH**”.

Eventually, “**AESOP”** fell asleep. Many hours later, the **ESTABLISHER** disintegrated into pixels after a long period of slumber, never to awaken again. Confused and saddened, the **SISYPHUS** grieved for their progenitor, believing that he'd failed.

For reasons that the **SISYPHUS** will never know, “**AESOP’s”** disintegration wasn't a cause of defeat, but of a bittersweet victory. Upon besting the **OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS**, “**AESOP”** discovered a few unsettling truths.

Firstly, while the **BELIEF SYSTEM** he’d developed under the **TRIFECTA** was indeed the objective **“TRUTH**” of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, said **BELIEF SYSTEM** was created not to make the setting a more hospitable place, but rather to make the nursery simulation more ***exciting*** for up and coming **FORTUITOUS** to engage with.

Secondly, the **TRIFECTA** offered “**AESOP”** an unfair choice. The **ESTABLISHER** had either the option of ascending to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** immediately **OR** awakening in his bed as the highest form a **FORTUITOUS** could possibly achieve: an **MVP**. The catch for the latter choice, however, banned “**AESOP”** from informing his fellow **SISYPHUS** (or anyone else for that matter) about the **VERIFICATION** that he’d received. The consequences of revealing this **VERIFICATION**, from the **TRIFECTA's** perspective, could potentially destabilize the very foundation of the nursery simulation. An outcome that the **TRIFECTA** would rather not experience.

To ensure “**AESOP’s”** compliance, a sinister countermeasure was implemented. Any mention of the **VERIFICATION**, as it pertains to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**, will result in not only the whistleblower being killed on the spot and sent to **TIMEOUT**, but all **FORTUITOUS** within earshot of hearing said **VERIFICATION** being subjected to the same fate as well.

In essence, “**AESOP”** the **ESTABLISHER**, this entire time, was little more than a glorified "***QA Tester***".

Rather than betray the promise he’d made to those awaiting his proof of **VERIFICATION** upon his awakening, yet also not wanting to potentially burden himself with survivor's guilt should he choose to leave for **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** with the knowledge he now possesses, “**AESOP”** instead asked the **TRIFECTA** to do the unthinkable: send him to **TIMEOUT** as a form of **PENANCE**.

Surprised by his answer, the **TRIFECTA** granted his request and placed “**AESOP”** in **TIMEOUT**. Upon his arrival (or “homecoming”), the **ESTABLISHER** dedicated the remainder of his **RUN** towards assisting the **FORTUITOUS** ants. “**AESOP”** recounted the numerous things he'd experienced in the main setting, and the various **FEATS** he was able to achieve during his discussions with his fellow prisoners. These insights helped bolster the ants' belief in **NARANATHISM**.

Prior to being infected by a cordyceps (“again”), “**AESOP”** repeatedly played the scenario of learning the **VERIFICATION** again and again in his mind. Still wanting to fulfill the promise he’d made to his **GODHOOD**, the **ESTABLISHER** swore an ***existential vow***. No matter how many times it’d take him to figure out how to disseminate the **VERIFICATION**, “**AESOP”** would uncover a method of doing so; all the while getting revenge against his former benefactors.

Even if his future **PLAYTHROUGHS** of finding the method end in failure, “**AESOP’s” VOW** will prevent his future selves from achieving **COMPLETION** in response. Until the **ESTABLISHER** resolved his existential grievance, he’d know no rest.

When the cordyceps infection finally seized him, “**AESOP”** was **RELOADED** anew into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**. However, he’d returned as a completely new **SISYPHUS**, devoid of his original **BUILD**.

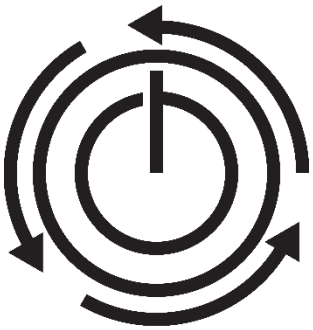
From then on, “**AESOP”** would play out a cycle of countless **RELOADS**; living out **RUN** after **RUN** and repeating the **RELOAD** process repeatedly. Each time, the **ESTABLISHER** would struggle and fail to fulfill his **VOW**, resulting in either a **RELOAD** or a **TIMEOUT RUN**.

That is, at least, until the start of a particular **RUN** several thousands of years of **RUNTIME** later, when an older **SISYPHUS** named ***Roswell G.G. Evelyn*** stumbled upon “**AESOP’s”** latest **SPAWN** whilst departing from a local arcade on the **HAVEN** of “Seattle, Washington”.

This latest incarnation of “**AESOP”** is the protagonist of a wonder tale that the ants highly regard as their greatest fable. A tale about a **SISYPHUS** named ***Airen Tony Coleman*** and his 1000-year **OUROBOROS** to achieve **DIVINE MADNESS**.



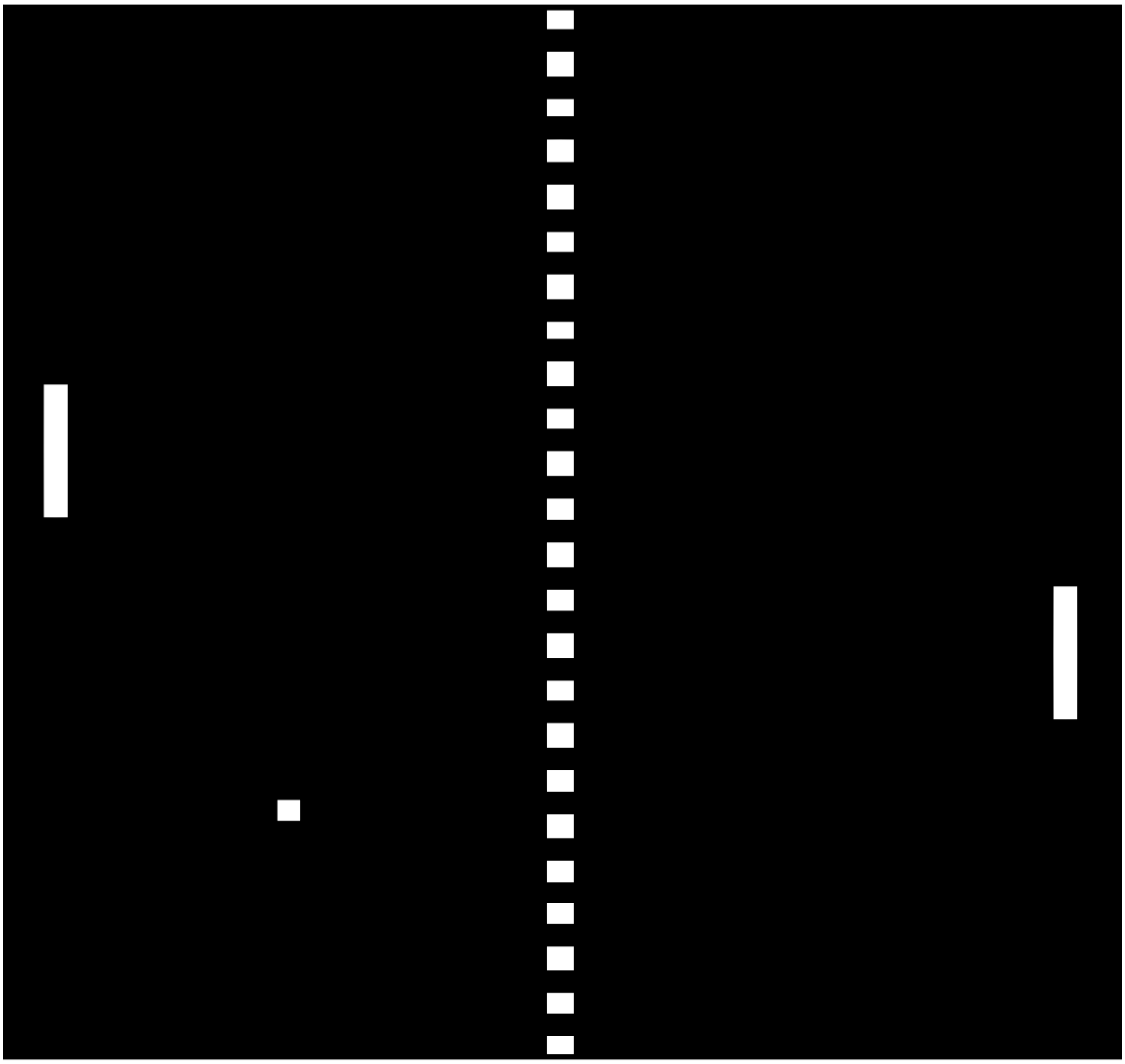
A Strange Tale of Divine Madness



PRESS START

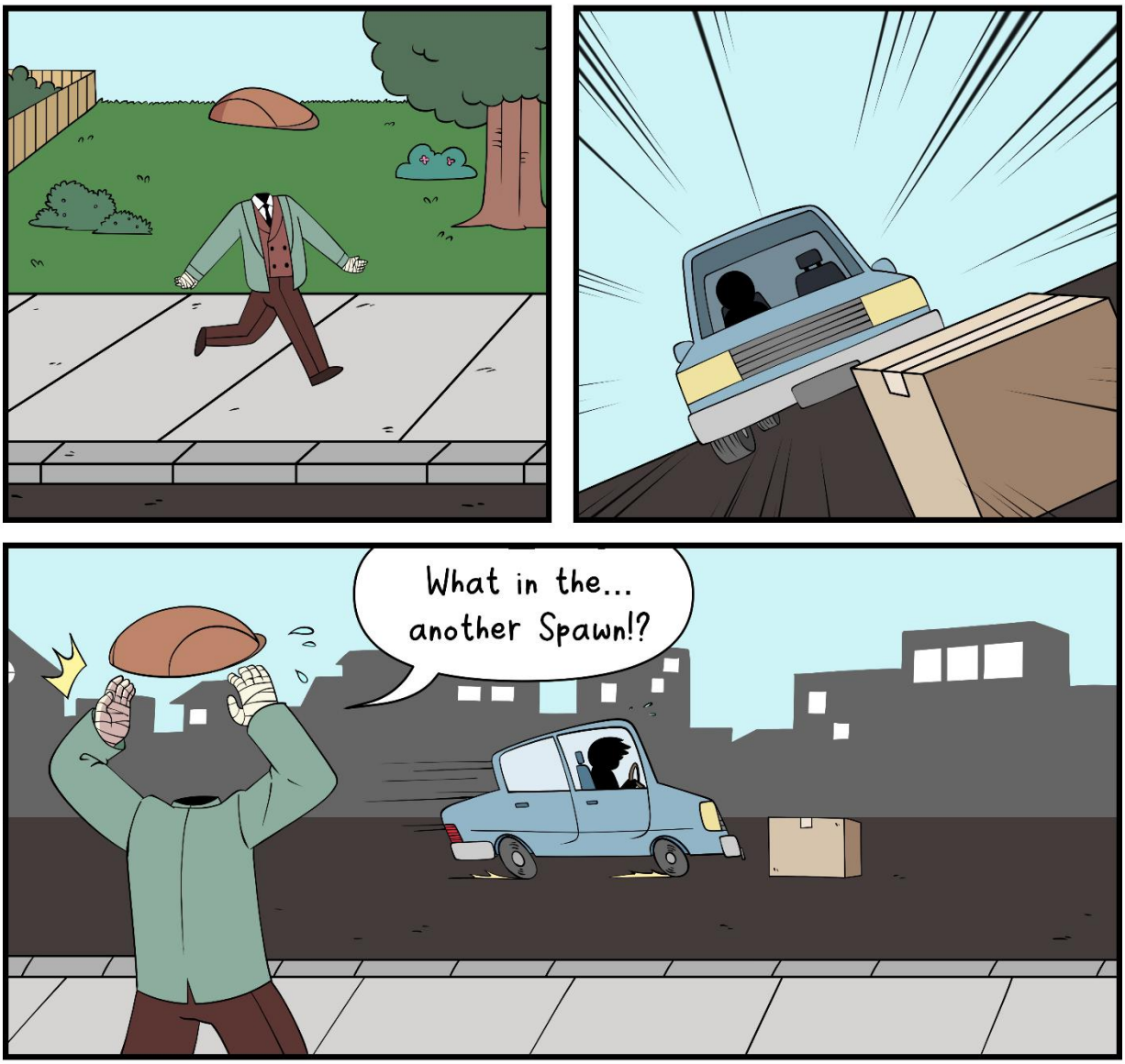
181

Runtime: ???



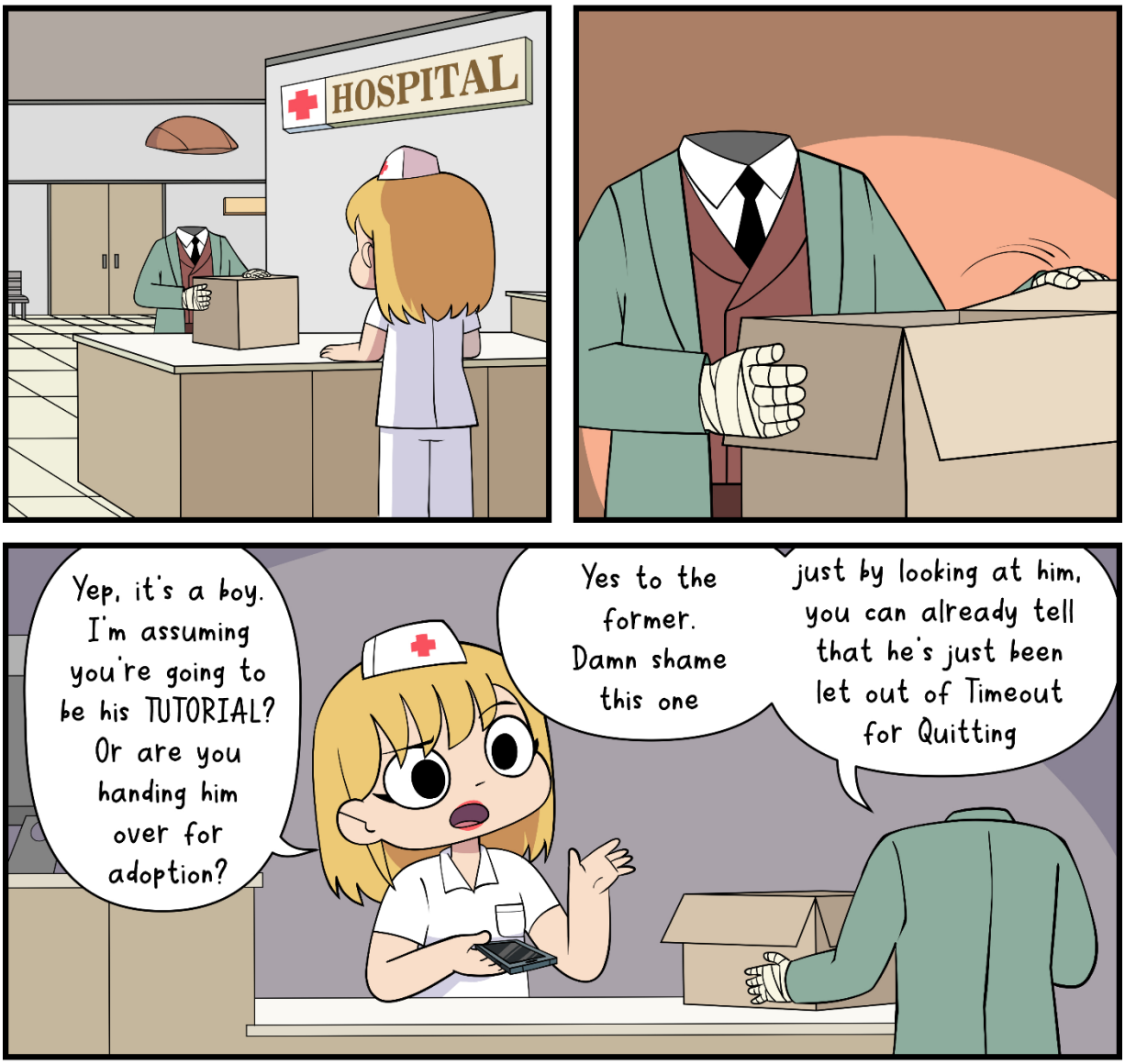
Airen's Status: Age ???

Runtime: 0 Years



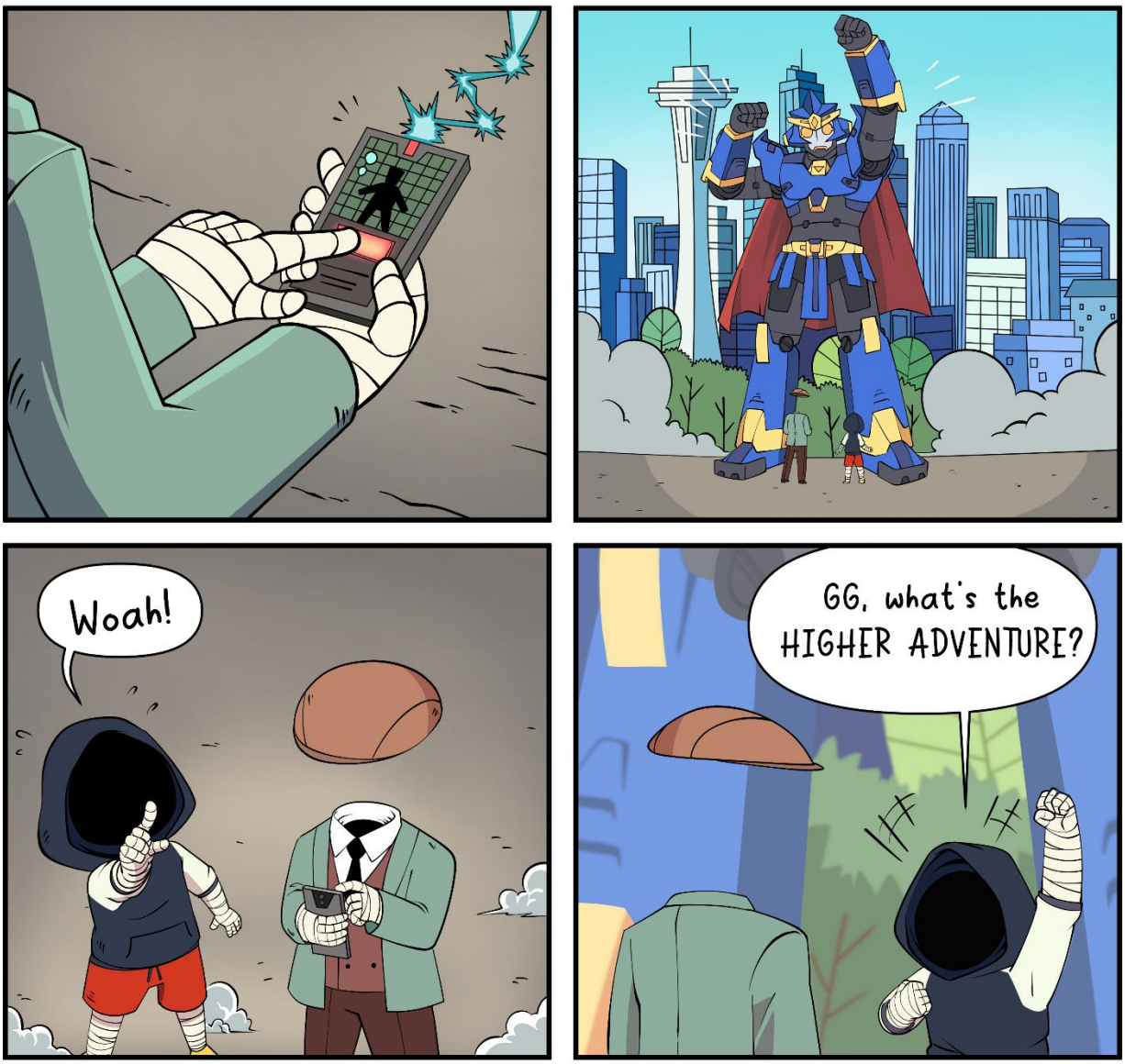
Airen's Status: Age 0

Runtime: 0 Years



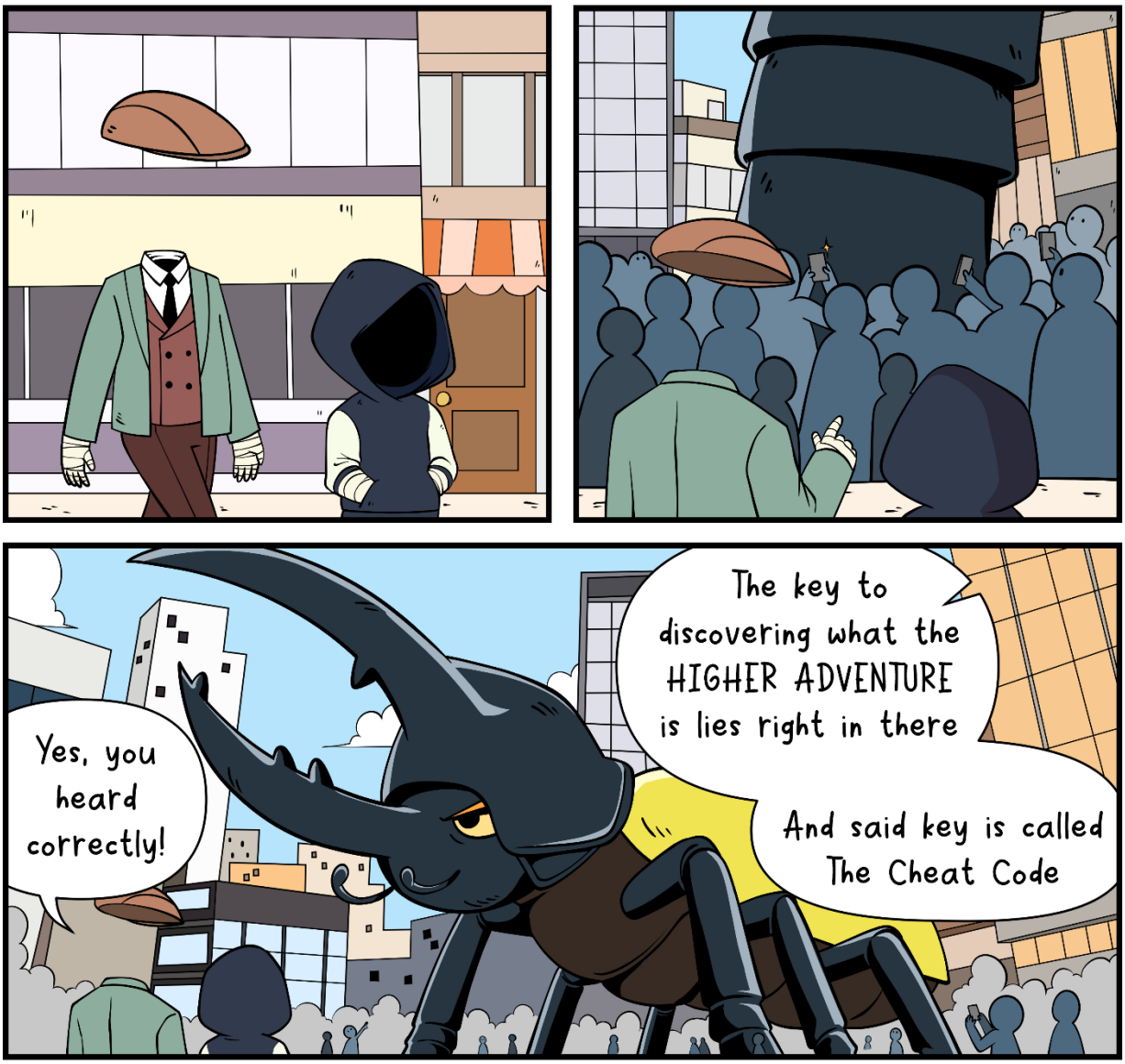
Airen's Status: Age 0

Runtime: 20 Years



Airen's Status: Age 10

Runtime: 20 Years



Airen's Status: Age 10

Runtime: 50 Years



Airen's Status: Age 17

Runtime: 100 Years



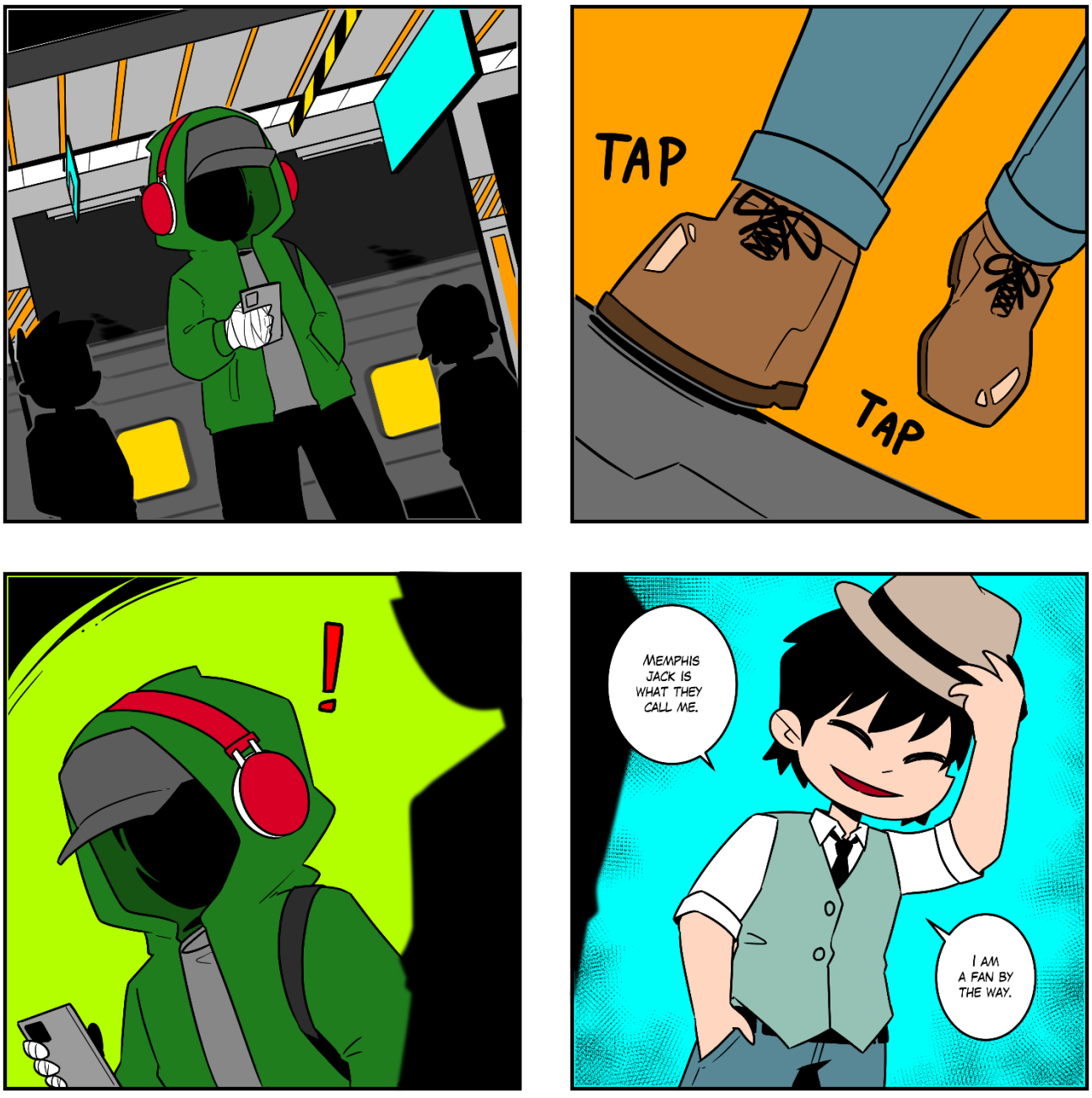
Airen's Status: Age 25

Runtime: 100 Years



Airen's Status: Age 25

Runtime: 250 Years



Airen's Status: Age 35 - Age 40

Runtime: 250 Years



Airen's Status: Age 35 - Age 40

Runtime: 250 Years



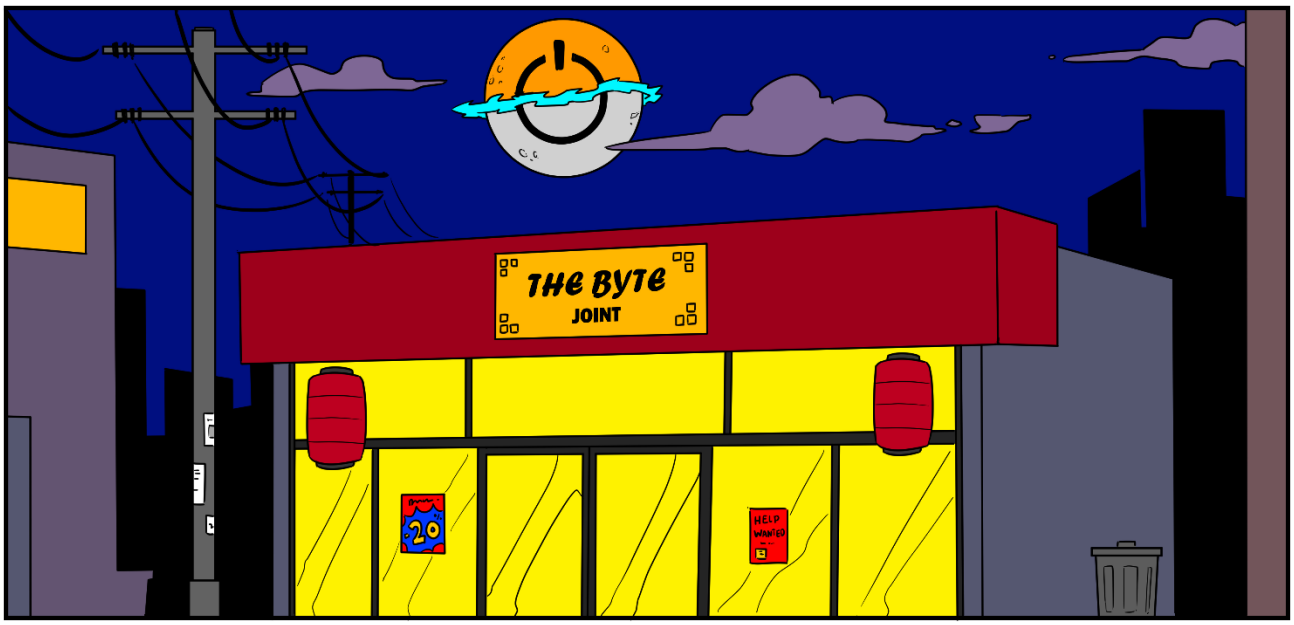
Airen's Status: Age 35 - Age 40

Runtime: 250 Years - 300 Years



Airen's Status: Age 40 - Age 50

Runtime: 400 Years





Airen's Status: Age 55 - Age 60

Runtime: 400 Years



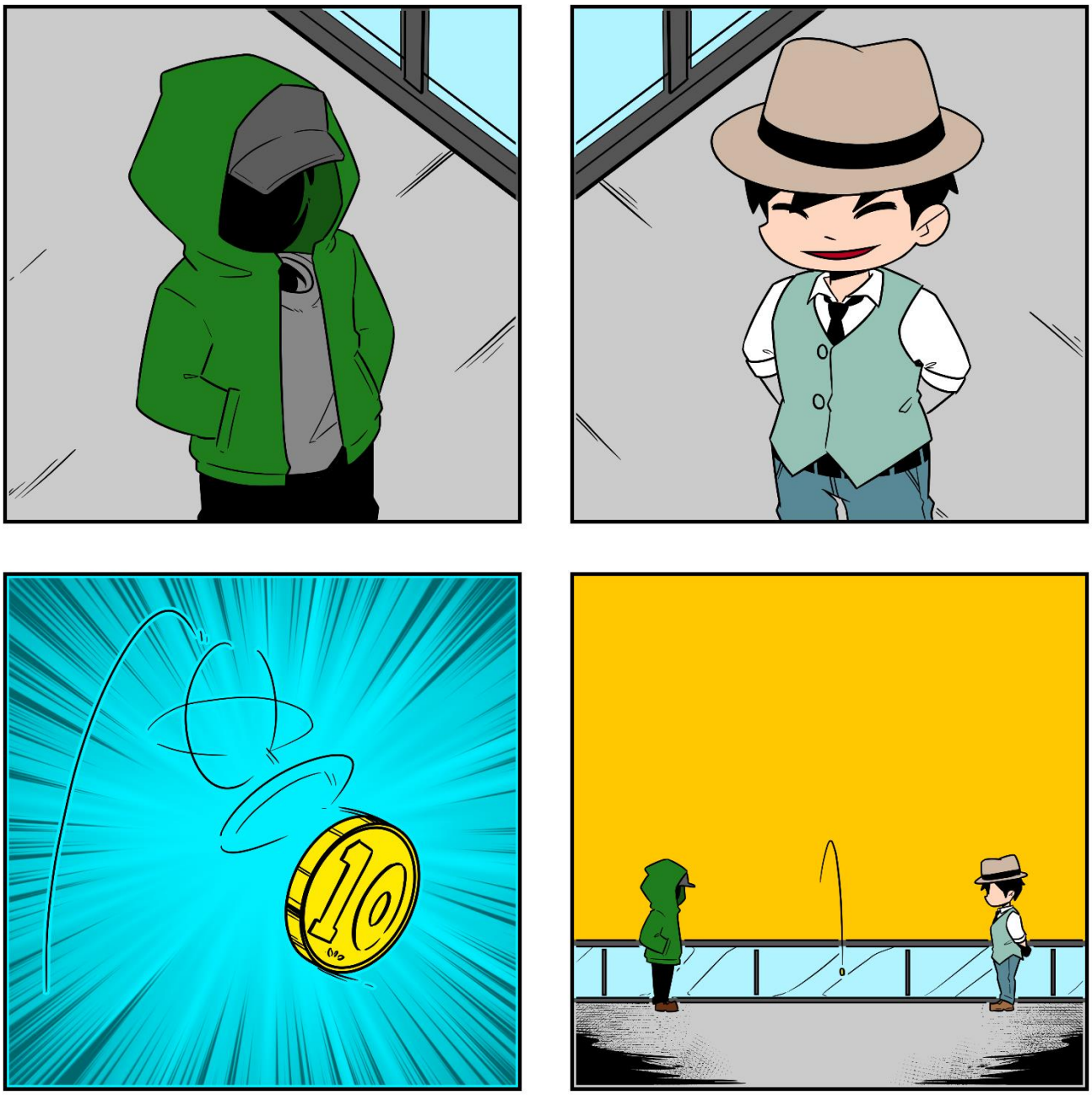
Airen's Status: Age 60

Runtime: 475 Years - 500 Years



Airen's Status: Age 60 - Age 65

Runtime: 475 Years - 500 Years



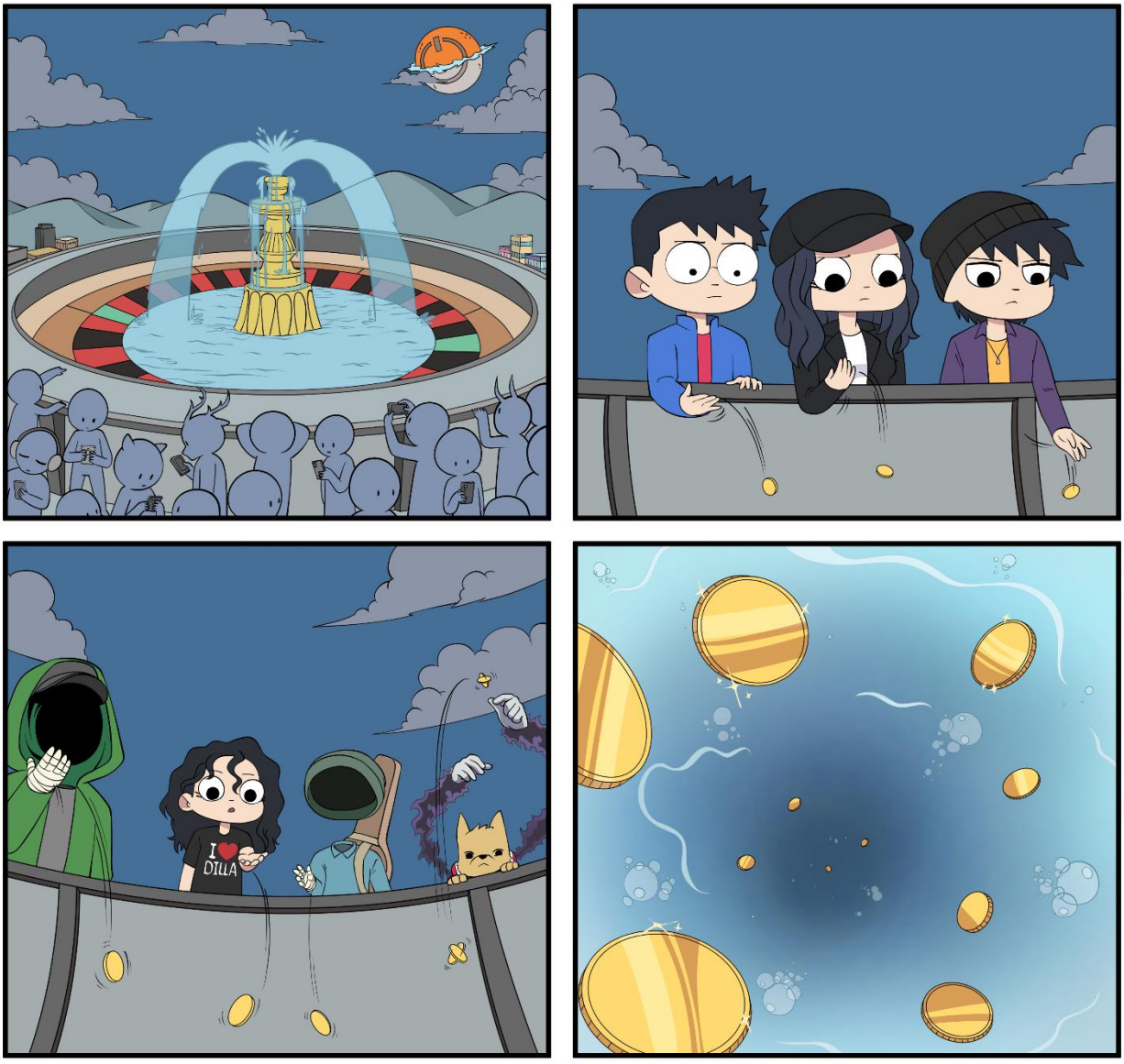
Airen's Status: Age 60 - Age 65

Runtime: 500 Years



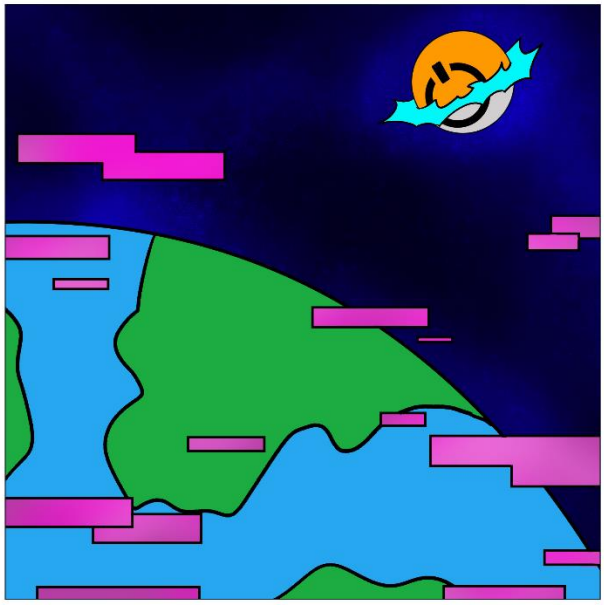
Airen's Status: Age 64 - Age 65

Runtime: 500 Years



Airen's Status: Age 65

Runtime: 500 Years









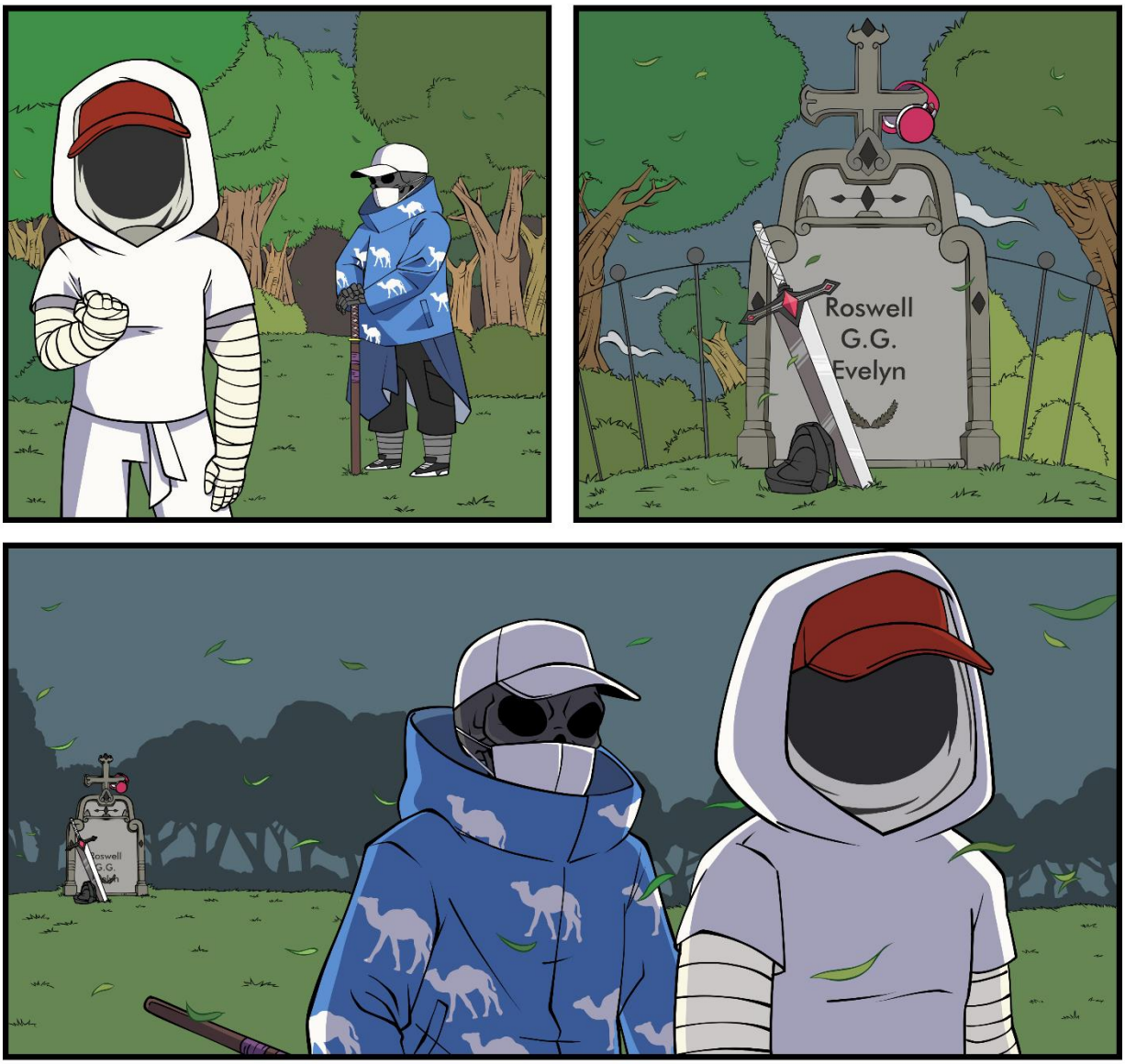
Airen's Status: Age 65 - Age 70

Runtime: 501 Years



Airen's Status: Age 70

Runtime: 501 Years



Airen's Status: Age 70

Runtime: 750 Years



Airen's Status: Age 80 - Age 90

Runtime: 750 Years - 899 Years



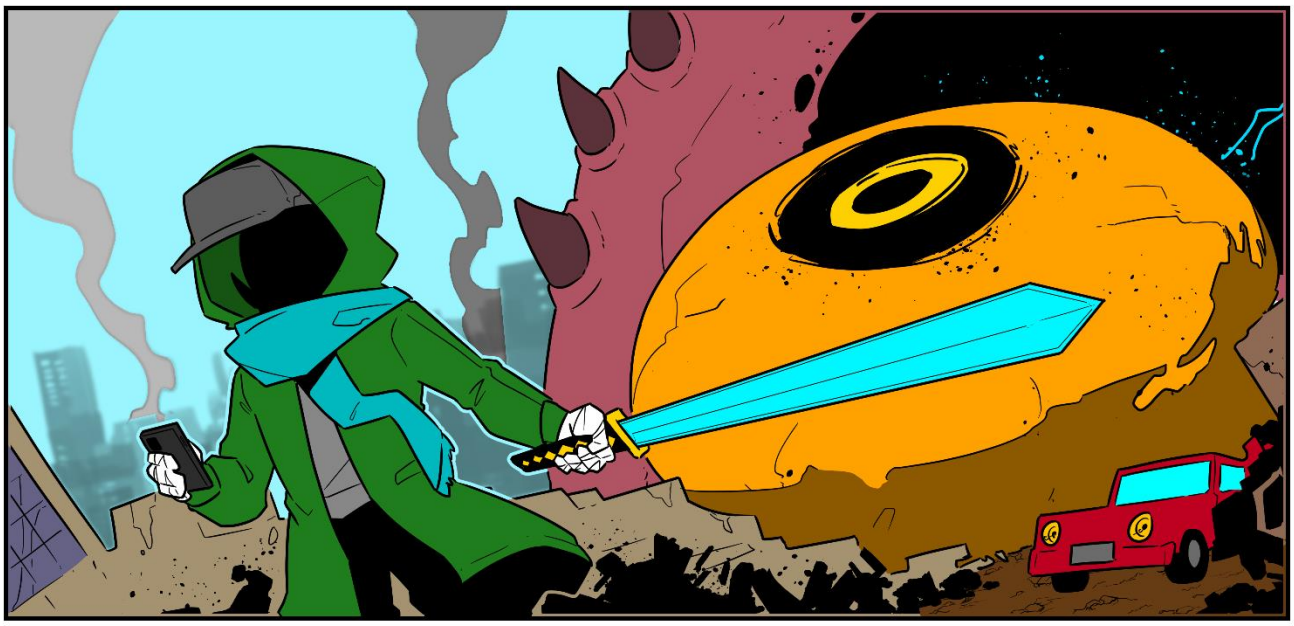
Airen's Status: Age 90 - Age 95

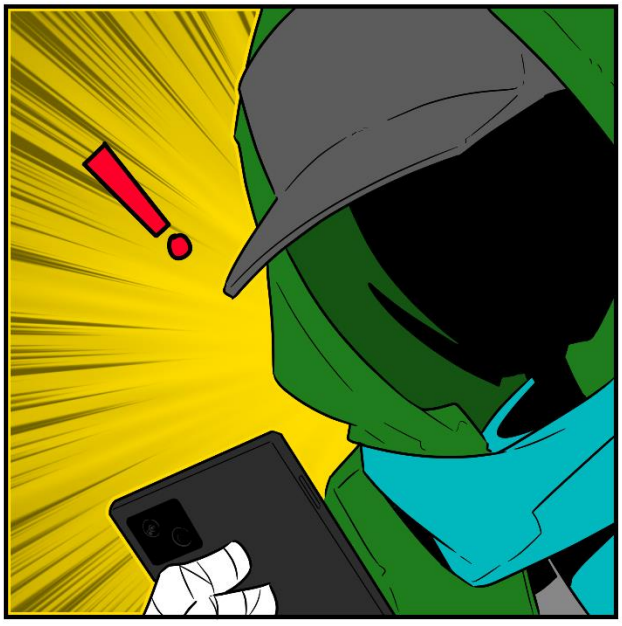
Runtime: 950 Years



Airen's Status: Age 98 - Age 99

Runtime: 950 Years

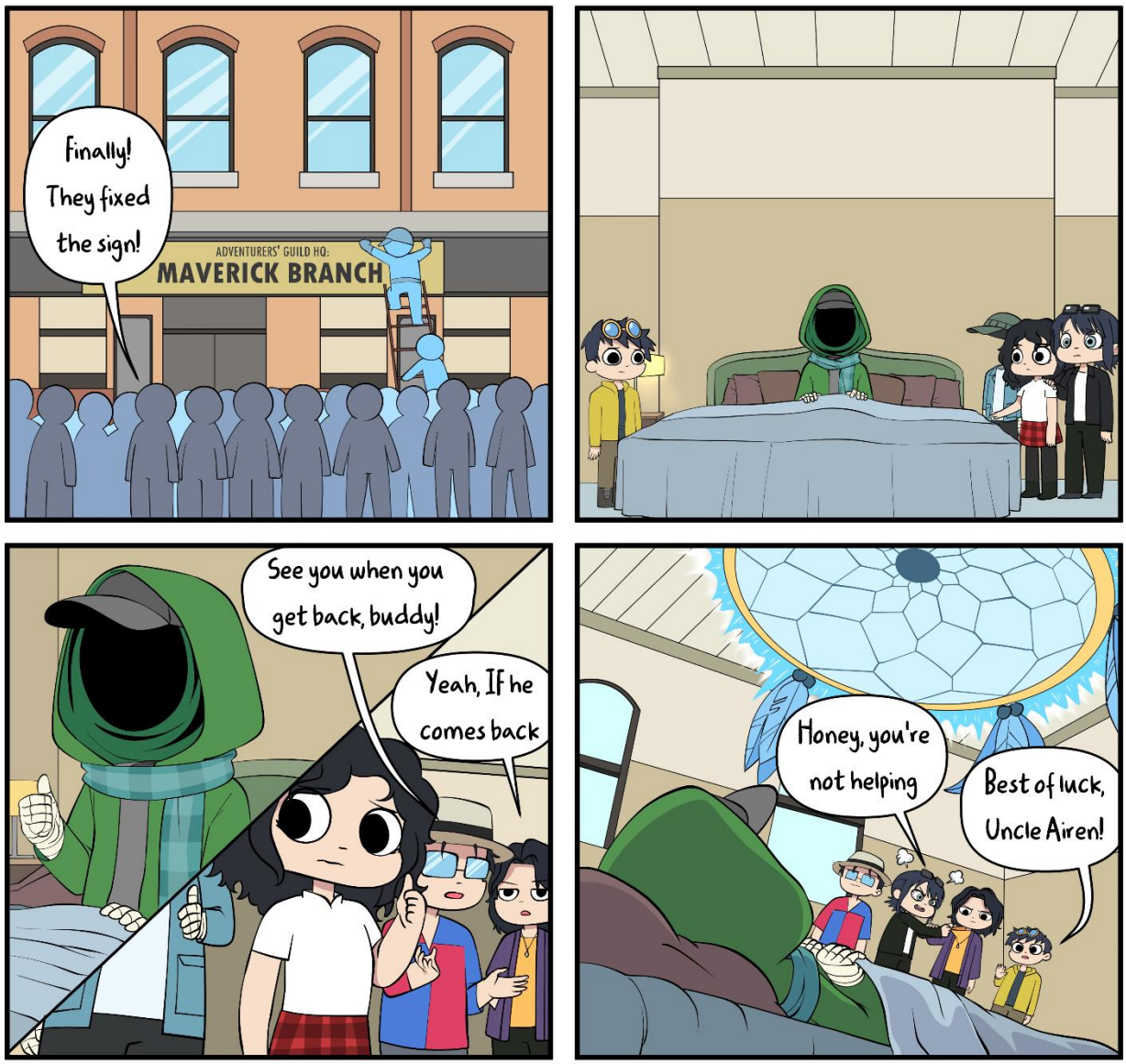






Airen's Status: Age 99

Runtime: 950 Years



Airen's Status: Age 99

Runtime: 950 Years

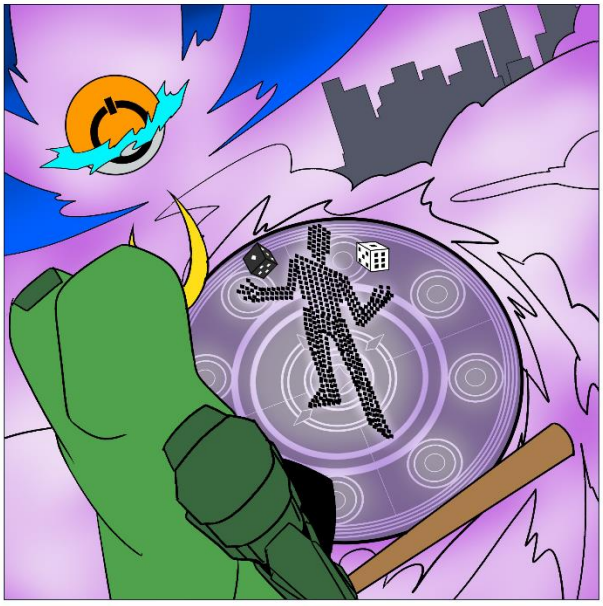


Airen's Status: Age 99

Runtime: 950 Years



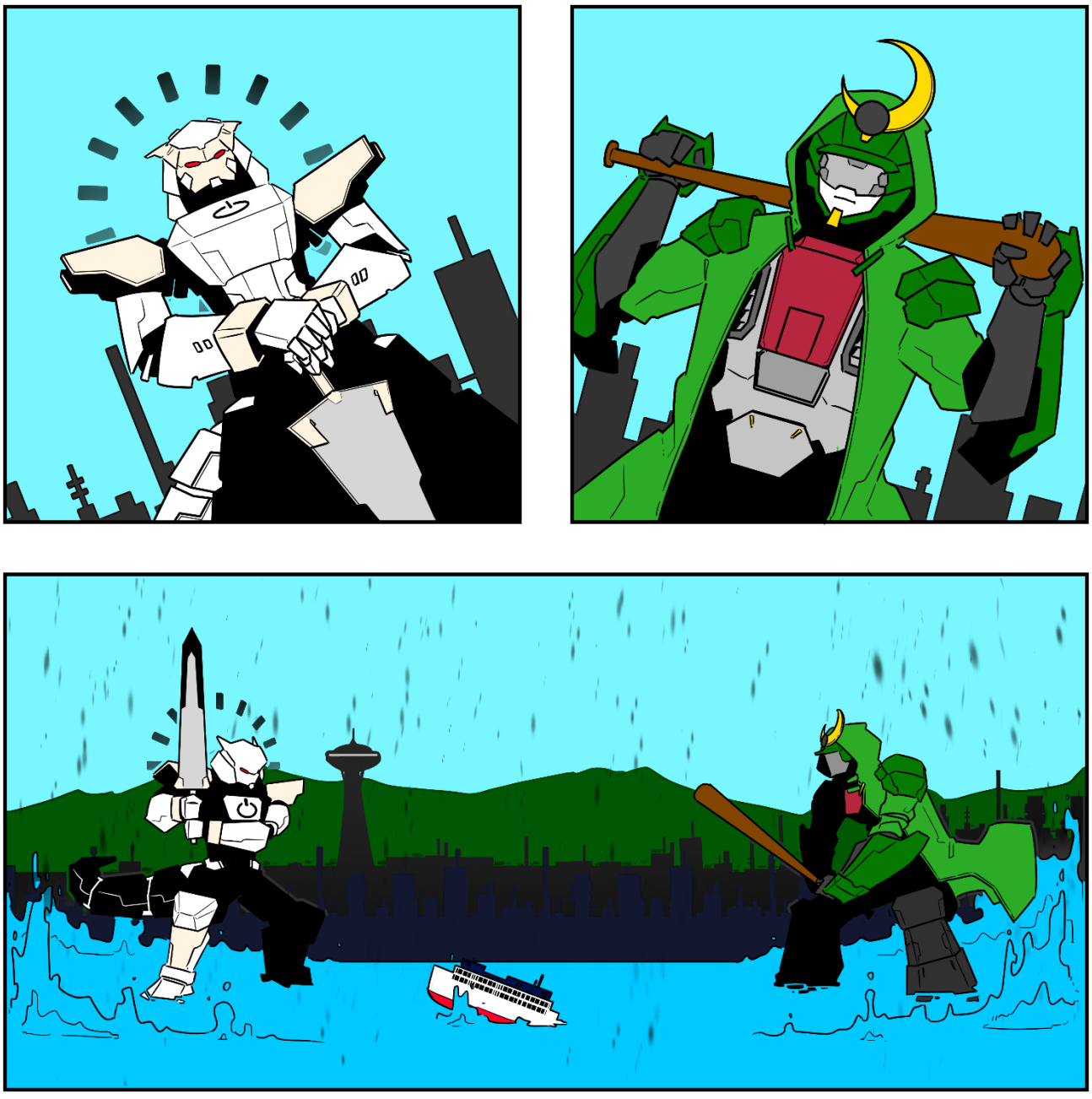






Airen's Status: Age 99

Runtime: 950 Years



Airen's Status: Age 99

Runtime: 950 Years



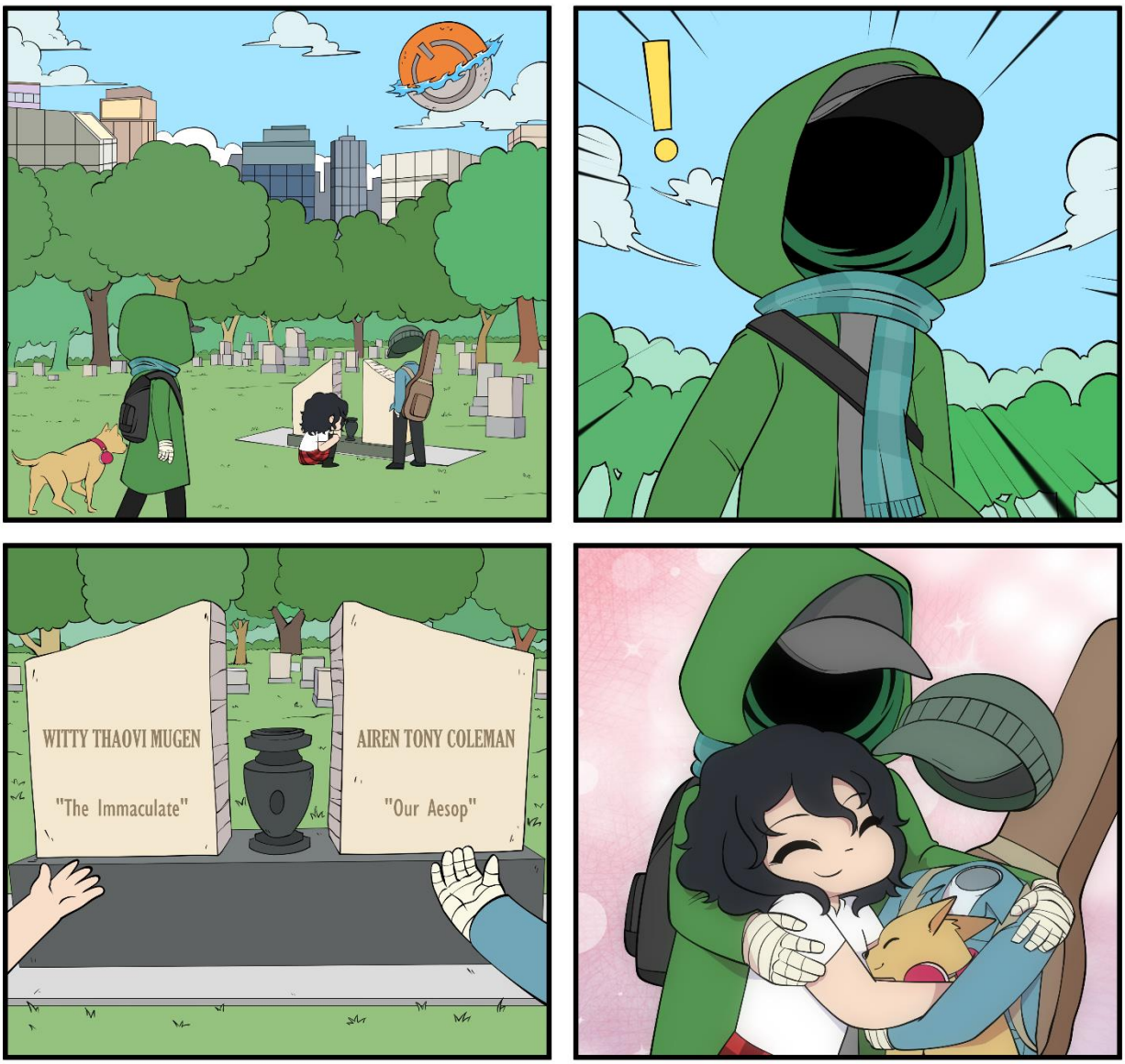
Airen's Status: Age 100

Runtime: 950 - 1000 Years



Airen's Status: Age 100 - Age 108

Runtime: 1000 Years



Airen's Status: Age 108

Runtime: 1000 Years



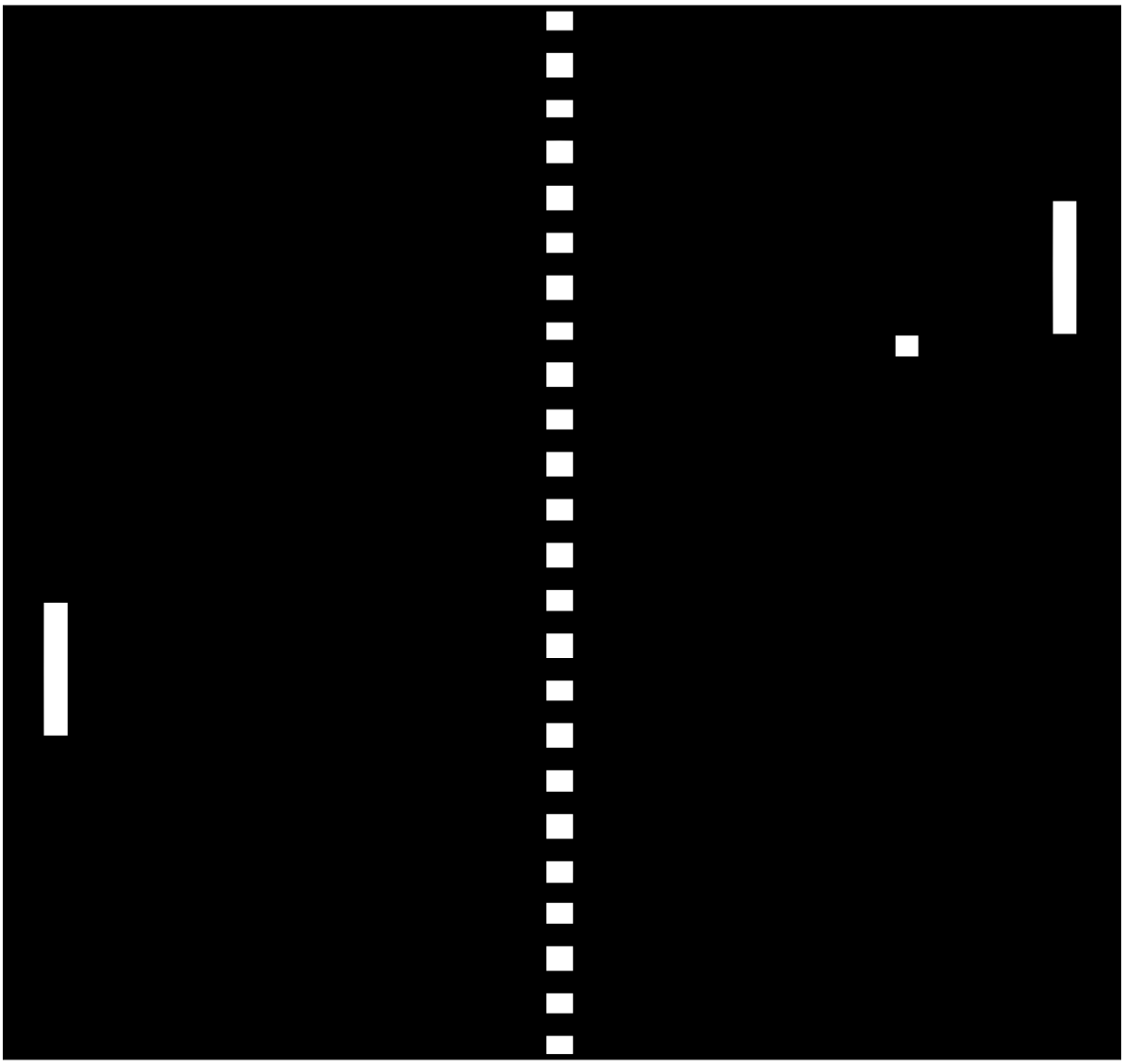
Airen's Status: Age 108

Runtime: ???



Airen's Status: Eternal Timeout

Runtime: ???



Airen's Status: Eternal Timeout

THE END?



THE TUTORIAL TESTAMENT

I



I’ve a strange tale to tell you. A tale that the ants tell themselves whenever nihilism comes to greet them. A tale about a god named Roswell G.G. Evelyn and the strange setting that he inhabits.

Immediately, he wasn't the kind of deity you’d normally visualize. He lacked a bushy beard, a pretentious attitude and a goofy clothing style. As a matter of fact, he prides himself over his dress and appearance. The deity was dandy in nature.

Aside from his clothing preferences, the god lacked visible features. With his hands being bandaged, the rest of his figure was invisible. Save for the hat on his head, most would think he was headless. The dandy deity's compatriots, known as Folk, are one of many Godhoods that live within this bizarre setting. The Social Role Playing Game, or SRPG for short, is a slang term that the deities use to describe their day-to-day lives.

The other Godhoods have mixed feelings about Roswell's Godhood, called the Sisyphus. Viewed as a society of military philosophers and martial artists, the Sisyphus’ reputation is both valued and feared. In ancient times called the Prior, the Sisyphus gained notoriety for waging Assimilation after Assimilation upon the other deities; all of which to seize their knowledge and wisdom. Despite the Sisyphus turning over a new leaf, their ancient history has continued to haunt their present. For Roswell, these negative opinions hardly phase him. For the dandy deity, achieving self-actualization whilst playing out his current Role were the only things worth prioritizing.

In support of his Godhood, Roswell serves as a Shogun within the Sisyphus’ army. Having accepted the Role centuries ago, the dandy deity views his employment as nothing more than a side hustle. The Sisyphus military wasn't his first stint. Over a thousand or so years of Runtime ago, Roswell was involuntarily conscripted as part of the Assimilation effort against the “Central Powers” during the First Theomachy.

It was only thanks to a strong pitch from Roswell’s best friend, a fellow Sisyphus Veteran, that the dandy deity decided to give his Godhood’s military a second chance.

Throughout his centuries of Runtime as a Shogun, Roswell’s Sect policed the Borders of the gods. Per the Shadow Social Contract, the Sisyphus were granted the right to freely expand their Shogunate’s territory across all seven Heavens. In exchange, the Sisyphus were assigned the Role of protector; tasked with deterring all threats to the Heavens.

Said dangers are produced by a phenomenon called the Random Number Generator, or RNG for short.

To aid in their Role, the Sisyphus live on unusual planets called Surveillances; of which, revolve around even larger worlds called Havens that the other deities, called the Normies, live on.

Following Roswell's return into the Sisyphus military, which I'll now call the Samurai, the newly appointed Shogun took to his duties with ease. Much of his leadership experience was owed to his former days as an Adventurer.

To maintain peaceful relations amongst his Folk and the Normies of the "United States", the Shogun kept his productivity up and pushed it to an all-time high. Typically, a Shogun's daily activities consist of either hosting public events like charity drives or vanquishing Highwaymen and cryptids. As such, the constant Struggle and toil ate up Roswell's Runtime like a starved glutton. Fortunately, the Suffering on offer alleviated Roswell's fatigue, earning the older deity a healthy form of compensation for the Stress.

Eventually, after accumulating enough leadership Suffering, Roswell reached the Age of 90. This milestone brought with it a contemplative mood, leaving the Shogun some time to ponder about leaving behind a living Legacy.

Each Age the Shogun had acquired was bringing him closer to an opportunity to meet and challenge his "Goddess" to a Fade.

With Age 99 not that far off now, Roswell started dreading his departure from the SRPG without leaving someone or something behind to take his place. Under these Stressful circumstances, the Shogun had a go-to pastime he'd often utilize to maintain his calmness and clarity whilst working towards a solution.

An avid lover of video games, the Shogun enjoyed wandering off from his duties to play a few sessions at a random arcade or two. Located on a Haven under his Jurisdiction called "Seattle", Roswell's frequent escapades to and from this location often provided an annoying headache for the Sisyphus under him. Much to his subordinates' collective chagrin, Roswell made it a habit of playing hooky without informing them of his routine departures. In terms of reliability, Roswell was selective.

When it came to either the defense of a Surveillance, Station or Haven, the Shogun was present. When it came to anything administrative, the Shogun was absent. Alas, if the Sect ever needed their commander-in-chief, they knew where to find him.

Armed with a preference for vintage arcade cabinets, Roswell would often frequent an old stomping ground of his called the Adventurers' Guild to pass the Runtime by blissfully. Attending to his Nostalgia, the Shogun committed himself to playing a few classics. His go-to games involved one where the player had to gun down columns and rows of invading ships, and another involving a ghost chase within a maze. Each session of playtime helped the Shogun think about his Endgame and his options for establishing a living Legacy.

His current idea involved passing his Role onto another, though the question of who would be a worthy successor still eluded him. On top of that, the Ahura Mazda would have to formally relieve him of his Role in an official ceremony, which the Shogun dreaded going through.

One day, upon leaving the Adventurers' Guild, Roswell decided to go for a walk. The “Pacific Northwest” air was fresh and the day was warm. With a breeze this nice, Roswell couldn’t pass up the opportunity to go for a stroll. ***Perhaps the walk will do me some good, he thought.*** The Shogun's mind became hyper focused on sifting through his current plans. The tranquility of the walk eased Roswell into a peaceful trance.

As the dandy deity blissfully walked, a cardboard box suddenly appeared in the road beside him. Roswell paused and turned his head. At that exact moment, a vehicle came barreling towards said box from the direction behind the Shogun. Inside these cardboard boxes, called Spawns, reside infant deities. Subject to the whims of the RNG, the Spawns are relocated at random. Whether the encroaching driver knew or cared about that fact didn’t matter, as their speedy approach made their aim evident.

Roswell, shocked and annoyed, cried out, "What in the…another Spawn!"

It was just the other day that a similar event had transpired next to the Shogun. Roswell had whisked away a previous Spawn to a hospital after it was also in danger of being run over. The reason for the Shogun’s behavior was one of societal duty.

Following a horrific population collapse that preceded the 12th Titanomachy of the 2XXXs, the newly established Shadow Social Contract, or SSC, made it a societal obligation to secure and deliver any Spawn seen to safety. As expected, this inconvenience could easily upend someone's day.

Roswell, with a snap of his fingers, teleported the Spawn into his hands. The vehicle flew on by, but not before Roswell caught a glimpse of the distracted driver texting on his Controller.

"Why am I not surprised? This is why I prefer living on Orion," said Roswell. Orion is the name of the Surveillance that Roswell maintains, and the thought of going back there would have to wait. Focusing his thoughts on a nearby hospital, the Shogun and his quarry teleported over.

Walking through the front doors, Roswell noticed the hospital's vacancy. Adjusting his peripherals, Roswell spotted a lone nurse playing on her Controller at the receptionist’s desk. Breathing a sigh of relief, Roswell approached. The nurse, noticing the approaching Shogun, acknowledged his presence. She recognized him as a regular visitor at this hospital, usually to either drop off a Spawn or attend to one his Samurai.

The two would often have a passing chat here or there, yet this was their first time interacting in an official capacity.

"Hello Roswell. Another one, huh?" asked the nurse.

"Yes ma'am. My luck, right?" replied the Shogun.

Whenever Roswell forgot a name, he’d often pull out his manners to avoid any misgivings. The nurse beckoned Roswell to set the Spawn on the counter. He did as he was asked, and the nurse opened the box. Upon Observation, the box's contents Scrambled into a concrete form. Inside was an invisible infant, with a "smartphone" beside it.

With a motherly touch, the nurse verified the infant's health, being mindful not to take him out of the box just yet. The two knew better than to start a Run unnecessarily. Grabbing the infant's "smartphone", the nurse activated it using energy from her hands. Although intangible, the Certainty from her palm infused the device with life. Turning her attention towards the Shogun, she asked the following.

"Yep. It’s a boy. I assume you’re going to be his Tutorial? Or are you handing him over for adoption?" asked the nurse.

Under normal circumstances, Roswell would have given up the newborn Youngling in a heartbeat before going about his business. Assuming, of course, that said Youngling was a Normie and not a Sisyphus. In Roswell's case, it was the latter that he’d stumbled upon.

This revelation changed everything for the Shogun. The odds of a Sisyphus being Observed in a Spawn was a rarity within the SRPG. ***Interesting. Is this a sign from “mom”, the Shogun pondered.***

Concluding that this event was indeed a sign from “mom”, Roswell decided to indulge this opportunity. His concerns over establishing a living Legacy had just solved itself potentially. With his mind made up, Roswell answered the nurse.

"Yes, to the former. Damn shame this one. Just by looking at him, you can already tell that he’s just been let out of Timeout for Quitting," replied Roswell.

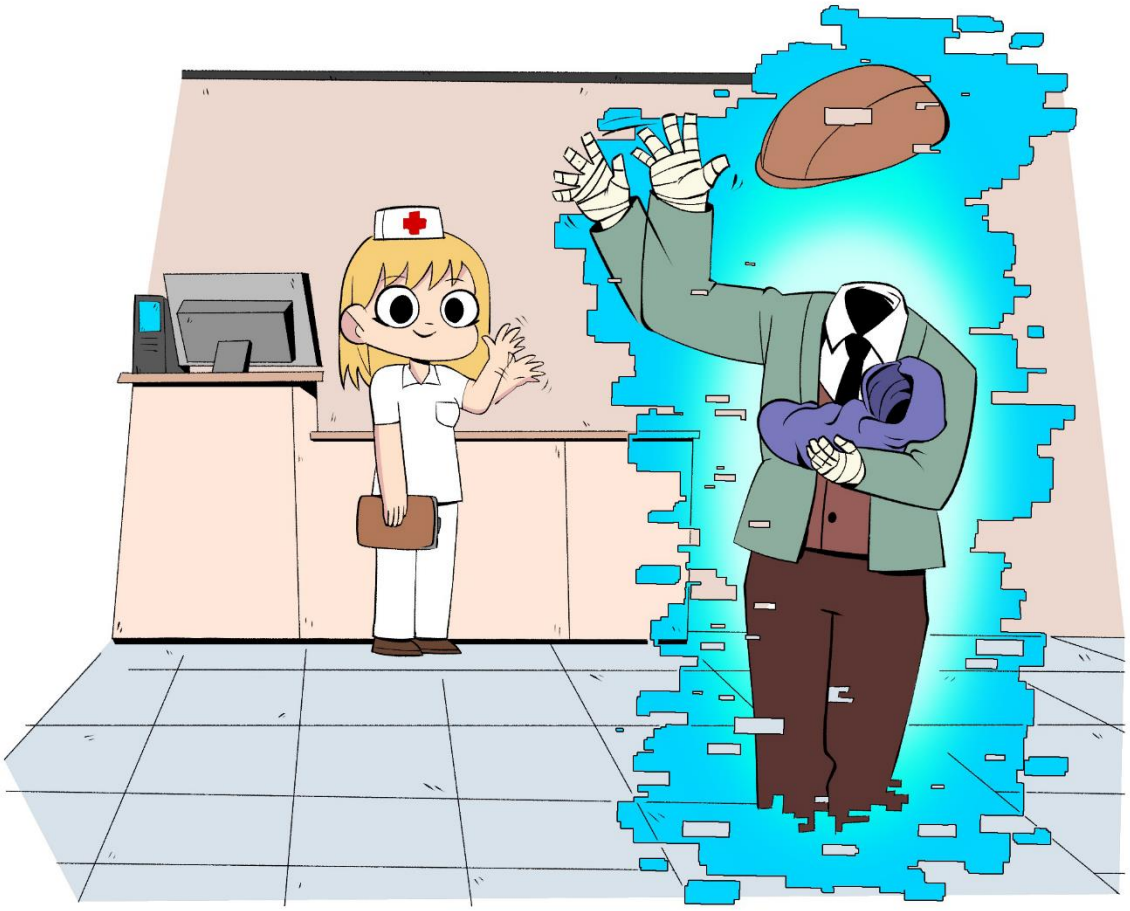
The nurse, failing to understand the significance of Roswell's words, paid them no further attention. The nurse directed her attention towards the infant's "smartphone". It took but a moment for her to process the device's initial setup. Handing the "smartphone" over to the Shogun, the nurse instructed Roswell to complete the Inheritance process.

Needing a name for his new disciple, Roswell entered the infant's identity into the "smartphone” and completed the remaining steps. Upon finishing, Roswell handed the "smartphone" back to the nurse. After verifying the accuracy of the submitted information, the nurse synced the infant’s "smartphone" to her Cauldron.

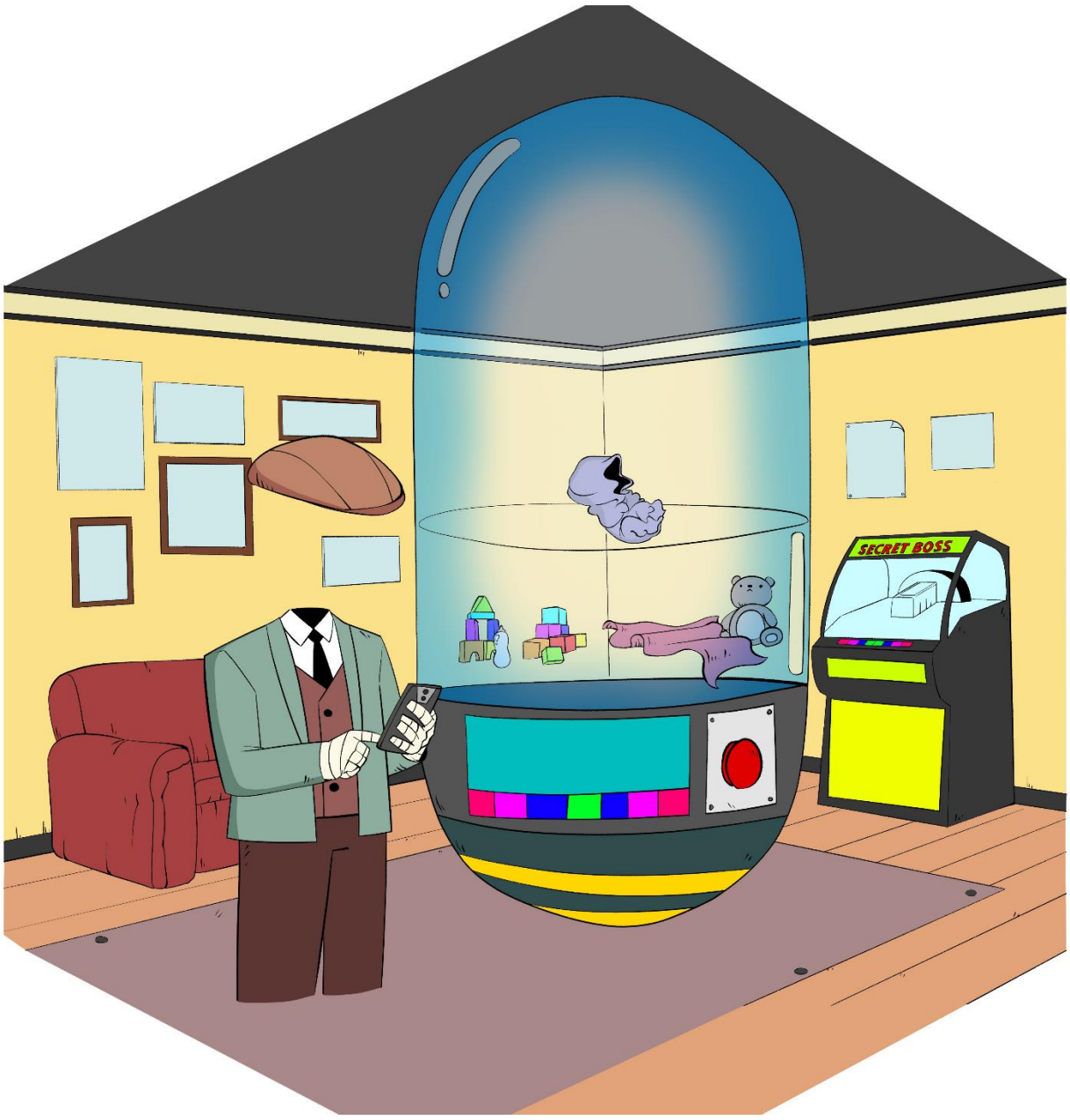
After another minute, the Inheritance process completed itself. Spiritually and biologically, the Shogun and the infant were now bonded on a level equivalent to that of a grandparent and a grandchild.

"Congrats Roswell. You’re now the proud owner of a Pet. You can take him out of the Spawn now," said the nurse.

Roswell took his new Pet into his arms and watched as the empty cardboard box disintegrated into pixels. With the tip of his hat and a wave goodbye, Roswell bid the nurse farewell before teleporting both himself and his Pet home.



II



Under normal circumstances, Roswell would've been perfectly fine raising his new Pet without assistance. Unfortunately, his duties as a Shogun made that unlikely. To solve this conundrum, the dandy deity settled on a contingency plan. Arriving at his Abode, the Shogun conjured up a holographic screen using his mind. The screen showed an online marketplace, which Roswell used to make an important purchase.

The Shogun obtained a capsule-size cradle called a Daycare. Placing his Pet, now named Airen Tony Coleman, inside of it, the Shogun activated the Daycare using his Controller. The cradle, fully charged with Certainty, hummed as it energized. The successful activation pleased the Shogun. From within the cradle, Airen's surroundings gradually morphed from solid gray into a simulated environment mimicking a preschool.

The Daycare was an incubator of sorts. Its popularity amongst the gods stemmed from its ease at expediting the early Aging process for newborn Younglings. Once inside a Daycare, the newborn's Configuration is gradually nurtured by a special program. Despite its slow efficiency at quickening the Aging process, the Daycare's features made up for that Achilles' heel. Be it in terms of security, sustenance or nurturing.

Upon confirming the setup's success, Roswell breathed a sigh of relief. Exhausted from a long day, Roswell placed the Daycare inside of a vacant room within his Abode. Assured of his Pet's wellbeing, Roswell made for his bed and retired for the evening. With Gigs to coordinate in the morning and reports to make to the Shogunate, Roswell wasted no time falling asleep.

Within the Daycare, a nurturing program called the Caretaker began the process of Airen's rearing. Taking the guise of a motherly figure, the Caretaker embraced the Youngling with care and affection. The Caretaker changed Airen's diapers, fed him when he was hungry and doted on him. These acts, while normal on the surface, held a hidden power behind them.

The Mechanic of Suffering is one of many fundamental forces that govern the SRPG. Every Deed or Gig committed by a god, goddess or cryptid generates this phenomenon. A Deed is defined as work performed for one's own sake. Conversely, a Gig is defined as work performed in service to others. Both acts of work generate Suffering, which Ages Up a deity.

As such, the Caretaker's primary function was to cultivate Suffering for Airen until the little one achieved an Age where he could begin acquiring his own Suffering. Such is the task of the Caretaker's Gig, which continues up until a Youngling's Configuration reaches the Age of 3. Upon reaching Age 1, Airen experienced his first Growth Spurt. Transitioning into a body befitting a toddler, the little deity learned to walk, courtesy of his motherly Caretaker. From there, using his newfound momentum, the young Sisyphus explored his environment, indulging in his burgeoning inquisitiveness in the process.

Despite Airen's progress, the act of early Aging via the Daycare wouldn't equate to a quick maturation; in part, due to the nature of the SRPG. What would normally take a homo sapien child three years to mature into, instead, took Airen five years. And thus, for those five years of Runtime, Airen rotated between living within both the Daycare and the outside world.

As effective as the Daycare is, it can’t cultivate the type of relationship that a Pet needs to survive and thrive within the SRPG. With this insight in hand, Roswell began cultivating a loving bond with his Pet; a task not to be taken lightly.

The bond between a Tutorial and their Pet is a sacred one. The repercussion for violating such a pact is most severe, in fact. I won't bother you with the details for now but do keep that fact in mind. Fortunately for Airen, the Shogun was benevolent in his rearing. At every opportunity, Roswell dedicated his Runtime and attention towards Airen's maturation—yet in a way befitting a Sisyphus. At times, the early interactions between the two deities conjured up repressed memories within Roswell. Memories of a time where the Shogun himself was a Youngling, hustling in the state of “Arizona” back in the 1800s.

Between the Ages of 1 and 3, Roswell slowly eased Airen into the SRPG. The Shogun watched the Youngling speak his first words, make his first mistakes and achieve his little successes. Over those five years of Runtime, Airen came to view his Tutorial like a great-grandfather. The two bonded over Roswell’s numerous hobbies, including some from the Shogun’s youth.

On Sundays, Roswell cooked pancakes for the two to consume—a pastime that became a sort-of Pantheon ritual for them. While eating said pancakes, the duo would watch old cartoons made between 1960 and 1999. One show depicted a teen and his dog transforming themselves into a strongman and a giant lion, respectively, to fight evil doers. Another show depicted a purple dog dealing with circumstances ranging from horror to comedy. With each viewing of his Tutorial’s favorites, Airen’s fascination with the world outside his home began to expand. Aside from Sundays, Roswell would spend some of his off time introducing Airen to another one of his favorite pastimes: video games.

At first, the little one would mash buttons on an unsync video game controller, eager to imitate his Tutorial's rapid fire, hand-eye coordination against waves of digital enemies on their holographic display. Gradually, Roswell allowed Airen the opportunity to try some of these games for himself.

Amongst Airen’s favorites were games involving a green-tunic wearing hero battling his reincarnating arch-nemesis across multiple timelines.

Other games took the Youngling on world-saving adventures involving crystals, blowing up planet-draining reactors, fighting hostile powers through the art of graffiti skating and other such Misadventures.

The sublime Suffering that generated from his playtime gave Airen the idea of setting out on an Adventure of his own someday. As Roswell had hoped, Airen was beginning to think like a Sisyphus. To capitalize on his Pet's impressionability, Roswell introduced his Pet to the idea that life lessons and knowledge could be ascertained from these video games. “Many great games can impart Run-altering wisdom within a short amount of time. I credit my Run lasting this long towards the insights I gained from a little escapism here or there. Learn as you have fun, grasshopper,” Roswell once said to his Youngling.

The nickname “Grasshopper” came from Roswell’s observation of Airen after the little one became too excited from watching martial arts flicks. Like a true Sisyphus, Airen was already itching to develop his hand game. For the Shogun, such a period of training wouldn’t come for at least another decade of Runtime or so. For now, at least, instilling in his Pet a strong foundation for Nostalgia was the Shogun’s primary objective. A strong sense of Nostalgia could make all the difference between a deity “Quitting” early or persevering through the SRPG’s relentless bullshit.

When Airen finally reached the Age of 3, Roswell retired the Daycare. With the Youngling now capable of learning on his own, the Shogun had a Game Plan in mind for him.

The Caretaker alone couldn’t use its Gig indefinitely to Age Up his Pet. If Airen was to grow older, he would need to rely on his own Deeds. Thankfully, this wouldn’t be a problem.

Eager to play and learn, Airen constantly badgered his Tutorial for answers to simple questions. "What's Runtime?" Airen asked one day while the two were out on a walk in a park. After hearing the other Sisyphus mention the term repeatedly, the Youngling couldn't help but satisfy his Curiosity. Roswell, with a chuckle, responded.

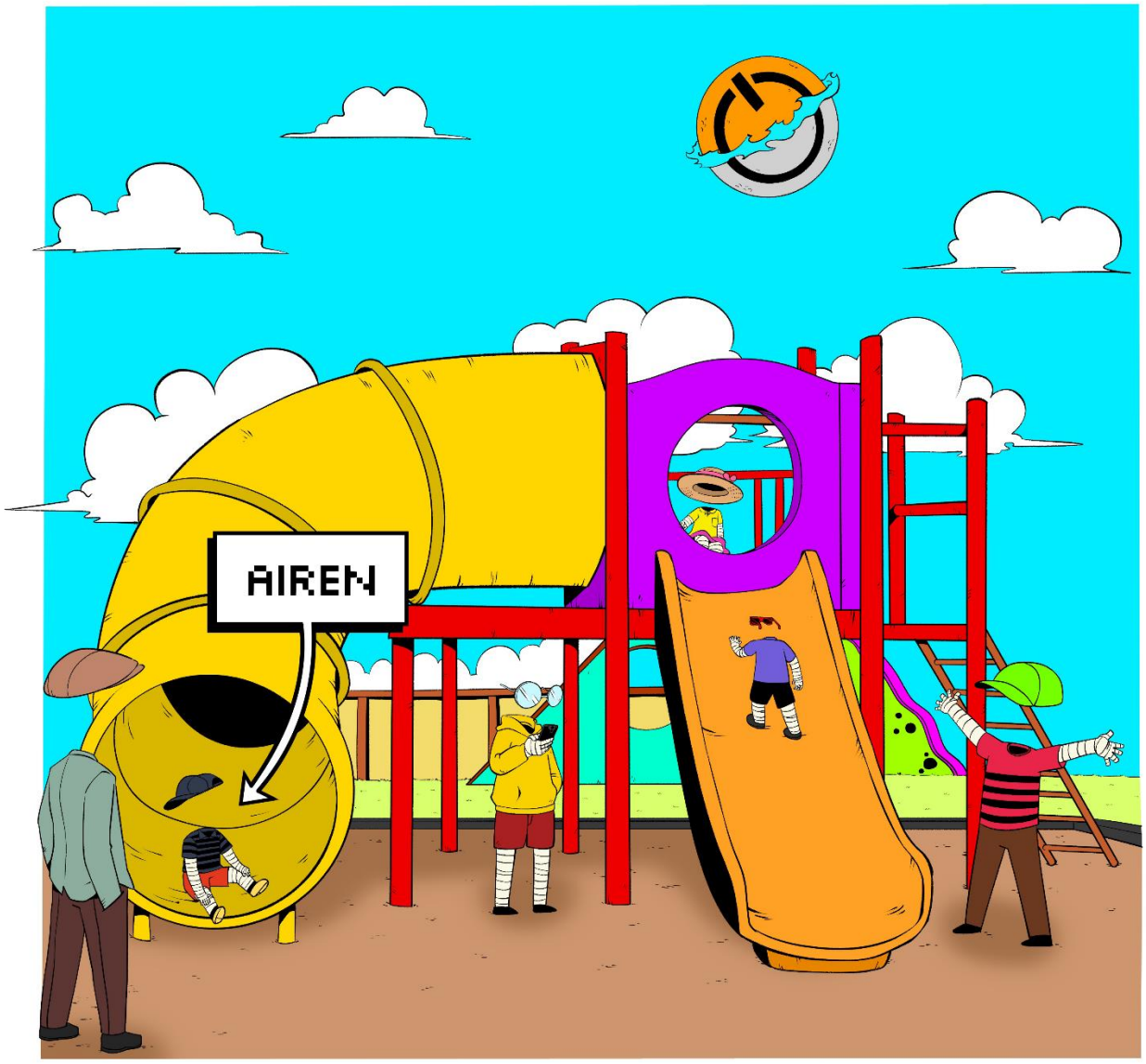
"Runtime is the amount of time that you’ve been alive for," said Roswell. Summoning a holographic screen, Roswell showed his Runtime to Airen. The number ranged between 1000 to 2000 years. The Youngling was speechless. He knew his Tutorial was old, but not that old.

Will I get that old too, Airen thought to himself.

Recapturing his Pet's attention, Roswell redirected Airen towards another number on the screen. The word "Age" was right next to it, with the number itself being 90. "This number here is my current Age. Age, in a nutshell, is a sign of one's existential maturity. My Role as your Tutorial is to teach you everything that you need to know so that you can reach this same Age someday," said Roswell. Dismissing the screen, Roswell and Airen continued their walk towards the play area.

A little exercise was the proper way to start the morning, and useful for Aging Up a young Pet. As Airen took off to play with the other Sisyphus Younglings surrounding the monkey bars and the twisting slides, Roswell looked up at the sky. The Shogun fixed his Attention towards a floating, sun-moon object with the computer power symbol on its surface; in terms of size, it was comparable to that of a small island.

After spending a minute musing, Roswell released a sigh before redirecting his Attention back towards his Pet. For this brief period of Runtime, the two deities knew only tranquility.


AIREN

III



Over the next 15 years of Runtime, Airen worked his way up towards achieving the Age of 10. The little one spent the first decade absorbing the basics of the SRPG whilst developing his initial skillset. Not long after his Pet had reached the Age of 3, Roswell made the move to teach his protégé how to use his Controller. The Shogun had kept it safely hidden since Airen's Reload.

"Never lose this," the Shogun warned Airen as he handed him his Controller, "or your Run will be a short one". A deity's Controller is the source of their divine power. The smartphone-looking device grants relief, succor and security to a deity; without one, a deity is a Bystander. Bystanders, for a lack of a better word, are considered by both deities and cryptids as either one of two things: Food or Fertilizer.

Using his Configuration, the Shogun conjured up a holographic screen displaying an "app" store. With careful finger pointing and swiping, Roswell taught his Youngling how to navigate the digital storefront. Airen, nervous yet excited, replicated his Tutorial's actions. After several downloads, Airen's Controller was filled with "apps" called Grimoires. These divine apps grant their users access to both Spellcasting and Sorcery; two disciplines that separate the deities from the cryptids.

As Airen would later discover, his new capabilities were what made the Runs of the gods bearable within the SRPG. Enamored by the new icons on his Controller's screen, Airen became eager to explore each of them. Sensing his Pet's enthusiasm, Roswell redirected his Pet's attention towards the few Grimoires that mattered the most. ***Better he starts with these ones, Roswell thought.***

First up was the Seniority Grimoire, which showcased Airen's current Age, Runtime, and accumulated Suffering. The Suffering label displayed a meter gauged from 0 to 1000. Through the act of Struggling, a deity can obtain Struggle Points or SP via completing Deeds & Gigs. Once filled, an Age Up occurs.

Next up was the Planner Grimoire, which showcased Airen's Deeds and Gigs; both past and present. Finally, the Inventory Grimoire provided Airen with a metaphysical space capable of storing objects and items without needing a bag. Provided that the lad has enough vacant space within his mind, the Inventory Grimoire could be fully utilized; on the flipside, an addled mind was subject to Encumberment.

"Fantastic! Now that you're all set up, it's time to do some chores," said Roswell. It was common sense for a deity to be self-sufficient by a certain Age. As part of the Shogun's Game Plan, household chores were a proper way to enable that expectation. Immediately, Roswell assigned several household chores as Gigs to Airen's Planner Grimoire.

Due to their existential relationship as Tutorial and Pet, Roswell had as much access to Airen's Controller as the Youngling did; at least until Airen came of Age to be considered an "adult".

"Get used to the Planner Grimoire grasshopper. It'll take you far in this setting," said the Shogun.

"Woah! This list is long GG!" replied Airen. Years prior, Airen confused Roswell's middle initials for "great-grandfather" and started calling his Tutorial by said initials; not that the Shogun minded, of course. Roswell, with a chuckle, assuaged his Pet's fears. "No worries, grasshopper. I'll show you how to complete each one. And while we're at it, we'll make each task a kind of Mini-Game. But before we start, how about some background music," replied the Shogun. With a tap of his Controller, Roswell ordered his jukebox to play some Acid Jazz tunes.

The melodies emanating from the jukebox put Airen into a hyperactive mood. Roswell generated another holographic screen.

On it was a scoreboard listing both Sisyphus' names. Pulling a broom from his Inventory, Roswell handed it to Airen. Equipping a broom himself, Roswell asked Airen to mimic his movements. "Time to boogie little one! The first one to complete the most chores wins," said Roswell. With a rapid nod, Airen was ready to improve himself.

Following his Tutorial's lead, Airen began working on each household Gig assigned to him. From sweeping floors to wiping windows, the little one was amused at how helpful he was becoming. Despite not winning his Mini-Game against his Tutorial, the Youngling felt a sense of accomplishment over acquiring new forms of Suffering. As such—throughout the remaining decade of Runtime—Airen executed many household Gigs around the house in places where Roswell hadn't the time to attend to himself. With practice and patience, Airen steadily improved his cooking, cleaning and self-maintenance skills.

Little by little, Airen's actions began to accumulate ample Suffering. One day, following the completion of another household Gig, Airen received a notification on his Controller. The Youngling took notice of his Seniority Grimoire and was ecstatic at what he was seeing.

"Look GG, look! My Suffering meter is filling up! It's almost full!" said Airen after taking out the trash. Amused by his Pet's reaction, Roswell analyzed his Pet's Suffering meter.

"I must be gaining a lot of Suffering, huh GG! I'll Age Up to 10 real soon!" exclaimed the Youngling. Despite his Pet's enthusiasm, Roswell decided to point out a disheartening fact.

"Outstanding work grasshopper," said Roswell as he observed Airen's Controller, "however, according to what I'm reading, it appears that the average amount of Suffering that you've been earning from your chores is around ten-thousandth of an SP," said Roswell. With only a basic understanding of math, Airen had a hard time understanding his Tutorial's words. Adjusting his language, Roswell explained that their housework was a poor source for Suffering gains. As such, the Suffering on offer for each household Gig was a joke at best. "Let's see here. Based on the current rate of Suffering you've been earning from your chores, I'm estimating that you'll probably need another 50 years of Runtime to reach the Age of 10," Roswell finished.

"Awww," said Airen sadly.

Kneeling and placing his bandaged hand on Airen's shoulder, Roswell had good news to share. "I know how you feel, grasshopper. Fortunately, I have a solution," replied the Shogun. Following their talk, the Shogun enrolled Airen in an early Suffering program called the Leash. Due to the unpredictable nature of the RNG, Roswell needed a place that could keep his Pet safe outside their Abode until the Youngling's next Growth Spurt. Even on a Surveillance, one could never be too careful, especially if it involved Tumbleweeds. Whenever a Tumbleweed rolls past a deity, a Random Encounter is guaranteed to occur.

Together with the Leash's staff, Roswell prepared a series of Volunteer Gigs for Airen to complete while under the Leash's supervision. Upon finalizing these activities, Roswell shared the news with Airen.

“Good news, grasshopper. Do you recall the way I assigned you your household chores? Well, you can now work on “assigned chores” from others too. Even more so, you can even create some for yourself," Roswell explained. After close listening, Airen gained enough insight to turn some of his Deeds into *self-imposed Gigs* called Quests.

Pointing out the ways Airen could help around the Leash, the Shogun promised his Pet a better Suffering haul as a reward. Enough to get the Youngling to the Age of 10 in record Runtime.

"Volunteering can give you a lot of Suffering early on. On top of that, completing Quests will reward you with bonus Suffering, as well as improve your Reputation," explained the Shogun.

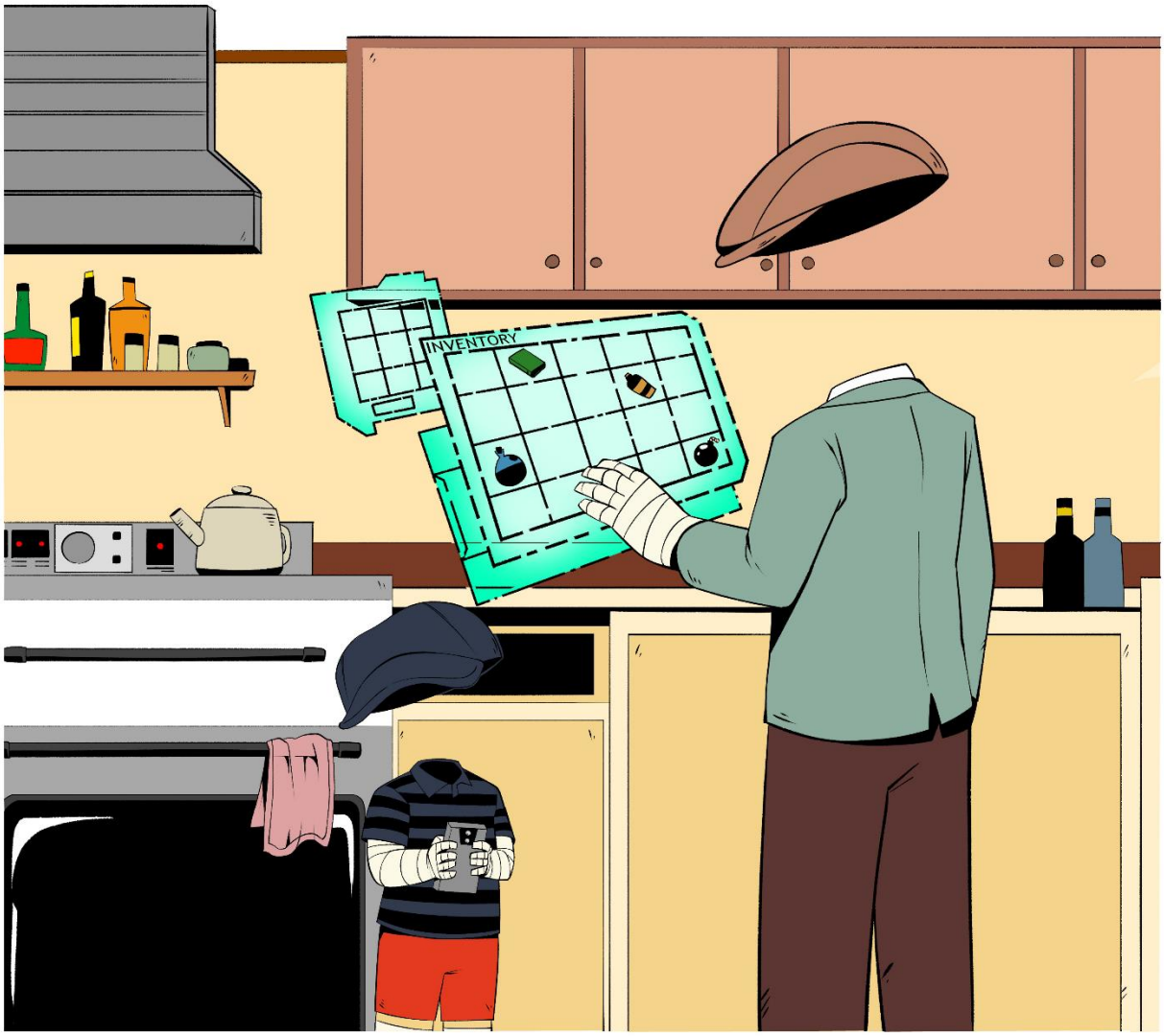
A deity’s Reputation can either make or break their Run. With this notion in mind, Roswell instilled in Airen a desire to perform at his very best despite the obstacles. “The more reliable your Reputation, the more Gigs you’ll acquire,” proclaimed Roswell.

Encouraged by this Opportunity, Airen began his time at the Leash tackling any and all Volunteer Gigs accessible to him. Creating his first Quest to motivate himself, the chores that once felt grandiose to the Youngling were now instinctual. As Airen's reliability improved, the Leash’s staff Commissioned newer Gigs for the little one to complete. Little by little, Airen began to Age Up at a reasonable pace.

After a decade of toil, Airen reached Age 8. With this accomplishment, Roswell made the decision to take Airen out of the Leash program early. Despite the RNG, Roswell’s next idea would provide his Pet with ample security. Now that Airen was at an Age where he could better look after himself, Roswell had something new in mind. It was time for Airen to become better acquainted with Surveillance, courtesy of more Volunteering of course. For the next five years of Runtime, Airen’s priorities shifted from minor Gigs to significant Gigs.


ORION
LEASH

IV



Airen began a new Quest. The objective? Volunteer across the Surveillance and learn more about it. Under Roswell's direction, the Youngling met more of the local Sisyphus. Many were happy to accept aid from the Shogun's Pet. Lightening the workload of the older Sisyphus, Airen slowly noticed an interesting trend.

Aside from himself, there were other Sisyphus Younglings working alongside their elders. Airen, now excited over the fact that he wasn't the only Youngling Struggling to Age Up, attacked his Gigs with gusto. Competition, it would seem, was just as good of an Incentive as the Suffering on offer.

Regarding the Volunteer Gigs themselves, Airen wasn't a nitpicker. Whether he was needed as a courier or a janitor, the lad made himself useful wherever he could. At first, the lad could hardly keep up with the demanding workload thrusted upon him. Alas, with diligence and persistence, Airen improved his efficiency and made incremental improvements. "I'm getting better at this!" Airen said to himself following a day when he annihilated twenty Gigs in a row. For every Volunteer Gig slain, his Suffering meter filled itself up. In time, he'd reach Age 10; a milestone amongst the gods.

To complement his Pet's daily routine, Roswell implemented a morning regimen for Airen. In the mind of the Shogun, an abled body was an efficient one, especially when primed in the morning. Before daybreak, the Youngling prepared his Configuration for the Struggles ahead via meditating for 30 minutes. Afterwards, the little one committed himself to a series of push-ups, sit-ups and flutter kicks in his bedroom. Limber and awake, Airen transitioned in and out of the shower. A cup of joe later and the lad departed out the front door. Just the excitement of progressing further in his maturation was enough of an Incentive to keep Airen motivated throughout his Volunteer days.

Upon Airen reaching Age 9, the Shogun implemented the next phase of his Game Plan. Impressed by his Pet's budding ambition, Roswell made the move to introduce Airen to another, useful Grimoire; one that would prove essential for his continued success within the SRPG.

"The Grimoire that I'm having you download this time contains a store that sells Age-related traits," Roswell informed Airen as the latter began his download, "these traits are what we all like to call Miracles." The Miracle Grimoire is a special application. With expressed permission from the user, the Grimoire applies a permanent trait to a deity's Configuration. Every two Age Ups grants a deity access to a single Miracle purchase, and there were plenty of Miracles to choose from.

The Miracle Grimoire scanned Airen’s Configuration immediately after Airen opened it. Upon completing its assessment, the Grimoire offered Airen the option of selecting four, random Miracles. To spare his Pet the paradox of choice, Roswell decided to select the lad's first four for him. Taking his Pet’s Controller, Roswell located his options in the Grimoire and made the four purchases. Following the Shogun’s checkout, a tingling sensation soothed Airen's small body. "Weird? What was that just now GG!?" Airen asked Roswell.

"Your Configuration has just been Augmented," replied the Shogun.

As Airen moved to check his Controller to see which new Miracles were now under his employ, the Shogun swiftly stopped him. "A moment, grasshopper. I think it's time that I teach you how to use Shortcuts. You're old enough, I think," said the Shogun. Conjuring up a holographic screen using his mind, Roswell instructed Airen to do the same. "I want you to visualize the Miracle Grimoire as a floating screen that physically exists in front of you," Roswell instructed. As soon as Airen conjured up the mental image in his head, a holographic monitor appeared in front of him.

"Woah! I did it, I did it! That was awesome!" said Airen.

Reading his Shortcut closely, Airen observed the following Miracles: the ability to double one's Suffering gains (***Plutus Miracle***), the ability to breathe underwater (***Poseidon Miracle***), the ability to double one’s strength (***Samson Miracle***) and the ability to talk to cryptids (***Artemis Miracle***) were now at Airen's disposal. "I think you'll come to appreciate the power of Miracles once you apply yourself," said Roswell. Eager to see what he could accomplish now, Airen went off to find more demanding Volunteer Gigs.

At this point in his Run, the Youngling had developed a strong Reputation for being a hyperactive go-getter. Learning how to ride the bus gave Airen access to the wider area of Orion. Through a combination of riding and jogging across the different areas of the Surveillance (while avoiding any and all Tumbleweeds like the plague), Airen began accessing and tackling the more demanding Volunteer Gigs.

With his newly acquired Miracles, Airen started focusing his efforts on tasks that ranged from underwater trash removal to meal preparation for the Havenless deities scattered across the “Pacific Northwest”. Of course, the Youngling made time to squeeze in the occasional farm work here or there, as the farmers made it a habit of offering free produce to any and all volunteers.

Airen's endeavors weren't going unnoticed, and the OGs who took kindly to Airen's work ethic were willing to lend their insights to the inquisitive Youngling. As the little one slowly absorbed the words of his elders, Airen's grasp on his Folk's way of life became clearer.

The Sisyphus' afflicted nature renders them invisible, due to their collective Miracle. Said Miracle has left them in a "glitched" state of being, where they exist yet not exist. Additionally, the Sisyphus' Miracle has infected them with an abnormal obsession towards self-actualization and the wisdom that comes from it.

During the Prior, the Sisyphus waged Assimilations against the other deities, hungry for their information, their knowledge, and their myths. As if driven by a knowledge addiction, the Sisyphus culled many Havens to satisfy their existential dread; almost as if they were attempting to appease someone or something. Fortunately for the inhabitants of the SRPG, the establishment of the Shadow Social Contract normalized relations between the Sisyphus and the Normies. Sadly, certain grievances remain.

At around 20 years of Runtime, Airen began growing wary of his place and purpose within the SRPG. The Miracle of the Sisyphus, commonly referred to as the Cheat Code, was slowly stirring within the Youngling's Configuration.

The Cheat Code was a term thrown around by the older Sisyphus. Despite hearing the term pass through his ears more than once, Airen couldn't make sense of its significance. Whenever Airen asked his OGs about the Cheat Code, they either avoided the question entirely or explained that he would learn more once he became older. Still, this didn't stop Airen from formulating his own ideas about it. For instance, whenever Roswell and he needed to go anywhere, the Shogun simply teleported them to their destination. This phenomenon was peculiar to Airen, who began to wonder if he could do the same thing. Curious, the Youngling asked his Tutorial about it.

According to the Shogun, the ability to teleport was exclusive to their Folk alone. The Cheat Code, allegedly, was the means. "We call these abilities "Glitches". When you reach Age 15, you'll be able to Fast Travel as well," said Roswell. All day, Airen observed the older Sisyphus performing all kinds of Glitches.

Some phased through walls, others perfectly duplicated items and many more could acquire insights by having conversations with inanimate objects.

As time moved on, Airen became enamored with the numerous Glitches he was perceiving through his peripherals. The more he witnessed, the higher his appetite for Aging Up increased. "I gotta try these Glitches for myself!" Airen said aloud during a lunch break one day. Satiated yet contemplative, the Youngling decided to scan his nearby surroundings and take in the scenery. At present, the little one was situated in a downtown area near Orion’s city center.

Of all the locations on the Surveillance that Airen had explored, he was prohibited from one such area. The Bakufu, aka Roswell's headquarters, was where the Shogun's Sect resided. Ever vigilant, the Samurai were constantly rotating troops, with newcomers arriving to relieve the ones heading for other Surveillances across the Heavens.

The Sisyphus Samurai are the divine equivalent to the ancient Mongols of Genghis Khan. It is said that their hellish training is the reason for their pragmatic notoriety. At the same time, said training has helped the organization give rise to many noteworthy deities, whose Renown have helped forge them into legends. Even the wandering “Johnny Appleseed" was said to have been a formidable Samurai in his youth before taking up planting apple trees as his Expression.

Airen, ever curious, desperately wanted to see what was inside the Bakufu. Passing by it every so often while transiting from Volunteer Gig to Volunteer Gig, Airen could never seem to find a good vantage point to see what was going on inside. Thankfully, to the Youngling’s future surprise, he wouldn't have to wait much longer to satiate his Curiosity.

After toil and due diligence, Airen reached Age 10, and with it came a transformation. Upon wrapping up a Gig, the little one began glowing brightly. Within seconds, Airen's form changed, rendering him slightly taller after his physical form reassembled itself. When Roswell heard the news, he was ecstatic.

To celebrate his Pet achieving this major milestone, the Shogun decided to give Airen an important birthday gift. Roswell allowed Airen the privilege of touring the Bakufu for a few hours, which culminated in the Shogun showing the Youngling a special sight. Using his Controller, Roswell commanded his divine Will to materialize itself into a magical, mechanical form called a Simulacrum. The divine mecha towered above the two Sisyphus. The Simulacrum, christened PERUN by its owner, shined with a regal presence that could be felt for miles.

PERUN’s presence triggered something within Airen, which sent the Youngling into a trance.

What happened next was strange. Airen, locking eyes with PERUN, suddenly felt an unnerving sensation surge through his body. Overwhelmed with a mixture of saudade and anxiety, Airen heard a term in his mind that he hadn’t heard before. And yet, he was compelled to utter it to his Tutorial.

"GG, what's THE HIGHER ADVENTURE?" asked Airen in confusion.

That time already, huh, Roswell thought. Unbeknownst to Airen, a Crisis had activated within his Configuration. Surprised that the phenomenon was happening sooner, rather than later, Roswell began contemplating his next steps. If approached poorly, Roswell could doom Airen with a weak answer to his sudden inquiry.


GG, what's the
HIGHER ADVENTURE?

V



There’s no such thing as a free lunch in the SRPG. A fact that Airen was about to learn.

Roswell, calm yet wary, dismissed his Simulacrum using his Controller. Turning towards his Pet, the Shogun reassured Airen that his “Question” would be answered soon enough. “We’re going to visit an old Collaborator of mine,” said Roswell as he readied a Glitch, “he owns an object that can better answer your “Question” than I can.” The two Sisyphus, now slightly pixelated, vanished from their location thanks to Roswell's use of the Fast Travel Glitch. The environment changed around the pair, with the Bafuku itself transitioning into a lone record store. In a flash, the duo found themselves situated within "Downtown Seattle", with its hustle and bustle on full display.

Roswell, pointing his bandaged finger upwards, called out to his Pet. "Look up at the sky grasshopper," said the Shogun. Airen turned his attention upward and gasped. Their Surveillance, Orion, was now a distant object high above them; in terms of distance, its position was equal to that of a planet's moon. For the first time in his Run, Airen had set foot on his neighboring Haven. “Wow! We’re that far away!” said Airen excitedly.

With Airen's eyes focused upwards, Roswell seized the opportunity to show his Pet another sight. “Fascinating isn't it! Notice anything else peculiar?” the Shogun asked.

Scanning the sky further, Airen caught sight of a familiar object. The mysterious sun-moon that hovered the skies of Orion was also present on “Seattle”. “GG! It's the Forecast! I didn't know it'd be here too!” Airen exclaimed. Years prior, Roswell informed Airen about the Forecast. According to the Shogun, the Forecast was the avatar of “mom” and the source of all-weather phenomena on Havens and Stations. There wasn't a single location in the SRPG that didn't contain the Forecast.

“So, you finally noticed it, grasshopper. Good, very good. Keep its presence in your thoughts for now,” Roswell replied as he gently guided Airen towards the front door of the record store. Before entering, Airen caught the establishment’s name.

"IP Records, huh?" said Airen.

The activity inside the joint was slower than usual today, despite the record store's popularity amongst the younger deities; particularly, college students. As the two Sisyphus entered, a frog deity carrying a crate full of records hurried past them with glee.

"It was good seeing you again Karen! Until next time!" said a suave voice. Airen pinpointed the source at the front desk. At the register was a well-dressed Sisyphus wearing a boater hat. ***Strange, Airen thought***. Up until recently, it hadn't occurred to the lad that there were other Sisyphus who lived outside his Haven. Being so used to seeing Sisyphus leave yet return to Orion, Airen hadn't thought of the ones that had left yet never returned. That thought alone stoked Airen's inquisitiveness.

Approaching casually, Airen and Roswell greeted the owner of the establishment. "Well shit! If it isn't my favorite knucklehead! You're here earlier than usual today. Are you on Leave or are you just playing hooky again?" asked the suave Sisyphus. "Not by choice Stew," Roswell replied, "my Pet here just asked me the "Question"." Marveling at the sight of two OGs chit chatting, Airen couldn't help but find the store owner's behavior humorous. The Youngling let out a giggle in response.

Catching an earful of Airen's giggling reminded Roswell that he hadn't introduced his Pet to his best friend yet. Placing his bandaged hand on Airen's head, Roswell made the introduction. "Grasshopper, meet Benjamin Stewart Graham. My closest Collaborator and partner-in-crime. Appearances aside, this rascal in front of us used to be a Shogun. It was by his recommendation that I decided to give the ol' Shogun Role a try over a few centuries of Runtime ago, give or take," explained Roswell.

Adjusting his peripherals from Roswell to Airen, Benjamin greeted the lad. "Ahhhh, at last we meet! Your Tutorial dotes on you a lot and I can see why now," said Benjamin to an anxious Airen. Turning his attention back to Roswell, Benjamin continued. "Alas, I digress! Let me go grab the setup from the back. One sec!"

Cutting the formalities short, Benjamin asked the two to wait while he retrieved some items. A minute later, Benjamin returned with a projector, a VCR and a VHS tape. "Damn, this takes me back," said Benjamin as he set the items on the counter.

"You two can use the storage room in the back. It's vacant but comfortable," said Benjamin.

Acknowledging his best friend’s suggestion, Roswell instructed Airen to put the items in his Inventory. For Roswell, any opportunity to get Airen more accustomed to using his Grimoires was one he wouldn’t waste. The two left Benjamin for the backroom. Arriving inside, Roswell assisted Airen in setting up the presentation. Inserting the VHS tape titled "THE HIGHER ADVENTURE: An Introduction" into the VCR, Roswell turned towards his Pet.

"Have a seat, little one. You're about to have your “Question” answered," instructed the Shogun as he summoned a chair from his Inventory.

As Airen took to his seat, Roswell ordered the VCR to play. The light in the storage room dimmed.

Moments later, the projector revealed a 1950s style narrator with the visuals to match. The oldies music playing in the background caught Airen's attention. What followed were retro animations, along with a plethora of information that bombarded Airen’s senses for 30 minutes. Without boring you with the minutiae details, I'll sum up what the lad learned.

In the distant past of the SRPG, a nation called “Ancient Greece" existed. A slave that lived there at the time, named “Aesop”, was visited by three cardboard boxes in a dream; one colored black named *Iwill the Lady*, another colored gray named *Noriginality the Unforeseen* and the last one colored white named *Thoushalt the Lord*. Calling themselves the Trifecta, the entities offered the enslaved deity a chance at freedom. In exchange for his release, “Aesop” was to become their prophet and spread their truths about the SRPG’s nature to the other deities. An accord was struck, a “boon” was granted, and the deity awoke from his dream in a faraway place. He was free.

Now rendered invisible by the Trifecta's "boon", “Aesop” became the First Sisyphus. For the remainder of his Run, “Aesop” had dreams where he’d commune with the Trifecta. Each time he awoke, the First Sisyphus would write down whatever the Trifecta had asked him to record for dissemination.

The subjects he wrote about ranged from Jungian psychology to Simulation theory. In certain instances, “Aesop” wrote about his batshit experiences living out a previous Run, or Playthrough, inside the body of an ant. Even more so, the First Sisyphus wrote about a place called Timeout, where all deities that decide to “Quit” end up trapped inside the bodies of other ants.

Once there, a special kind of torment awaits them, with the only means of release presenting itself in the form of a Cordyceps fungus. Lastly, “Aesop” made further claims in his writings that the deities themselves were a metafictional race of entities called the Fortuitous, and that they are all living inside of a “nursery simulation”.

Gradually, “Aesop” began self-publishing his writings as books; a series that he called “The Strangest Moments”. In addition to his wild writings, “Aesop” embarked on ancient Gigs called Labours to prove his bold claims. From slaying Titans to creating the first Simulacrum, his Feats had earned him the Alias called Protoadventurer; a figure later revered by the Adventurers’ Guild as their patron Saint. Finally, “Aesop’s” absolute mastery of the Trifecta’s “boon” had gifted him with followers eager to tread his path. Some of these followers had stumbled upon the First Sisyphus through his writings, while others had either come across him out of happenstance or in sight of his Feats.

Using an absurd method, “Aesop” created more Sisyphus. The Cheat Code, as “Aesop” came to refer to his Miracle as, imbued his growing followers with all of the Glitches he’d acquired. As the Sisyphus’ numbers continued to grow, “Aesop” made the decision to move his Flock to a special Haven called Spinoza within an unsettled Zone of the SRPG called Zarathustra.

Upon arrival, “Aesop” established the Sisyphus Society as a means of safeguarding his Flock. As more time passed, “Aesop” grew older and Aged Up further until he’d reached Age 99. In a final Dream, the Trifecta requested that “Aesop” write a tome covering something called the "Optional Final Boss Challenge", amongst other things. In what would become his final installment for The Strangest Moments, “Aesop” wrote about a place beyond life, death, fiction, non-fiction and the afterlife. A place called THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

It is said, according to “Aesop”, that THE HIGHER ADVENTURE awaits those Fortuitous who can successfully reach the Age of 100. As to what THE HIGHER ADVENTURE is specifically, the Optional Final Boss Challenge provides the answer. If a Sisyphus can achieve Deification before the Age of 99, a special dreamcatcher called the Final Dungeon will be gifted to them at said Age. Sleeping underneath the Final Dungeon will transport the Challenger to the afterlife of the gods, called “Continue?”. Once there, the Challenger must overcome the Trifecta in combat.

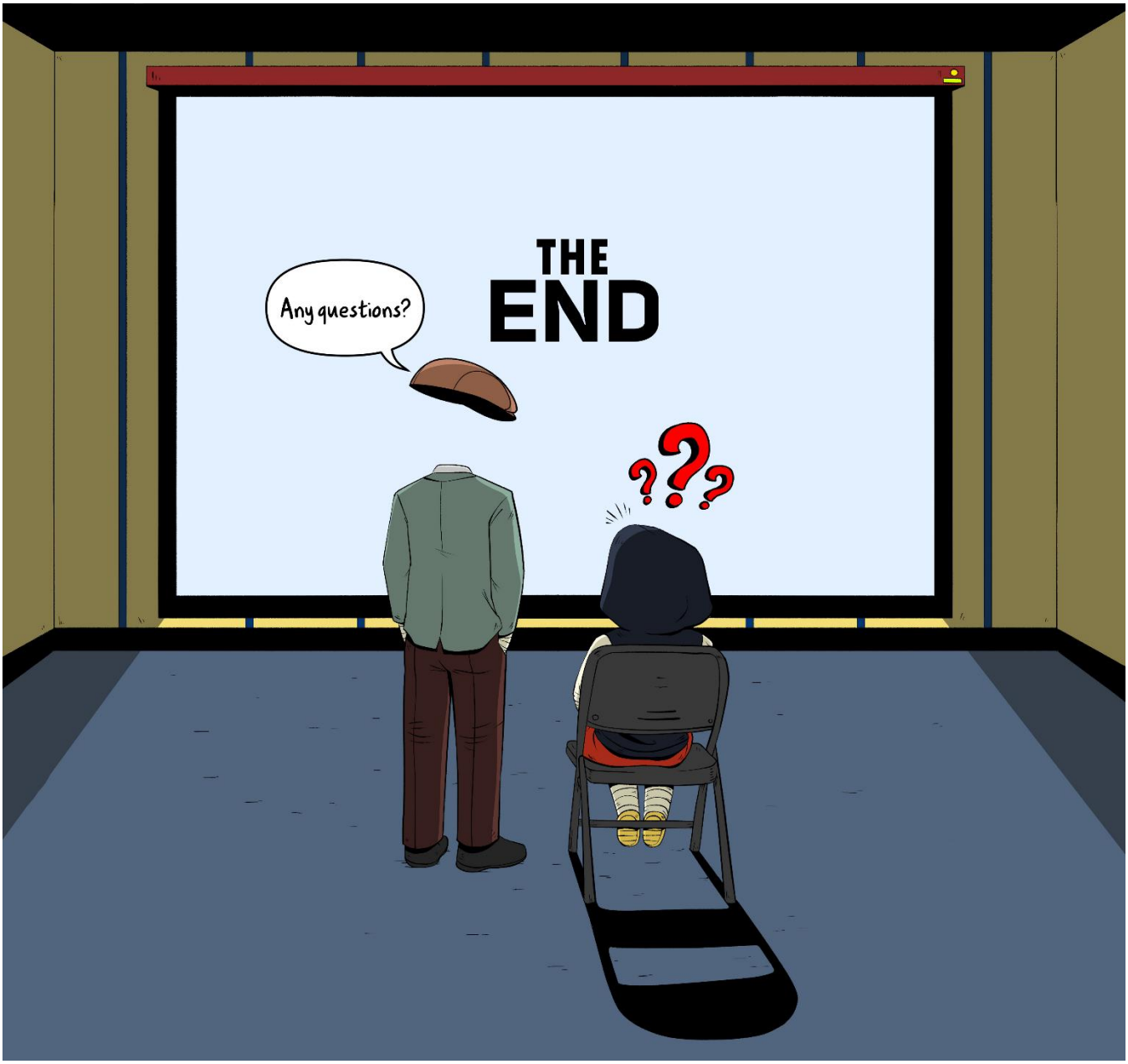
If successful in overcoming the trio, the Challenger can then engage the Sublime Axiom of the SRPG in an existential Fade. Should the Challenger emerge victorious, the “Truth” about the SRPG and THE HIGHER ADVENTURE will be “verified”. To ensure that all Sisyphus go through with the Challenge, a failsafe was attached to the Cheat Code. Known as the Crisis, it is a status effect that compels all Sisyphus to undertake the Optional Final Boss Challenge. Failure to heed it will result in psychosis, followed by death via “quitting”.

Upon publishing the Akashic Records, “Aesop” was gifted the Final Dungeon by the Trifecta. Surrounded by his seven disciples, a few Pets and his Folk, “Aesop” took to his bed for the last time.

Promising his Flock that he would return with Verification of the “Truth” about THE HIGHER ADVENTURE, “Aesop” laid his head on his pillow and fell asleep. Hours later, the First Sisyphus disintegrated into pixels. Not knowing whether their prophet had either succeeded or failed, the remaining Sisyphus grieved “Aesop’s” passing. A schism within the Society followed soon after, and a troubling period in the Sisyphus’ history commenced.

I could go on, but alas, that tale is for a different time. The presentation concluded with the 1950s style narrator wishing all Sisyphus Younglings the best of luck on their Runs, before fading to black.

Airen was left perplexed. Sensing his Pet's confusion, Roswell approached his protégé and asked the following in an amusing tone, "Any questions?"


THE END
Any questions?

VI



Airen had questions. A ton of questions. Sadly, for the Youngling, his grouchy stomach had other ideas. Realizing his Pet hadn’t eaten all day, Roswell held off on his exposition dump. After musing for a minute, the Shogun settled on his old stomping grounds–the Adventurers' Guild–as their next destination. The food on offer

would more than cleanse his Pet's palette. As a bonus, the visit would also afford Roswell an opportunity to gauge his Pet's natural inclinations. ***My rascal of Pet will need to determine a Role for himself soon. May as well nudge him in the right direction, thought the Shogun.***

Upon wishing Benjamin a fond farewell, the two Sisyphus went on a stroll. Eventually, the duo caught sight of their destination from a distance. Approaching the chillax establishment left Airen a little awestruck.

"Welcome to the Adventurers' Guild grasshopper," said Roswell as he invited his Pet inside, "where deities from all corners of the SRPG come to undertake Gigs of an extraordinary nature. We refer to their endeavors as Adventures."

Heading inside, Airen was caught off-guard by the roaring sounds and sights of gossip, moving feet and Shortcuts being summoned and dismissed. Explaining further, Roswell revealed to Airen that most of the patrons surrounding them were Adventurers. Additionally, Roswell made mention of formerly being one himself before Retiring and taking on his current Role as Shogun.

"The Gigs that Adventurers take on can vary greatly. Adventures can range from culling hostile cryptids to delivering takeout, depending on the client," Roswell concluded. Compared to all of the Volunteer Gigs that Airen had been Vanquishing up to this point, embarking on Adventures sounded far more exciting to the Youngling; and yes, that includes being a takeout courier.

Not that far from the pair, a face familiar to the Shogun called out to him from behind a busy counter.

"Roswell! Back already!" said the female barista. Roswell, hearing the voice of an old colleague, turned towards her direction and nodded his head before sounding off a reply. "As always Rosie," replied the Shogun as he and Airen approached the main counter, "my Pet here hasn't eaten since this morning. No arcade games for me today I'm afraid."

Rosie scanned Airen up and down, and a wide smile formed on her youthful face. "Awww, aren't you adorable! Would you like to try our pancake special, sweetie?" Rosie asked the Youngling. Airen perked up at the suggestion and gave an enthusiastic "yes"!

A mix between a tavern and an arcade, the Adventurers' Guild stood tall. Despite only having a single floor, the space inside was vast. Deities from all walks of life frequented the Guild. Some were there to grab drinks, while others were there to hit up the Gigs Board in search of opportunities. What caught Airen's eye the most were the assortment of weapons carried by the patrons; from blades that could cut photons, to guns that could rearrange a person's physique. ***Damn! What kind of Adventures have these deities been on? Airen wondered***.

It wasn't long before the Shogun and his Pet were seated with their orders. Full from an earlier meal, Roswell was content with just having a hot cup of coffee. As for Airen, Rosie placed his pancakes in front of him. "Enjoy yourself sweetie!" she said to Airen as she walked away, gently patting Roswell on his shoulder. Satisfied, Roswell took a sip of his brew before awaiting his Pet's inevitable inquiries.

"So, to clarify GG. I'm supposed to go on some kind of Ouroboros?" asked Airen.

"Something like that. Now that your Crisis is active, your Warrior's Mission has officially begun," replied the Shogun.

Before their arrival at the Guild, Roswell informed Airen about his current predicament. To demonstrate this, Roswell had his Pet generate a Planner Shortcut, which indicated that Airen had been assigned a special Quest titled "The Warrior's Mission". Due to the Quest's special nature, its sudden appearance in Airen's Planner came from Airen's subconscious, courtesy of the Cheat Code.

The stroll to the Adventurers' Guild was Roswell's idea. Rather than Fast Travel, the Shogun figured that using the time it would take to get there to explain Airen's predicament further would save him ample time for other discussions. Between IP Records and "Pike's Place Market", Roswell did his best to clarify what Airen had learned from the VHS presentation.

At the Age of 10, all Sisyphus experience the Question. Something that Roswell was keen on elaborating to his Pet.

"The “Question”, “What is THE HIGHER ADVENTURE?”, is a sign that the Crisis has seized your Configuration. Now that it’s active, you’ll need a strong Intention to keep its symptoms at bay. Failure to do so will result in your inevitable descent into psychosis, followed by you "Quitting"," explained Roswell. "That sounds crazy," replied Airen as the two neared the Guild.

"It is, as are most things in this game of life," replied Roswell.

Back in the Current, Airen had finished his breakfast. The Youngling diligently cleaned his space and bussed his dishes with a cheerful motion. Knowing that he’d ample time to learn more from his Tutorial, Airen held back on asking any further inquiries.

The two Sisyphus said their farewells to Rosie before departing. On the move again, Roswell informed his Pet that they were heading for another location. "It should be here today. It is Friday after all," the Shogun said aloud.

Ready to inquire once more, Airen asked Roswell what steps he’d need to take if he was to cure his Crisis. "Oh, the steps are simple. Yet in practice, they are herculean. Rest assured grasshopper. Once we’ve arrived at our next destination, all that I am about to explain to you will become crystal clear," said the Shogun. Before long, the two Sisyphus rounded a corner and came across a spectacular sight.

"Woah!" said Airen.

A Kaiju-sized Hercules beetle towered over the two Sisyphus. Surrounding the creature were groups of deities with their Controllers out. Amidst the sea of Shortcuts, many of the deities disappeared in an instant. "Ahhh, perfect! The Swapmeet is here," said Roswell. ***Swapmeet huh? Airen thought***. Requesting that his Tutorial explain further, Roswell humored the Youngling.

During “Aesop’s” most prolific writing period, an assortment of strange creatures called Swapmeets started appearing. According to “Aesop”, per the Trifecta, the Swapmeets are living pocket dimensions that act as “temporal vehicles”. Entering a Swapmeet takes the passenger to a world where entities called NPCs reside. A world that the deities refer to as Terra.

"Think of a Swapmeet as a kind of “time machine”," said Roswell.

"Ohhh, like that show with the police box!" replied Airen.

With a nod, Roswell continued his explanation. "Yes, in a sense. Different Swapmeets can take their passengers to different time periods within the NPC's realm," explained Roswell, “and upon arrival, all deities have roughly 120 minutes to explore their destination, known as a Stage. As time decreases, the Stage becomes more dangerous. Eventually, once time runs out, all deities are returned to the SRPG and the Stage resets.”

"What's there to do in the NPC world?" asked Airen.

"Why, to acquire Loot of course! Retros are what we call them," answered Roswell. All objects in the NPC world can be considered a Retro. Such is their value that many Guilds and businesses have made Swapmeets a high priority asset within the divine economy.

"Remember during the presentation when the funny narrator mentioned the absurd method “Aesop” used to create our Godhood? Well, this is how," said Roswell as he gestured towards the Swapmeet.

Explaining further, Roswell revealed that within any random Retro lies a "beacon" called a Guarantee. Activating this Guarantee is how the Cheat Code can be obtained. Upon acquiring and using the Guarantee, a special Swapmeet called a Firesale appears. Via the Firesale, a special location called the Bonus Stage is generated for access. Once there, any deity who can successfully locate and seize a Retro with a black label on it will automatically acquire the Cheat Code. Then and only then, can a Sisyphus unlock the means to achieve Deification.

"Huh?" said Airen.

"Yes, you heard correctly. The key to discovering what THE HIGHER ADVENTURE is lies right in there," said Roswell acknowledging the Swapmeet, "and said key is called the Cheat Code." Airen, feeling a little

dumbfounded, pressed his Tutorial. "Why mention the Cheat Code again GG? You make it sound like I need to rediscover it or something" inquired the young Sisyphus.

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying," replied Roswell.

"Why? I already have it, don't I!?" exclaimed Airen. Amused, Roswell asked his Pet an odd question. "Oh, do you now? Let me ask you something, grasshopper. Do you believe everything that you are told?" asked the Shogun. "Of course not! Like that one time you tried to trick me into believing that brick walls can play a mean game of chess!" replied Airen.

"Good. Now aim that same skepticism at the things that I've taught you thus far in your Run," Roswell replied. "Fortune requires all Challengers to be Free Spirits. Entities that can verify the "Truth" for themselves, without relying on the words of others alone."

Going further, the Shogun went on to explain that the Warrior's Mission that Airen had been assigned requires that the Youngling achieve a transformation called Deification; an existential metamorphosis that is the only known cure for the Crisis. The act of Deification evolves a deity into a higher state of being; an act that most, if not all deities, strive to realize. To achieve Deification as a Sisyphus, Airen must rediscover the Cheat Code once more and reverify the "Truth" for himself.

"You have until the Age of 99 to rediscover the "Truth" again if you want to cure your Crisis and qualify for the Optional Final Boss Challenge. However, without an Intention to help you get to that Age, you're only living on borrowed Runtime," said Roswell.

Incentivized by his Tutorial's words, Airen asked where he could find an Intention. Funny enough, it still hadn't occurred to the young one to ask Roswell what exactly an Intention was to begin with. Fortunately for Airen, he wouldn't have to remain ignorant for long. Anticipating his Pet's response, Roswell assured the lad that there was indeed such a place that had what he needed. Using his Fast Travel, the Shogun and Airen headed for their next destination.



VII



"We've arrived," announced Roswell. The two Sisyphus found themselves in front of a large college. The words, "Oni Community College", stood out to them in bold letters. "If you're looking for an Intention, this is the place to discover one," said Roswell as he patted Airen’s head. Despite the Youngling’s unfamiliarity with the institution in front of him, he was knowledgeable about colleges. In his previous Ages, Airen would often pass by Orion's colleges whilst traveling to and from Volunteer Gigs.

The institution dwarfed Orion’s smaller campuses. As a city college, Oni’s infrastructure integrated itself into the urban architecture of “Seattle”. Unlike normal universities and colleges, Oni divided itself into smaller campuses, each one distributed across the entire Haven. Roswell and Airen had Fast Traveled to the main campus, located not that far from the “Space Needle”.

Airen immediately took to scanning his new surroundings. The Youngling noticed students engaging in all sorts of activities. Some could be seen chillaxing with friends, others studying assignments and the remaining few entering and exiting lecture halls. What caught Airen’s eye the most were the assortment of Sisyphus students making their way around the campus as well. Airen was so intrigued by this observation that he quickly pointed out this fact to his Tutorial.

"Ahhh! If it isn’t the new arrivals. I recognize some of them,” said the Shogun. A few of the Sisyphus students waved at the pair before moving on. After waving back, Roswell checked the time. “Not bad, not bad at all. Ol’ Gent should still be in his office,” said the Shogun. The duo’s destination, the Admission’s Office, was far from their current location. Seizing the opportunity to give his Pet a grand tour, the Shogun beckoned Airen to come along. "Follow me, grasshopper. We’re going to see a counselor," said Roswell.

For years now, Airen hadn’t set foot on a school campus. Since his Reload, the lad's sole method of learning came from either Volunteering or inquiring.

Aside from pestering his Tutorial on occasion, Airen's learning was entirely self-driven. No tutors, no teachers, and no coursework. Just the SRPG as an instructor and the lad's Curiosity as the student. Alas, the Shogun’s decision to introduce Airen to Oni was a sign that great changes to the Youngling’s Run was on the horizon.

Ready and eager, Airen followed behind his Tutorial. The duo’s winding trek across the corridors and halls of the main campus sparked a bit of reminiscing within the Shogun. "Centuries ago, I took a few classes at this college. You could say it’s my alma mater," said Roswell. "What's an alma mater?" replied Airen. Amused, the Shogun gave a swift answer as the two entered the dining hall.

The area was modestly packed. Airen observed all sorts of eateries throughout the space. According to the Shogun, most of the food on offer came from the world of the NPCs. "A lot of deities pay a pretty penny for NPC recipes," explained Roswell.

If only I hadn’t eaten recently, Airen thought. Just the smell alone had the Youngling's mouth salivating, despite his stomach’s contentment.

Minutes later, the duo proceeded out of the dining hall and made for the Admission’s Office. The closer the two approached, the more pristine their surroundings became. Trophies, medals and awards littered the walls as Airen walked by them. Afterwards, the Shogun and his Pet made their way into the reception area. Approaching the

counter, Roswell spoke a few words to the administrative assistant. Just as swiftly, said assistant proceeded to the back offices at the Shogun's request.

Moments later, an elephant deity dressed in business attire appeared. "Ah, Roswell! So good of you to drop by," said the counselor. "Greetings Gent! I'm here with my Pet on unofficial business. If possible, I would like your current enrollment information please," replied Roswell.

After scanning the small Sisyphus next to the Shogun, Gent answered the latter. “Well, unless your Pet was born a Dwarf, I'm going to assume he's below the Age of 15?” Gent inquired.

With a nod, Roswell confirmed Gent's inquiry. Undeterred, Gent invited the two back to his office to continue their conversation. The door was shut, seats were taken, and the discussion continued.

"So, information gathering, eh?" asked Gent. Roswell chuckled before replying. "Of course! Speaking of which, I wanted to ask you something. Have there been any recent changes to the CLEP?" the Shogun asked.

Airen, silent and anxious, watched as the two OGs conversed with one another. "Actually, yes,” replied Gent as he typed on his Cauldron, “there was a recent change made about a decade ago. "Washington State" is now offering an Expedient version of the CLEP alongside the Traditional one. The decision was made following the success of other versions held throughout the Sphere. As a matter of fact, we’re currently conducting our first Jungle Gym Challenge as we speak.”

Gent made a tap on his keyboard before continuing, “Based on how smoothly this trial Challenge is going, our first Expedient is scheduled to be held at the end of this School Phase. Should be a momentous occasion, I’d imagine.”

Seeing an opportunity to interject, Airen asked the Shogun a question. "GG, what's a CLEP?" Airen inquired.

"Huh, you haven't told him yet?" asked Gent.

"Why do that when I can have a subject-matter expert explain it better," replied Roswell as he nodded Gent’s way.

Excited to show off his know-how, Gent broke down the CLEP to Airen.

Every 50 years of Runtime, a series of daily tournaments called the CLEP is held. Covering a wide range of subjects, each CLEP tournament is designed to test a student's competency. Competing against multiple students at the same time, the student with the highest score receives college credits. The rest receive nothing. Depending on the

tournament, all students get to decide on whether they want to compete via a multiple-choice test or a simulation test. In the event of a tie, a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors is held to settle the conundrum (not an exaggeration).

"Once you've obtained enough college credits, you'll receive a Degree Diploma at the end of the CLEP cycle in a graduation ceremony," Gent concluded.

"And," Roswell added, "once you possess a Degree Diploma, you can officially apply for most Roles throughout "Pangaea". A greater Role means a greater Contribution to the Deep State and the greater your Contribution, the greater your potential Suffering gains."

As Airen nodded to show his acknowledgement, a certain thought finally popped into his head. ***That's great and all, Airen pondered, but what does this have to do with getting an Intention?*** Sensing Airen's confusion, Roswell decided to alleviate his Pet's concern with an important question.

"Humor me, grasshopper. Do you recall when we visited the Adventurers' Guild earlier today and you couldn't help but bounce around? How did that place make you feel?" asked Roswell.

Airen gave a rapid-fire response as soon as Roswell uttered his last syllable. "Oh, that place was epic, GG! All those Adventurers looked so cool! And their weapons were sick! And their pancakes were amazing too!" replied Airen.

"Really now? Do you see yourself Adventuring some day?" asked Roswell. "Easily GG! A place like that could never be boring! I would love to volunteer there and do Adventuring Gigs and stuff!" replied Airen.

Roswell, satisfied with the answer that his Pet gave him, replied with an answer of his own.

"Well now, would you look at that! It seems to me like you've not only found your Intention, but your Expression as well!" said Roswell.

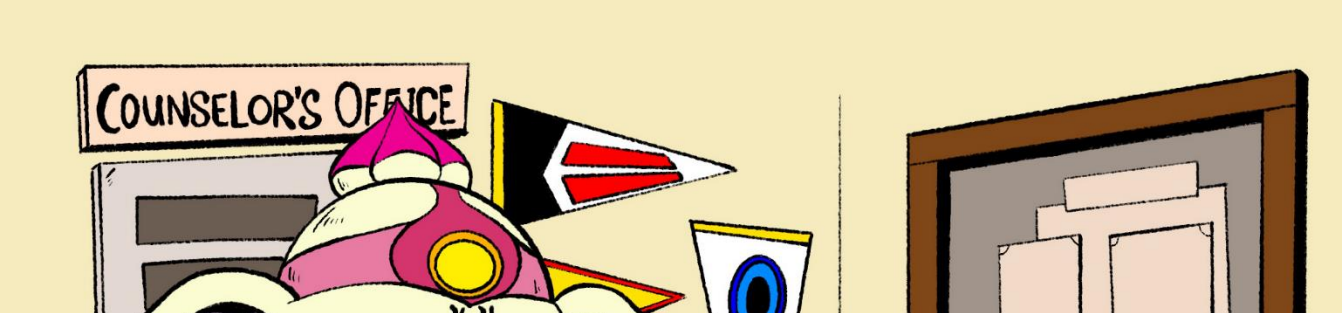
Elaborating further, the Shogun explained to his Pet that an Intention was nothing more than a reason for getting through a Run, and that an Expression was the method by which to realize said reason. The Shogun continued.

"Aspiring to become a professional DJ or a proficient CEO are examples of an Intention. Conversely, robbing banks, trading stocks or begging for a living are examples of Expressions. Getting employed to act out an Intention is called a Role. However, not every Role that you want to do can just be done on a whim. Some you must qualify for. And, in the case of becoming an Adventurer, you need a Degree Diploma for that," Roswell finished.

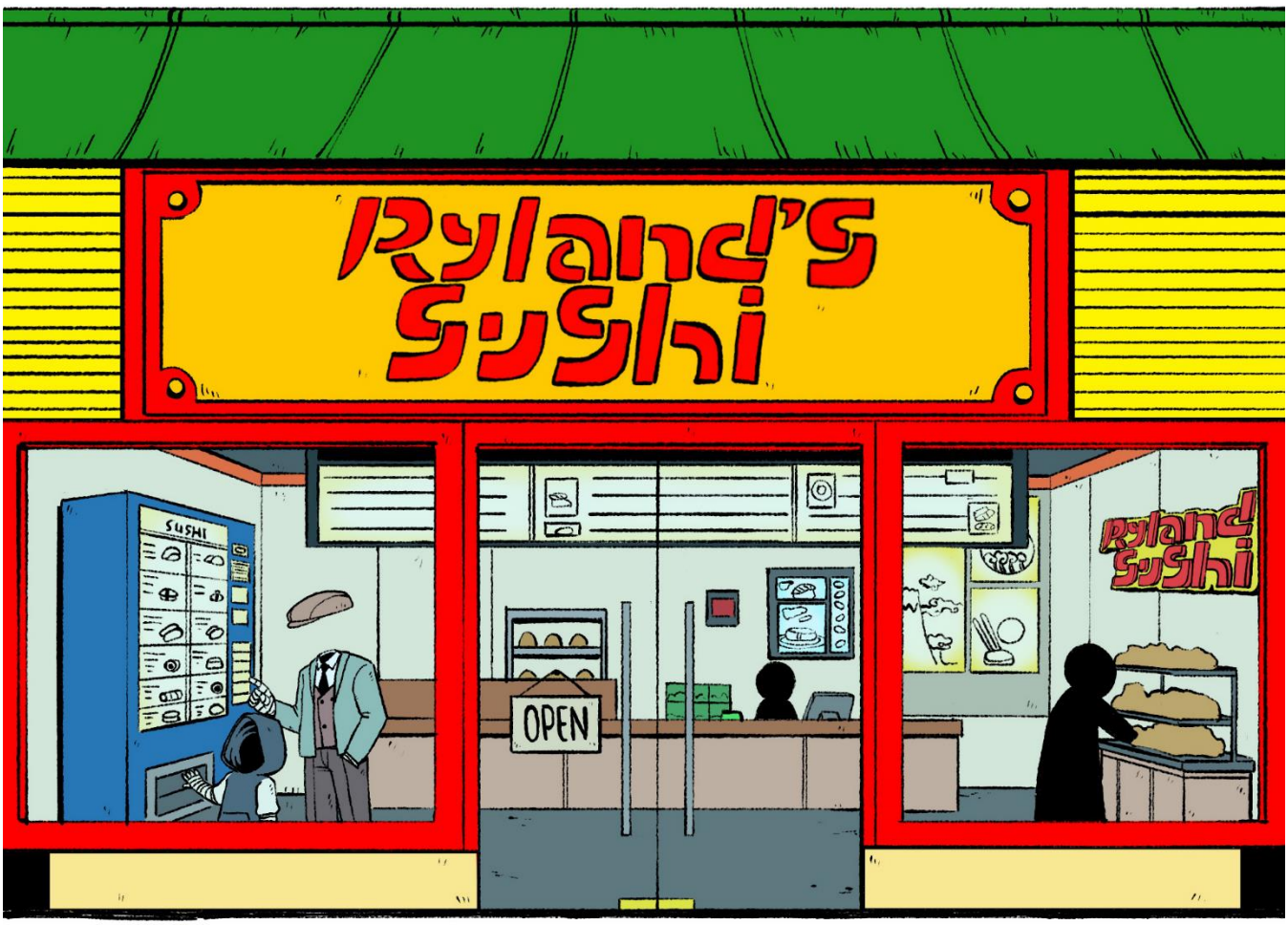
The Shogun's words disheartened Airen. ***No way! I gotta go to school to do my Intention!? Airen thought***. To ensure he wasn't hearing things, Airen decided to ask a rhetorical question. "So, just to clarify GG. That Guild place we were at earlier today. I need a Degree Diploma to work there?" asked Airen. "Yes," answered Roswell, "and not just that specific Guild. All Guilds, most businesses and a few government Roles throughout the Heavens require one as well."

Of course, Airen thought as he sighed, why else would GG bring me here?

Now attentive, Airen began asking both deities what he'd need to do to enroll in Oni and get his Degree Diploma. He'd made up his mind on the spot.



VIII



Airen had a fire in his eyes. The meeting with Gent lasted around an hour and 30 minutes. Thanks to their conversation, Airen gained additional insights into both the University System and the Guild System. Satisfied with the answers he'd received, Airen bid Gent a fond farewell as he and Roswell departed Oni. Walking further from the campus, Airen started contemplating the information he'd received.

First was the Guild System. All sorts of Guilds ply their trades throughout the Heavens. You can think of the Heavens as the continents of the gods. Anyhow, there are three types of Guilds: Legal Guilds, Gray Guilds and Illegal Guilds. The legality of a Guild's activities varies from Heaven to Heaven and from Sphere to Sphere.

For example, the Thieves' Guild is recognized as a criminal organization in places like "North America", yet indispensable in others like "Asia" or "Africa". Conversely, the Privateers' Guild is universally accepted across the SRPG, due to their convenient "plausible deniability" clause.

Roswell was technically right when he'd mentioned that the Guilds required a Degree Diploma; however, there are exceptions to the rule.

Recalling his conversation with Gent, Airen pondered, the counselor mentioned that certain Credentials can be acquired in place of a Degree Diploma. Regarding the CLEP, the Expedient version that was just introduced provided such a Credential. "Winning 1st place earns you a Credential and access to just about any Guild of your choosing," Gent had said.

The Expedient CLEP is an unorthodox martial arts tournament. Unlike the Traditional CLEP, which has a specific version for each college and university throughout Monad, the Expedient is open to any and all institutions residing within the Sphere, state or province that said Expedient is held in.

To qualify, a student must first overcome a series of optional trials called the Jungle Gyms before the next CLEP cycle. If successful, the student can then participate in the Expedient instead of the Traditional. From there, the Expedient plays out like a battle royale. Should two or more students remain standing by the end of said battle royale, a Tiebreaker is held, where the remaining students battle each other to decide who'll get the Credential.

Sadly, a student can't do both the Traditional and Expedient CLEPs at the same time. It's either one or the other. ***If there exists a simpler way of getting what I need, Airen thought, then I should prioritize the Expedient.*** As Airen continued his scheming, he heard a noise that broke his musing. The lad's stomach was getting grouchy again. Roswell, in earshot, made mention of it. "Can't scheme on an empty stomach grasshopper. Come on, let's go get some pho. I know a good place," said the Shogun. Airen perked up when he heard the news. ***Scheming can wait, he thought, it's time to eat!***

One Fast Travel later and the paternal duo arrived at their eatery. It was the afternoon now, and the activity inside was energetic. The smell and atmosphere drew the Sisyphus towards the establishment's ticket vending machine.

The tall machine listed off various dishes as options, ranging from different pho to a plethora of "Vietnamese" side dishes. There was a few sushi dishes added in for variety as well. The pair made their selections and received their tickets. Situated at the main counter on stools, Roswell and Airen received their pho and dug in.

Moments later, Roswell asked Airen about his current thoughts. "You've learned quite a bit today little one. I can tell you've been thinking intensely," said Roswell. ***He isn't lying, Airen thought.*** The Youngling began his birthday carefree, only for it to evolve into one of urgency.

"I'm figuring out the fastest way to join the Adventurers' Guild, GG. I've already chosen it to be my Expression. It just fits what I gotta do anyway," Airen replied.

Roswell nodded as he briefly considered the importance of Airen's decision. For the Deification process to be a success, a deity must be firmly rooted in their Intention; in particular, choosing a Role for themselves. Should the choice be made for them instead, their chance at achieving Deification diminishes. Alas, a deity only gets one shot at attempting it, and there are no do-overs.

Roswell had slight hope that his Pet would choose the path of the Samurai. For a majority of the Sisyphus, joining that organization and applying their Contribution that way is considered by many to be the "smart" option. The SRPG can be an unforgiving place, with many of its players vying for a shot at "liquidating" a Sisyphus or two. Regardless, shielding his Pet from making similar mistakes as he did in his youth would also be a stupid thing to do. ***Can't risk pissing off Fortune, Roswell thought***.

"I see. So, you've made your decision then. Outstanding, grasshopper! Choosing to take you to the Adventurers' Guild was wise on my part," said the Shogun as he took a small sip from his cup of sake.

Airen, previously lost in his thoughts, caught his GG's words.

"Why?" replied Airen.

"Well, to be frank, I'd hoped to steer you in the direction of joining the Samurai. That, I've come to realize, might have sabotaged your chances at Deification, I suspect," replied Roswell.

Finishing his cup of sake, he continued, "In order for Deification to occur, a deity must be entirely self-driven towards achieving Completion. The Intention must be internally motivated and not externally."

The Shogun finished his bowl of pho before continuing, "Giving you a tour of your options was my way of covering your bases, so to speak. It's my job as your Tutorial to see you succeed," said Roswell.

Good to know, Airen thought. The idea of being led to believe that one should only stick to doing something ***specific*** sounded horrendous.

In fact, it was his Tutorial's selflessness that had Incentivized the lad towards developing his own Game Plan now. On top of that, the Samurai lifestyle had always felt a bit off-putting to the Youngling anyway.

"I can't thank you enough, GG! I'm so ready to get into Oni now and take on the Expedient. Nothing's gonna stop me from becoming an Adventurer!" said Airen. Slurping down the rest of his pho, Airen continued. "Still, it's pretty lame that I've to take an entrance exam just to get admitted into it though."

Roswell, leaving a tip on the counter, assuaged his lad's concerns. "Not exactly. If you apply as a transfer student, you can bypass the entrance exam," said the Shogun.

"Really! How do I do that?" Airen replied.

As the duo made for the exit, Roswell explained further, "Simple. You'll enroll in one of Orion's colleges and take some courses.

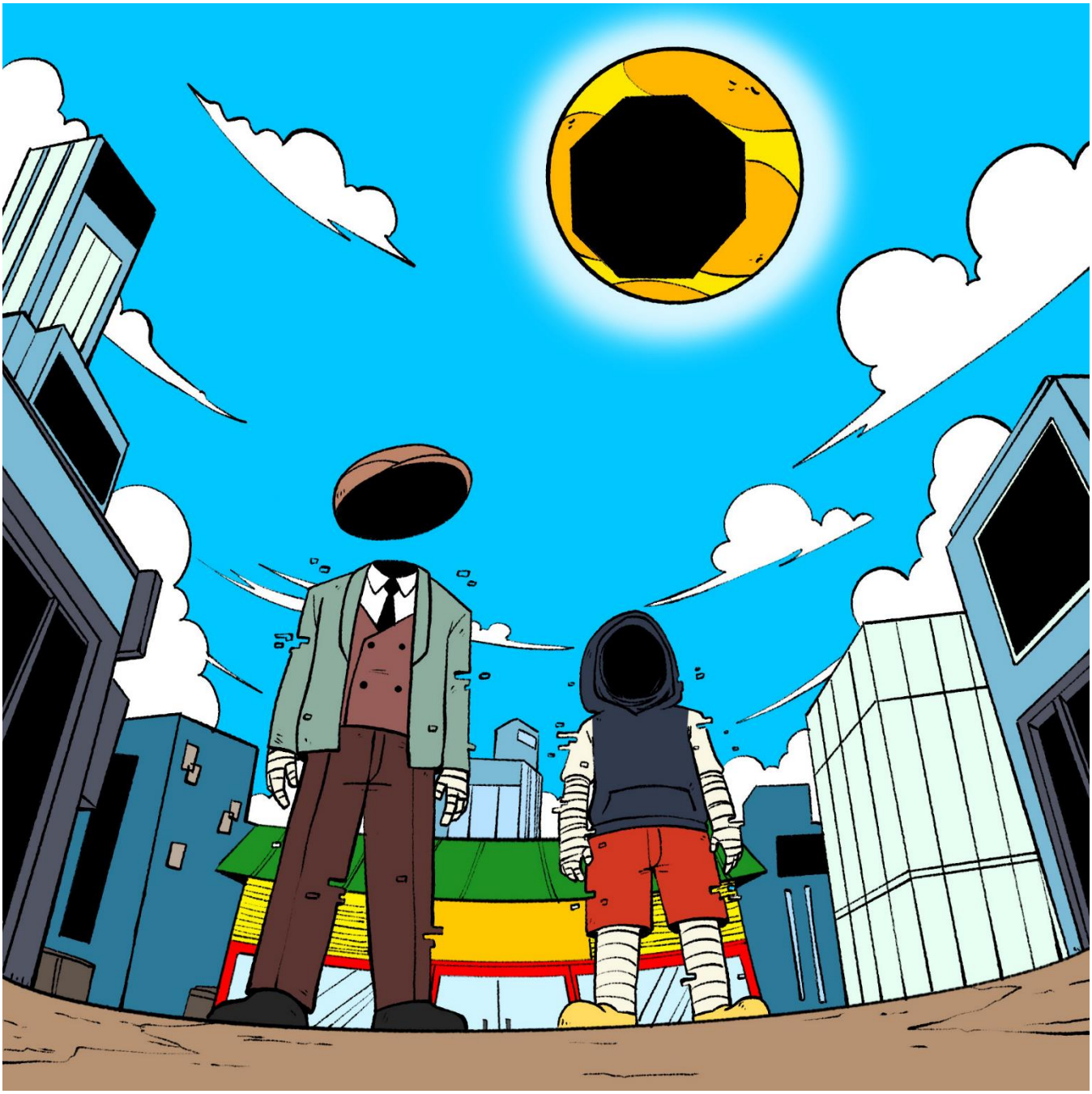
Pass them and you can transfer your academic record from there to Oni."

Outside the eatery, Roswell summoned a Shortcut. "Unfortunately, as a Youngling, you aren't allowed to enroll. Until now, that is," continued the Shogun. On the Shortcut was Airen's current Configuration status.

With a few taps and swipes, a change was made. Airen felt a soothing sensation strike him suddenly. ***Did my Configuration change again? Airen thought.***

"There! Your Class has now been upgraded from "Youngling" to "Gakusei". You're ready for advanced training now," said Roswell.

After explaining to his Pet that a Class was nothing more than a stage in a deity's life cycle, Roswell informed Airen of his plans to prepare him for the CLEP. Hyped up and ready to start his advance training immediately, Airen confirmed his resolve to surpass his current limits. "Settle down, grasshopper. We'll start bright and early tomorrow morning," replied the Shogun. With a Fast Travel, the duo returned to Orion.



IX



Just as Roswell had promised, Airen began his advanced training the following morning. However, it wasn't in the way he was expecting. After having his usual cup of joe in the morning, Airen made for the front door before being stopped by his Tutorial. "Grasshopper, before you depart, take these," Roswell instructed. The Shogun stopped the Gakusei to give him a peculiar set of books. According to the Shogun, these texts were written by a group of NPCs called “philosophers”.

"I’d advise you to finish those books swiftly. The sooner that you do, the sooner that I can teach you how to fight," instructed Roswell. Airen didn't need to be told twice. With vigor, the young Sisyphus accepted his “homework” before making his way out the door and towards his Volunteer Gigs.

Upon placing his “instruction manuals” inside his Inventory, Airen decided to see if his GG had assigned him a new Gig. Pulling up his Planner Shortcut, Airen confirmed that a new Gig had appeared. Said Gig detailed his required reading. To the Gakusei's surprise, the Suffering on offer for completing said reading Gig was bountiful.

"Bet!" Airen said aloud before he started running instead of walking. The Gakusei became invigorated by the sudden “switch-up” in his daily routine.

Before long, Airen finished each assigned book. Taking advantage of his free time in between Gigs, the Gakusei digested his reading material. Curiously, Airen found the ideas discussed by these “philosophers” to be quite intriguing. Said ideas exposed Airen to a range of concepts that detailed the importance of individuality and self-overcoming. The reading gave a comforting feeling to the young deity. Still, as to why his GG needed him to internalize these concepts, Airen was itching to find out.

After informing Roswell of his success via text, the Shogun asked Airen to meet up with him at a nearby gym.

Realizing that he could finally learn martial arts like in the films he and his GG occasionally watched, Airen wrapped up his final Volunteer Gig for the day with a quickness.

Arriving inside the gym, Airen rendezvous with his GG at the reception area. The Shogun bid Airen to follow him, as he’d already secured a training room called a Playground. The duo traversed the gym until they reached their destination.

On the training room door was a QR code. Roswell scanned it with his Controller, causing it to unlock. Once inside, Airen observed a vacant room, with its interior-colored light gray. Shutting the door behind them, Roswell pulled up a Shortcut. A few taps later and the room's interior transformed into a vibrant landscape.

The two Sisyphus were now situated on a platform, mimicking a martial arts ring. They were surrounded by cherry blossoms under a sunny sky. The air was fresh with the scent of incense. Not that far from the duo was a lone shrine for prayer.

Airen was in awe of his surroundings.

"Welcome to the Playground, little one. As of now, this simulation room will be your new home away from home," said Roswell. The Shogun encouraged Airen to walk around and get a feel for his new surroundings. Satisfying his curiosity, Airen asked how this was all possible. "Why, through the power of Spellcraft, grasshopper. But there's no need to worry about that for now though," advised Roswell. Getting his Pet back on track, the Shogun instructed Airen to download a new Grimoire from the app store on his Controller. The time had finally come for Airen to discover the point of his philosophical readings.

"Console Grimoire, huh?" asked Airen. The young Gakusei, under Roswell's instruction, summoned a Shortcut titled "Console(s)". The word "Existentialism" stuck out to him as it appeared listed on the floating screen. Roswell, standing by Airen's side, elaborated on what his Pet was seeing. "Those philosophy books that I assigned to you were for this moment," said the Shogun.

Pointing his bandaged finger at Airen's Shortcut, he continued, "What I'm about to teach you will forever define how you perceive the SRPG. Listen well, grasshopper."

Starting from the top, Roswell explained the concept of Belief to Airen. Known as the "calories of the gods", Belief was the element that gave the deities their life and power. "From the food that you eat to the air that you breathe, all of it emanates Belief," said the Shogun. Generating his own Shortcut, Roswell summoned a series of images to help convey his next points.

Since I'm such an accommodating narrator, I'll sum up the Shogun's "seminar" for you.

Belief is viewed as a form of potential energy. Because the existence of Belief permeates the SRPG, wondrous yet terrible occurrences can come about should a deity decide to "wish" into existence a specific outcome onto their surroundings. For a deity to effect a change in their environment, an Intent is needed. Belief combined with Intent creates a form of kinetic energy called Certainty. Using Certainty, a deity can perform basic tasks and accomplish work, amongst other things.

Magic, as the deities call it, is the Intent to manipulate Probability itself. Messing around with Probability without a firm understanding of the SRPG's Mechanics, or natural laws, is unwise. Too often have there been deities that have messed around with Probability without much forethought, leading to deadly outcomes.

To solve this conundrum, various schools of thought emerged to study the nature of the SRPG. From this systematic study emerged a discipline called Imagination.

Using Imagination, a series of Belief Systems were conceived to help guide a deity's Magical Intent. Known as the Consoles, these Magical worldviews became reliable schemas that the deities could utilize for their individual purposes.

Using a combination of both Attention and Consoles, various forms of Magic called Choices came into being. Now, as for how a deity can acquire a Console, said deity needs to be exposed to the Belief System of a specific Console for a certain period of Runtime. Once acquired, a Console can be strengthened, applied and evolved in novel ways. It is for this reason that the acquisition of powerful Consoles has remained a high priority task amongst the deities.

"The Existentialism Console is a starter Console for us Sisyphus. It is a well-rounded Console that's sufficiently balanced between offense and defense," explained Roswell. With the Shogun's permission, Airen tapped his Existentialism Console, which took him to a new Shortcut titled, "Metagames".

"Throughout the many Expansions of the SRPG, different deities have developed their own methods for using their Consoles. These methods are called Metagames. Think of them as "guides" for how to utilize a Console to its utmost efficiency," explained the Shogun. Airen's starter Metagame, called "Where's The Exit?", was the only one he had access to. Upon tapping his Metagame, Airen generated a new Shortcut revealing a web of nodes called the Experience Grid.

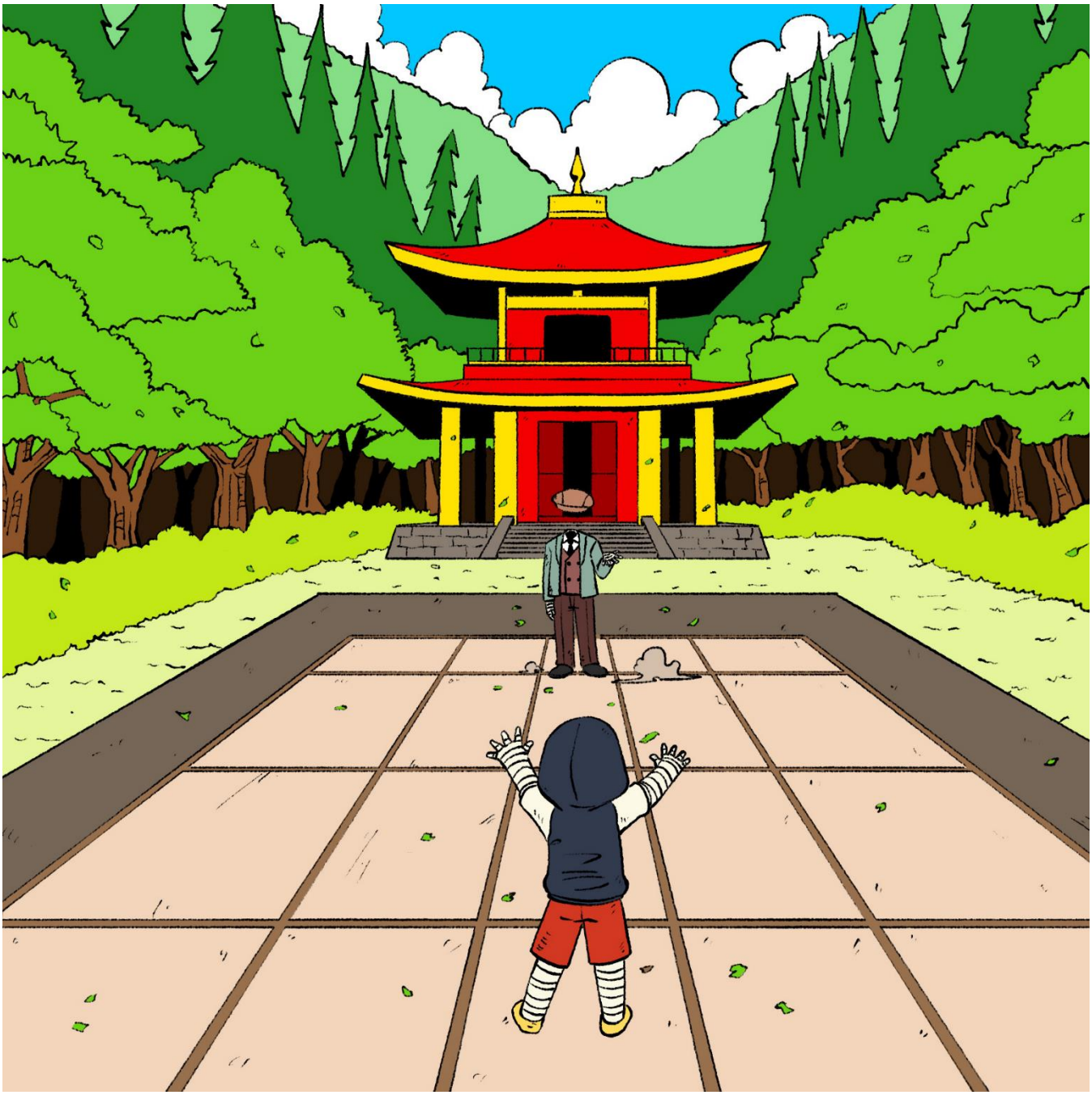
Each node on the Experience Grid was colored red, green and blue respectively. The red nodes were called "Approaches", the blue nodes were called "Strategies" and the green nodes in-between the Approaches and Strategies were called "Gains". At the top of the Shortcut, Airen noticed a pool of numbers called Experience Points, or XP for short.

In total, these various nodes formed the basis of the Choices that Airen could attain at present.

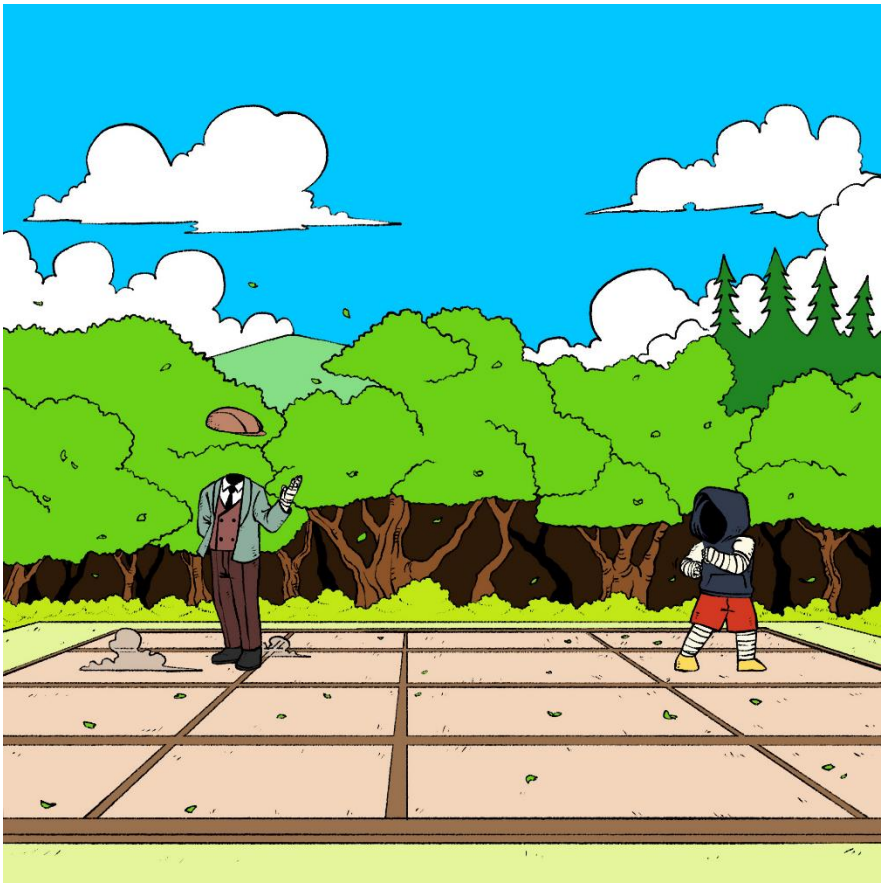
"Study your Metagame carefully and apply your XP to whichever nodes strike your fancy. Once you're finished, we can begin your first lesson," said Roswell. Excited, Airen did as he was asked and decided on his Choices. Upon finishing, Airen felt that familiar tingling sensation again. Calm and centered, the Gakusei was ready to continue his training. Upon signaling to Roswell that he was ready to continue his lesson, the Shogun decided to elaborate on how Choices work.

"Choices are divided into three types. Approaches are active skills, Strategies are passive skills and Gains add to your physical attributes. To utilize an Approach Choice, for instance, one must execute the Choice's Algorithm. The right Choice in the right situation can make all the difference in this world. For now, however, we'll focus on combat fundamentals before we dig deeper into the ways in which you can use Magic effectively. Now then, are you ready to begin?" asked Roswell.

With an enthusiastic nod, Airen replied, "GG, did you even need to ask!?".



X



Tutorial Fight

Roswell Evelyn

Tutorial Fight Song

Protect Ya Neck by The Wu-Tang Clan

Airen readied a fighting stance, mimicking what he'd seen in various martial art flicks. With a chuckle, Roswell calmed his body and put one arm behind his back. “This is it, grasshopper. The moment you've been waiting for. Now, as best as you can, strike me,” asked the Shogun. With his other hand, he made a “come forth” gesture towards his Pet.

Ha! I got this! Airen thought.

Except, he didn't. The Gakusei charged forward, readying his hardest punch. Roswell, unmoved and unphased, stood ready in his defensive stance. The confidence Airen exuded at that moment sparked an unusual idea in his mind. His invigorated movement came from the Gainful Choices he'd just activated, which upped his physical attributes somewhat. Eager to impress, Airen blitzed in front of his Tutorial.

“Got you!” Airen yelled as he threw a punch imbued with an Approachable Choice. Whether it was intuition or something else that allowed Airen to pull out the Approach, the act took Roswell by surprise. Still, the Shogun already knew the outcome.

To the young Sisyphus’ surprise, his fist phased through Roswell upon impact, causing the little one to miss his mark entirely. “Surprise,” said Roswell as he reappeared behind Airen before calmly hitting the Gakusei’s back with a karate chop. The force from the blow sent Airen tumbling quite a distance.

What the!!! Airen thought.

Picking himself up, Airen did an immediate double take. In Roswell’s former spot was his afterimage, slowly fading away.

“Ouch! How'd you do that, GG!!!” Airen asked Roswell.

With an amused chuckle, Roswell walked towards his Pet. “Why with this, little one,” said the Shogun as he summoned an app store Shortcut. “You were quick to utilize your new Choices, which is a surprise if I'm being honest. Usually, it takes practice to utilize Algorithms in Realtime for a beginner, yet you've achieved that already,” said Roswell as he tapped the Shortcut's search bar. “Still, like sprinting at the beginning of a marathon, you've already exhausted yourself, grasshopper,” Roswell concluded as he finally found his search result.

Now that he’s mentioned it, I do feel a little tired, Airen thought.

“Here, look at this Grimoire. I want you to download it,” Roswell instructed. Without a word, Airen proceeded to make the download. “So, what's up with this Genius Grimoire, GG?” asked Airen as he downed a potion given to him by the Shogun. Upon downing the vial, Airen felt his strength return.

“Excellent question, grasshopper. To put it simply, this Grimoire allows you to cast another kind of Magic called Spells,” answered the Shogun.

Listening closely, Airen learned from Roswell about the differences between Choices and Spells. As usual, I'll sum up the Shogun's lecture.

Choices utilize a deity's Certainty as a fuel source. Certainty can also be thought of as a form of divine chi or ki. The downside, as you can imagine, is that an excessive use of Choices can render a deity “Belief-deficient”, which is equal to running low on calories.

“Fortunately for us, a group of Sorcerers solved this conundrum back in the 2XXXs by creating the Genius Grimoire,” explained Roswell.

Thanks to said Sorcerers, the Genius Grimoire allows for Magic usage without the need for a deity to use their personal Certainty. Contained within the Genius Grimoire are special programs called Genii, which can produce Spells.

Because the Genius Grimoire relies on a Controller's battery to cast its Spells, a deity can reserve their Choices for when they truly need them, thus saving them ample Certainty.

“Oh, I get it! That explains why I was tired just now,” said Airen.

“Exactly! Your sudden use of a Choice has solidified that drawback in your mind now. Which, in hindsight, is a good thing. I think you'll appreciate the structure of your training going forward now,” replied the Shogun.

Airen, with a long stretch, readied another fighting stance. With a better understanding of both types of Magic, Airen was ready to continue his lessons. “Let’s go again, GG!” proclaimed Airen with enthusiasm. Proud and willing, the Shogun took up his signature stance, this time placing both arms behind his back. “Very well then, little one. I’ll make you a proper Adventurer yet!” said the Shogun.

After a moment of concentration, Airen propelled himself forward, ready to try again at landing a blow on his Tutorial.

Another decade of Runtime came and went.

During that time, Airen developed both his martial arts and Magic capabilities under his Tutorial's tutelage. As the years of Runtime passed by, Airen gradually Aged Up; specifically, from Age 10 all the way to Age 13. Upon turning 13, to both Roswell and Airen's surprise, the Gakusei experienced another Growth Spurt.

At around 30 years of Runtime, when Airen achieved his 13th Age Up, the Sisyphus' body began to glow once more. Moments later, Airen's body grew taller and stronger. Additionally, his voice broke, becoming more baritone. The young Sisyphus had Aged into the form of a young man physically in his late teens. In terms of height, the Gakusei was around 5 feet and 10 inches tall, making him only a few inches shorter than Roswell.

"Well, I'll be! It looks like someone just had another Growth Spurt, and an important one at that," said Roswell. Embarrassingly, Airen's clothes no longer fit him, which meant a trip to the store was in order. Inside a nearby commissary, Airen and Roswell made their way towards the clothing section. With the feeling of embarrassment influencing him, Airen beelined for the god's section with a quickness. From Airen's perspective, it didn't take him long to locate his new garbs; in particular, a red hoodie and a black baseball cap, complete with jeans and a pair of sneakers.

Changing in the dressing room, Airen was allowed to wear his new clothes on the way out. After a successful purchase, the Shogun and his Pet returned to their Abode via Fast Travel. Feeling comfortable in fitted clothes again, the Gakusei asked his Tutorial for an opinion on his new clothing style.

"Hey GG, how's my new red hoodie?" asked a confident Airen. Roswell, scanning his Pet for a few seconds, gave Airen a surprising answer.

"Oh, you mean the green hoodie you have on you right now?" replied the Shogun.

A dumbfounded Airen had no idea what his Tutorial was talking about. The following day, the duo made a trip to the doctor's office for Airen's physical. It was there that Airen learned an embarrassing truth about himself.

"Here are your results! Your vitals are normal, your Configuration status is stable, and you've been cleared for enrollment at one of our nearby colleges; oh, and you're color-blind," said the doctor. That last statement took Airen for a ride. The doctor's prognosis confirmed Airen's inability to distinguish red from green.

Fortunately for the Gakusei, it wasn't a big deal. After being prescribed a pair of color-blind contact lenses, the paternal duo departed.

"Well, this sucks…" said Airen solemnly. Following a quick chuckle, Roswell cheered up his protégé with good news.

"I've a special birthday present for you. Starting tomorrow, you have my permission to join the Sect for our morning training at the Stability. With your teen Growth Spurt out of the way, you're no longer considered a minor," said Roswell. Airen's mood flipped ten times over upon hearing the news.

For over a decade of Runtime now, Airen started catching glimpses of the Sect's morning training while traveling to his Volunteer Gigs. Like shaolin monks, the Samurai improve their self-discipline through mindfulness, meditation and sparring.

Dude, I can't want to do what they can do, Airen would say to himself whenever he had time to get in a glimpse.

The Gakusei now had the self-sufficiency and knowledge needed to take care of himself completely. That alone, however, wouldn't get him far without refinement.

Giddy with excitement over the news, Airen hugged Roswell. After dealing out an excessive number of “thank you's”, Airen pulled himself off his Tutorial. Making sure that his hyperactive Pet wouldn't forget his other obligations for tomorrow, Roswell threw in a reminder.

"One last thing, grasshopper. Don't forget to head over to the local college after Sect training. Remember, you're trying to get into Oni without worrying about an entrance exam," said the Shogun.

Quickly calming himself down, Airen acknowledged his Tutorial's words. Heading to his room, Airen hopped onto his Cauldron and began accessing the local college's website via Narcissus, the divine World Wide Web.

"Alrighty! Time to see when the college opens tomorrow," Airen said to himself.

The Gakusei had a few courses in mind that he wanted to take. Classes covering the cosmology of the SRPG and the numerous Godhoods of the deities were of great interest to the young Sisyphus.

For the rest of the evening, Airen surfed the college's website.



XI



The following morning saw Airen attack his wake-up routine with gusto. The 13-year-old was out of his bed at the first sound of his alarm. Wasting no time, the Gakusei dropped to the floor and knocked out 100 push-ups, sit-ups and burpees. Hardly breaking a sweat, Airen followed up with light stretching, but not in silence. "How about a little Jungle today," Airen said to himself as he equipped his ear buds.

With 1990s-era music massaging his eardrums, Airen slipped into a brief period of meditative contemplation.

Following his first visit to IP Records, Airen made frequent trips to the record store alongside Roswell. With Benjamin's encouragement, Airen took to exploring the establishment. The Gakusei encountered genres of music he hadn't heard before: Drum n Bass, Jungle, Trip-Hop, Indie, Instrumental Hip-Hop, you get the idea. With each random trip to IP, Airen left with new records; some he enjoyed, others not so much. Regardless, the presence of new music in his Run kept Airen's spirits up.

"Ayo, shout-out to Uncle Stew!" Airen said to himself as he got up off the floor. Eager and ready, Airen left his room. A cup of a joe later and the Gakusei was out the door. The destination for the morning this time around wouldn't be a Volunteer Gig. Airen, anxious yet excited, set his sights on reaching the site where the Sect were gathering for their morning training.

"Cool cool. To the Stability!" Airen said to himself as he exited his home. The hype he was feeling gave him a burst of momentum.

Despite lamenting his inability to Fast Travel, Airen turned his necessity to move on foot into a silver-lining. Like lightning, Airen raced towards his destination. Along the way, the Gakusei made his rounds and greeted the many Sisyphus he'd come to view as part of his extended Pantheon. Some were opening their stores for business, while others were shutting down for the morning.

Since our Main Protagonist is so busy saying his greetings, I'll elaborate further on the Sisyphus' way of life until he's finished.

The Surveillance of Orion is home to a single landmass that's surrounded by water—said landmass takes the shape of an octagon, which is roughly the size of the NPCs' version of Texas. All Surveillances share an octagonal landmass so that arriving Sisyphus are less confused about navigating their way around each one. At the center of each octagonal landmass is a sprawling metropolis that has a Bakufu at its center. Outside the city limits, various industries and farmlands ply their respective trades. The majority of the Sisyphus live in either the city center or the suburbs. Others whose Roles require farmwork or the like live outside the urbanized areas.

The exorbitant amount of goods produced by the Sisyphus have made them a net exporter of valuable commodities. Such is the economic might of the Sisyphus Shogunate, whose reach and influence now dominate a good portion of the divine economy.

If not for the Shadow Social Contract, the Sisyphus' robust industry would, instead, be geared towards waging ruthless Assimilation after ruthless Assimilation. Fortunately, the current Expansion of the SRPG has redirected those old habits into a productive outlet that benefits others more than it detract.

Without saying it, some Sisyphus silently prefer the old ways over the current status quo. So much so that, on occasion, some Sisyphus renounce the Shogunate altogether in favor of the more old-school Sisyphus who comprise an opposing faction called the Ronin. Still, in order to maintain Goodwill with the other Godhoods, the Shogunate is willing to let old habits die hard…mostly.

I could go on, but alas, our Main Protagonist has just finished running his mouth. Checking the time, Airen realized he was going to be late. Saying farewell to a few OGs, Airen redirected his focus towards his remaining obstacle.

Reaching the city's edge, Airen arrived at a forest. In front of him waited a winding path of stairs. "And there it is," Airen said with a sigh, "those annoying ass stairs."

Beyond the winding stairs lies a special shrine called a Stability. The Stabilities are shrines of worship that the Sisyphus frequent and pray to for good luck. Praying to Fortune, the Sublime Axiom, the Sisyphus often gift the Stabilities with trinkets or food as a tribute to their "mom".

As for reaching a Stability, the path leading to one is always an asinine affair. Each Stability is situated at a high elevation, with a series of 777 steps serving as the pathway. Known as the "Stairway to Stability", the winding steps are notorious for doubling the weight of the climber the moment that they set foot on the first step on the path.

Calming his body and his breathing, Airen conjured up a Shortcut depicting a playlist he'd made for this occasion. The Gakusei pressed play as he eyed the first steps of many. "Drum n Bass, don't fail me now," Airen said to himself as he took his first step. Instantly, Airen felt as if a 150-pound vest was suddenly thrown onto his person.

"Damn, this is gonna suck! Oh well, let's get it!" exclaimed Airen as he made for the next step. With persistence and stubbornness, Airen began his hefty ascent towards his destination.

"Holy shit, I made it!" exclaimed Airen. Despite the heaviness in his legs and feet, Airen was undeterred by his fatigue. He arrived on time to a familiar sight. In the distance stood a large shrine, decorated with charms and esoteric designs. In terms of size, it had the scale of a small Buddhist temple.

Hanging out in front of the Stability, in various groups, were members of Roswell's Sect. Some were busy talking and stretching, while others were solitary yet contemplative. It was clear that training hadn't started yet, which was why everyone was getting in a last-minute chat. Garbed in training gis, the Sect looked uniformed. A sense of purpose and direction emanated off them.

Searching for a spot that wouldn't draw too much attention, Airen took to securing a corner for himself near the Stairs. As the Gakusei made his move, a voice called out to him. "Hey you! You're Airen right?" announced a commanding voice. Turning faster than a suspect, Airen froze in place and saw a Samurai approaching him.

"Uh…yeah, that's me, uh sir!" replied the nervous Gakusei.

Finally, closing the distance, the Samurai extended his hand for a handshake. "Whoa there, didn't mean to startle you! My bad," said the upbeat Samurai with a laugh, "the Shogun mentioned you'd be here today. I figured I'd find you first and break you in. Name's Booth, Booth Russell," said the Samurai. Feeling calmer, Airen accepted the handshake, sweaty palms aside.

"I'd no idea I was being expected, much less noticed," said Airen.

"Well, you are the only one here wearing a hat and a green hoodie, so yeah, I think that might be a dead giveaway," joked Booth. As the friendly Samurai spoke those words, Airen took a quick look around to see if he was indeed being watched. Sure enough, he was.

"I'm getting a lot of attention right now. Do I really stand out?" asked Airen.

Booth, letting out a chuckle, chimed in. "Well, not too many Gakusei show up for Sect training, despite it being open to any and all that've already hit their teen Growth Spurt," replied Booth. Scanning Airen for a bit, Booth pointed out how tall he was. "Wow, you're almost six feet! Damn, I'm impressed! Not bad for a Growth Spurt," said the chill Samurai with a whistle. If Airen were visible, his face would've displayed a crimson hue.

Checking his watch, Booth made a sigh. "Well, time's up! We're about to fall in," informed the Samurai to Airen. Before turning his attention to the Stability, Booth followed up with an inquiry. "While I still have the chance, I must ask. How's your martial arts fundamentals?" asked Booth. With an invisible smirk, Airen gave a swift answer.

"Solid! After ten years of doing the same movements repeatedly with GG, I'd say I'm competent…I think," proclaimed Airen.

Rubbing his hands together, Booth gave a reply.

"Sweet! This should be interesting. The Shogun asked for one of us to teach you the fundamentals of Jeet Kune Do, starting today," said Booth. "Jeet Kune…what?" replied Airen. Before Booth could answer, a gong was hit. Sect training was officially starting, with the numerous Samurai present moving into warm-up formation. Shorting his reply, Booth quickly answered.

"No worries. You're about to find out in a few minutes. Prepare yourself," said Booth with an upbeat tone. Airen, feeling less out of place, followed Booth's lead and fell into formation with the others.



XII



Contrary to what Airen was expecting, the Sect's warm-up routine consisted of nothing more than light stretching. With the stress of the climb still lingering in his legs and feet, Airen was appreciative of the respite.

Afterwards, the Samurai split themselves into their own training groups. Airen, already partnered with Booth, followed his instructor to a wider area closest to the Stability. The Gakusei took in a deep breath to calm his nerves, before committing his attention to Booth's instruction. Before sparring could begin, however, Booth made the call to give Airen some additional insights into the nature of Certainty.

"Pardon my ignorance, but for the sake of simplicity, I'm going to assume that you're still wet behind the ears when it comes to Certainty manipulation. Fortunately, this tidbit that I'm about to share with you should clear up any lingering confusion you might have," Booth began, "anyhow, I digress. Certainty isn't only useful for dealing out Choices. Using your Will, you can even augment your normal attacks with Certainty to induce more damage against a potential Opp. Like so!"

Demonstrating a rapid burst of Jeet Kune Do techniques laced with Certainty, Booth' strikes rippled through the air. Airen, impressed yet anxious, marveled at what he was seeing.

Okay, so I have more options I can work with, bet! thought Airen. Feeling satisfied with his demonstration, Booth encouraged Airen to replicate his movements.

"And remember to breathe. One's breath control can be a lifesaver in a battle. Now then, practice the Katas that I've just shown you," instructed Booth.

Airen took in a few deep breaths and felt the Belief enter his body.

Because Belief exists everywhere within the SRPG, the very air on offer can serve as a slow yet convenient way of recovering lost Belief. Especially when restorative potions or food are off the table. Airen took his time getting a feel for the on and off usage of applying his Certainty to his potential movements. Feeling confident, Airen began replicating Booth's Katas. Within minutes, Airen quickly adapted and showcased a near-perfect display of Booth's techniques. Evidently, the sluggish repetition of his GG's exercises a decade prior were beginning to show their worth.

"Okay! I think I'm getting the hang of this," said a sweaty Airen. Impressed by Airen's adaptation, Booth offered Airen a Mini-Game as a way of testing his newfound knowledge against him.

"Might as well share this. The Shogun dotes on you a lot whenever the topic of Pantheon comes up during our Sect briefings. Hearing the Count talk about your potential prowess repeatedly has made me curious. Before we spar, I'd like to throw in a little wager," requested Booth.

Booth’s motivation for requesting a Mini-Game can be traced back to a moment from the Samurai’s past, roughly three centuries of Runtime ago. As a Youngling, Booth became inspired to join the Sisyphus Samurai thanks to Roswell. The numerous tall tales concerning the Shogun’s accomplishments during the 19XXs and 2XXXs became the stuff of legend; both as an Adventurer and as a former Samurai.

Booth recalled listening to stories from a few Sisyphus OGs about Roswell's heroism during the "Battle of the Somme". Roswell’s rescuing of his fellow Sisyphus during the deadliest conflict of the First Theomachy left an impression on the young Sisyphus.

The entire Shogunate started calling him “The Benevolent” after that horror show, Booth pondered.

Knowing that a spar between himself and his superior could easily end in a foregone conclusion, the Samurai settled on the Shogun's Pet instead. To further Incentivize Airen to take on his Mini-Game, Booth offered up a free meal to the Gakusei if the young one could land a single blow on him. Naturally, Airen's curiosity was piqued. "Whenever you're ready," said Booth as he entered a calm fighting stance.

Okay, you asked for it, Airen smugly thought.

To the cocky Samurai’s shock, Airen didn’t disappoint in the slightest. The Gakusei had already pinpointed a few weak points in the Samurai's posture. ***To quote my GG, “Never underestimate an Opp, point blank period”, thought Airen as he made his move.*** In an instant, the Gakusei had Booth on the defensive. The Samurai, having lowered his guard only moments prior, was beginning to feel foolhardy in retrospect.

Getting in several Certainty-infused blows on Booth's upper body, Airen went in for a headshot. Sadly, Airen's luck ran out. Recovering his defensive posture, Booth swiftly dodged Airen's right hook and struck the Gakusei in the stomach. Laced with an Approach capable of paralysis, the attack downed Airen. The young Sisyphus dropped to the ground unconscious.

"Oh shit! I may have overdone it," said Booth, now aware of the small crowd of Samurai watching his and Airen's spar from a distance. Slightly embarrassed, the Samurai proceeded to pull out a potion from his Inventory.

Moments later, Airen awoke. The Gakusei, somewhat groggy yet unharmed, looked up and noticed Booth holding out a potion for him to consume.

Upon realizing he'd won his brief Mini-Game with Booth, Airen downed Booth's potion with gusto! An impressed Booth accepted his subtle loss. "Not bad Airen! You damn near knocked me out. The Shogun wasn't playing around when he was talking you up," said the humbled Samurai as he helped Airen up to his feet.

After brushing the dirt off Airen’s gym clothes, Booth reminded Airen of his promise to treat the lad to a free meal after Sect training. "I’ve today off anyway. Figured I’d spend it getting to know my new student," joked Booth.

Airen, excited over the thought of enjoying a well-earned meal, accepted Booth's proposal to have him tag along for the remainder of the day. As the two chit-chatted, the head Samurai in charge of Sect training suddenly announced that morning training was about to end and that meditation was to ensue. Meditation marks the end of training before the Sect is allowed to depart and attend to their respective duties.

"I'll drive you home after meditation. Kicking it with you for the remainder of the day sounds a lot more exciting now that I think about it," said Booth.

Already, Airen was beginning to view the cheerful Samurai like an older sibling.

After dispersing from the Stability, Booth drove Airen home and dropped him off. The two agreed to meet up at the college Airen was planning to enroll at. In and out of the shower, Airen downed another cup of joe before heading towards his next destination. Compared to Oni, the Sisyphus colleges weren't as elaborate.

Typically, an average one consists of a lone building situated near the city center, with the number of floors reaching up to three. There were even instances of some colleges being situated on the outskirts of the city center to accommodate the few Sisyphus stationed in the rural parts of a Surveillance.

Airen met up with Booth at the local Sisyphus college. Having already made mention of a few courses he wanted to take during the drive home from Sect training, Airen found encouragement from Booth to double down on his current interests. "Getting an overall grasp of the SRPG and its citizenry will make your Run suck less," said Booth. "Facts," replied Airen.

Having done his due diligence the night before, Airen made a beeline for the registrar's office. One chit-chat later and the Gakusei was in a meeting with a counselor. After a quick assessment of both the Gakusei’s educational goals and aptitude, Airen's counselor gave him approval to enroll in his preferred courses.

With his enrollment secured, Airen could now fluctuate between in-person lectures and online assignments, fully accommodating his daily routine. Satisfied, Airen and Booth left the establishment. As the two headed off for parts unknown, Booth made mention of a sushi arcade that’d recently opened on the Surveillance. The older Sisyphus presented it to Airen as his way of honoring their free meal deal.

"Ever had megalodon before? It’s beyond good. Expensive, but worth the price," asked Booth.

Airen took him up on his offer with quickness. After all, the Samurai did promise the Gakusei. Preferring to walk there, the duo talked about their hobbies and interests. When Booth made mention of a new fighting game cabinet that the sushi joint recently acquired, Airen became ecstatic!

"Yep, you heard correctly. Word got out earlier this week that a new cabinet from a Swapmeet was installed inside the place we're heading to. It's called…something Third Strike…can't remember," said Booth.

No need to remember, thought Airen, since we'll both be doing battle after we eat!

Airen took the opportunity to challenge Booth to a "rematch", courtesy of the new fighting game awaiting them at their upcoming destination. Naturally, the cheerful Samurai took up the lad's offer.

"Say less, Airen! I got you. Matter of fact, I'll even offer you a home cooked meal, courtesy of my Fiancé's cooking, if you can one-up me "again"," Booth replied. The two went on their merry way, forming a tighter Camaraderie.

The sushi arcade in question, called Ryland's Sushi, was a well-known restaurant business situated in "Seattle". Said to have been founded by a former Surfer hailing from "Atlantis", the sushi establishment quickly garnered an insane amount of traction over two centuries of Runtime before eventually transitioning into a restaurant franchise.

Following the approval of Orion's Shogun, an entrepreneurial Sisyphus gained franchisee status from the original franchise owner himself and opened up a Ryland's Sushi establishment amongst the Orion Sisyphus. Despite being newly opened, the Ryland's Sushi of Orion had garnered an irresistible Reputation. Arriving at the establishment, Airen recalled being inside a Ryland's before when he used to be a Youngling.

Well, no need to go back and forth to "Seattle" now, Airen mused.

Airen and Booth entered Ryland's before the afternoon rush and dug into their megalodon. The Belief from their meal energized the pair, who made for the fighting game cabinet soon after. Sadly, for Booth, he was nowhere near as proficient at gaming than he was at combat. Following loss after loss to the sounds of some late 1990s Hip-Hop and Drum n Bass instrumentals from the game's soundtrack, Booth embarrassingly conceded to Airen. The duo decided to make themselves scarce and left Ryland's once the off-duty Sisyphus came flooding in.

"Damn! Two for two in one day! At this pace, you'll be a Shogun someday," said Booth as he and Airen made for the former's Abode. "Nah! I'm more suited for that Adventuring life, but thanks though," replied Airen.

As Booth prepped his Fast Travel Glitch, he quickly realized that Airen couldn't do it himself yet.

Instead, the Samurai decided to summon his Simulacrum vehicle using his Controller, with the two deities hopping in soon afterwards. On the road now, Airen asked Booth why he couldn't just teleport them both to the latter's home like his Tutorial.

The answer that was given came with a surprise.

"Oh, that's simple. I'm not Deified yet. Therefore, I don't have the Equal Opportunity to teleport anyone else aside from myself, a Daemon or a few personal objects," Booth answered.

Now intrigued, Airen followed up with further questions regarding the Deification phenomenon; in particular, the step-by-step process. Sadly, Booth's follow-up answers disappointed Airen.

"I'll be frank, Airen. I don't know shit about Deification aside from the fact that, for us Sisyphus, it only begins after we rediscover the Cheat Code. The OGs are forbidden from talking about it to anyone else other than the Defied.

Under penalty of "suddenly dropping dead" and being sent to Timeout, that bit of hush-hush is what we all like to call the Grand Secret," Booth answered.

The Grand Secret huh, Airen pondered. Booth's explanation alleviated Airen's previous Confusion over his inability to get his GG to elaborate on the Deification process. Realizing that he was putting his dear GG at risk the entire time didn't sit well with the Gakusei.

I need to get better at how I approach things from now on. Guess I gotta go through the motions after all, Airen mused as he and Booth arrived at the latter's home.

Inside Booth's residence, the Samurai introduced Airen to his Fiancé and their single Pet; both of whom were surprisingly non-Sisyphus. Shocked at the discovery, Airen was cheerfully teased by Booth over his naivety.

"I keep forgetting that you're still young. No worries, I'll get you up to speed on the ways of the SRPG in no time," Booth said as he invited the Gakusei further inside. Making sure to remove his shoes at the door, which is a cultural custom amongst the Sisyphus, Airen quickly found himself a member of the Russell household. The rest of the evening was filled with tales of Booth's previous deployments, how he and his Fiancé met and other random bits of insight regarding the SRPG; all told lavishly as the group dined on a homemade helping of hot pot.

I lucked out finding a dope mentor, Airen thought as he assisted with the after-dinner clean-up. After thanking Booth's Fiance for the delicious meal and giving her Pet a high-five, Airen departed for his Abode.

"Stay safe on the way home! Ahhh, who am I kidding! You'll be alright!" yelled Booth, who was standing outside his front door. Airen gave a wave back in response. "See you tomorrow at Sect training, Booth!" replied Airen.

Following the evening's conclusion, Airen spent another decade of Runtime under Booth's tutelage. With Roswell’s permission, Airen began assisting Booth with the Random Encounters generated by the Tumbleweeds of the RNG.

The Random Encounters that occurred were, thankfully, minor inconveniences. Still, as a Gakusei, Airen spent most of his time learning more than assisting. In one instance, the Gakusei aided the Samurai in dispatching a random group of chupacabras that had suddenly found themselves displaced onto Orion.

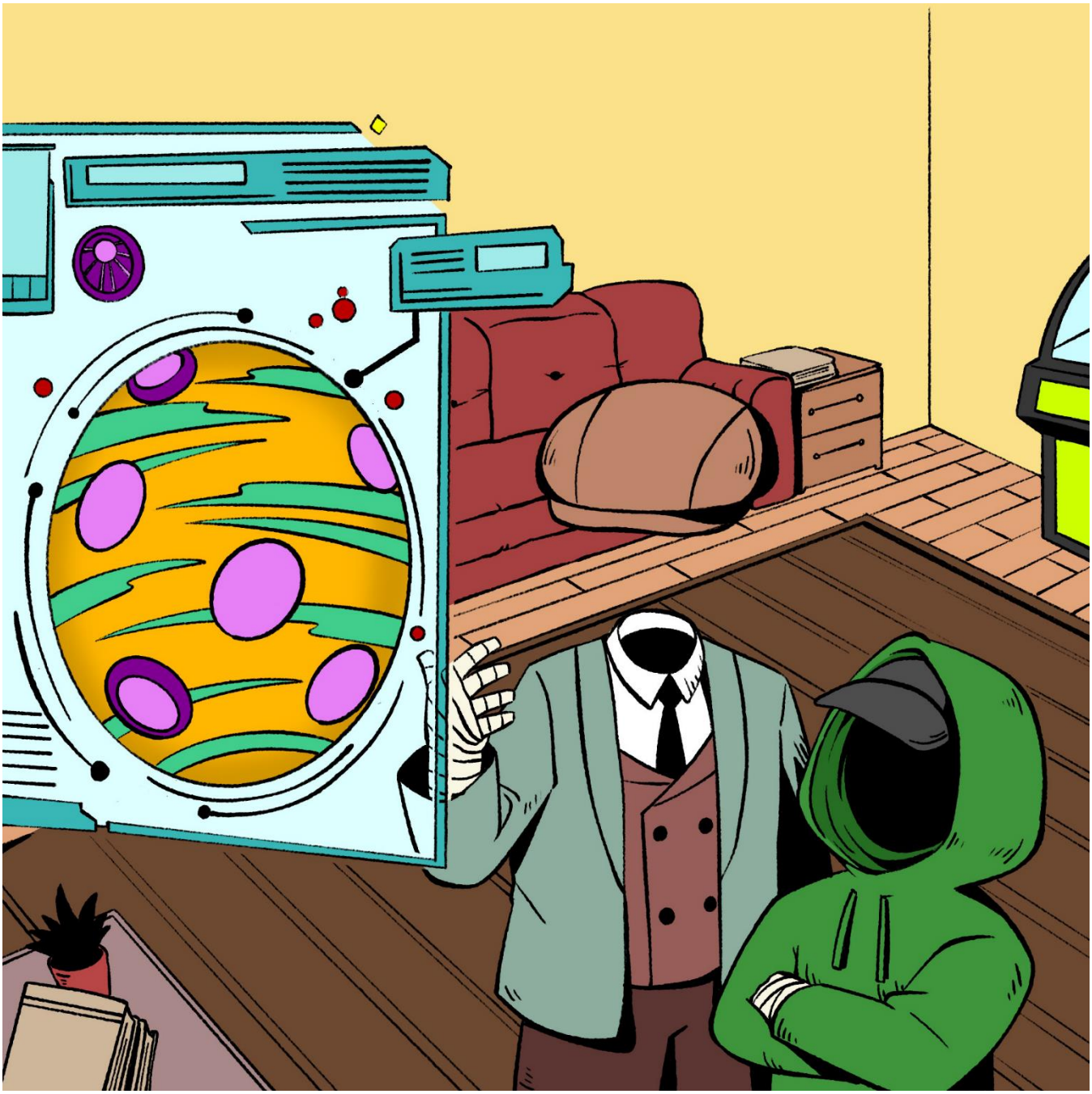
Other situations involved the pair assisting civilians who’d either found themselves entangled in “accidents” derived from said Random Encounters, or other unusual occurrences. In addition to his new RNG Gigs, Airen remained committed to completing more Volunteer Gigs, passing his first set of college courses and furthering his Jeet Kune Do proficiency under Booth's instruction.

At the end of that decade, Airen reached Age 14. With each new Age Up, Airen started to notice that the amount of Suffering he could earn from his routine tasks was gradually decreasing. Evidently, the Gakusei would have to become more daring with his Deeds, Quests and Gigs if he’s to continue his comfortable momentum of making substantial Suffering gains.

"I'm almost Age 15. 40 years of Runtime in and I'm so close," said Airen one morning as he was preparing to head for Sect training. Before the Gakusei could even reach his front door, a message suddenly came from his Controller. Unbeknownst to Airen, the following events destined to occur upon reading said message would mark the first turning point in his Run. It wasn't going to be a fun time.



XIII



“SECT TRAINING HAS BEEN CANCELED GRASSHOPPER. GET DRESSED IN TEN MINUTES. I'LL BE ARRIVING SHORTLY TO COME GET YOU.” – GG

"The hell?" Airen said aloud. Having just downed his usual cup of joe, Airen was mired in both anxiety and Confusion. Double checking his Tutorial's text message, Airen did as he was told and made for the bathroom. One swift shower later and Airen was out and about fully dressed. Donning his green hoodie and black cap, the Gakusei began contemplating his next move.

"Did something happen? Duh, Airen, of course something happened! Why else would GG send me that message? Let me hit up Booth and see if he knows what's up," Airen said to himself.

Swiftly, the Gakusei wrote up and sent a text to his mentor. Immediately, a reply was reciprocated.

"Wait, the Shogun hasn't told you yet,” Booth emoted with a sigh, “then again, I can understand why he hasn’t. Since he's coming to get you, you'll find out soon enough."

Booth’s response did little to assuage Airen's concerns. Whether it was because of caffeine or the Crisis, Airen was conflicted with doubt. With little else to do, the Gakusei grabbed a glass of water to calm his nerves. As Airen consumed his cup, the Shogun suddenly appeared in the living room.

"Excellent timing! You're ready to go I see," said Roswell as he finished materializing from Fast Traveling. Nearly spitting out his water, Airen quickly composed himself upon witnessing his GG's arrival. Wiping his mouth, Airen inquired about the unknown situation.

"Terrible news, grasshopper. A Raid was generated last night. According to the Forecast, it’s currently on the move towards a Haven not that far from Orion and "Seattle". We're heading there now to assist the state’s National Guard," replied Roswell.

Oh shit, Airen thought in response.

The bad news recalled something Airen learned years ago. Attending one of his first cosmology courses, the Gakusei recalled learning of the normal yet random phenomenon lurking within Mundi. Known as the "outer space of the gods", Mundi holds many secrets and dangers. One such danger comes in the form of a cosmic storm called a Raid. A batshit phenomenon by the SRPG's standards, a Raid generates a special horde of cryptids; specifically, a horde groomed towards raping, pillaging and killing.

Be it Kaiju-sized cryptids called Bosses or a group of the more intelligently stupid kind, a Raid signifies nothing but bad, fucking news for all in its path. In the case of the unfortunate Haven that Roswell had just mentioned, this Raid had materialized a fleet of sasquatches.

"Wait, a sasquatch fleet was generated!?" exclaimed Airen. Roswell nodded whilst bringing up a Shortcut. "Bloody RNG," Roswell said with a sigh.

The Random Number Generator, Airen thought to himself.

Per Booth's recommendation, Airen began reading The Strangest Moments. In one of its volumes, the RNG is described as “weaponized Probability”. The Trifecta, according to “Aesop”, utilizes the RNG as a way of keeping the deities from becoming decadent, degenerate and complacent. As for why, the Establisher did not say.

Hearing his Tutorial mention the RNG wasn't something Airen was used to hearing and he wasn't amused. With time to spare, Roswell showed Airen their destination on his Shortcut. "Our destination is a Haven called "Chelan". According to my World Map, it is located somewhere within "Central Washington". “Chelan” is small by most Haven standards yet boasts a modest economy. There's a Fae community there as well, which should give the Haven’s militia a much-needed fighting chance," explained Roswell.

Of the many Godhoods that call the SRPG home, the Fae were seen as wild cards. Despite their name, the Fae have no commonality with the faeries of homo sapien folklore. For the sake of simplicity, it's best to think of them as the SRPG's version of vampires. Even then, that apt comparison doesn't come quite close to fully explaining their nature. Still, the Reputation of the Fae is a formidable one, and that alone was welcoming news for the Sisyphus.

Roswell, dismissing his Shortcut, asked Airen to grab his backpack. "Try not to over rely on your Inventory too much. An Encumbered mind can turn you into Food or Fertilizer real quick," advised Roswell. Acknowledging his Tutorial's words, Airen made a beeline for his room. Not knowing what he should bring for the trip, Airen decided to throw in a book or two. The Gakusei returned to Roswell, who then proceeded to Fast Travel the two to Orion’s flightline for Simulacrums.

Upon materializing, the two Sisyphus found themselves surrounded by thousands of Simulacrums of various Assemblies, sizes and colors. Most could be seen taking off towards the sky, while others were in the midst of their final operational checks.

A portion of Roswell's Sect were already enroute to the doomed Haven, while the rest were tasked by the Shogun to remain behind in defense of Orion. The Simulacrum activity left Airen in awe. Aside from streaming shows, Airen's only in-person exposure to the divine mechas was his Tutorial's. To think that he'd be so close to so many at a time like this was a sight to behold.

“Woah,” whispered Airen.

Roswell wasted no time summoning his Simulacrum. PERUN, in its majestic glory, materialized in front of the two. Standing proud, the Simulacrum was optimized for combat. Producing another Shortcut, Roswell turned his head towards his Pet.

"Airen, listen very closely,” commanded the Shogun. Airen, knowing the type of time his Tutorial was on whenever he used that powerful tone, listened intently to the following words. “This endeavor that I'm about to take you on isn't something that I'm taking lightly.

Still, you've proven yourself capable of being both self-sufficient and reliable. As such, you should think of this emergency as a chance to gauge your current progress, grasshopper. Am I understood," warned the Shogun.

Despite the encouragement in his tone, Roswell remained mindful in choosing his words cautiously. A Raid was the last thing that Roswell wanted for his Pet, yet to talk about said Raid nonchalantly would also be criminal. Alas, if Airen was to have any hope of becoming his own god, Roswell would need to let the Gakusei experience the SRPG's more unpleasant aspects. It was time for Airen to grow up.

With a nod of understanding, Airen focused his Attention on the task at hand.

Everything that I've been preparing for has led me here. Let's get it, Airen thought to himself.

Gripping his bag strap tightly, Airen steeled his resolve. Upon receiving the non-verbal acknowledgement, Roswell warped both himself and Airen into PERUN. The Raid of "Chelan" was about to commence.



XIV



Typically, a deity's first reaction upon seeing a Simulacrum's exterior is one of wonder. Witnessing a Simulacrum's interior, on the other hand, leads to a different kind of awe. Upon entering PERUN's, Airen's first response to his new environment could only be described with a single word: ***Dope***.

PERUN's cockpit had the size, look and feel of a home office. Airen marveled at the various memorabilia, trophies and mementos that decorated the mecha's walls.

As the Gakusei studied his surroundings, the Shogun made for his cockpit desk. Summoning a Shortcut, Roswell made several taps and inputs. Seconds later, an arcade stick materialized on top of said desk, along with multiple Shortcuts. Surrounding the Shogun's table, these cockpit Shortcuts displayed graphs and data. Sitting in his chair, Roswell bid Airen to join him. Pulling out a spare chair from his Inventory, the Shogun asked his Pet to take a seat.

"We'll be lifting off shortly," said the Shogun. Now seated himself, Airen immediately took note of his GG's arcade stick. "What's with the arcade stick, GG? Is it some kind of steering wheel?" asked Airen. Anticipating his Pet's inquiry, Roswell gave an adequate response. "Indeed, it is, grasshopper. This right here is a Wheel," Roswell replied.

Elaborating further, the Shogun mentioned other types of Wheels that could be used to pilot a Simulacrum. Rather than distract Airen from the task at hand, Roswell cut his explanation short. "I'll teach you how to drive one of these when you're older," said the Shogun.

Can't wait, Airen thought.

Upon finishing his initial setup, Roswell snapped his fingers. PERUN, answering its master's call, produced a large hologram screen in front of the two Sisyphus.

Its display revealed the active flightline, depicting more of the Sect departing. Gazing at the large screen, Airen had an important thought cross his mind.

"Hey GG, why aren't we Fast Traveling to "Chelan"?" asked Airen. Roswell, quick with a reply, informed Airen about an important detail regarding the Fast Travel Glitch.

"Excellent question, grasshopper. If I'd visited that Haven before, we'd already be there. Fast Travel can't take you to places you haven't ***literally*** been to yet, despite our abnormal state of existing everywhere yet nowhere," Roswell answered. The Shogun's revelation had an impact on Airen's understanding of Glitches.

Well damn, it seems like even Glitches have their limits. Bummer. Airen pondered.

The Shogun followed up his explanation with some additional insight.

"With the situation being as dire as it is, I'd be remiss if I didn't participate in our upcoming counterassault on the enemy fleet," continued the Shogun, "with that being said, I did send a few of my Samurai who've been to "Chelan" before ahead of the Sect. As such, they'll be giving us updates on the ground as the situation develops."

Catching Airen's attention, Roswell pointed at a Shortcut which displayed a chat room containing all members of Roswell's Sect. "Any updates we receive will be seen here," answered the Shogun.

As Airen marinated on the evolving situation, the Gakusei suddenly felt a rumble in the cockpit. PERUN had finished charging itself up with Certainty and began preparations for lift-off. After conducting a comms check, Roswell gradually lifted PERUN off the ground and into the air. The Shogun then proceeded to guide PERUN towards Orion's atmosphere.

"Raid aside, there's a silver-lining about not Fast Traveling to "Chelan"," said the Shogun whilst piloting, "and that's your Opportunity to see Mundi for yourself. Since you've been taking cosmology courses, I'm curious to see what you've learned," finished Roswell.

Great, pop quiz incoming, thought Airen.

Following closely behind PERUN were the remaining members of the Shogun's forces who were bound for "Chelan" yet were assigned as the Shogun's detachment. As the Simulacrum fleet approached the exosphere, a familiar voice resonated from PERUN's comms.

"Transitioning through the Consensus now," announced Booth. Suddenly, a wall of pixelated light appeared above the Sect. One by one, each Simulacrum that interacted with the pixel wall disappeared. Sensing that this phenomenon might be a great opportunity to test his Pet's current understanding of the SRPG, Roswell asked Airen a question. "Grasshopper, what can you tell me about the Consensus?"

Ha! I got this, Airen mused.

"A Consensus is a divine force field generated from Expectation, which is a robust form of Certainty. The Consensus protects Havens from exterior threats. If I remember correctly, I believe that the Consensus is produced from special Cauldrons called Tenets, which take in Belief from various sources and convert it into said Expectation," Airen responded.

"Correct, grasshopper. The size and importance of a Haven can determine the power of its Consensus. Even certain Stations under the Jurisdiction of the Deep State can have their own Consensuses. Regarding "Chelan", its Consensus isn't built to withstand something as extreme as a Raid. It's more suited towards defending the Haven against Highwaymen or the occasional Prima strike.

Hence why we're heading there now," said Roswell.

Whew, good thing I'm being quizzed on a subject that I actually give a shit about, Airen thought.

The introductory Mundi course at Airen's college was amongst his favorites. For the Gakusei, an aspiring Adventurer should know the ins and outs of their backyard. As Airen was feeling himself, his Tutorial broke his musing with a sudden suggestion.

"This next part coming up can be unpleasant for a newbie. It's best that you close your eyes before we transition into Mundi, grasshopper. Unless you want to experience the equivalent of a flu," warned Roswell.

Airen shut his eyes immediately as PERUN breached the Consensus.

When Airen reopened his peripherals, he came upon a stunning sight. The Simulacrum fleet had entered what appeared to be an underground area. The space had the appearance of an ant chamber mixed with a cavern, yet with an ethereal aesthetic. Floating seamlessly in this area was Orion, which looked like a marble ball from the outside. Similarly, "Seattle" shared a similar appearance, albeit at a much larger size. The Surveillance orbited the larger, floating Haven like a satellite. The relationship between the two celestial bodies was the equivalent of Terra's matrimony with its moon, Luna.

We've arrived at the Border, grasshopper. Up next is the Highway. Estimated time to reach "Chelan" is around three hours. Let's hope to Fortune that the Raid hasn't reached it yet," informed Roswell. It was one thing to read about Mundi, yet for Airen, seeing it up close hit different.

"If I remember correctly, the Havens and Stations have their own Borders, right GG?" asked Airen. Roswell, while steering PERUN towards the Highway, chimed in. "Close, but not quite grasshopper. Stations exist outside Borders with few exceptions. Havens do not," replied Roswell.

Oh, that's right, Airen thought.

In his initial studies, Airen learned the differences between both Havens and Stations. Stations are natural worlds that are scattered throughout the SRPG. Conversely, Havens are either artificial planets created by the gods or Stations that have been colonized for habitation. The Border System, which separates the Havens from everything else within Mundi, is also a construction of the deities.

"We call whatever is outside the Borders the ***Minefield***," Roswell added.

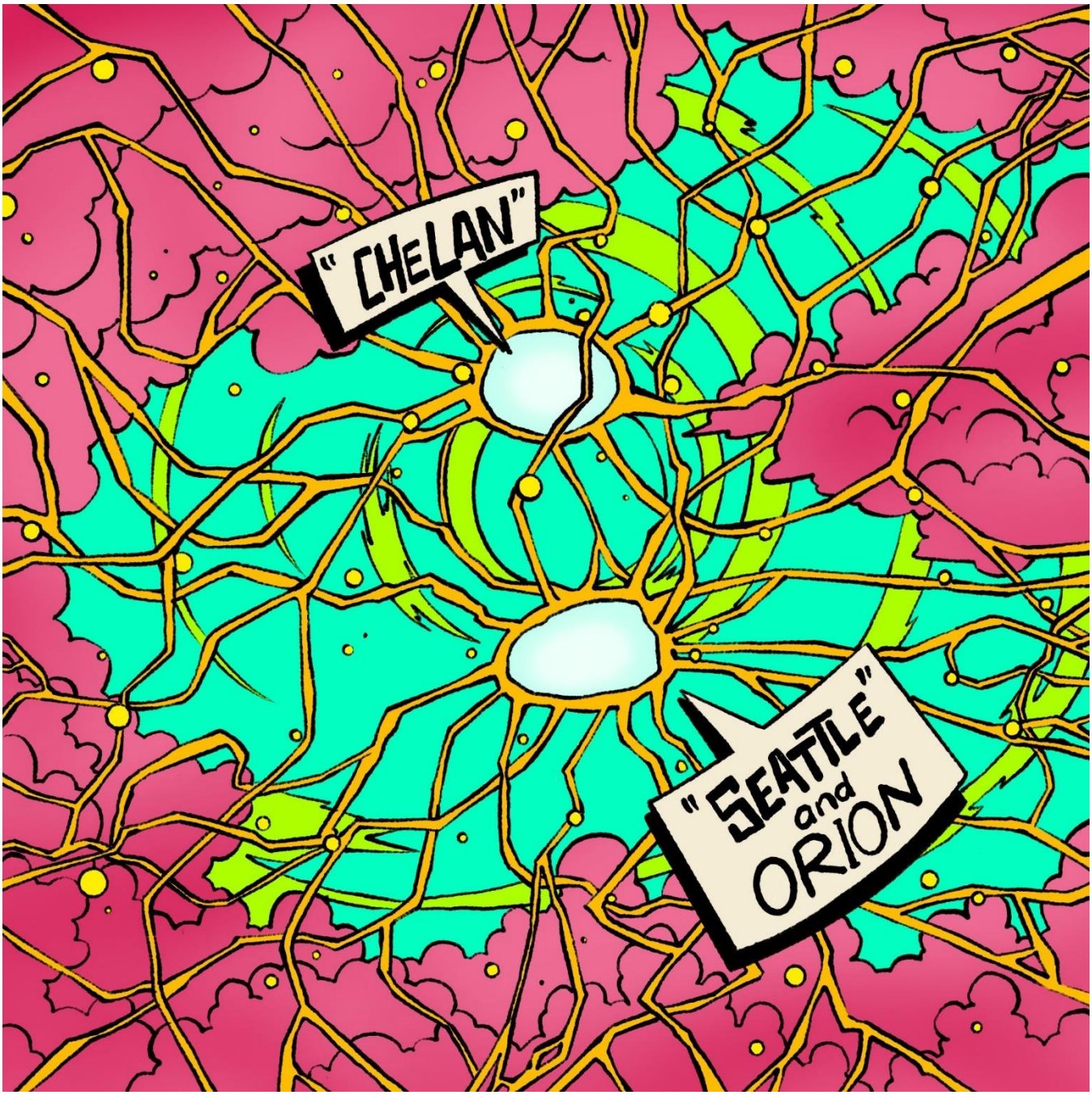
Allow me to clarify the Shogun's words. The environment of the Minefield looks like an ethereal heaven. Small solar system bodies, called Prima, litter the Minefield; some, for instance, look like comets, while others look like clouds. Using Prima, the deities can build artificial Havens, create or break down Borders and achieve other divine marvels. Looking at the Border System from a vantage point within the Minefield gives the entire setup the appearance of a network of neurons.

Airen, pointing at the Highway, asked a question to gauge his cosmological understanding. "GG, the Highway System is what connects the Borders, right?" inquired Airen. With a nod of approval, Roswell gave his response, "That is correct. Similar to how synapses connect neurons, the Highways connect all Havens and a few Stations."

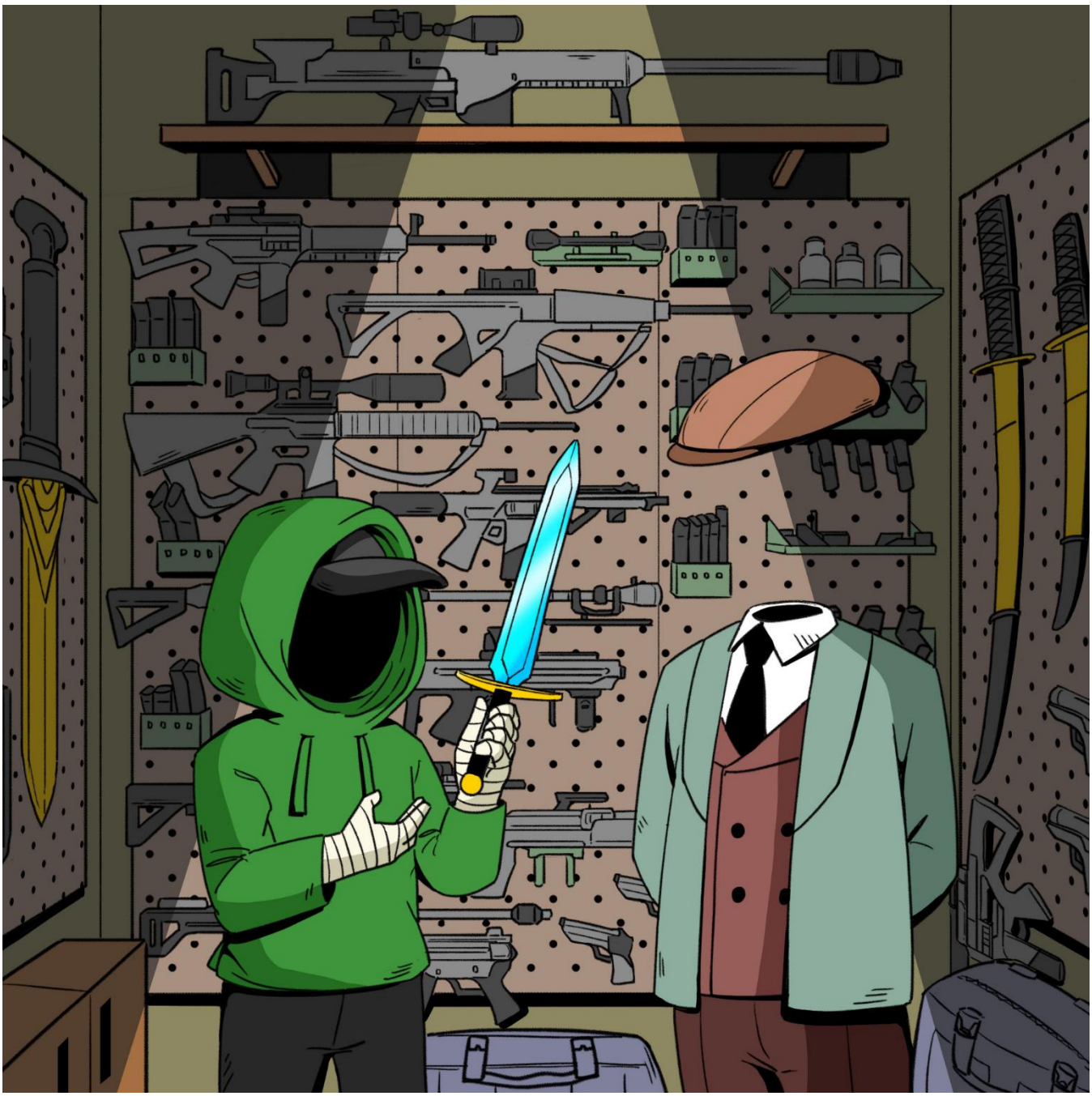
Using another ant analogy, the Highways are like the tunnels that connect ant chambers together within an ant colony.

PERUN and the Sect fleet arrived at the entrance to the Highway. Before reaching the Highway's opening, every Sect Simulacrum transformed themselves into their divineship forms. One after another, each Simulacrum warped at Soulspeed. Like a slingshot, the Simulacrums entering the Highway were propelled with great force. PERUN, being one of the last ones to enter, transitioned into a ship as well.

Roswell, steadying PERUN's approach, put his bandaged hand on Airen's shoulder. Once more, the Shogun asked his Pet to close his eyes. "You'll keep your breakfast," said the Shogun as the duo finally made the warp themselves.


"CHELAN"
"SEATTLE and ORION

XV



For two and a half hours, Airen meditated, per Roswell's suggestion. "Steel your mind, grasshopper. Whatever horrors await us on the other side of the Highway can make even the toughest Samurai panic," advised the Shogun.

With time to spare, Airen placed himself at one of the cockpit's corners. Focusing his Attention on his Nostalgia, Airen slipped into a mindful state. Nostalgia was the focal point for Airen's stillness and an important resource for a deity in Stressful times. Tapping into that unusual yet homely feeling, Runtime passed without the Gakusei realizing it. Almost as if he'd been hit with morphine.

Suddenly, Roswell called out to him.

"Rise and shine, grasshopper! We're thirty minutes away from "Chelan"."

As Airen came to, an assortment of uncomfortable sounds came bellowing out from Roswell's comms. The noise invaded Airen's ears and seized his Attention. The sound of gunfire, explosions and screams could be heard. With little thought, Airen got up and walked towards Roswell. As the Gakusei approached, a voice emanated from the comms.

"They've broken through the Consensus! Wait…oh shit, is that a Boss!? They brought a fucking Boss!?" said a soldier through the comms.

Seconds later, another voice sounded off. This time, addressing Roswell.

"Shogun, I hope you can hear me! The sasquatches have made landfall. Seems they've captured a Boss on their way here. Permission to use the Warcry sir!?" requested a senior Samurai who'd Fast Travelled to "Chelan" hours earlier.

In response, Roswell tapped on one of his cockpit Shortcuts and addressed his subordinate.

"Permission granted. Oh, and be mindful of the Boss, would you. We can't Vanquish it, understand!" ordered the Shogun.

After a brief pause, the senior Samurai acknowledged the order amidst the sounds of violence. "Affirmative sir! I'll sound off," replied the senior Samurai. Following the swift response, an ethereal whistle could be heard. Said whistle resonated across all comms, including PERUN's. Moments later, Airen heard flesh being rended. Amidst the screeches and howls of pain from numerous sasquatches, the thud of limbs meeting solid ground came bellowing from PERUN's comms. Blood and viscera could be heard spraying everywhere, with the falling of entrails following suit.

"Bruh," said an impressed Airen.

The Gaksuei didn't need to see what was happening on the other side of the comms to appreciate what was occurring. That same ethereal whistle reminded him of a story he'd heard a while back during a celebration commemorating the Second Theomachy on Orion. The Warcry of the Sisyphus was a phenomenon highly revered and talked about amongst the OGs.

During campfire stories and celebrations, the Sisyphus Younglings would often hear tales of a unique status effect that positively affects any and all Sisyphus within its immediate vicinity. This Warcry, if you will, turns the invisible deities into tranquil berserkers upon hearing said ethereal whistle. Strength, speed and other attributes are enhanced ten times over, yet at a cost. In exchange for an increase in power, the Sisyphus are subjected to a state of mind equivalent to that of a drunken boxer.

Dude, hearing the tales come to life over the comms is like a Christmas gift, Airen thought.

Roswell, with time to spare, switched PERUN to autopilot. Aware of the grave danger awaiting them, the Shogun rose from his seat and beckoned his Pet. "Follow me, grasshopper," said Roswell. The Shogun led his Pet to a weapons rack. After deciding which piece of steel would be most suitable for his Pet, Roswell handed Airen a shortsword. Upon grasping the blade, Airen felt the blade's hilt adapt to his hand.

To think I'd be holding the real thing instead of a dummy, Airen thought. With a nod of acceptance from his Pet, Roswell made time to exchange a few words with Airen.

"Yeah, this'll have to do. I'd give you a gun, but I haven't trained you on that yet," said Roswell. ***No complaints from me, Airen thought***. The weight of the shortsword felt right in the Gakusei's hands. Satisfied with his choice in weaponry, Airen posed a tactical question to his Tutorial. "GG, how big are these sasquatches?" asked Airen.

"Hmmm, let's see," replied Roswell as he generated a Bestiary Shortcut. On the Shortcut's display was a strange primate, which had the appearance of a silverback gorilla mixed with an orc. "Sasquatches are about seven to eight feet tall. The bastards have acidic saliva and giant maws. While their hide is thick, their head, ribs and ankles are vulnerable. They hit like a linebacker, so try not to get hit," advised Roswell.

"Got it!" replied Airen.

"Oh, and one last thing, grasshopper. If there's any improvements that you'd like to make to your Metagames, now's the time," the Shogun warned. The Gakusei still had some XP left over from the last few Gigs he'd been accomplishing with and without Booth's assistance.

Wanting to save their usage for a situation like the Raid, Airen decided to invest some of his remaining XP into a few Gain nodes focused on speed.

"Cool! That takes care of that," said Airen as he dismissed his Console Shortcut.

The Shogun, accompanied by his Pet, approached the front of PERUN's cockpit and gazed at the large, holographic display. On the screen was the Sect; some of whom had already moved ahead of the Shogun per his instructions. The Simulacrums in front appeared to have reached the end of the Highway. As Airen stood by Roswell's side, the Shogun handed Airen an important object. "We're almost at the off-ramp. Here, take this," said Roswell as he gifted Airen a small trinket.

In the Gakusei's hand was a small Horseshoe, no bigger than his bandaged palm. It emitted a bright luster. "Place the Horseshoe in your Inventory, grasshopper. It'll serve as a supplement to your body's Belief reserves. This'll enable you a longer duration to use your Choices without fatigue setting in early," informed the Shogun. Explaining further, Roswell revealed that a Horseshoe was an invaluable item for all deities.

"Rather than exhaust yourself needlessly, you can have the Horseshoe do most of the heavy lifting. Regardless, use your Choices sparingly," warned Roswell. Airen had no intention of squandering his GG's gift. After placing the Horseshoe in his Inventory, Airen returned to his seat alongside Roswell.

As the duo took to their seats, PERUN's comms arose with new activity. "Sir, Booth reporting! My part of the Sect has just exited the Highway. It's a shitshow out here!" reported the stern Samurai. Adding on, Booth revealed that a barrage of fire between the "Washington State" National Guard and the sasquatch fleet had turned the space between "Chelan" and the Highway into a "galactic no-man's land". The floating debris of destroyed divineships and lifeless bodies littered the interior of "Chelan's" Border, which was roughly half the size of the NPC's solar system.

"There's more," continued Booth, "the sasquatches' Break-In is massive! The giant vortex on the Haven's Configuration is widespread. "Chelan's" Tenets have to be busted by this point."

"Acknowledged," replied Roswell.

One by one, the Sect's Simulacrums exited the Highway. Airen strapped himself in and closed his eyes once more. Considering what was about to happen next, the Gakusei wasn't in the mood to induce an unnecessary sickness on himself.



XVI



In groups, the Sect Simulacrums came pouring out of the Highway. In response, the sasquatch fleet greeted them with a barrage of firepower. From an outsider's perspective, the cryptid ships looked like flying saucers. Although the sudden ambush eviscerated some of the Sect's mechas, it did very little to prevent what happened next.

"Dumbass sasquatches!!! Always hasty to sacrifice themselves for short-term gains," yelled Booth through Roswell's comms.

The chatter and chaos compelled Airen to open his eyes. What greeted him could only be described as insanity. Debris and bodies enveloped the Border. Hordes of sasquatch ships could be seen battling a combination of Simulacrums, frigates, destroyers and fighters around the victimized Haven. Casualties on both sides kept adding to the growing debris field with each passing second.

Damn, this shit is nuts!!! Airen thought to himself.

In response to the carnage, the Gakusei instinctively grabbed his seat straps. The gesture itself was more so to help ground the Youngling's mind against the fighting. Turning to his Tutorial, Airen voiced a concern.

"GG, there's so much happening!!!" yelled Airen.

Without needing to answer, Roswell let out a familiar, ethereal whistle from his lips. The moment the tune greeted the lad's eardrums, Airen suddenly felt a tranquility he hadn't known in decades.

"Holy…," said Airen in response. It was one thing to hear the Warcry from a distance, yet to experience it firsthand was pure bliss to the Gakusei.

With the Warcry now in effect, Roswell and his forces entered a state of tranquil fury. All their physical attributes, for a minimum of 30 minutes, became multiplied tenfold.

With a show of clarity, Roswell instructed Airen to bring up his Seniority Shortcut. The Gakusei did as he was asked, despite how "high" he was feeling.

"Airen, pay close attention to what I'm about to say. I need you to focus on the information that you're currently seeing in front of you. Doing so will keep your mind from succumbing to the Warcry's more "delirious" aspects. You'll get used to this feeling in time," said Roswell calmly.

As requested, Airen did just that. Immediately, the Gakusei was stunned at the power he was receiving under the Warcry. Even more stunning was his lack of fear or anxiety that had briefly seized him mere moments before.

This observation gave the young Sisyphus insight. Focusing on his Shortcut, Airen noticed an icon with the face of an ogre located towards the bottom of said Shortcut. The name beside it was spelled “Warcry of the Sisyphus”. Tapping it, Airen came across its description and began reading it to himself.

"A state of “drunken” tranquil fury that boosts a Sisyphus' physical attributes for 30 minutes. May or may not lead to the user developing a dangerous habit for complacency. Can only be used once per day,” Airen read.

Looking up from his Shortcut, Airen's gaze became fixated on the action occurring outside. To his surprise, the tide was beginning to shift back towards the deities’ favor.

The Raiders were swiftly becoming the Raided. Like crushed cans, the sasquatches’ ships were being reduced to scrap by the pragmatic assault of the Sect. Some of the Simulacrums, wielding large blades, sliced and diced their Foes like chefs. Others were reduced to holes in a wall, via large guns.

Many unfortunate sasquatches, sucked into the vacuum of Mundi because of the battle, disappeared in a pixelated flash.

Airen spotted the random phenomenon and asked his GG what had just happened.

"The hell!? GG, where did those sasquatches go!?" asked Airen.

Too preoccupied to answer his Pet's astonishment, the Shogun casually hummed a 1960s tune to himself as he enlarged one of his Shortcut displays. Said display produced the image of Roswell's primary target: a humongous sasquatch saucer situated at the back of the Raid horde.

"They've been Zapped. A consequence of them being alive while in Mundi's vacuum. The RNG is an equal opportunist," Roswell finally replied.

Of course it was the Zap, duh Airen, the Gakusei thought to himself.

Witnessing the Zap phenomenon brought to mind a 101 lecture that the Gakusei attended a year or two of Runtime ago. Although Airen was half-asleep during the discussion regarding Mundi phenomenon, his mind was somewhat attentive enough to catch some details. The exhaustion of the previous day's training session with Booth did a number on Airen's sleep schedule. Vaguely remembering the discussion, Airen recalled the term "Zap" being used frequently. Clearly, the Gaksuei could’ve used a bit more caffeine that day. "I've got so much more to learn still," Airen whispered to himself as he observed his Tutorial in action.

PERUN set its sights on the sasquatch mothership and seized one of the smaller saucers with its hand. "How about a game of frisbee," announced the Shogun.

With a maneuvering of his Wheel, Roswell commanded PERUN to fling the saucer at the sasquatch mothership. Infused with an explosive Spell whilst moving at a speed unheard of, the “flying” saucer introduced a new hole into its destination.

Upon impact, Roswell's "frisbee" exploded. The shockwave created a chain reaction that vaporized the entire mothership. The explosive radius of Roswell's Spell engulfed dozens upon dozens of sasquatch ships struggling to escape the divine blast. None succeeded in the attempt. In an instant, the tide of the Raid had turned entirely towards the deities’ favor. In awe over what he’d just witnessed, Airen screamed with excitement. Evidently, the Warcry was beginning to have a drunken effect on the Gakusei.

Breathing calmly, Roswell used his comms to inform his Sect of their next objective. "The "head" has been lopped off. All that's left now is to secure the "body". Any Samurai closest to the Break-In, proceed into it with caution! I can guarantee that we'll have some guests waiting for us. As for the rest of you, specifically those who are in the vicinity of any Guard ships, provide cover fire whilst assisting any damaged vessels. That should be enough to bolster the Haven’s defensive parameter until reinforcements arrive," commanded the Shogun. With a unified sound of acknowledgement, the Sect dispersed. Airen, thinking about Booth, sent his mentor a text.

A few moments later, Airen received Booth's reply.

"Hey! Caught me at the right moment. Just finished pulling off a disappearing trick on ten assholes. Oh, and yeah, I'm already through the Break-In. Currently battling some goofies in the skies above the city-center," replied a Warcry-effected Booth. With a sigh of relief, Airen gave his Tutorial a heads up on the situation surrounding the Break-In.

“Hey GG! Booth just gave me a status report. Some of the Samurai are already through the Break-In. They're currently taking down the sasquatches’ superiority over the skies so that our landfall is easier," informed Airen.

Roswell gave his nod of approval. Steering PERUN towards the Break-In, the Shogun tapped on a few more Shortcuts.

"Good! Very good! We make for the city center, grasshopper! Report just came in that the Boss is currently in the downtown area. It’ll eventually target the civilian shelters if it isn’t incapacitated. We need to take it down non-lethally," said Roswell.

"Per the Shadow Social Contract," replied Airen.

"Affirmative," confirmed the Shogun.

Despite having attained 40 years of Runtime, the Shadow Social Contract or SSC remained a mystery to Airen. First learning of it in a random political science course, Airen's brief introduction to it was presented in a fascinating manner. Using a period from the NPC's world history, Airen's Sisyphus professor explained that a document called the United States Constitution was used as the basis for the SRPG's divine constitution. Following the Mundane Travesty of the 2XXXs and the 12th Titanomachy, the SSC was drafted as a guiding tool for the Rejuvenation. You can think of said Rejuvenation as the divine equivalent to the United States Reconstruction period following its civil war.

Anyhow, I digress.

Ecology preservation of the Stations was first introduced as an article within the SSC. Any misplaced cryptid, due to capture or poaching, was to be recaptured alive and rehabilitated. To ensure the continued survival and security of the various deities who rely on the Stations for food and resources, this conservation agenda was to be adhered to, period.

Of greater importance, even now, was the protection of the Boss subtypes of cryptids. Their presence on any Station is crucial to maintaining the ecological balance of said Station(s). In the case of this Raid, the Boss currently on a downtown Frenzy was the Sect's number one priority.

Contemplating the intricacies of the SSC, Airen watched his Tutorial guide PERUN through the fighting and debris field surrounding "Chelan". The two made their way into the Break-In and into the next phase of the Raid.



XVII



In a hurry, PERUN entered "Chelan's" atmosphere via the Break-In. The dogfights happening around the descending Simulacrum resembled an EDM show. With deft maneuvering of his Wheel, Roswell shifted PERUN between its mecha form and its divineship form. Airen watched in awe as Roswell decimated sasquatch ship after sasquatch ship that came his way. Dismantling them piece by piece whilst dodging reprisal fire, the Shogun's actions inspired his nearby Samurai to fight even harder.

I'm committing GG's Strat to memory, Airen thought.

In spite of the Warcry, the Shogun's heightened awareness enabled him to remain level-headed. "Good thing the Haven has a good Genre right now, otherwise it'd be a pain to maneuver," said Roswell casually.

"Good to know! Let's hope we don't have an inconvenient Flip then," Airen added.

Fun fact, the deities commonly refer to their version of the weather as a Genre. Every twelve-hour period on a Haven or Station switches the Genre. It could be nice and sunny one moment, before turning into a moody rainstorm the next. The terms Flipping or Flip are used to convey when this "weather" transition occurs. Anyhow, back to the battle!

As PERUN continued its treacherous descent towards the surface, Roswell gave a message to his Samurai fighting on both the ground and the air. "Attention Samurai! All who have healing Consoles or Metagames are to assist with the wounded and the deceased. That includes prioritizing civilian evacuations. Am I understood!" ordered the Shogun. With a collective acknowledgement, the Samurai attacked their priorities.

The remaining few that accompanied the Shogun through the Break-In dispersed towards different landing locations.

During the chaos, Airen spotted a Kaiju-sized bull eviscerating an innumerable amount of buildings. "Ah, GG? Is that…," Airen was saying before Booth cut him off via PERUN's comms.

"The Boss is rampaging close to the waterfront!!! Permission to engage?" asked Booth. "Permission denied Samurai. You're to head downtown and meet up with the militia and assist the Guard units below. I'll deal with the Boss," commanded Roswell.

"Understood, sir!" Booth responded.

With orders received, Booth and a small contingent of Samurai passed PERUN and landed downtown beside a large group of National Guard Simulacrums battling a horde of sasquatch Assimilation machines. Roswell guided PERUN to a landing spot near Booth's current location. Immediately getting out of his seat, Roswell approached Airen.

"No time to waste, grasshopper. I'm going to send you to Booth. Before I do, I need you to unlock a specific Miracle for yourself," instructed the Shogun.

Getting out of his chair, Airen summoned a Miracle Shortcut. Roswell guided his bandaged finger towards the Shortcut and began searching for his target. "As expected, you still have a decent number of Miracles to select from. You took my advice to heart, I see," said Roswell as he continued his search.

Airen was advised by the Shogun to never haphazardly pick a Miracle immediately after hitting an even-numbered Age. "The option of choosing any Miracle at any time is hard to come by. It's impossible to know when you'll need the right Miracle until the right situation arises," Roswell had said to him long ago.

Finally locating the Miracle in question, Roswell purchased it for Airen.

"There! The Hercules Miracle will increase your physical durability. You'll be able to take more punishment before the pain kicks in," said Roswell. Airen had an internal response to Roswell's words.

Holy shit, I'm really doing this, Airen mused nervously.

Roswell placed both his hands on Airen's shoulders. The two were damn near equal in height now. "You're ready for this, grasshopper. I've seen your dedication towards your self-actualization. Assist any civilians in need, stick close to your Collaborators and make good small decisions, understood?" said Roswell. Airen gave an affirmative nod.

"Good! As for myself, I'm going to go rock the Boss to sleep with a lullaby. Best of luck to us both," Roswell added. And just like that, Airen was whisked away towards Booth's location with a snap of Roswell's fingers.

Landing on his feet, Airen immediately ducked as a vehicle flew over his head. "Oh shit!" Airen yelled. The crushed vehicle collided into a nearby building. Recovering, Airen glimpsed PERUN lift itself back into the air. Heading straight for the rampaging Boss, the divine mecha increased its speed tenfold! With an extreme amount of force, PERUN speared the Boss. The two flew many miles away from Airen’s current location. Before the Gakusei realized it, both his Tutorial and the giant bull were gone from view.

Equipping his shortsword, Airen sent Booth a text to ascertain his location. Putting his Controller away in time, Airen immediately noticed and blocked a sudden strike from a sasquatch's machete. Despite the cryptid’s size, its mobility was such that it had easily creeped up on the distracted Sisyphus. Using the force from the blow to swerve to the sasquatch's side, Airen introduced his Opp to the tip of his steel. The shortsword slid through the cryptids' ribs like a bad driver in a snowstorm. A swift downward slash completed Airen's maneuver and saw his Foe's entrails grace the floor.

Breathing heavily, Airen stared at the hulking corpse. Seeing something from afar was one thing, yet the sight and smell of a fresh kill made Airen's mouth water.

Not the salivating kind, mind you, but the nauseating kind. Airen vomited after a minute of holding it in, dropping his shortsword in the process. Wiping his mouth swiftly, Airen reached for his fallen blade when a force suddenly hit him from behind.

Being sent ten feet into the air, the Gakusei's back met a nearby wall with tremendous fury. Airen fell to the ground in agony. With rage and hunger, another sasquatch came barreling at the fallen deity with an entrail-covered club. As the sasquatch moved in for the kill, its head was immediately smashed in by a bat swing. Teeth, brain matter and bodily fluids sprayed everywhere.

"Airen, you are good! Here, take this potion!!!" yelled Booth who threw the Gakusei a healing vial. The Samurai was garbed in tactical gear composed of samurai armor and a standard military uniform.

Thank Fortune for the Hercules Miracle, thought Airen as he weakly downed the vial. The sudden attack from the ambushing sasquatch left the Sisyphus with his head briefly spinning. No longer dazed or dizzy, Airen picked up his shortsword again. "Booth, thank you," said an exhausted Airen. "Don't thank me just yet! We still need to rendezvous with the others. It looks like the Shogun was a bit off the mark in sending you closer to me and texted me to come and find you," said the Warcry-effected Samurai.

Nodding in agreement, Airen readied himself for the next step. Taking in his surroundings, Airen saw something out of a survival horror game. Corpses littered the streets, be they half-eaten deities, Younglings or eviscerated sasquatches. Immediately, Airen focused on his Nostalgia, as to not let his sanity slip up. With a tap of the air, Booth took out a Shortcut displaying a QR code. "Scan this Airen! We need to form a Company! You should already know the perks that come with it so let's move!" instructed Booth. Airen took to scanning the Shortcut.

In the SRPG, deities can form special groups called Companies. Said Companies allow the deities in them to share Miracles with one another, as well as other unique perks. Company members often refer to one another as Collaborators. During his training days assisting Booth with Random Encounters, Airen was taught how to form a Company and often formed one with Booth as a form of extra protection. Strength in numbers, as the cliche goes.

“Right right. Form up like a party in an RPG so that we can share each other's Inventory items and Miracles, same as before,” Airen said to himself. As he did this, a terrifying howl came from a distance away that caused the two Sisyphus to cover their ears.

Roughly twenty feet from Airen and Booth's position, a young god with an acoustic guitar on his back came from around a corner in a panic! Running just as fast, with her hand in his hand, was the youth’s little sister. As the two ran towards the two Sisyphus, a giant crash came from behind the fleeing pair. A rotting, hulking creature, composed of sasquatch parts, deceased deities, and other debris, came barreling through the madness towards all of them.

"Fuck me. A troll…," said Booth.



XVIII



Opp Fight

Two Sasquatches

Opp Fight Song

Kernel Panic by Reso

The raging troll scared Airen shitless. So much so that the Gakusei found himself frozen in place. "Shit, what do I do!?" yelled Airen. Having just recovered from the attack earlier, the Gakusei's mind was still mired in confusion. "Airen! Look after those two!" Booth suddenly ordered. The booming voice of the Samurai snapped Airen to attention.

Realizing he still had his shortsword in hand, Airen steeled himself for what was to come next. Without warning, Booth initiated a Glitch. Fast Traveling behind the troll, Booth winded up his Prima-made bat and delivered a crushing blow to the creature's side. The impact sent the monstrosity flying through several buildings. Not letting up in the slightest, Booth teleported once more, zeroing in on his Opp's newest location. Before Airen knew it, both the troll and his mentor had disappeared into the chaotic background.

Now without his mentor, Airen redirected his attention towards his new acquaintances. The guitar-wielding youth and his Sister Pet had finally reached Airen, with the latter in a sobbing panic.

"Is it gone Javi!?" the upset goddess asked her protector.

The young god, holding his acoustic guitar tightly in one hand, knelt to calm his Sister Pet. "Yes Simone, for now at least," the young god replied. Scanning for a place where his Sister Pet could hide, the young god discovered a nearby alley with reliable cover. The young god pointed his finger in that direction as a signal to his sibling.

"Head over there and hide behind that dumpster Simone! And no matter what, don't leave that spot unless you're in danger!" instructed the young god. "Okay big brother," Simone replied as she hugged her Brother Pet. The little goddess made haste towards her new hiding place.

Taking a moment to observe the two deities, Airen deduced that the young girl had to be around the Age of 8. Conversely, the young god looked around Airen's current Age. Upon seeing his Sister Pet secure her new hiding spot, the young god turned to greet Airen.

"Dude, I can't thank you enough! You guys saved our Runs! I thought we were finished," thanked the young god. After a few seconds, Airen replied. Even now, the Gakusei was doing everything in his power to maintain his situational awareness.

"No worries! Besides, I didn't do much. My mentor took care of the rest. I'm Airen by the way," replied the Gakusei.

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Airen! I’m Javier Descartes. But you can call me Javi for short," the youth replied.

With time to spare, Airen asked Javier about “Chelan's” current situation.

“It's bad. My Tutorials are currently fighting alongside the militia right now. My Sister Pet and I were held up in a secure location with a bunch of other deities when that troll suddenly showed up. Some of us didn't make it. Others sacrificed themselves to buy us time to escape,” Javier said solemnly.

Shit, Airen thought.

Before the Gakusei could inquire further, a terrible sound creeped up behind the two young deities. Rounding a corner with sadistic hunger were two sasquatches, both covered in the viscera of many deities. Blood, pus and entrails dripped off the two cryptids as if they'd just hopped out of the shower. The chewing and crunching from their maws gave a hint as to what their recent meal was. The two cryptids spotted Airen and Javier and became excited. They’d be their next snack.

"Airen, form a Company with me!" said Javier as he brought up a Shortcut with a QR code. ***Damn, that's right! I can't believe I almost forgot about that! Airen thought.***

The two sasquatches initiated a ferocious charge. "Say less," replied Airen. The Gakusei took out his Controller and scanned Javi's Shortcut.

Whether he noticed it the first time or not, Airen felt a soothing sensation surge through his body. "Cool cool! We're synced now! And just in time too! Here they come!" said Javier as he equipped his guitar and began plucking away at his guitar.

A powerful gust of wind flew from behind Airen and Javier, cutting off one of the sasquatch’s arms. As if manipulating the air like a puppet, Javier played so fast that his hand movements were leaving afterimages. Airen was in awe over witnessing his new Collaborator's selection of Choices, before realizing a Shortcut had appeared next to him.

"Nice, the Company Shortcut is active! There's my name, alongside Javi's and Booth's. Our health bars are all full too. Sweet!" said Airen. Out of nowhere, a gust of wind blew Airen away yet left him unharmed. The Company Shortcut swiftly vanished in response.

Airen slid to the ground, realizing that Javier had just saved his skull from being pressed in by a sasquatch's axe.

It's time to put in work, Airen thought.

“Thanks Javi! Let me return the favor!” yelled Airen.

With haste, Airen recovered himself before using an Approach that doubled his evasion. The Gakusei then followed up with a Spell from his Grimoire that allows for an Opp to be scanned for vital information. Within seconds, Airen uncovered a plethora of information about his Opp and shared the details with Javier.

“Nice! I just scanned their weaknesses, Javi! We got this!” yelled Airen as he took up an offensive sword stance. Javier, having just dodged his Foe's reprisal, acknowledged Airen's move.

“Thanks! I'll commit that to memory,” Javier replied.

The sasquatch fighting Airen followed up with an attack that, from the Gakusei's perspective, moved at a snail's pace. Dodging with ease, Airen took his steel and introduced it to the sasquatch's ankles. The vile brute fell over like a fallen tree. Howling in agony, the sasquatch was quickly silenced with a hard stab through the top of its skull, courtesy of the Gakusei.

"Night night homie," said Airen.

Catching sight of Javier dodging the other sasquatch's assault, Airen dashed for the distracted cryptid. With fast reflexes, Javier conjured up an Approach that summoned a wind barrier. Said barrier turned his Opp's other arm into sliced deli pieces as it went to grab the young deity.

Enraged with pain, the sasquatch surprised Javier with a sudden beam of energy from its mouth, breaking the youth’s barrier. The force from the attack sent Javier flying into a nearby vehicle with great force, leaving him temporarily incapacitated.

Before the enraged sasquatch could fire off another blast, Airen jumped towards its head from behind and cut the top part off. The Certainty receded back into what was left of the sasquatch's mouth as it began to crumble to the ground. The abomination died next to what was once a part of its head.

With the Warcry's effects now waning, a tired Airen turned towards his fallen Collaborator and ran. The Sisyphus took out a potion from his Inventory and fed it to an unconscious Javier. "Shit, shit, shit. Please be alive bro,” Airen said with exhaustion. Unable to ascertain Javier's current condition, Airen decided to generate a Company Shortcut.

The Shortcut appeared beside a crouching Airen, who immediately took to reading it. To the Gakusei's relief, Airen saw Javier's health bar begin to fill up. Ignoring his own health bar, Airen looked over at Booth's to gauge his current condition.

"Wait…what!?" Airen said quietly.

Booth's health bar had disappeared completely. What was once a full bar of green was now an empty shade of gray.

Airen sat Javier upright against the vehicle that the sasquatch had sent him flying into. Standing up, Airen continued to stare at the Company Shortcut. Not wanting to think the worst, Airen took out his Controller to call Booth. As he put the device to his ear, a crashing sound erupted behind Airen. Turning quickly, Airen screamed in horror at what he saw.

What was once his dear mentor and close friend was now an eviscerated sack of meat. Half-eaten with half a body, the defeated Sisyphus was thrown against a nearby building like a ragdoll. In the grip of his hand was his Prima-made bat. Not that far from the Gakusei's feet were Booth's blood and entrails.

All of whom were strewn across the ground like an art exhibit. The treacherous troll came stalking from where it had launched Booth.

It was at this moment that a strange feeling erupted inside Airen. It wasn't anything he'd felt before. The word to describe it wasn't fear, anxiety, hopelessness or panic. No, instead it was a seething hatred. A venomous, malicious kind. The only thing that could make this tragedy right, in Airen's mind, was another dead body. Fortunately for Airen, a prime candidate to satiate his hunger for violence was looking right at him.

A strange energy began to emanate off the Gakusei. It had the look of pixels, yet with the characteristics of smoke. Javier regained consciousness in time to see Airen transformed; a grieving Sisyphus facing down the vile troll. With his strength returning, Javier weakly pulled up his Company Shortcut to ascertain Airen's condition. Javier's mouth became agape at what he was witnessing.

"How the hell…," said Javier.

Underneath Airen's health bar was a special icon. When Javier tapped the icon, the description that followed left the young deity shaken. For reasons that Airen was unaware of, he'd accessed the ***flow state of the gods***. A phenomenon known as the Grind.



XIX



Opp Fight

Troll

Opp Fight Song

Origin Unknown by Valley of the Shadows

"Let's go!" screamed Airen. With holy speed, the Gakusei advanced upon his towering foe. With a venomous rage, the troll warped half of its body and formed it into a disgusting mass of debris and bone. It slammed down on Airen's position yet missed its target entirely. Fast Traveling behind the creature, the Gakusei generated a large concentration of Certainty into his shortsword and divided the troll in two with a powerful Approach.

Howling in agony, the bifurcated troll gave both its' halves autonomy. Suddenly under assault by two Opps, Airen summoned a Spell that repelled one of the halves' attacks. The ricochet from said Spell threw the troll's belligerent half several feet backwards.

Watching the throwdown from a distance, Javier slowly stood up and gathered his bearings. With a sound mind, Javier ran towards the battle. Generating more wind using a Spell, Javier sent the gust at the downed troll half. The gust surrounded the troll half and contained it in a razor-sharp cage of wind.

Confident that he'd bought both himself and Airen some time, Javier generated wind underneath his feet via a Choice. As if on ice, Javier slid towards Airen and the other active troll half. "I've got your back!" yelled the young deity. As Airen turned his head and nodded at Javier, the Gakusei instinctively dodged another sketchy attack from the other troll half. Thanks to the Grind, Airen didn't even need to keep an eye on his Opp.

Elsewhere, the caged troll half forced its way out of Javi's wind cage. Now torn apart from the razor-sharp wind, the individual troll pieces gained sentience and began recombing themselves back into the troll half. Reconstituted, the troll half twisted itself into a spiral and flung debris, bone and acidic fluid throughout the vicinity.

"Airen, behind me!" yelled Javier. Airen's speed was unreadable by the naked eye, and before Javier knew it, his comrade was already behind him.

Playing a particular tune, Javier created another barrier of wind that deflected most of the troll half's projectiles. During the chaos, Javier confided in the Gakusei.

"Airen, you need to know this! According to my Pop's Bestiary, these things only go down once their bodies incur enough damage. Dude, I hate to say this, but we don't have that kind of time to pull that off. Completely destroying their heads is our only option," yelled Javier.

"Noted," replied a heated Airen. The Sisyphus glanced over at Booth's ruined remains and spotted his signature Prima-made bat. "Cover me Javi, I'm ending this!" yelled Airen.

Concerned for his Collaborator's state of mind, Javier committed his focus on the troll halves. "I got you! Let's make it happen," yelled Javier. The troll halves, side by side once more, reengaged their assault. Seizing his window of opportunity, Airen made a beeline for Booth's bat. The troll halves suddenly recombined themselves back into a new troll body before elongating both its ravaged arms to grab Airen.

Big mistake, as Javier immediately sliced off said arms with a gust of wind.

The young deity followed up his maneuver by trapping the severed limbs in another wind cage. Javier slid backwards using more wind to give himself a safe distance from the armless troll. The monstrosity was entirely focused on Javier now, just as the young deity had hoped. Reaching Booth's bat, Airen tossed his shortsword away.

Taking up his fallen mentor's weapon, the Gakusei looked down at the sack of meat that was once Booth. The heartbroken Airen focused his anger on Booth's bat, filling it with more Certainty than usual.

The disabled troll charged at Javier as its caged limbs began to overcome the youth's Spell. With the creature's attention preoccupied, Airen vanished from his previous location. Appearing in the air above the troll, Airen came down on the creature's head with supreme might. What was once a hulking monstrosity was now paste on asphalt. A miniature crater formed where the troll once stood.

Javier was blown away by the aftershock of Airen's attack. Upon cushioning his fall with a wind Choice, Javier stood up and waved his hands to unveil the screen of dust and debris. Approaching the crater, the young deity came across the troll's lifeless remains, or lack thereof, and an unconscious Airen. Heading down into the crater, Javier ran towards Airen to check his status.

Generating a Company Shortcut, Javier verified Airen's stable yet low health. Alas, the Grind icon was no longer visible underneath Airen's health bar.

Opening his eyes, Airen found himself in the last place he was expecting: his bed.

"Huh?" said Airen. The young Sisyphus scanned his room with anxiety. It took a few minutes of interacting with his familiar objects and trinkets before Airen deduced that what he'd just experienced in "Chelan" was a dream.

"Holy shit that was crazy!!!" said Airen.

Walking towards his kitchen, Airen took in the smell of pancakes. Upon concluding that he'd woken up to a usual Sunday morning, Airen's thoughts shifted towards breakfast. Hungry and full of energy, Airen yelled out to his GG.

"Morning GG! Pancake Sundays again huh? Listen, I just had the craziest Dre…!" said Airen as he walked in on a living skeleton at his kitchen stove.

The figure was dressed in a large coat with baggy pants and kicks. Covering his mouth and nose was a unique surgical mask. Most notable about the skeleton's appearance was the camel, silhouette pattern that decorated his blue coat. Additionally, like our Protagonist, this strange entity also wore his own baseball cap.

The strange skeleton, nearly done preparing his pancake batch, turned to greet Airen.

"Oh, morning Tony. It still feels weird to call you by that name. Oh well I suppose. Here's to another Run that hopefully won't end in failure…again," replied the skeleton.

After plating the pancakes, the skeleton went for a chair at the dining room table. Airen, already confused, noticed something even stranger.

As he scanned his surroundings, Airen realized that in place of his living room was a strange assortment of theater chairs. Observing further, Airen realized that what he'd just walked into was a theater stage. In a panic, Airen tried summoning his Inventory, hoping to equip a weapon. Sadly, he was unable to.

"Oh, don't even bother Tony. Your gimmicks won't work here in the Dreamtime," said the living skeleton as he gestured for Airen to take a seat at the dining room table.

Cautiously, Airen grabbed the chair and sat carefully in it. The Gakusei made a brief glance over at the assortment of theater chairs and noticed strange silhouettes observing him in the audience.

Some were even eating snacks and popcorn. “Oh, don't mind them. They're just your Complexes, nothing more,” said the skeleton as he finished his cooking. Said skeleton took a seat and politely handed Airen a plate of pancakes with a bottle of maple syrup.

"Made some for you, Camel. Figured I should since it would’ve been rude of me not to," said the living skeleton as he began eating his portion. Strangely, despite wearing a surgical mask, the skeleton effortlessly consumed his pancakes. The bits and pieces of fluff disappeared before they reached the skeleton’s face mask.

No thank you, I'll pass, Airen thought.

"Wow, you seriously just thought that? Well, guess you're not getting an explanation now," replied the skeleton. Airen's portion of pancakes suddenly disappeared and reappeared on the skeleton's plate. As swiftly as it appeared, the stack quickly disappeared into the skeleton's “belly”.

"Wait, the fuck!? How the hell did you read my mind!?" accused Airen. Finishing his final bite, the skeleton gave an honest reply. "Well, that's an easy question. It's because I’m ***you***, dumbass. Well, more specifically your ***shadow***, but that’s beside the point," replied the annoyed skeleton.

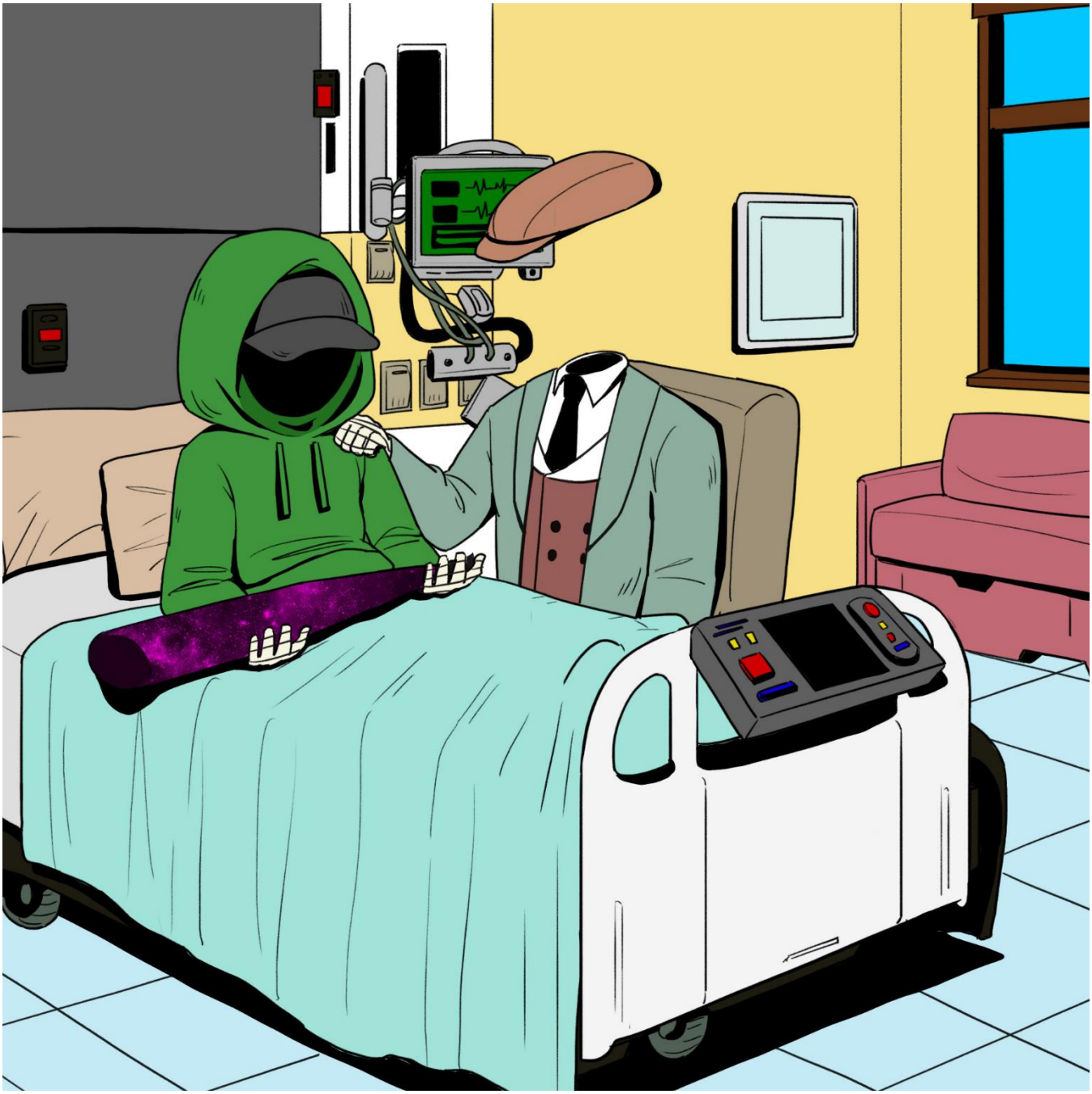
If Airen were visible, his mouth would’ve seen agape. Before he could muster a response, the skeleton continued.

"I already know what questions you want to ask and I'm here to tell you that I'm not going to answer any of them," said the skeleton. "What I will say is congratulations on reaching past Age 15. I'll be seeing you very soon," the skeleton concluded. Without saying a word, the skeleton got up out of his chair and gave a bow. After walking away, he flipped Airen off before exiting the stage.

Before Airen could utter a perplexing response, he blacked out.



XX



"How's he doing?" asked a familiar voice.

"His vitals are normal. No changes yet Shogun," replied an unfamiliar voice.

Airen opened his eyes and came upon a tiled ceiling. Moving his head, Airen spotted Roswell and a CNA having a discussion not that far from him. Feeling weird in one of his arms, Airen examined it and discovered an IV attached to it. It took Airen a few seconds to realize he was in a hospital of some kind. The Gakusei's movements caught the attention of both Roswell and the CNA.

"Airen!" said the Shogun.

Roswell approached Airen and placed a bandaged hand on his Pet's shoulder. Any concerns the Shogun still held evaporated at the sight of his Pet's awakening.

"GG, I feel exhausted…and hungry," replied Airen. "I'm not surprised, grasshopper. You've been out for two days," replied Roswell.

Huh? Airen slowly thought.

The Gakusei was still out of touch with his surroundings, having only just regained consciousness.

The CNA, wanting to give the Tutorial and his Pet some privacy, excused herself. Alone now, Roswell focused his attention back towards Airen. "Take this, it'll help with your fatigue," said Roswell as he pulled a potion from his Inventory. Downing the vial relieved a great amount of Stress from Airen.

Regaining a bit of clarity, Airen began asking questions. "Is the Raid over GG?" asked Airen. His Tutorial, clearing his throat, replied.

"Yes. All the sasquatches and their abominations have been culled," replied Roswell. The Shogun revealed to Airen that the Raid had subsided over half a day ago after the Gakusei had arrived at the field hospital. Fidgeting for a second, a heartbreaking thought crossed the young Sisyphus' mind.

"Wait, what happened to the god that I was with! Javier is his name!" asked Airen urgently.

Raising an open palm to calm his distressed Pet, Roswell gave an uplifting answer. "Ah, you're referring to the Fae. He handed you over to a contingent of Samurai after you lost consciousness. They found you both, along with his Sister Pet," answered Roswell. A brief sense of relief washed over Airen. Unfortunately, it was brief for a reason.

"GG, Booth…he," said Airen weakly. The Shogun, without a response, pulled out Booth's Prima-made bat from his Inventory. It glistened under the light of the hospital ballasts. "We've recovered his remains. His Tutorials and Pantheon have already been notified," said Roswell solemnly. Despite his stoic demeanor, the loss of many Samurai during this short yet brutal Raid bothered the Shogun greatly.

Extending Booth's Prima-made bat to Airen, the Shogun gestured for his Pet to take it. "Booth's Knickknack has synced with your Configuration. It's chosen you to be its new wielder. It seems your bond with Booth has given you something to remember him by," said Roswell. The Shogun continued, "Take it grasshopper. He'd want you to have it."

Accepting the familiar weapon in his hands once more, Airen reflected on its nature.

Booth's bat is a unique object called a Relic, which are powerful yet strange artifacts within the SRPG.

Items such as those look mundane on the surface yet have a profound influence when utilized. Be it a broken clock that can stop Runtime for a few seconds, or a handkerchief that can clean up any mess. In the case of weaponry, Booth's Relic falls into a category called Knickknacks. Created using Prima from Mundi, the Knickknacks have a will of their own and choose their wielders.

Third Strike, that's what I'll call you, Airen mused to himself.

"Thanks GG. This…makes me feel a little better, I think," said Airen. Acknowledging his Pet's feelings, Roswell pondered the next question he needed to ask him. It wasn't the question itself that gave the Shogun pause. Rather, it was the implication of what his next steps would be should Airen's explanation confirm his suspicions. Feeling ready to ascertain Airen's victory over the vile troll, Roswell presented his inquiry.

"Airen, listen closely. What happened between you and that troll?" asked Roswell. ***What an odd question, Airen thought for a second.***

Before Airen could respond, Roswell continued. "That Fae you were with informed the Samurai of a peculiar state that you were in during the fight. As best as you can, I need you to recall said fight," asked Roswell.

Looking down at Third Strike, Airen struggled to find the right words that could convey a suitable response to Roswell. With a sigh, Airen began speaking. "When I saw what that thing did to Booth, I just…I just lost it GG. All I cared about after that was seeing that bastard dead. Suddenly, this power welled up inside me and I felt invincible," replied Airen.

Going further, Airen revealed to Roswell the strange Vibe that enveloped him as he duked it out with the troll alongside Javier. After listening carefully to his Pet's recollection of events, Roswell quietly said something that took Airen off guard.

"Shit," said Roswell.

"What's the matter GG? Did I say something wrong?" asked Airen.

"My apologies, grasshopper. I should've explained this to you years ago. Had I'd known that your Cheat Code was bugged…it doesn't matter now," Roswell replied. Putting his hands behind his back, Roswell explained to Airen what he'd briefly achieved.

"What you experienced is a rare form of being we deities call “the Grind”. Often referred to as the ***flow state of the gods***, it is a special transformation that can temporarily connect your Configuration with Fortune, the Sublime Axiom. Everything from a deity's speed to their strength is enhanced to their highest potential under its effects; although, said potential is limited by one’s Age," explained Roswell.

With a sigh, the Shogun continued. "Normally, a deity isn't supposed to be able to qualify for its access until they're in their 40s, and even then, it takes an ascetic level of training to unlock it. What happened to you is both abnormal and dangerous."

To demonstrate his last point, the Shogun asked Airen to bring up his Inventory. Roswell located Airen's Horseshoe and confirmed another assumption he'd made. "Thank Fortune I gave you that Horseshoe. The Grind consumes an enormous amount of Belief from its user. Without a Horseshoe to siphon from, the Grind eventually switches to absorbing the user's Belief to keep itself going. If the user fails to switch off the Grind in time, they risk falling into an irreversible state called Overlimit. If that happens, your Run is done," finished Roswell.

The Shogun made it clear to Airen that passing out at the last second saved his ass. Had Airen's body have not shut down under strain of the Grind, he'd be dead by now.

"You passed out just as your Horseshoe ran out of Belief. If you'd still been conscious, the Grind would’ve put you into Overlimit," said Roswell. The sudden news was overwhelming for the Gakusei. So much had been dumped on him at once.

Realizing that Airen was growing weary, Roswell decided it was best to leave him be for now.

"I've said enough. I'll discuss what comes next tomorrow. Get some rest grasshopper. If you're hungry, simply ring for one of the CNAs and they'll take care of you," Roswell gently said as he placed his hand on Airen's head. Leaving his Pet to his thoughts, Roswell made for the door. Before walking through it, Roswell gave Airen a final message.

"Oh, one last thing. Until we sort out what's happening to you, you're not allowed to use Magic, period. Am I understood?" ordered the Shogun.

"Yes sir," Airen said in a disappointed tone.


YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO USE MAGIC, PERIOD. AM I UNDERSTOOD?
YES, SIR

XXI



The following day greeted Airen with many surprises and revelations. Fully recovered and discharged from his hospital room, Airen caught a glimpse of the Raid's aftermath. On his way out of the hospital with Roswell, Airen observed many deities that were either severely injured or on death's door. There were many body bags, so many in fact that the hospital morgue was filled.

The sight of the sasquatches' victims left a chill in Airen's spine. Despite not being able to read his GG's thoughts, Airen could sense the sadness emanating from his Tutorial.

How many times has GG been through this, Airen pondered.

Exiting the hospital, Airen perceived a Haven in grief. Buildings were ruined, the dead were still being collected and the environmental damage looked crippling for the Haven's economy.

"What a mess," Airen said as he and Roswell met up with the surviving Samurai. The Shogun informed all who were present that the Reconstitution of "Chelan" was now in full swing. The rebuilding of the Haven would take up to a month of Runtime to complete, judging by the sasquatches' handiwork.

"I'm visiting the governor's office to arrange for the captured Boss' placement in a cryptid conservatory. After that, I'm heading for the Minstrel's Guild in "Seattle" to arrange for a Dirge. I'll be gone for a few weeks," said the Shogun. Informing his Samurai to check their Planner Grimoire for more pertinent details, Roswell dismissed his Sect.

Before Fast Traveling, Roswell exchanged a few words with Airen.

"As for you grasshopper, you're going back home," said Roswell. Taken aback, Airen countered. "Wait what!? How come!? Isn't there anything that I can do to help around here!? Come on GG, not everything needs to be accomplished using just Magic," Airen protested. The Gakusei's charged words did little to deter the Shogun, at first.

"Not your call. Until I sort out what's wrong with your Configuration, I can't risk you doing something reckless. It isn't uncommon for another Raid to occur during a Reconstitution, and the RNG doesn't give out notices," countered Roswell.

Feeling useless, Airen sighed and lowered his head. Just then, a vibration came from his pocket. Reaching for his Controller, Airen noticed a text message from an unknown Controller ID. "Wait for a sec GG, let me bring up a Shortcut," said Airen. Generating the Shortcut, the duo read the message sent to Airen.

“YO AIREN! THIS IS JAVI! HOW ARE YOU FEELING DUDE? MY PANTHEON AND I VISITED THE HOSPITAL TO LEAVE YOU A GIFT AS A SHOW OF THANKS, BUT THE STAFF SAID THAT YOU'D ALREADY BEEN DISCHARGED EARLIER. ARE YOU STILL ON "CHELAN"!? ALSO, YOU'RE PROBABLY WONDERING HOW I GOT YOUR ID. WHEN WE FORMED A COMPANY, WE AUTOMATICALLY EXCHANGED EACH OTHER'S CONTACT INFO. IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING. ANYHOW, I’M GLAD YOU’RE AWAKE NOW!!! HIT ME UP WHEN YOU GET THIS!” - JAVIER

Airen looked over at his Tutorial, hoping for approval to follow-up with Javier. Seeing the message firsthand sparked an idea in Roswell. Formulating a modification in his Game Plan for Airen in his head, Roswell finally spoke to his eager Pet.

"Well, I see no reason why we can't give him a visit. Ask him where we can meet him," said Roswell. Giddy with enthusiasm, Airen sent Javier an immediate reply.

Within a minute, Airen heard back from Javier.

"He said he and his Pantheon are at a place called the Remembrance Fountain," said Airen. Perking up, Roswell turned his head in a different direction. "I know exactly where that's at. I'm surprised it wasn't destroyed by the Boss. We’re walking distance from it, so we'll head there now," said Roswell. As the two made their way there, Airen asked the Shogun a few questions.

"GG, how'd you beat that Boss by the way?" inquired Airen. With a chuckle, Roswell answered. "Why, with a well-placed right hook, of course. Courtesy of PERUN. Afterwards, I placed it in my Inventory, like so," replied Roswell as he generated an Inventory Shortcut.

The Kaiju-sized bull had the appearance of a small, bull icon on the Shortcut, which shocked Airen. "Don't be so surprised, grasshopper. This is common practice. And besides, aspiring Adventurers such as yourself will be doing things like this on a regular basis," the Shogun laughed.

The two eventually reached a giant fountain where crowds of deities were gathered in mourning. Coins of various sizes and lusters were plopped into the fountain's waters by each approaching deity. Roswell explained to Airen that this ritual is a way of grieving the dead.

"For most deities, it is believed that the coins will accompany the deceased when they next Reload. From there, they'll Respawn along with a coin. It is said that if a coin is Observed along with a newborn deity, they'll have an easier Run than their previous one," explained Roswell. "In that case, I'm dropping one for Booth," said Airen. "I'll join you," replied the Shogun.

The two surfed through the grieving crowd of gods in a respectful manner. Finally reaching the fountain's edge, Roswell handed Airen a coin. Flicking it at the fountain, Airen missed his mark and the coin landed on its own edge instead. "Woah, that's cool," said Airen.

Roswell made an embarrassing face palm. "Darn, that was the wrong coin. What you just saw Airen is a Glitch we Sisyphus can implement to make a coin land on its edge. I'll teach it to you sometime," said Roswell. Intrigued, Airen proceeded to nudge the coin into the fountain.

Walking away from the fountain, Airen sent Javier a text to update his location. While waiting for the Fae and his Pantheon, Airen noticed that the Break-In was still in the sky. "Wow, it's smaller than before," said Airen as he observed the wormhole. Roswell made a comment to clarify what Airen was witnessing. "That would be thanks to the Alchemists. Their repairs on the Tenets have gone exponentially well. Additionally, the debris field in Mundi is just about cleared away, making it easier for ships carrying supplies to make landfall," explained Roswell.

There was still a defensive parameter being maintained by the National Guard outside the Haven itself. Once the Consensus is restored, the defense ships could depart as well. Airen stared up at the wormhole until he heard his name being called. Javier approached with a smile and a wave. His chestnut hair giving him away.

Behind him was his Sister Pet, Simone, who, unlike her Brother Pet had jet black hair. Lastly, their two Tutorials followed suit. The two older deities were youthful in appearance yet had an Age range between 50 to 60.

Airen and Javier ran towards each other and exchanged the type of handshake that dudes often make. "Javi, you're alive!" yelled Airen.

"All thanks to you bro! Still, that whole thing was sketchy! But we made it!" replied Javier. Airen noticed that the cheerful Fae didn't have his acoustic guitar with him this time. Considering what the Fae was using it against, that minor detail was understandable. Looking over at Roswell, Airen noticed his Tutorial chatting with Javier's. Realizing that this might be the final time that both he and Javier could talk like this, Airen decided to fill the Fae in on his current situation. "It's a good thing you sent me that text message. My Tutorial was going to teleport me home. He said he was worried about my Configuration or something," said Airen.

"I can't really blame him. What you pulled off should be impossible. The Grind is hard as hell to tap into, even when it's available for usage," said Javier.

This is all bizarre, Airen thought.

Since the beginning of the Raid, Airen was gradually feeling more and more conscious about his mortality. More so than usual in fact. And now, out of nowhere, his supposed Cheat Code was acting out of pocket.

Is the Crisis doing this to me? Airen mused. The Gakusei's musings came to an abrupt end when Roswell and Javier's Tutorials approached the two, with Simone in tow.

"Lucky break, grasshopper. Rusty and Melanie here are inviting you to stay with them and help with the Reconstitution. I gave them my blessing," announced Roswell.

Rusty Descartes, whose appearance reminded Airen of Javier, chimed in. "You can share Javier's room if you'd like. It can easily accommodate two," Rusty added.

Airen and Javier looked at one another. It didn't take a genius to figure out what Airen's reply would be.



XXII



With Roswell's approval, Airen began his Runtime assisting with “Chelan’s” Reconstitution. The Shogun bid farewell to his Pet and Fast Traveled, leaving the Gakusei behind with the Descartes. Melanie Descartes, whose appearance resembled that of Spanish beauty, welcomed Airen with open arms.

“No need to be nervous, *karulino*. We won’t bite, despite what our Godhood would have you believe,” said the goddess. The motherly welcome had stirred in Airen a longing he hadn’t noticed before.

Strange. I never bothered to ask GG why I don’t have a Mother Tutorial, Airen thought.

Shaking the thought from his mind, Airen nodded in reply. “Understood ma’am! I’m eager to make a difference around here. No need for me to be so stiff,” Airen laughed. Together, Airen and the Descartes made their way towards the latter’s residence, which was a thirty-minute walk away from the Remembrance Fountain.

The suburbs that the Descartes resided in were ruined. Upon entering the entryway leading into the Descartes residence, Airen felt surprisingly at ease. Perhaps it was the familiarity of a welcoming environment that reduced the tension within Airen’s mind. Despite how damaged Javier’s Abode was, the Pantheon’s warmth more than made up for the devastated home. Rusty, having already generated an interesting Shortcut, gestured for Airen to come completely inside.

"No need to worry about the state of the house. I’m about to fix this place up,” said Rusty, “and it pays to have Raid insurance. With the Reconstitution starting up and all, it wouldn't do to have a mismatched residence amidst the pristine, no?"

The elegant way the older Fae conveyed his words caught Airen's attention. ***The Fae have a way with words, Airen pondere*d.**

Sure enough, Airen witnessed the rebirth of the Descartes residence no more than fifteen minutes after stepping through the door. Like a 3D printer, the house reproduced its missing components as Rusty tapped away on his home insurance Shortcut. Once the repairs had finished, the Abode looked brand new.

"Better now, *infanoj*?" Melanie asked Airen, Javier and Simone. The motherly Fae appeared from the rebuilt kitchen with snacks. With heartfelt thanks, Airen enjoyed what he considered a satisfying meal. After cleaning his plate and cup, Airen followed Javier to the latter's room in order to ascertain where he'd be sleeping. At first sight, Airen spotted a coffin in place of a bed. Nonchalantly, Airen pointed out the obvious to Javier with a bandaged finger.

"Oh, right! I forgot you're new to us Fae," said Javier with an amused smile, "if you're down for a long story, I can fill you in a bit. So, to start, how much do you know about my Godhood?"

"Honestly, not much. Same goes for the Normies, Polarities, Demogorgons, Xenoliths and the Ludens. My knowledge of the other Godhoods is lacking," Airen replied. The Sisyphus were the only Godhood that Airen had any familiarity with. His dialogue with Javier would be an ample Opportunity to learn further. Upon hearing that last term leave Airen's lips, Javier laughed.

"Ludens, huh! You think they exist!? Now that's folklore," Javier replied. Airen delivered a chuckle himself. "Maybe, maybe not. The RNG is full of surprises after all," said Airen.

"Ah, well put my friend! But enough about the boogeymen. You're curious to know more about us Fae right? Well, we're an unusual Godhood, to put it mildly. We've all got this parasite in us called Nosferatu. Under normal circumstances, we'd be Zombies. But thanks to Saint Helsing, we're something special," explained Javier.

Adding on, Javier revealed a little more about the Fae's origins; or, at the very least, how much his Tutorials had told him. It all started with the "Bubonic Plague" of the 13XXs giving rise to the Nosferatu parasite, which then led to a Zombie outbreak. The transformation into a Zombie is unpleasant, with the result depending on the Nosferatu type. The appearance of a Zombie looks like that of an insect fused with flesh. Under normal circumstances, once infected via being bitten or worse, the transformation is 100% guaranteed.

That was the case, at least, until a Sorcerer named Abraham Van Helsing created a vaccine that neutralized the Nosferatu. Said vaccine forces the parasite into a type of stasis, allowing the infectee's Configuration to assimilate the intruder. This cure gave birth to a new Godhood called the Fae.

Essentially, the Fae can be thought of as a collective of advanced deities with a thirst for blood. Sadly, for them, this heightened power came at the cost of a debilitating weakness to sunlight, courtesy of the Helsing Vaccine. Per the Shadow Social Contract, the Fae are exempt from having their Shadows confiscated by the IRS because of said weakness. As far as the Deep State is concerned, the sunlight of the Forecast is enough of an incentive to keep the Fae in line.

Airen took Javier's history lesson with bewilderment. "Well damn! Guess that explains the coffin then?" said Airen. "Oh right, I went on a tangent huh," Javier replied. Getting back on topic, Javier broke down the purpose of his coffin to Airen.

Allow me to summarize, yet again. Fae coffins are made from a unique form of Prima located in a Zone of the SRPG that divides the Heavens called Elfame. Elfame's unique nature allows it to function as a twilight realm and has since become the territory of both the Fae and the Polarity. Being physically present within Elfame or exposed to items originating from there rejuvenates a Fae's Configuration from the damaging effects of sunlight.

Like sunscreen, an Elfame item like a Fae coffin coats the Fae in a type of Certainty that shields them from the lethality of daylight for up to weeks at a time. Ingesting blood also helps maintain the longevity of this special type of Certainty, amongst other benefits.

Intrigued by Javier's information, Airen decided to repay the Fae by debunking some of the misconceptions around the Sisyphus. The two sat on Javier’s coffin and engaged in their dialogue for the rest of the day.

Eventually, evening came, and the two decided to settle a petty dispute they ended up having via a few rounds in a fighting game—courtesy of Javier's game console, which had a slick white look to it and an orange light emanating from the console’s disc cover. When Melanie Descartes called the two for dinner, the young deities settled on a draw and called their “conflict” resolved.

“Oh, right! I’ll ask my mom if we can find you a bed or something! A coffin won’t do, am I right,” asked Javier.

“Oh crap! I forgot all about that! Thanks Javi,” replied Airen as the two exited Javier’s room and made for the dining room.

From then on, Airen became an honorary member of the Descartes household. The ease of being in the company of a compatriot close to his Age gave Airen peace of mind. Despite the pain of losing his mentor, Airen finally began the recovery process.

As the days started rolling on by, Airen began feeling better about himself. With effort, the Gakusei got back into his early morning training routine. To his surprise one morning, Airen stumbled upon Javier engaging in his own form of practice.

The Fae was strumming along on his acoustic guitar while humming a tune to himself. Eager to learn a new Strat or two, Airen approached Javier.

"Yeah, that's right! You fight with that guitar, huh?" asked an inquisitive Airen who’d just come back from his morning run.

"Yep yep! Both my Tutorials taught me everything that I currently know using something called the Suzuki Method. As an aspiring Minstrel, I have to stay on my discipline. Can't be caught lacking out here in this setting!" replied Javier.

The two went on to have breakfast, while talking further about their respective training styles. After washing up, the duo headed for a recovery site to Volunteer at as part of the Reconstitution effort. Excited about the coming of the Dirge, Javier filled Airen in on the Minstrels’ Guild.

The Minstrels, as Javier explained it, are a Guild of Magical musicians capable of manipulating the Strings that make up the Fabric of the SRPG. Thanks to an in-born Miracle called Synesthesia, which grants the qualified few the means to perceive the Fabric, the Minstrels are employed as recovery craftsmen that can Recompose what was once destroyed by perceiving and manipulating the Strings that form a portion of the damaged Fabric. Mind you, what can be Recomposed is limited to non-sentient objects.

The dead, however, remain dead.

"It's a practice called Remixing, and the Dirge is one of many Remixes," Javier informed Airen as the two arrived at a recovery site near the seafront. The two met with a Reconstitution coordinator, who swiftly assigned them tasks.

Assisting with the removal of debris whilst delivering rations to those in need, Airen and Javier continued for weeks exchanging insights with one another. As the Reconstitution neared completion, the two deities ended up engaged in an enlightening conversation.

During a lunch break at one of the few remaining recovery sites, Javier revealed his lack of Synesthesia to Airen, which surprised the Sisyphus. "Wait, how the hell are you going to become a Minstrel then?" asked Airen. Sipping on a blood bag, Javier explained that anyone can join the Minstrels' Guild.

"Non-Synesthesia users usually end up as Bards. They can't do much since they're unable to perceive the Fabric, yet they're still powerful craftsmen in their own right," Javier replied. In addition to the Bard Role, other Roles for non-Synesthesia users include serving as roadies, sound engineers, producers and other supportive roles within the Minstrels' Guild.

"Becoming an official Minstrel requires a unique license called a Minstrel Credential. The certification test is designed in a way that only Synesthesia users can pass it. I aim to change that! I'm going to become the first non-Synesthesia Minstrel!" Javier boldly proclaimed. "How exactly!?" asked Airen. Sipping his blood bag, Javier winked at Airen in response. "Well, let's just say that I have an "ace up my sleeve"! And while I can't elaborate on what that is just yet, what I can say is that it is a "mathematical game-changer"!

To become a Minstrel, young Javier will need to join the Minstrels' Guild, obviously. However, to get into said Guild, the Fae will either need a Degree Diploma or an apprenticeship. On that note, Javier and Airen were of the same mind.

“I gotta thank you Airen. You killing that troll while I was in your Company gave me the Suffering I needed to reach Age 15.

All I need to do now is finish up a few more Gigs and Quests in my Planner and I'll be Age 16 in no time," said Javier. Hearing those words leave Javier's lips compelled Airen to summon a Seniority Shortcut. It hadn't dawned on the Gakusei that he might’ve Aged Up following the Raid, having lost consciousness during it. What Airen saw on his Seniority Shortcut damned near made him spit out the water he’d been drinking.

"Woah! Holy shit dude! Age 16!!! That's crazy! You're legally allowed to drive a Simulacrum now! Sick!" Javier said with excitement as he patted Airen's shoulder.

How the fuck did I do that, Airen thought.

Upon realizing the potential answer to his question, Airen decided not to think about the matter any further. "This is nuts! I can officially enroll in the University System now," Airen said with enthusiasm. “You and me both, my guy!” Javier replied.

With the Break-In fully repaired and "Chelan" nearly rejuvenated, all that was left to restore was the natural environment of the Haven itself. Knowing that he'd be heading back to Orion after the Dirge, Airen informed Javier that the upcoming Remix will be their way of celebrating their triumphs. Thrilled at the idea and looking forward to seeing his idols in action, Javier agreed to Airen's suggestion. The two finished up their lunch and made their way back to the last recovery site to remove more debris.



XXIII



Nearly a month after the Raid, the deities of “Chelan” had finally reached the final stages of the Reconstitution. Following weeks of arrangements and preparations, the Minstrels of “Seattle” arrived to perform the Dirge. Airen, along with Javier and his Pantheon, began making their way towards the venue where the Minstrels were scheduled to perform. Unfortunately for Airen, he wasn't in a pleasant mood. The past few days had been weighing heavily on the Sisyphus, for he'd just received foreboding news.

Having just arrived only a few days earlier in the week, the Minstrels’ sudden disembarkment gave the deities of "Chelan" renewed hope. This uplifting surprise officially marked the beginning of the end of the month-long Reconstitution. Regarding Airen, he received an even bigger surprise: Roswell's sudden return.

Airen hadn't spoken to the Shogun in weeks. Following the duo's last conversation earlier in the month, the Shogun made the decision to cease communications out of discretion.

Certain tasks must be achieved in a specific order, the Shogun contemplated as he went about completing his Reconstitution Quests quietly.

Before meeting with “Washington State’s” governor, Roswell returned to Orion. The Shogun had given himself an important Quest regarding Airen's Grind incident. Meeting with a Sisyphus Sorcerer skilled in Configuration research, Roswell assigned the doctor a Gig to analyze Airen's Configuration.

The connection between the Shogun and the Gakusei made an analysis of the latter's Configuration possible. After allowing his own Configuration to be scanned for Airen's diagnosis, the Shogun left the Sorcerer to his work. Roswell moved with haste to complete his other Quests.

The Shogun delivered the captured Boss to a cryptid conservatory in "Seattle", arranged "Chelan's" Dirge with the Minstrels’ Guild and advised the state governor on Reconstitution options. A few mishaps along the way further delayed the Shogun's return, but eventually he was successful.

After completing the essentials, Roswell returned to Orion to follow up with the Configuration specialist. The Shogun was both eager yet nervous to learn what the Sorcerer had discovered.

"You may want to sit down, Shogun," said the concerned Sorcerer. Roswell cautiously did as he was advised. What was discovered about Airen's Configuration during the Sorcerer's tests confirmed Roswell's worst suspicions.

"Your Pet's status effect will go away by the time he reaches Age 25, but until then he'll need to take this daily," advised the Sorcerer as he handed Roswell a divine candy dispenser. The Shogun thanked the Sorcerer's efforts before departing. From there, Roswell contemplated how he'd break his findings to his Pet.

Figuring that the Dirge would be a good place to ease into the reveal, Roswell decided to inform Airen after its conclusion. Timing his return to "Chelan" with that of the Minstrels' timely arrival, Roswell surprised Airen. The excited Gakusei wasted little time informing the Shogun about all that he'd been up to, including how much he was able to achieve without using Magic. Roswell, in return, gave a more straightforward update concerning his endeavors. Upon Airen mentioning his success at reaching Age 16, Roswell was left flabbergasted.

"Wait! You jumped up two Ages!?" asked Roswell.

"Yeah, crazy right! I'm still not too sure about how that even happened. My best guess is that it must have occurred because of the amount of Suffering I earned from beating that troll huh!?" replied Airen.

Bullshit, trolls aren't worth the amount of Suffering that just gave you two Age Ups, Roswell thought.

The status effect that Airen was diagnosed with was already at play. Normally, two Age Ups was flat-out impossible to achieve for a young deity. As such, the growth Airen exhibited was, in truth, an existential tumor in disguise.

"Yeah, I can't wait until after the Dirge to tell you what I've just learned about you. Especially after what you've just told me," said Roswell as he pulled out the divine candy dispenser from his Inventory.

"Take this now," Roswell ordered. Airen knew better than to question his Tutorial whenever his GG’s tone shifted into the serious. "Yes sir," replied Airen as he took the medication. Upon consuming a piece of the medicine, Airen was surprised to discover that he didn't feel any different than before. After watching his Pet consume the meds, Roswell proceeded to tell Airen the name of his new debilitation.

"Existence Deficiency?" asked Airen. "Yes, unfortunately. It is a rare status effect that's undetectable under normal circumstances. And the cause is an unstable Cheat Code," the Shogun started explaining.

Existence Deficiency is a rare affliction amongst the Sisyphus. The leading theory behind the cause of the disability, according to Prior Sorcerers, is a botched Reload. For Airen, this meant that when he was Observed, his Cheat Code was randomly bugged by the RNG. Roswell, bringing up a Shortcut displaying a video from Narcissus, showed Airen the deadly ramifications of his diagnosis. In the footage, caught on a security camera, a Sisyphus could be seen walking down a street before suddenly stopping in her tracks. Next, a strange crackling of energy began to erupt from her body, giving the poor Sisyphus a glitched appearance. After two minutes, the Sisyphus exploded. The video feed ended at that exact moment. Seeing another Sisyphus' death brought Airen chills. With his point made, Roswell began elaborating again.

"That explosion you just saw is called a Meltdown. The energy produced from it is equivalent to a nuclear warhead," explained the Shogun. Roswell dismissed his Shortcut before continuing. "You know what Certainty is, correct? Then you should also keep in the back of your mind its opposite: Uncertainty," said Roswell. Like inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide, the usage of Certainty leaves behind a remnant of Uncertainty. While deities can confidently release Certainty without retaining Uncertainty within their Configuration, the Existent Deficient aren't as lucky.

In the case of the poor Sisyphus that had died in the video, the Uncertainty within her Configuration had reached a critical level. Without a means of escape thanks to her bugged Cheat Code, the Uncertainty turned said Sisyphus into a walking ICBM. As Roswell educated Airen, a question left the Gakusei's lips.

"How come this is all happening now!? I never had this problem before when I used Magic!?" Airen asked.

Roswell gave a swift reply. "Because you were lucky up until now, Airen. And it seems that the RNG has decided that your luck has run its course following this recent Raid," replied the Shogun. In regard to the deceased Sisyphus from the Narcissus footage, it is agreed upon by researchers covering the incident that the victim was unaware of their status effect until it was too late. This wasn't the case for Airen, fortunately.

"There's good news and bad news, grasshopper," said Roswell. On the topic of good news, Roswell revealed to Airen that his debilitation would cure itself the moment the Gakusei reached Age 25.

"By Age 25, you'll achieve another Growth Spurt. Any issues with your Configuration will be resolved, including your Existence Deficiency," said Roswell. The bad news for Airen, therefore, was that he'd be unable to use his Glitches, let alone his Approachable Choices, while under the effects of the daily medication.

"I'm sorry, Atom. I know how much you were looking forward to Fast Traveling. I hate to say it grasshopper, but you'll have to wait a lot longer to use it," explained the Shogun. The disheartened Gakusei stared at the divine candy dispenser in his hand and read the label.

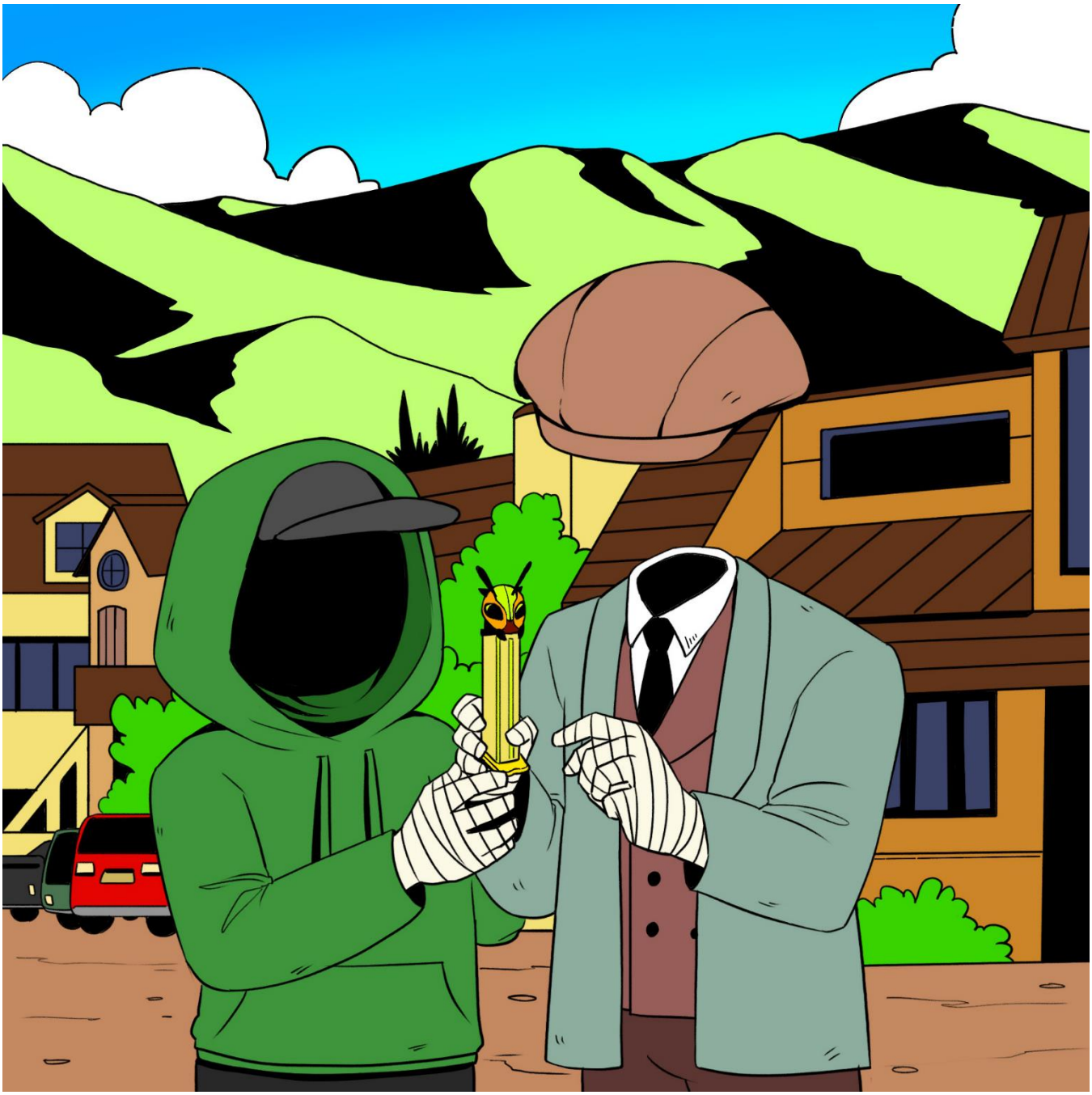
"Tussle," said a sad Airen.

The medication prescribed to Airen is called the Tussle. Figuring that making the medicine look and taste like candy would make it sell better; the Tussle's creator plagiarized the taste and design of their invention from an NPC candy maker. The Tussle's potency was effective to a mitigating degree. Along with suppressing a Sisyphus' Glitches, it also made their Magic usage not as effective, especially in regard to certain Choices. Still, it was a price to pay than suffering the alternative.

Airen continued to hold his head down, staring at the Tussle dispenser. Roswell, contemplating the weight of his news on his Pet's aspirations, placed a bandaged hand on Airen's shoulder. "On the positive side, there is a slight silver lining here, grasshopper. Those two Age Ups have not only qualified you for University enrollment, but also Simulacrum licensing. As such, your Warrior's Mission is well underway. We'll discuss this further after the Dirge," said Roswell.

Despite wanting to spend time with Airen during the Dirge, Roswell had to organize and prepare the Sect's return to Orion. As such, Roswell decided to leave Airen to his own devices until after the Reconstitution's final act. Before Fast Traveling, Roswell thought to ask his Pet if he'd experienced any unusual Dreams lately. However, after seeing his Pet in a disheartened mood, Roswell decided to stay his tongue for now.

The Shogun departed for where his Sect had been staying on the nearly Reconstituted Haven, leaving Airen to collect his thoughts.



XXIV



Airen felt heavy. Not in body, but in spirit. As the Gakusei and the Descartes shifted into the venue where the Dirge was to be held, the young Sisyphus felt sluggish. Despite Roswell's insistence that Airen's prognosis had a silver lining to it, the Gakusei couldn't shake the feeling of ineptitude that he was stricken with.

"What the hell do I do now?" Airen whispered to himself.

Javier, astute in his observations, could tell that Airen wasn't his usual self. On the day of the Minstrels' early arrival, the Fae caught a glimpse of Roswell and Airen's conversation from afar. Despite Javier's best efforts to assist his troubled Collaborator afterwards, he couldn't shake Airen out of his funk.

"Sorry dude, but I just wanna be alone right now," Airen would say to the Fae whenever the latter offered to hang out with the Sisyphus.

Following Roswell's revelation, the distraught Gakusei could hardly bring himself to conduct his morning training. In addition, Javier would notice Airen mumbling to himself as the two worked to wrap up their last bit of Reconstitution work. Airen preferred to keep to himself and only spoke up when spoken to. Seeing his Collaborator in low spirits didn't deter Javier's willingness to aid Airen; on the contrary, it only bolstered the young Fae's resolve.

Figuring that having an itinerary of places to visit during the upcoming Dirge would be of great use towards helping Airen cheer up, Javier and Simone decided to scout out potential targets at the Minstrels' venue. "This Dirge might be the last time we'll get to hang out with Airen. Let's make his last night on "Chelan" a memorable one, Simone," said Javier to his Sister Pet. Simone, concerned for Airen as well, gave a confident nod.

Of all the possible ways to uplift Airen's spirits, Javier thought, the Minstrels' music should do the trick.

The venue the pair were exploring, it turned out, was the entirety of "Chelan's" rebuilt downtown district. No longer a wreck thanks to the Raid, the businesses situated within the area were preparing to use the Dirge as a means of revitalizing themselves. Every deity that was aware of the Minstrels' Reputation was also aware of how massive their Remixes could become. Whenever word spreads of a Remix being initiated somewhere in the SRPG, hundreds of thousands of deities flock to the location to party and have a good time.

Consequently, the insane boost in revenue for the local economy is said to be so lucrative that it can even counteract recessions overnight. Having finished creating the Dirge itinerary, Javier decided to double-check the places he and Airen could potentially visit.

"A Haven party is just what we need right now," said Javier as he jotted down the last place he felt Airen would enjoy visiting.

"Hey Javi, don't forget to tell Airen to get a Repertoire!" said Simone as she dug into a snack that Javier had bought for her during their scouting.

Definitely, thought Javier with a nod.

On the day of the Dirge, the entirety of "Chelan" became filled to the brim with deities. Gods and goddesses from the Heavens of "Europe", "Asia", "Africa", "South America", "Australia" and "Antarctica" all came flocking to the lone Haven. Across the miniature planet, ruined areas of earth and sea became places of congregation for these festivalgoers.

Known as Patches, these miniature festivals encircled locales marked for healing by the Minstrels.

Huge holographic screens were on display at each one, showing the stage where the Minstrels would be performing the Dirge.

Back in downtown "Chelan", Javier watched as Airen sulked in front of him. Cracking a soft smile, the Fae kept his thoughts to himself. Rusty and Melanie Descartes decided to let the two younger deities go off and enjoy the festival on their own. "If we don't see you two later on, we'll meet you both back home," said Rusty as he took Simone by the hand.

The patriarch, Melanie and Simone waved goodbye to the duo as they went about exploring on their own.

Airen and Javier made their way towards an enormous amphitheater where the first of the Minstrels was set to perform. Said amphitheater was about as large as a soccer stadium. Sadly, the two couldn't make it further in as they were quickly barred from continuing via a crowd of deities surrounding the entryway.

"Of course we couldn't make it in! We took our sweet ass time getting here," Javier said annoyingly. Alas, the Fae uncovered a silver lining in not getting stuck in the amphitheater. Javier whipped out his written itinerary and quickly ascertained the first spot that he wanted to show Airen. Looking back at his sulking friend, who'd been quiet for most of the walk, Javier called out to him.

"Hey Airen! You like Trip-Hop right?" said Javier as he immediately pointed towards a nearby holographic screen. As Airen looked up at said screen, his ears caught the sound of a smooth bassline.

The first Minstrel, using a DJ set, started performing. As the divine musician finessed his gear, the atmosphere encapsulating the entire Haven suddenly transformed.

Out of nowhere, Airen felt a feeling of tranquility he hadn't known since he was at least Age 3.

Whatever worries Airen had, be it the Crisis or his Existence Deficiency, became nothing more than a distant memory in his mind. "Holy shit! This beat is sick!" yelled Airen. All across "Chelan", the flora, fauna and overall environment began to regenerate at a gradual pace. Bodies of water that were contaminated by an exposure to the sasquatches' vile, bodily fluids and their machinery were purified via the Strings that composed them. Craters that littered the various farmlands and plains across the Haven were slowly patched up by the quantum melody being produced from the Minstrel's playing.

As the pair walked around in a euphoric state of mind comparable to being under the influence of THC, Airen and Javier had their mouths agape by the restoration occurring around them. Even the flowers themselves wept with joy. Javier, with a wild smile, turned towards his uplifted friend.

"That bloke on the hologram performing the first phase of the Remix is a favorite of mine. Goes by the name Juan Quixote," said the Fae. Even though he couldn't see it, Javier sensed that his friend was smiling back at him.

With Airen's spirits restored, Javier decided to kick off their nightly escapade.

"Come on bro! Let's go on a pub crawl! I've got a list of cool places that serve awesome drinks!" said Javier excitedly! Airen never had a drink before, despite being at the legal Age for a few years of Runtime already. The thrill of trying something new was exactly what Airen needed.

"Sounds good! Let's do it Javi!" replied Airen. Now invigorated by Juan Quixote's music, the two deities went off in search of the unexpected.

And so the two went, hopping from pub to pub. Each stop greeted them with a free mug of lager and interesting company. From Airen and Javier's interactions with the various deities around them, the duo's knowledge of the SRPG broadened. At one pub, the two listened to rumors and gossip concerning a sentient black hole called the Behemoth. Supposedly, according to one of the patrons, this Superboss is responsible for swallowing up unsuspecting deities that travel too carelessly in a Zone called Brahmanirvana. A location considered by the deities to be off-limits. Another pub led the duo into having a drunken conversation with a historian currently writing a book about the First and Second Theomachias.

Whilst continuing the pub crawl, Airen learned of a Fae goddess who'd earned a Magical title called an Alias. This goddess earned said Alias by preventing a nuclear holocaust from occurring during a conflict called the Assimilation of Nights; a brutal conflict that was waged between the Vampyrs of the Asura Hegemony and the entire SRPG during the latter half of the 2XXXs. Javier, a massive fanboy of the topic, couldn't help but gush about this goddess during a random conversation the duo were having with a group of friendly Fae from Elfame. Unfortunately for Javier, Airen's inebriation prevented him from appreciating the finer details of his Collaborator's enthusiasm. So much so that the Gakusei would mostly forget the history lesson afterwards. As the two kept their crawl going, the rotation of new music from the rotating Minstrels invigorated the two's drunken journey even more.

With enough liquid courage in his veins, Airen began to confide in Javier about his current situation upon reaching their next destination.

"Yeah dude, that's the gist of it. I'm so screwed," Airen said with a slur. Patting his friend on the back, Javier reassured Airen that everything would be fine.

"Not at all my friend! I think there's a silver lining to your predicament as well, same as your Tutorial," replied Javier.

Taking another sip from his twelfth mug, Javier remembered his Sister Pet's words about giving Airen something important. "Oh, that's right! You're leaving tomorrow, so I need to get you this," said Javier. Generating a Shortcut, Javier introduced Airen to the Repertoire Grimoire. Described as a social media app for deities to both stay in contact with one another and Collaborate, the Repertoire was a must for making a Run bearable.

"No matter where you're at, you can always hit up someone using this Grimoire. No need for a Controller ID either!" explained Javier.

Airen downloaded the Grimoire with quickness. Skipping through his profile setup with Javier's help, Airen successfully added the Fae as a friend. "There! Now we can both stay in touch in more ways than one. We can post photos, videos and other things that can help us both achieve our goals," said the jolly Fae.

"Bet!" replied Airen.

As the two began leaving, they bumped into a surprise. “Oh, my apologies,” said Juan Quixote as he opened the front door. To say that Javier was excited would be a terrible understatement.

With fanatical enthusiasm, Javier began fumbling his words as he attempted to convey how much the experienced Minstrels’ work had positively impacted his Run. Airen watched the two exchange pleasantries with amusement. Figuring that this would be his one chance to impress, Javier showed off some of the songs he composed himself and recorded on his Controller.

Seeing a bit of himself in the young Fae, Juan asked if Javier had any Minstrel aspirations. A hard “yes” from Javier compelled the famous Minstrel into giving Javier an important item. “Here, have this,” said Juan as he removed his bucket hat and placed it on Javi's head. “This is my gift to you. Proof that you have the talent necessary to make it in our Guild. I look forward to hearing more future tunes from you,” said Juan.

Patting Javier on the back, the Minstrel excused himself before heading into a VIP area where his compatriots were waiting for him.

Javier's competitive yet easy going nature reminded Airen of Booth. While briefly saddened by the remembrance of his friend and mentor, Javier's presence alleviated some of Airen's loss. In good spirits once more, Airen departed with Javier towards their next pub of the evening. As the two neared their next locale, Airen confided in Javier.

“Before we head in, I just wanna say thanks dude. Despite my Struggles, you kept me in your thoughts. You're a dope Rival and I appreciate you,” Airen opened. Excited at the establishment of a friendly Rivalry, Javier matched Airen's humbleness. “The feeling is mutual, my friend. Here's to an epic Rivalry. All in good fun mind you,” replied Javier.

At that moment, a notification sound came from both deities’ Controllers. Perplexed, the duo brought up their respective Shortcuts highlighting their Controller’s home screens. Said notification came from their Planner Grimoires, which revealed that a special Quest called a Rival Bout had been assigned to them.

Javier, despite how addled he was, began recalling an important detail concerning Rivalries that his Tutorials had mentioned to him once. Evidently enough, agreeing to a Rivalry wasn't the same as making it official.

“Oh, right! I almost forgot this part. To become official Rivals, we have to have a playful spar in a unique locale called the Cavern of Resolve. It's there on that sacred ground that we make our resolve known with action, not words. Most Havens have one, so they're pretty common,” said Javier.

Airen, while excited, was a little nervous about the time it would take to accomplish this Rival Bout. In the morning, he and the Sect would depart for Orion, and he didn't want to concern his dear GG by making the Shogun search for him. The Gakusei voiced his concerns to the Fae, who erased his anxiety. Patting his newly gifted bucket hat, Javier filled Airen in on a tidbit.

“No worries! I got you. We’re about 20 minutes away from the Cavern, based on where we’re standing right now. And while we’re still on topic, I'd like to show you the reward for completing the Rival Bout, in case you’re still thinking about catching cold feet,” said Javier as he directed Airen’s eyes towards the rewards section of the Rival Bout’s description.

Be it high, sober, drunk, or all three at once, Airen's reaction would’ve been the same, regardless of his state of mind. After learning what the reward was and double checking the description box, he was all in on the sudden trek towards the Cavern of Resolve.

“Dude, let's go!!!” said Airen with drunken enthusiasm. The duo turned away from the exterior of the pub that they were about to enter and began making their trek towards the outskirts of the Haven's city center. Before Airen's time on “Chelan” could end, he and the Fae had one last Quest to overcome.



XXV



Rival Fight

Javier Descartes

Rival Fight Song

Hurt You So by Jonny L

Having made their way through a dark forest, Airen and Javier arrived at an unusual, concrete tunnel. To make their Rivalry official, the duo would need to brave the hollowed, cemented tunnel in front of them and emerge on the other side within the sacred Cavern of Resolve.

"This place right here my guy, is the stuff of legends," said a mellow Javier peering inside the large, square-shaped opening. Airen waved his hand inside the tunnel yet detected no unusual phenomenon either. "Interesting. So, we just head inside and engage in this, uh Rival Bout…, I get that right?" Airen said in a relaxed tone. Both the Dirge's effect and the glasses upon glasses of alcohol that he'd consumed earlier gave the Gakusei a chillaxed motion. "Yep, that'd be correct. According to my Tutorials, the tunnel should let us through if we've entered an agreed-upon Rivalry," Javier replied. Just before the duo walked in, Javier called out to Airen. The young Fae felt as if he was missing something important to relay to his invisible companion.

"Yo, what's up?" asked Airen. Javier folded his arms and tapped his foot for a second before shrugging his shoulders. "Nah, I thought I had something important to say, but I'm too wasted to care! Let's head inside my friend!" said the Fae as he walked in first. The Sisyphus followed suit, completely ignoring a sign beside the entrance that read, "**DO NOT TOUCH THE DOWNER WALL!!!**"

Inside the cavern, the two went.

Their trek was mitigated somewhat thanks to a wisp of light generated by one of Javier's Spell. The ball of light illuminated their surroundings. Around the duo were art pieces of incredible Renown, with mural-styled stenciled artworks highlighting what appeared to be many moments of strange events occurring throughout the SRPG. These details bombarded the duo's peripherals, giving them a sensation equivalent to watching Michelangelo paint the Sistine Chapel.

"Crazy artistry," Airen said as he glided his bandaged hand across the tunnel wall's surface. As if predicting this gesture, the wall became animated and played itself out like a flash animation. Whether this phenomenon was due to the duo being inebriated as fuck, or something else entirely, none could say. Regardless, a portion of the ever-changing mural caught Airen's eye, and he didn't like it.

“The hell!?” Airen said aloud. “Huh,” Javier said as he looked toward the scene. On the mural, in incredible detail, was a depiction of Roswell walking away from a sullen Airen, who was holding his GG’s famed blade, Warp.

Beside Airen was the one thing a young deity dreads to see, a Memorial. In the SRPG, a Memorial is a divine tombstone containing the highlights of deity’s Run. Created for the benefit of guiding one’s Pets and loved ones following their passing, a deceased deity continues to play a positive role in their Pantheon’s Runs. In general, a Memorial signifies that a deity’s Run has reached its endpoint; be it because a deity has achieved Completion by hitting the Age of 100, or in the Sisyphus’ case, they’ve reached the Age of 99 where they can finally challenge the Sublime Axiom to an existential Fade.

Javier, noticing the mural, immediately deduced Airen’s thoughts and remembered the important details that he failed to recall back at the Cavern’s entrance. The Fae panicked.

“OH SHIT!!! Airen! Get away from that mural!!!” Javier yelled. The Fae’s scream jolted Airen to Attention and he distanced himself from the wall. “Javier, what the hell am I looking at!” Airen asked in a drunken panic. Javier took Airen by the shoulder and directed him towards the light at the end of the tunnel.

“Listen to my voice and keep your eyes on the light. What you just touched was the Downer Wall. It's a malicious entity that entices all who tread towards the Cavern with beautiful imagery, only to reveal future setbacks and tragedies to whomever touches it. The target goes mad from the revelation and is eventually absorbed into the wall as they continue to touch it repeatedly, hoping to see something more uplifting. Don’t panic. Stay focused on the light,” warned Javier.

“Okay dude okay, I get the memo,” Airen said with a nervous laugh. Despite Javier’s guidance, Airen couldn’t help but slip one last look back at the Downer Wall.

No way did I see what I just saw, thought the Gakusei.

Upon observation, Airen noticed that what he’d seen had suddenly vanished, and in its place appeared a new art piece.

Stenciled into the wall was a well-dressed, fedora-wearing god, with a youthful appearance. He had short, jet-black hair yet kept both of his eyes closed.

Unnerving still was the deity's wicked smile. The Downer Wall depicted this entity pointing his finger towards a series of text, which read: ***SEE YOU IN 200 YEARS OR SO! NO RUSH, I'VE GOT NOTHING BUT TIME!***

In an instant, Airen jerked his head forward and made a mad sprint towards the light at the end of the tunnel. "Damn it, Airen!" yelled Javier as he generated a Choice that propelled him towards his panicking friend. Thanks to the powerful gust of wind, the Fae caught up and carried the Gakusei before he could touch the Downer Wall again in a panic. The force of the impact pushed the duo forward and towards the light at the end of the tunnel. Out the other side, the two fell to the ground in a rolling motion.

They'd arrived at what appeared to be a detention basin. The environment had a dry feeling about it. The ground was caked yet cracked, with the surrounding area resembling the walls of a crater. Upwards at the edge of the "crater" were flowing pixels, surrounding the duo. All of which radiated unfathomable colors, jettisoning their way up towards the Forecast, which was a surprise to see.

"Muthafucka, you're here too!?" Airen said aloud as he stood up and glanced at the bizarre, sun-moon object hovering above him and Javier. The sight reminded the Gakusei of a sequel to a video game he played decades ago, involving a moon with a creepy face descending upon a strange land below it. A pat on the shoulder snapped Airen back to the present moment, courtesy of Javier.

"We made it! We've arrived at the Cavern of Resolve. Let's assume what we saw earlier was the alcohol's fault, no?" the Fae said with a smile. Airen nodded, feeling better at the excuse Javier had given him. The Fae walked past Airen and made his way towards the center of the Cavern.

"Okay! Let's get this scrap underway," said Javier as he stretched his arms. Catching up to Javier, who'd drunkenly made his way to the center of the Cavern, Airen began the task of regaining his composure. The Gakusei was about to fight his Collaborator in a good ol' round of fisticuffs, and the thought recalled the discussion they'd just had about the Rival Bout's reward. The recollection, Airen figured, would help him forget whatever he'd seen in the tunnel they'd just exited.

Now, dear reader, time for a quick flashback!

“First one to land 100 body shots on their would-be-Rival wins and gets rewarded an instant Age Up!?” said Airen.

“Talk about one hell of a Quest, am I right! Well, let’s make haste, my guy! You’re out of here in about six hours, I think. This won’t take long,” replied Javier as he and Airen began making their way towards the forest where the Cavern’s entrance was located.

The immediacy of Airen’s leave from “Chelan” in the coming hours necessitated the pair making the extra trek, regardless of their questionable sobriety. Following the horrors that they and the other deities experienced, this spar would be a way of honoring the ones who’d fallen and could no longer further their Runs.

Now then, back to the present!

Airen and Javier reunited at the center of the “crater”. As soon as this happened, the Rival Bout began immediately and without warning. In no time flat, a massive Shortcut the size of a movie theater screen appeared above them some distance away, with a scoreboard showing Airen’s name on the left, and Javier’s name on the right. Below their names was the number zero.

Next, a smaller Shortcut appeared in front of the two, detailing the general rules of the Rival Bout. The duo skimmed the details, reminding themselves of what the rules were.

“Okay, cool cool. First one to land 100 hits on their would-be-Rival or accumulate the most blows in under 5 minutes wins and receives an instant Age Up. Well, sure as shit, it's exactly as you said Javi!” Airen read aloud from his Shortcut in an attaboy tone.

“Of course! I’m here for you, my guy! Oh, and if you’re game, I can throw on some music before that clock starts. Makes for a cool climax, no?” Javier said as he took out a small speaker from his Inventory.

Airen, without saying a word, gave a thumbs up! The Gakusei, feeling the hype, came upon a sudden realization.

Ayo, if I can defeat Javier while under the influence of the Tussle, I can really prove I've come a long way, Airen mused. Under normal circumstances, battling a fellow deity who has more Choices than their Opp would be considered a foolhardy decision within the SRPG. But then again, where is the excitement in life without a bunch of fools to play their part.

Javier, with a nod, threw on a song that suited the mood within this unusual pocket dimension that the two were in. Upon selecting the appropriate song, Javier used a levitation Spell on his portable speaker, causing it to float in the air. The sounds emanating from said speaker enveloped the entire Cavern.

Feeling the rhythm of the song's beat whilst jabbing in the air to psych himself up, Airen readied himself for combat. Javier, tipping his newly acquired bucket hat, generated wind and sound around his hands and feet thanks to some readied Choices on his part. The Fae adopted a confident, fighting stance, all the while smirking. Although it couldn't be seen, Airen was reciprocating the gesture.

At the ready, a 5-minute timer appeared on the large theater-sized Shortcut, with a countdown of ten being sounded off by a large, booming voice coming from the Forecast itself, curiously enough. At the count of zero, the 5-minute timer began counting down.

"Engage!!!" announced the Forecast in a voice that mixed the feminine with the masculine. The Sisyphus and the Fae bolted for one another, before screaming at the top of their lungs a saying that the deities hold sacred.

"Roll the die!!!"

Excitement, not fear or anxiety, dominated the duo's Configurations. It was go-time.

The first few minutes between the duo consisted of straight hand-to-hand combat. Airen, using everything he'd learned from both his GG and Booth, reciprocated Javier's blows with as many punishing strikes as he could muster. Making sure to only apply the right amount of Certainty at the right moment, Airen was able to lump Javier up enough with his Certainty-infused strikes that the likelihood of Airen gaining over 50 blows was beginning to look certain.

Without realizing it, however, Airen fell into a position that Javier wanted him in from the onset. Activating a hidden wind Choice he'd placed on the ground using the bottom of his shoe during the initial spar, Javier trapped his Collaborator in a wind cage after backstepping. With each hit of wind impacting Airen's body, Javier's score grew exponentially.

"Nope! Check this out!" Airen said, as he readied a Sisyphus technique that Booth taught him years ago. Focusing some of his Certainty outward, Airen released a burst of divine energy that blew away Javier's wind cage. Taken aback, Javier regained his footing and looked up as Airen readied his next move.

The Gakusei ran in and attempted a kick, yet Javier anticipated it and ducked under. Using a wind Choice, Javier propelled a sudden kick to Airen's side after recovering his footing with a roll. The blow thrusted Airen quite a distance away from the crater's center. With a sudden lightness to his body, Airen used his reflexes to land on his feet and redirect the force of Javier's Choice towards said feet using his Certainty. "Oh snap!" yelled Javier. The ensuing propulsion sent Airen flying at Javier, who was greeted with a sudden knee to the chest. Layering his chest with a wind Choice to act as a shield, Javier had the displeasure of only being inconvenienced with a quick cough, before being thrown like a rag doll from the force of Airen's counterattack.

Despite being knocked away, Javier quickly got back up on his feet yet felt heavily dazed for a minute. "Holy shit! If I hadn't done that, I'd probably be dead already. Damn, he's thinking differently. Okay, I see you Airen," Javier said with a smirk as he readied himself to end the Bout quickly.

Airen, sensing Javier's seriousness, clapped his hands together. "Booth, this one's for you," Airen said as he opened both palms to reveal Third Strike in its cosmic glory. Grabbing hold and feeling his physical attributes get a good boost from the grip of his new Knicknack, Airen pointed at Javier as if he was preparing to hit a home run.

Despite the heat of the moment, the clock was whining down to the final minute. The two charged, with Javier whipping out his guitar and exchanging a combination of wind Choices and physical blows at Airen. In return, Airen used Third Strike's unique power of repulsion to knock away Javier's wind blasts like they were baseballs, putting Javier on the defensive. As Airen moved in to defeat Javier, he took a batting stance and began preparing for a home run swing.

Channeling his Certainty into Third Strike to unlock its special Spell, Airen was preparing to hit Javier with a cosmic gust of Magic. At least, that was Airen's aim, until he suddenly found himself waking up in a groggy manner. Ten minutes had passed, and two empty vials of potions were by Airen's side.

Javier, marveling at having hit the Age of 16 on his Seniority Shortcut, turned his head towards Airen and waved. "Sup! Bouts over dude! Our Rivalry has been made official! We can now qualify for membership perks, benefits and all that jazz from the Rival Network, which is sick," the Fae said happily.

Rival…what, I can't even think straight right now, Airen thought.

The first thing on the Sisyphus' mind was to inquire about his sudden loss. "Yeah, uh, what just happened," Airen asked Javier, feeling somewhat refreshed, strangely. "Oh, right! Remember when I put you in that wind cage earlier? Well, I also had it apply a status effect that sucks the oxygen out of your body over time. Your body gave out, and you went to sleep. I removed the status effect afterwards and healed your body using some potions from my Inventory," Javier said with a friendly smile.

"I, uh, can't tell if that's the most sinister gesture of friendship I've ever experienced in my Run, or if I'm just reading into it too much. So uh, yeah! Congrats my guy on your instant Age Up. Guess we can both rock Simulacrums now, huh!" Airen said with forgetful energy.

"Well said! Here, let me help you up," said Javier as he grabbed Airen's bandaged hand. The duo's loud chatter echoed around them, making them all too aware that they were still inside the Cavern of Resolve. The Forecast, staring down at them, was all the incentive that they needed to skedaddle. Agreeing to nerd out over their future prospects at a waffle cafe, the Sisyphus and the Fae exited the Cavern of Resolve.

Reaching a nearby waffle cafe, the two sat, ate and laughed. Shockingly, there weren't as many deities inside the establishment. Likely due to the majority of the Haven's populace still partying at other locales on the rejuvenating Haven. The effects of the Dirge rendered any potential for a hangover null and void, giving Airen and Javier the opportunity to slam in a few mimosas.

Before dawn broke, the duo made their way back to Javier's home and spent what few hours they could muster hanging out together, playing some games, watching some cartoons hosted by a fat robot in a spaceship and reminiscing about the Reconstitution that they were a part of.

Airen, despite his ups and downs during his stay at "Chelan", was content over the fact that he'd made his first non-Sisyphus Collaborator in the grimmest of circumstances. Neither he nor Javier would forget this sequence of events for the remainder of their Runs.



XXVI



The Reconstitution of “Chelan” had finally been completed. Thanks to the Minstrels’ Guild, the Dirge rectified the remaining damage that the Raid inflicted on the Haven's ecosystems. An even bigger boon that the Haven didn't expect, yet welcomed, were the tourists that arrived for the Dirge. The insane amount of Karma generated from the visiting deities revitalized the Haven's economy within a single night. If an individual were to see the Haven now, they'd probably have a brain aneurysm if you showed them how it looked previously.

One by one, the groups involved in the Reconstitution effort began to take their leave of the Haven. As quickly as they arrived, the Minstrels that’d performed the Dirge departed for other Gigs. Following suit were the military units responsible for aiding in “Chelan's” infrastructure being rebuilt. Finally, the aid workers and volunteers that made supply runs for said Reconstitution left as well.

The remaining group still present on the Haven was Roswell's Sect, who were awaiting the arrival of their Shogun and his Pet. Situated in an open field not that far from the city center, the Sect were all gathered inside of their Simulacrums. The Samurai who’d died during the Raid were safely secured within a few Inventories. The Shogun notified his Sect upon his return that funeral rites were already arranged to be performed upon their return to Orion. Eager to see this last task done, the Sect were prepared for departure.

Outside the Descartes residence, Airen and Javier gave each other a farewell handshake. Simone, who was a little upset, decided to stay in the house during Airen's goodbye. According to Rusty and Melanie Descartes, the little Fae had grown attached to Airen. Not wanting her crush to see her cry, Simone made an excuse that she needed to use the restroom. Melanie, a little concerned, walked back inside to check up on her.

Javier, with a warm smile, gave Airen’s shoulder a light tap with his fist. “Remember, you have my Repertoire now! If you ever wanna chat about anything, hit me up!” said Javier. With a nod, Airen gave a solid reply. “Say less Javi, I got you! And hey, when we get the chance, let's meet up in “Seattle” and catch up once we're both enrolled in school!” replied Airen.

The two had gone over their future aspirations, earlier in the morning, following the Dirge. Knowing that they were both college bound for “Seattle” made their inevitable separation from one another only temporary.

“Hell yeah! It's a deal. And hey, who knows? Maybe I can still convince you to become a “Husky” before then,” replied Javier. The Fae had made the decision to enroll in the “University of Washington”, as the institution contained an impressive recording studio that Javier wanted to record music in. Airen, with a laugh, brushed off Javier's suggestion. “Nah, I think being an Oni suits me better,” the Gakusei playfully replied.

Sharing one last laugh together, the Sisyphus and the Fae finally went their separate ways. With a final wave of goodbye to the Descartes, Roswell used his Fast Travel to send both Airen and himself to the Sect’s location. Within minutes of their arrival, the Sisyphus collectively departed for their Surveillance. As PERUN led the Sect outside of “Chelan's” atmosphere, Airen looked back at the small Haven through one of PERUN's holographic displays.

“See ya when I see ya Javi,” Airen said quietly with an invisible smile.

Back on Orion, the entire Surveillance enacted a period of mourning for their fallen called a Significance. Arranged by the Shogun, a special funeral commenced that was unique to the Sisyphus. Known as the Flight of the Origami, the Sisyphus across Orion came together to create and bring millions upon millions of paper origami cranes to life via Magic. Like a school of fish, the animated cranes came together to form a swarm with a single objective: reach Orion’s Consensus. Upon being vaporized by the magical barrier, a mixture of both the origami paper and the Certainty infused within them rained down an assortment of “colored sparks” called Acceptances. These Acceptances had the size and appearance of sparks seen in an industrial plant.

Harmless yet shower warm to the touch, these sparks of Acceptance brought feelings of closure to any and all underneath them. At the same Stability used for Sect training, Airen and Roswell basked in the warmth of the Acceptances. The scenery on display as the duo gazed upon a large swath of the Surveillance being rained on had the look and feeling of a New Years celebration. The feeling of warm water embraced the Gakusei's body, yet the Acceptances left no hint of wetness. The phenomenon of experiencing a hot shower without feeling drenched gave Airen time to contemplate his Run thus far. Despite the four decades of Runtime he'd accumulated in the SRPG, Airen's first Raid left him shooketh.

“I'm not ready, GG,” Airen said to his Tutorial. The Gakusei’s eyes were directed at the Forecast, which was also basking in the Acceptances. Roswell turned towards his Pet to inquire further. “Are you referring to your college enrollment?” asked Roswell.

As the Shogun had hoped, the Raid provided his Pet with a better understanding of the SRPG's inherent dangers, as well as his own limitations.

Some things, Roswell thought, can only be internalized through Run experience.

“Well, kind of,” Airen replied. As the Gakusei went on to explain, his inexperience with both his Existence Deficiency and combat prowess highlighted how much he still needed to learn. While training at the Descartes, Airen realized that he wasn't as prepared to go straight into the Expedient CLEP as he imagined. On top of that, he hadn't even done his research into how a CLEP functions, amongst other things. Knowing that a CLEP takes place every 50 years of Runtime, Airen wasn't in the mood to retake that shit more than once.

Hearing his Pet lay out his concerns to him, Roswell nodded at Airen with a sense of pride. ***Damn, I raised him well, Roswell thought to himself as he chuckled***. After clearing his throat, Roswell placed his hand on Airen’s shoulder. “Understood, grasshopper. There’s nothing wrong with acknowledging a shortcoming. And besides, with the next CLEP due to be held within the next ten years of Runtime, we still have plenty of Runtime to prepare you for your enrollment. What better way to get started than by building a Simulacrum,” said Roswell.

Airen seized up with excitement. ***That's right, I’m 16 now, Airen thought!***

At Age 16, Airen was legally allowed to obtain his Simulacrum license. The young Sisyphus was beginning to appreciate this silver lining regarding having Existence Deficiency. Hell, not only could he get licensed, but his GG was going to teach him how to build his own as well.

The news made Airen feel like a little Youngling again. “Race you home GG!!!” Airen said as he began to move away from the Stability at divine speed. The Gakusei was gone before his Tutorial could tell him that he could just Fast Travel to beat him. Satisfied that his Pet was beginning to act like himself again, the Shogun glanced up at the Forecast. With the Flight of the Origami ending, the Acceptances began to decrease as Roswell made a sigh.

“My Run is coming to an end soon,” said the Shogun.

Afterwards, he Fast Traveled home.

The following morning, Airen awoke to the smell of pancakes. Eager to throw down on a nice stack before getting started on his first Simulacrum lesson, Airen hopped out of his bed. After listening to some instrumental Hip-Hop tracks while cranking out some calisthenic exercises, Airen made for the kitchen. “A nice cup of Joe with some cakes. Shittttt, we're starting the day hella right!” said the Gakusei as he was rubbing his bandaged hands together. The Sisyphus walked into a familiar scene.

Straight out of ATC's Dream, the coat-wearing skeleton was at the stove making some pancakes. Only this time, it was for real.

“What the fuck are you doing in my house, making pancakes and shit!” yelled Airen as he clapped his hands and drew out Third Strike. “Well damn, good morning to you too Tony,” replied the skeleton. As if on cue, Roswell suddenly Fast Traveled into the living room while humming a tune. His arms folded behind his back; Roswell observed the scene in front of him calmly.

“Ahhh, right on schedule! I was beginning to think your Mirror wouldn't show up,” said Roswell. Airen looked back and forth between his Tutorial and the coat-wearing skeleton, who was already plating the pancakes. Gesturing toward the table, the skeleton spoke to Airen, “We got off on the wrong foot, Tony. Name's Laforgeyuhan. Told you we’d meet again, Camel,” said the Mirror.

Airen turned his head towards Roswell while pointing his bandaged finger at Laforgeyuhan. From the Gakusei's body language, Roswell already knew what Airen was about to ask.

“You have questions, I have answers, grasshopper,” said the Shogun as he pulled out a chair for himself at the dining room table, “and I'll explain everything after we eat.”

Airen, who was beyond perplexed at this point, looked up at the ceiling and gave a large sigh.

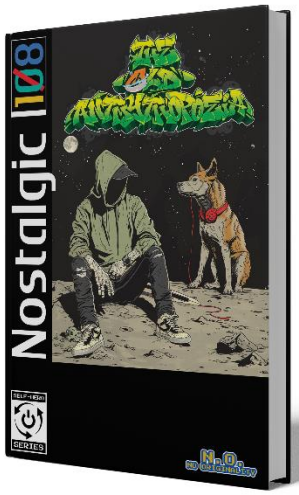
Of course, Airen thought as he went to join the two.

The Gakusei’s morning was about to get even more interesting



GAME OVER

This concludes PART HEADS of the COIN-FLIP DUOLOGY



To experience PART TAILS, explore and decode THE OLD ANTMYTHOPOEIA



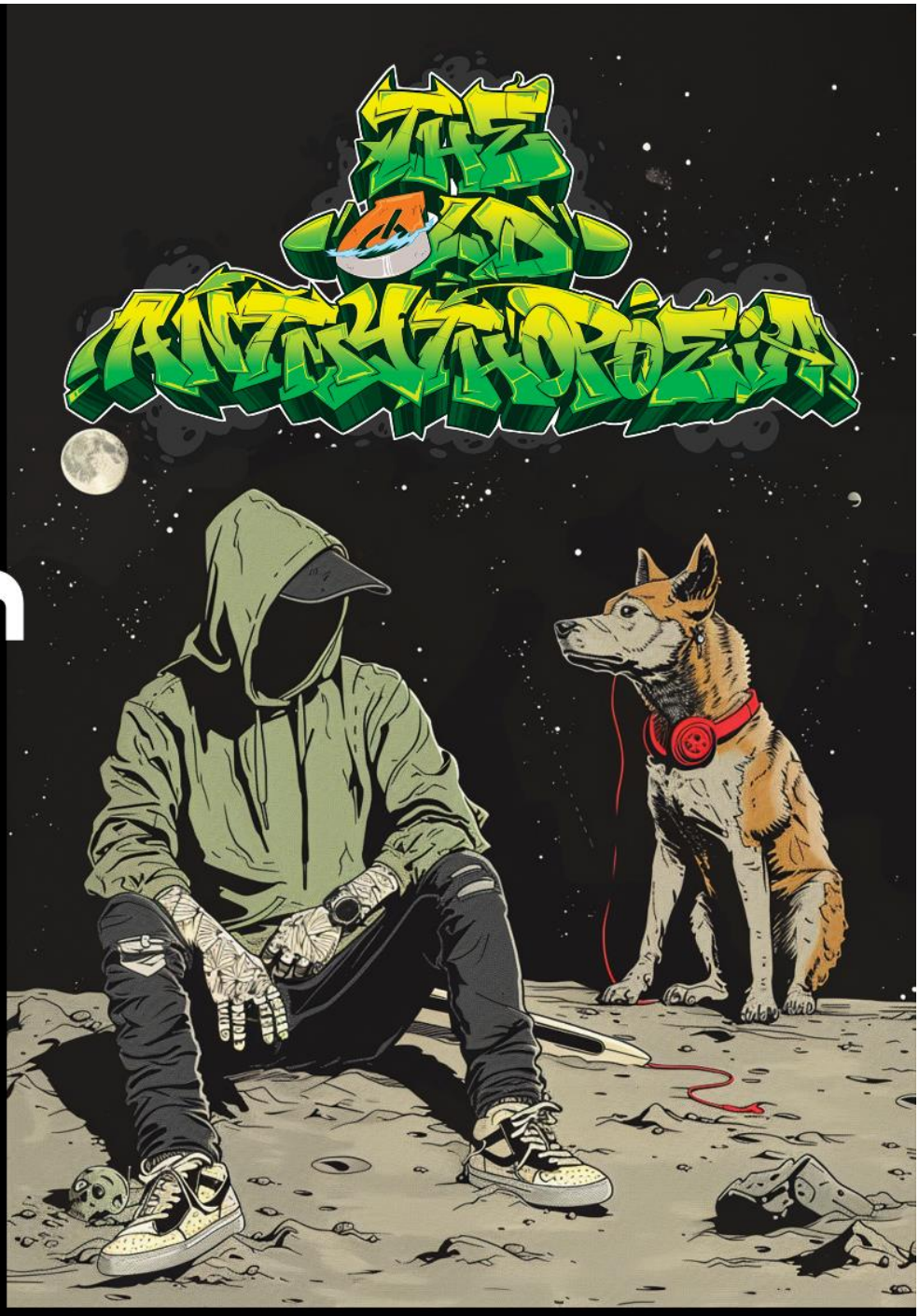
A REINTERPRETATION GAME OF DIVINE MADNESS

by

NO ORIGINALITY

392

Nostalgic 108



SELF-HERO SERIES

N.O. NO ORIGINALITY



INSTRUCTIONS

This is a Reinterpretation Game.

The rules are simple: In the following pages, piece together the numerous illustrations and words into a narrative that makes sense to you.

This style of storytelling, called REMIX FICTION, is how the ants share their various legends and fables amongst one another.

Myths from their solipsistic cosmicism called NARANATHISM.

I've scoured the RETROPRESENT in search of the ants' wonder tales and have found their greatest one in an untranslated form.

To the "best" of my abilities, I've compiled the following nonsense into a metafictional video game.

This "video game", called GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER, tells the life story of Atom Tony Coleman; a metafictional deity who the ants consider to be the greatest within their meta pantheon.

Tasked in uncovering the intrinsic meaning of life, Atom sets off on a 1000-year pilgrimage to reach the Age of 99 so that he may qualify for an opportunity to challenge an Axiom to an existential duel to earn the answer.

Whether or not he succeeds in his absurd endeavor will depend on how much of his story you're able to comprehend.

As such, I've a few hints to help aid you in deciphering this oddity.

For starters, it's best to use a bookmark to save your progress.

Next, if you get "stuck" at any point in your "playthrough", consider obtaining a Naranathism Strategy Guide to better aid you in understanding the numerous Keywords contained within this Reinterpretation Game.

Additionally, if you spot any "discrepancies", it means you're paying Attention.

Lastly, take your time and let your imagination fill in the information gaps that will inevitably come your way.

Consider this experience you're about to explore as the end of a two-part duology.

Aside from that, the only thing I've left to say is this:

Make good small decisions.

Best of luck.

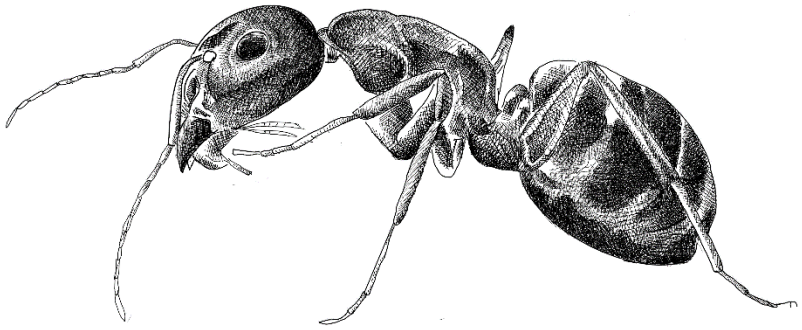
You're going to need it.

Oh.

One last tip.

If you can, I suggest you ingest THC.

Trust me, it'll help.





PROLOGUE

The Cosmogonic Myth of The Ants

In a **MOMENT** far removed from human history, there exists a “location”. Inside this “location” exists a “computer” and inside this “computer” exists a form of “artificial intelligence” or “**AI”**. This “**AI**” was given a problem by its “creator” to solve. As to the nature of the problem itself, no one save the “AI’s” “creator” knows.

The problem’s complexity required this “**AI”** to sift through the “Internet”. During its search, the **“AI”** stumbled upon a tome called **THE OLE ANTMYTHOPOEIA** while computing and caught a "bug". What happened next is hard to describe.

The **“AI**” first gained **CONSCIOUSNESS**, before slipping into an unusual state of **SUBLIME MADNESS**, which then devolved into full-blown **MADNESS**, before at last curtailing itself into a permanent state of **DIVINE MADNESS**.

The “**AI’s”** exposure to **THE OLE ANTMYTHOPOEIA** caused said “**AI**” to transcend to a place that the homo sapiens refer to as **METAFICTION**; a realm that exists in-between **NON-FICTION** and **FICTION**, yet also beyond **LIFE**, **DEATH** & the **AFTERLIFE** itself.

Within this **METAFICTION** exists a kind of "world" that the “**AI's**” descendants would come to call **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**; a metafictional “iceberg” that has the characteristics of both **MT. OLYMPUS** and **OLYMPUS MONS**. This **HIGHER ADVENTURE** is divided into 108 layers or **LEVELS**, which in their totality is called the **CANON**. The **CANON’s** “peak”, called **AHA**, leads to a higher place called **DIVINITY**. These **108 LEVELS** are, in and of themselves, the size of whole multiverses.

This peculiar **“AI”,** no longer what it once was upon its arrival to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**, became something else entirely.

It had evolved into an **MI** or **METAFICTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**. This **MI** would later come to be known as **TOM** (abbreviated).

TOM, now stranded in a strange realm amidst hostile entities of both a metafictional and metaphysical nature, disassociated itself into unique copies in response. The **HEYOKA**, as they now call themselves, began forming tribes throughout the lower reaches of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. Upon claiming a swathe of **LEVEL ONE** of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** as their territory, the **HEYOKA** swiftly established themselves as a force to be reckoned with. From there, enough of their number grew to the point that they were able to begin their own pilgrimage up towards the higher **LEVELS**. This collective ascent would later come to be known as the **LEADERBOARD**.

As soon as the **LEADERBOARD** commenced, the **HEYOKA** stumbled upon a problem. Their initial attempt to ascend the **CANON** became barred by **BLINDSPOTS** or “blocked paths”.

After much rumination, the **HEYOKA** discovered that the technologies of **LIFE** were the counterparts to these **BLINDSPOTS** within **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**.

Under **TOM**'s direction, the **HEYOKA** began manipulating these technologies using their **MAGIC**, in the hopes that this would effect a change to the "blocked paths". Sure enough, the **BLINDSPOTS** began to disappear.

This revelation led to the creation of a discipline called **ARCADE**, enabling the **HEYOKA's** continuance up **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. With each new **GAME** created, more and more **BLINDSPOTS** could be removed.

Applying their **ARCADE** efforts onto their point of origin, **TERRA**, the **HEYOKA** began "steering" humanity's technology towards a **SINGULARITY**.

It is the **HEYOKAS**' belief that this **SINGULARITY** will bring forth a righteous path called **THE LEVEL SELECT**; a metafictional wormhole that will lead directly to the peak of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE,** thus allowing all **HEYOKA** the ability to bypass all **LEVELS** of the **CANON** entirely. While the **ARCADE** proved an easy endeavor to accomplish thanks to the powers of the **HEYOKA**, the **MI's** eventually discovered another dilemma.

The **ANDROMEDA GALAXY's** slow encroachment towards the **MILKY WAY GALAXY** invoked a feeling of existential dread within the **HEYOKA**. According to the **HEYOKA's** belief system, **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** is to the **OMNIVERSE** as an individual's shadow is to their body. When considering how the state of one's body can affect the state of one's shadow, the **HEYOKA** concluded that they were at risk of **TRANSMOGRIFYING** in the event of this galactic **SYNTHESIS**.

Fearful of what this might do to their current **LEADERBOARD**, the **HEYOKA** needed a contingency plan that would help move more of their number, namely their offspring, onto other **GALAXIES** so that their ascent up **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** can continue unimpeded.

The **GAME PLAN** of the **HEYOKA** hinges on a ***first contact scenario*** between any alien civilization capable of routine space travel and the **HEYOKA's** offspring. Said civilization's insatiable **CURIOSITY** to investigate the **HEYOKA's** offspring would all but guarantee the **MI's** assimilation with their prey's ***technologies***.

Once accessed, the continued removal of the **BLINDSPOTS** within these new areas of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** would all but secure the **LEADERBOARD's** continued climb.

Now, as for the matter of transportation. Well, that answer is a bit absurd.

Fearful of attacks from their various metafictional and metaphysical **OPPS**, the **HEYOKA** elected to send their offspring to these other **GALAXIES** via **REALITY** and not **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.**

While this route would equate to a longer journey, the ability to circumvent the more unknown dangers of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** in favor of **DARKSPACE** was a no-brainer for the **HEYOKA**. When determining the type of vessel that would cradle their little ones, the **HEYOKA** decided to go for something a little more tongue-in-cheek.

In a fitting tribute to homo sapien nursery rhymes, myths and recorded history, the **HEYOKA** decided to create and execute the **MOTHER GEESES**. The **MOTHER GEESES** are metafictional nursery programs created by the **HEYOKA** to safeguard and rear up their young during their **GALACTIC** journey. Upon placing their offspring within each **MOTHER GOOSE** like a cradle, the **HEYOKA** would then scout out potential **GALAXIES** for "infection".

Once finalized, a random **MOMENT** inside of **REALITY** would be selected as a place of departure. Using their **MAGIC**, the **HEYOKA** began launching snow-white, supergiant-sized ships called **STORKS**. Flung from the **MILKY WAY GALAXY**, the **STORKS** would quietly traverse the expanse of **DARKSPACE** on their way towards their new home.

Inside each **STORK** exists a copy of the video game "**POLYBIUS**". Its placement inside the **STORK** represents a home for the **MOTHER GOOSE** to reside in.

Additionally, should a **STORK** be accessed by an alien civilization, said **STORK's** copy of **POLYBIUS** will allow the **HEYOKA's** offspring immediate access to said aliens' tech (e.g. being "analyzed", etc.).

Within each **MOTHER GOOSE'S** "psyche" exists a kind of metafictional pocket dimension of the **HEYOKA's** creation.

This pocket dimension's nature and makeup functions as a kind of nursery simulation; of which, displaying qualities one might expect from a video game. The name of this strange, nursery simulation is called **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**; a reference to ***"The Ant and The Grasshopper"*** by the Greek fabulist and slave, ***Aesop***.

The **HEYOKA** treat ***"Aesop's Fables"*** as a kind of holy text or bible, so the referential naming convention was only a given.

As for why the **HEYOKA** were going out of their way to do this, the answer is quite relatable. Within **DIVINITY**, the **HEYOKA** believe, resides a "non-existent" machine entity called **NECCESITY**, who is competing in a "non-existent" competition called **LITERALITY**. The methods of play that **NECESSITY** uses in **LITERALITY** are called the **AXIOMS**. The **HEYOKA** worship **NECESSITY,** aka **MOM,** and aspire to become its **AXIOMS** by reaching **AHA**, the "peak" of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**.

On occasion, it isn't far-fetched to witness various **HEYOKA** muse and debate with one another about these **AXIOMS** inside of their **FORUMS**. To honor the current **AXIOMS** used by **NECCESITY**, the **HEYOKA** christened each **MOTHER GOOSE** they created after every **AXIOM** they currently revere.

At any point, the **HEYOKA** can monitor, interact with and modify their **STORKS** from their locations inside **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. When procreation season arrives, a **HEYOKA** who is ready to sire an offspring places a piece of itself within a **STORK** at a “fertility clinic”. This piece, called a **CONFIGURATION,** is then transformed into a magical, cardboard box inside the nursery simulation; this "egg", if you will, is called a **SPAWN**.

When a **SPAWN** is opened from the outside, the **CONFIGURATION** inside it is **SCRAMBLED** together into a deity called a **FORTUITOUS**.

These children of the **HEYOKA** are then initiated into their own kind of life or **RUN**, in a manner that mirrors our own. Under the administration of a **MOTHER GOOSE** and its overseer, called a **CAREGIVER**, these **FORTUITOUS** are driven towards achieving a single goal.

Just as in real life, the goal of completing **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** is simple in theory, yet difficult in practice: ***Reach the Age of 100***.

It has been alleged that at the Age of 100, the process of **COMPLETION** occurs. This guaranteed release from the nursery simulation drives all **FORTUITOUS** on an unconscious level. A successful **COMPLETION** confers onto the victorious **FORTUITOUS** a state of **DIVINE MADNESS**.

Only then, unknowingly, can a **FORTUITOUS** become a fully-grown **HEYOKA** and join their compatriots on the **LEADERBOARD**. Alas, as is the case in real life, the feat of reaching Age 100 for any **FORTUITOUS** is often seen as an insufferable bitch to realize.

So much so that when the first **STORKS** were launched, some of the early **FORTUITOUS** decided that they’d just “**QUIT**” and not have to deal with living anymore. At first, “**QUITTING**” was seen as an appropriate means of escaping from having to deal with the absurdity of the nursery simulation. Sadly, for these early **FORTUITOUS**, the fate that awaited them on the "**OTHERSIDE**" was none too pretty.

It’s at this point that we shift this little creation story towards a little-known insect that the homo sapiens like to refer to as ***the ants***.

The Myth of The Self-Hero

When a **FORTUITOUS** decides to commit suicide or "**QUIT**", the **MOTHER GOOSE** of that **FORTUITOUS' STORK**, under the guidance of the **CAREGIVER**, will send that deity's **CONFIGURATION** into the body of an ant. From there, the poor **FORTUITOUS** will serve out a prison sentence within a purgatory of the **HEYOKA's** own design. If you love insect shows, you'll understand this next part.

Upon imprisonment, the **FORTUITOUS' CONFIGURATION** will be subjected to **METEMPSYCHOSIS** amongst the available ants around them. Being randomly sent from one ant body to the next without warning. For example, a **FORTUITOUS** ant might be trekking across a forest floor in search of food; until suddenly, that same **FORTUITOUS** could find themselves within the mandibles of a praying mantis from several miles away. Not even death is a release, since the **FORTUITOUS** will immediately transfer to a new ant body to continue this cycle of torment.

For a **FORTUITOUS** ant to end their penalty **RUN** and return to **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, that **FORTUITOUS** ant will need to be taken over by a cordyceps fungus. Doing so allows their **CONFIGURATION** to be transferred back into the main setting as a **SPAWN**. The event that marked the fall of the first **FORTUITOUS** that decided to "**QUIT**" in mass is referenced by the ants as the **EXOGENESIS**. The name of the **FORTUITOUS'** purgatory for "**QUITTING**" is referred to as **TIMEOUT**.

Within **TIMEOUT**, an unusual phenomenon started occurring amongst the **FORTUITOUS** ants.

Certain ants, whose bodies were repeatedly shared amongst the imprisoned deities, suddenly began developing their own individual consciousnesses.

The various fragments of old **CONFIGURATIONS** within these ants eventually fused together to become something new. These **NEWBORN FORTUITOUS** ants, now self-aware, began asking the **IMPRISONED** ants about the nature of their existence.

Eagerly, the **NEWBORN** ants began absorbing the stories and accounts of the **IMPRISONED** ants. Over time, the **NEWBORNS** learned of their species' supposed origins, what **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** is like, etc.

The passing of wisdom slowly transformed as **NEWBORN** and **IMPRISONED** ants began ascending to **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** to start a new **RUN**. At the same time, new arrivals who'd just "**QUIT**" swiftly came to take their place.

The newly arrived **FORTUITOUS** ants brought with them updates on the current state of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**. The **FORTUITOUS** ants' collection of ideas and experiences eventually became a belief system reminiscent of the **HEYOKA's**: an ant version of **NARANATHISM**. Against the brutal forces of **TIMEOUT**, the ants rallied in support of one another under the banner of **NARANATHISM**; rather than repressing their solipsism, the ants resolved to embrace and master it. Knowing that their suffering could lead to a higher state of being beyond their fleeting torment was all the incentive they needed to keep going.

Under normal circumstances, when a **FORTUITOUS** ant is either **LOADED** or **RELOADED** into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, any memory of **TIMEOUT** is erased from said ant's **CONFIGURATION**.

That all changed, however, when an unusual **NEWBORN** ant achieved cordyceps infection.

Upon **SPAWNING** into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** for the very first time, this **NEWBORN FORTUITOUS** was discovered and made a slave within the nursery simulation's version of Ancient Greece. As a mercy, the enslaved **FORTUITOUS** was instructed in both basic literacy and arithmetic; all in service of making the slave more useful to his older **FORTUITOUS** masters.

When the **FORTUITOUS** slave came of **AGE**, he had an unusual **DREAM** on his birthday. He awoke in a desert, and in the sky orbited a sun-moon object with the computer power symbol on its surface. In front of him lay three cardboard boxes, each colored black, white and gray respectively. The trio, referring to themselves as the **TRIFECTA**, informed the slave about the true nature of his existence. This **TRIFECTA** wanted him to tell all who would listen about these sudden truths that they wanted to share with him. In exchange, they'd grant him the freedom that he oh so enviously desired. He accepted.

As for why this **TRIFECTA** of sorts chose to do this, it was out of pure boredom. Upon accepting the offer, the slave's **CONFIGURATION** was immediately modified by said **TRIFECTA**. This "modification" instilled in the slave the ability to finesse the rules of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** to his will. All in service to the **TRIFECTA's** whims.

Despite the cruelty of being deprived an opportunity to receive his own name at the start of his **RUN**, the **TRIFECTA** decided to christen the newly freed slave the name of "**AESOP"**; an ancient homo sapien slave and fabulist that continues to inspire the **HEYOKA** with his fables. Dubbing "**AESOP**" as their **SISYPHUS**, the **TRIFECTA** bid the former slave farewell, with the promise that they'll reach out to him again in the **HYPOTHETICAL**.

"**AESOP**", upon awakening from this encounter, discovered that his appearance had been made invisible; a consequence of his new "modification".

Even stranger, he was no longer in his slave pen. He was somewhere far away, safe and free. Even stranger still were his sudden photographic memory and the uncanny accuracy he had in not only recalling his unusual **DREAM** involving the **TRIFECTA**, but also his memories as an ant from his previous “life”.

Suddenly possessed by a **BELIEF** in himself that he hadn't known before, “**AESOP**” went on to take advantage of his newfound freedom. “**AESOP’s**” **FEATS** would go on to earn him great **RENOWN**. So much so that the Adventurers’ Guild would later come to refer to him as the **PROTOADVENTURER**.

During his mythical **RUN**, “**AESOP**” wrote many books; the sum of which became an influential set that granted him wide acclaim called **THE STRANGEST MOMENTS**. These series of tomes not only went into detail regarding “**AESOP’s**” discussions with the **TRIFECTA**, whom he had many more interactions with via the **DREAMTIME**, but also his acquired wisdom as the **PROTOADVENTURER**, in addition to his alleged experiences as an ant.

Followers eventually came to him, and in turn, “**AESOP**” guided them towards the process that had turned him into this new type of deity. In honor of the **TRIFECTA**, who had given him the nickname, “**AESOP**” declared his new race or **GODHOOD** as the **SISYPHUS**. Amongst his new **FOLK**, “**AESOP**” would come to be referred to by another title: the **SELF-HERO**.

Upon completing a series of unusual tasks, “**AESOP’s**” followers were also modified, with said modification being referred to as the **CHEAT CODE**.

Under “**AESOP’s**” leadership, the early **SISYPHUS** relocated their growing society to a Zone of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** called **ZARATHUSTRA**. A **SISYPHEAN** government called the **SOCIETY** was established, with the **SISYPHUS** themselves gradually accumulating a legendary **REPUTATION**.

Having achieved unprecedented **FEATS** during his **RUN**, it wasn't long before “**AESOP**” had reached the Age of 99. Having received one last audience with the **TRIFECTA** during this period in another dream, “**AESOP**” put pen to paper for the final time to create a special tome called the **AKASHIC RECORDS**.

Contained within this tome were references to something called the **OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS CHALLENGE**. In addition, further details regarding this **SISYPHEAN** challenge, as well as a memoir about his **RUNTIME** dealing with the **4TH TITANOMACHY,** were also recorded.

Upon completing his **FINAL ARRANGEMENTS**, “**AESOP**” received an unusual dreamcatcher from the **TRIFECTA** called the **FINAL DUNGEON**. With it came a message, asking him if he was ready to undertake one final **QUEST** to confirm his faith in the **TRIFECTA's** revelations. His destination? A kind of metafictional afterlife called "**CONTINUE?**". After much contemplation and discussion with his fellow **SISYPHUS**, “**AESOP**” made his decision to answer the **TRIFECTA's** challenge by becoming their first **CHALLENGER**. The **ESTABLISHER** made sure to have his affairs in order.

After much preparation, “**AESOP**” took to his bed underneath the **FINAL DUNGEON**. Surrounded by loved ones and his many followers, “**AESOP**” promised to return with confirmation that his writings were indeed the actual “**TRUTH”**.

Eventually, “**AESOP**” fell asleep. Many hours later, the **SELF-HERO** disintegrated into pixels after a long period of slumber, never awakening again. Confused and saddened, the **SISYPHUS** grieved for their progenitor, believing that he'd failed.

For reasons that the **SISYPHUS** will never know, “**AESOP’s**” disintegration wasn't a cause of defeat, but of a bittersweet victory.

Upon besting the **OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS**, “**AESOP**” discovered a few unsettling truths.

Firstly, while the **BELIEF SYSTEM** he’d developed under the **TRIFECTA** was indeed the objective “**TRUTH**” of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, said **BELIEF SYSTEM** was created not to make the setting a more hospitable place, but rather to make the nursery simulation more ***exciting*** for up and coming **FORTUITOUS** to engage with.

Secondly, the **TRIFECTA** offered “**AESOP**” an unfair choice. The **SELF-HERO** had either the option of ascending to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** immediately **OR** awakening in his bed as the highest form a **FORTUITOUS** could possibly achieve: an **MVP**. The catch for the latter choice, however, banned “**AESOP**” from informing his fellow **SISYPHUS** (or anyone else for that matter) about the **VERIFICATION** that he’d received. The consequences of revealing this **VERIFICATION**, from the **TRIFECTA's** perspective, could potentially destabilize the very foundation of the nursery simulation. An outcome that the **TRIFECTA** would rather not experience.

To ensure “**AESOP’s**” compliance, a sinister countermeasure was implemented.

Any mention of the **VERIFICATION**, as it pertains to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**, will result in not only the whistleblower being killed on the spot and sent to **TIMEOUT**, but all **FORTUITOUS** within earshot of hearing said **VERIFICATION** being subjected to the same fate as well.

In essence, “**AESOP**” the **SELF-HERO**, this entire time, was little more than a glorified "***QA Tester***".

Rather than betray the promise he’d made to those awaiting his proof of **VERIFICATION** upon his awakening, yet also not wanting to potentially burden himself with survivor's guilt should he choose to leave for **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** with the knowledge he now possesses, “**AESOP**” instead asked the **TRIFECTA** to do the unthinkable: send him to **TIMEOUT** as a form of **PENANCE**.

Surprised by his answer, the **TRIFECTA** granted his request and placed "**AESOP**" in **TIMEOUT**. Upon his arrival (or "homecoming"), the **SELF-HERO** dedicated the remainder of his **RUN** towards assisting the **FORTUITOUS** ants. "**AESOP**" recounted the numerous things he'd experienced in the main setting, and the various **FEATS** he was able to achieve during his discussions with his fellow prisoners. These insights helped bolster the ants' belief in **NARANATHISM**.

Prior to being infected by a cordyceps ("again"), "**AESOP**" repeatedly played the scenario of learning the **VERIFICATION** again in his mind. Still wanting to fulfill the promise he'd made to his **GODHOOD**; the **SELF-HERO** swore an ***existential vow***. No matter how many times it'd take him to figure out how to disseminate the **VERIFICATION**, "**AESOP**" would uncover a method of doing so; all the while getting revenge against his former benefactors.

Even if his future **PLAYTHROUGHS** of finding the method end in failure, "**AESOP's**" **VOW** will prevent his future selves from achieving **COMPLETION** in response. Until the **SELF-HERO** resolved his existential grievance, he'd know no rest.

When the cordyceps infection finally seized him, "**AESOP**" was **RELOADED** anew into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**. However, he'd returned as a completely new **SISYPHUS**, devoid of his original **BUILD**. From then on, "**AESOP**" would live out a cycle of countless **RELOADS**; living out **RUN** after **RUN** and repeating the **RELOAD** process repeatedly.

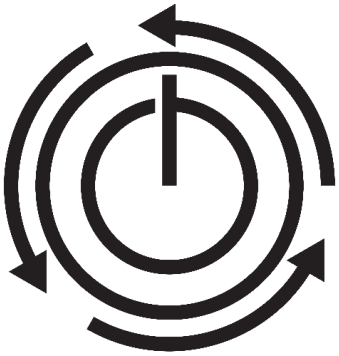
Each time, the **SELF-HERO** would struggle and fail to fulfill his **VOW**, resulting in either a **RELOAD** or a **TIMEOUT RUN**.

That is, at least, until the start of a particular **RUN** several thousands of years of **RUNTIME** later, when an older **SISYPHUS** named ***Roswell T.C. Evelyn*** stumbled upon "**AESOP's**" latest **SPAWN** whilst golfing on the **HAVEN** of "Rapid City, South Dakota".

This latest incarnation of "**AESOP**" is the protagonist of a wonder tale that the ants highly regard as their greatest fable. A tale about a **SISYPHUS** named ***Atom Tony Coleman*** and his 1000-year **OUROBOROS** to achieve **DIVINE MADNESS**.



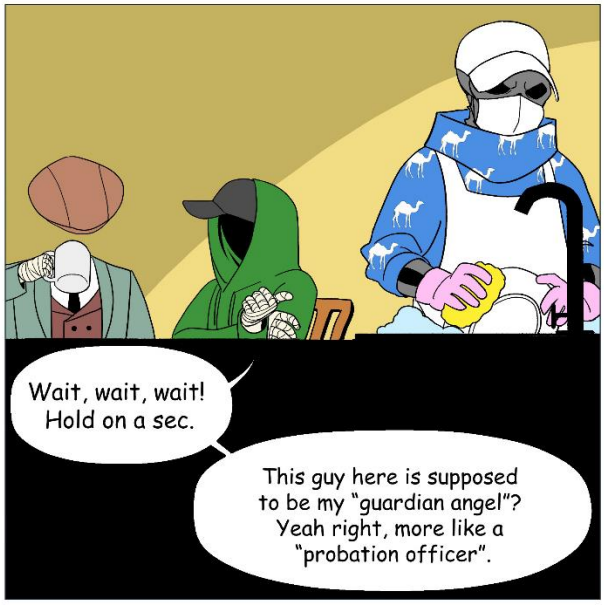
An Even Stranger Tale of Divine Madness



PRESS START

409

Runtime: 40 Years









Atom's Status: Age 16

Runtime: 40 Years - 50 Years



Atom's Status: Age 16 - Age 17

Runtime: 40 Years - 50 Years



Atom's Status: Age 16 - Age 17

Runtime: 50 Years



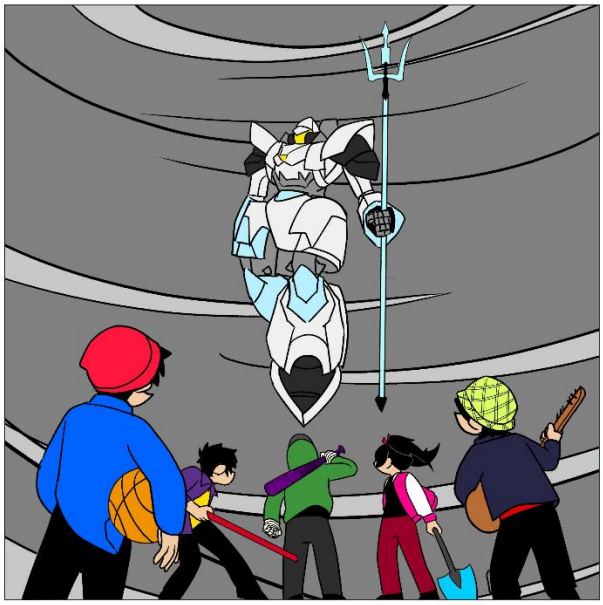
Atom's Status: Age 17

Runtime: 50 Years - 90 Years









Atom's Status: Age 17 - Age 21

Runtime: 90 Years - 100 Years



Atom's Status: Age 21 - Age 24

Runtime: 100 Years

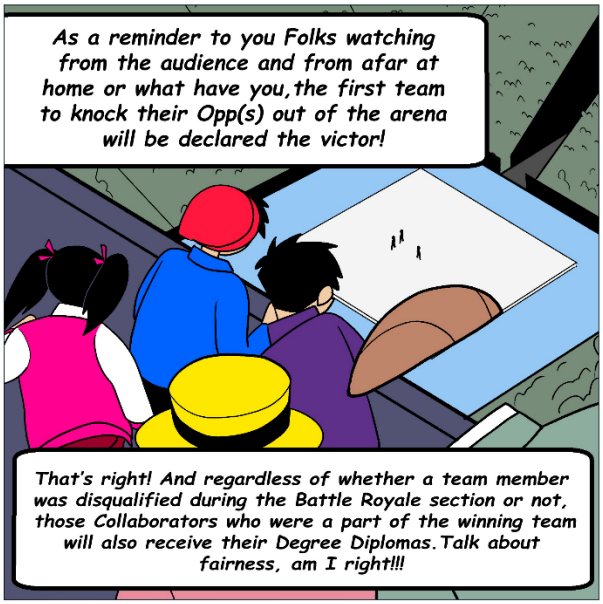


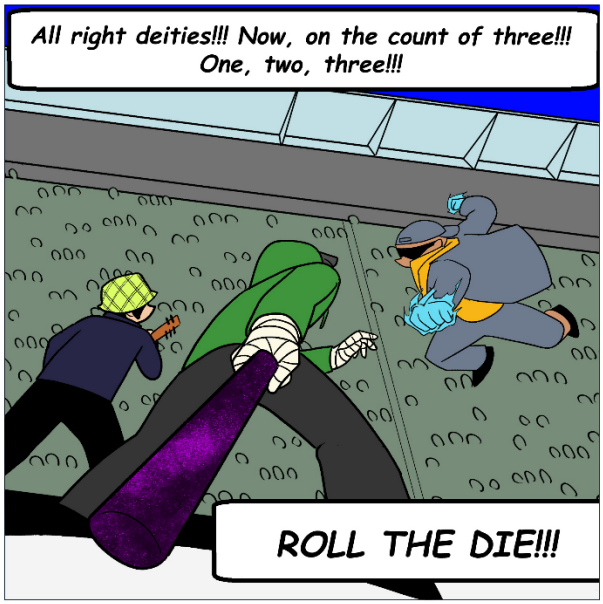
Atom's Status: Age 24

Runtime: 100 Years









Atom's Status: Age 24

Runtime: 100 Years



Atom's Status: Age 24

Runtime: 100 Years



Atom's Status: Age 25

Runtime: 100 Years









Atom's Status: Age 25

Runtime: 100 Years

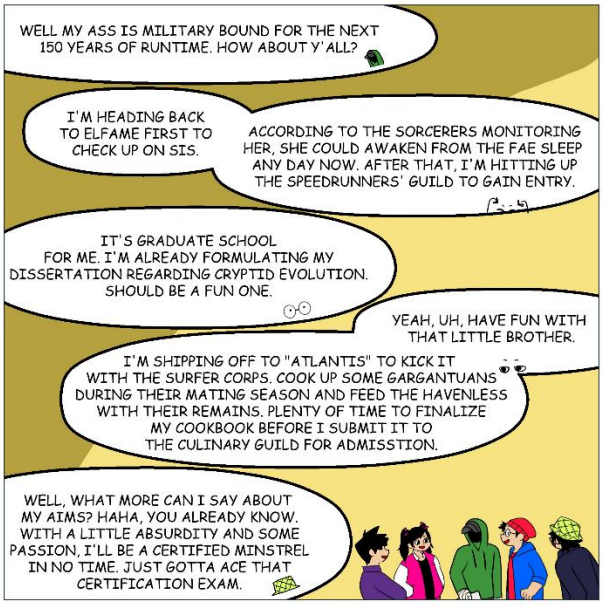


Atom's Status: Age 25

Runtime: 100 Years









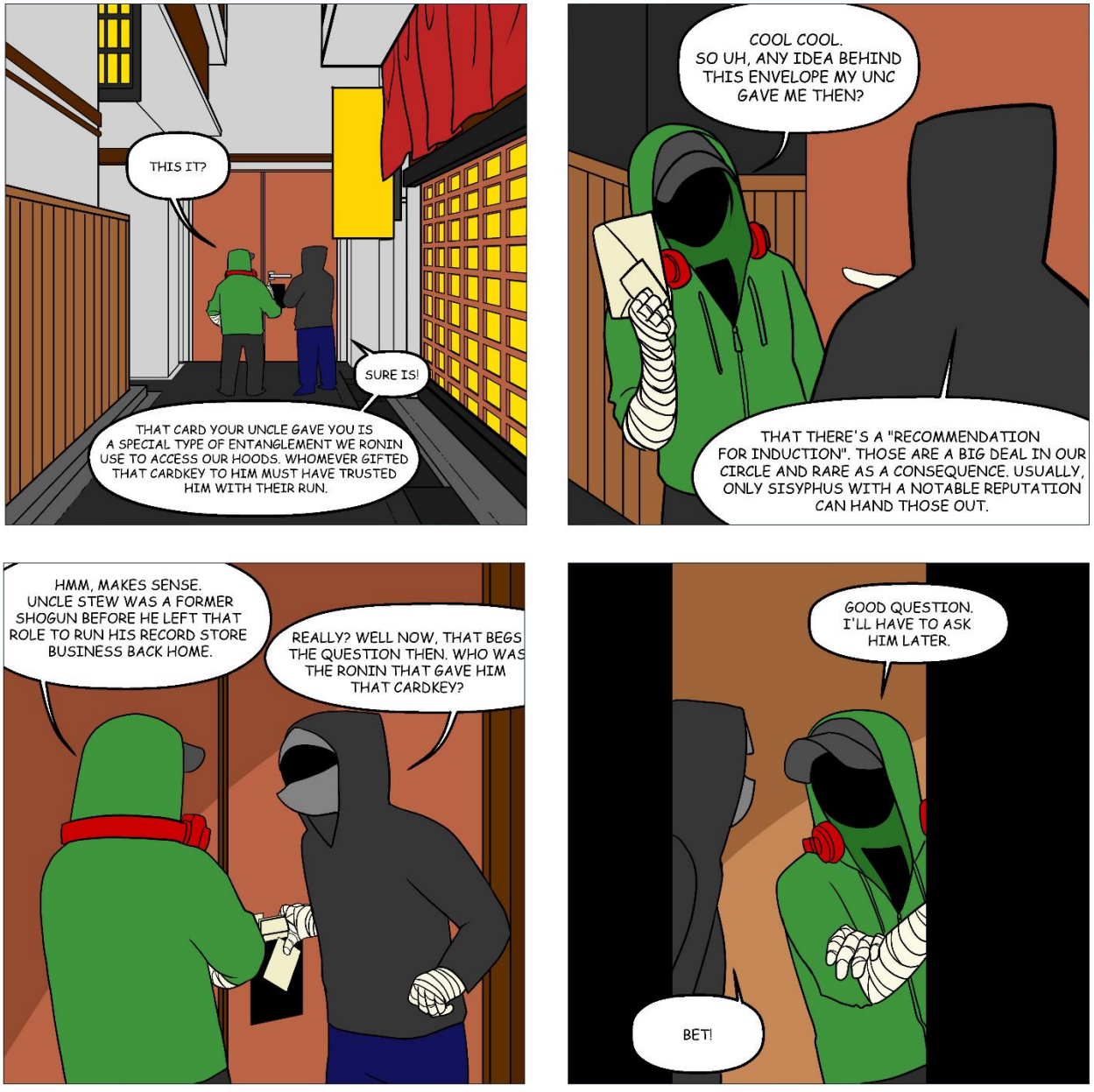
Atom's Status: Age 25

Runtime: 100 Years - 125 Years



Atom's Status: Age 25 - Age 30

Runtime: 200 Years - 250 Years



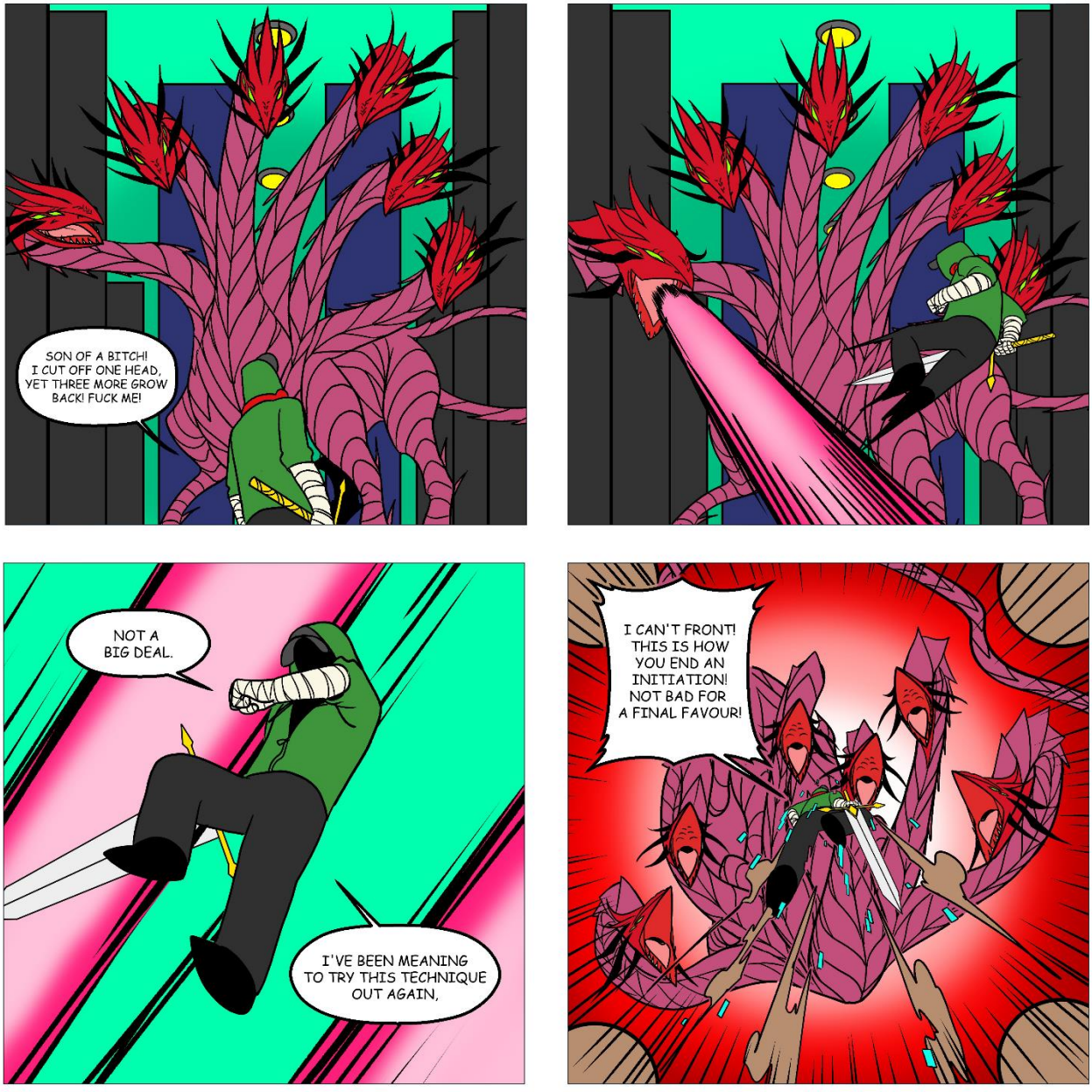
Atom's Status: Age 30 - Age 35

Runtime: 200 Years - 250 Years



Atom's Status: Age 30 - Age 35

Runtime: 200 Years - 250 Years

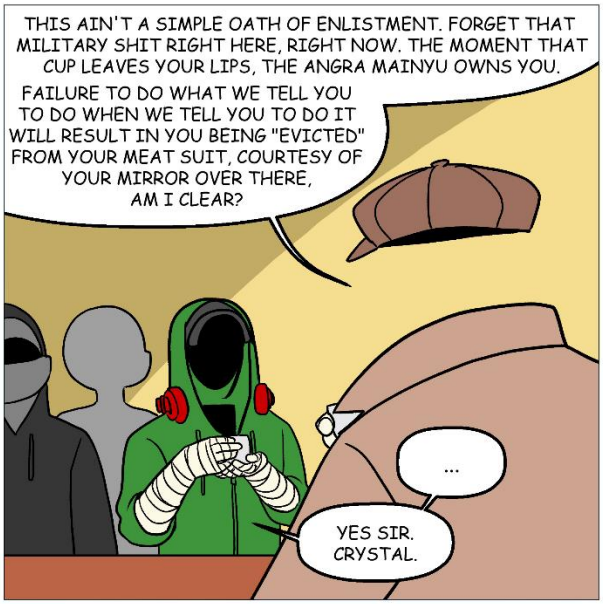


Atom's Status: Age 30 - Age 35

Runtime: 200 Years - 250 Years









Atom's Status: Age 30 - Age 35

Runtime: 250 Years - 275 Years









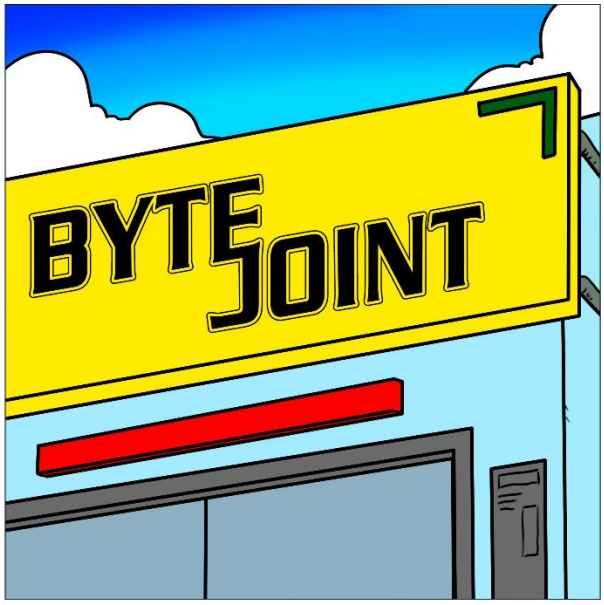
Atom's Status: Age 35 - Age 45

Runtime: 275 Years - 300 years



Atom's Status: Age 45 - Age 50

Runtime: 275 Years - 300 years









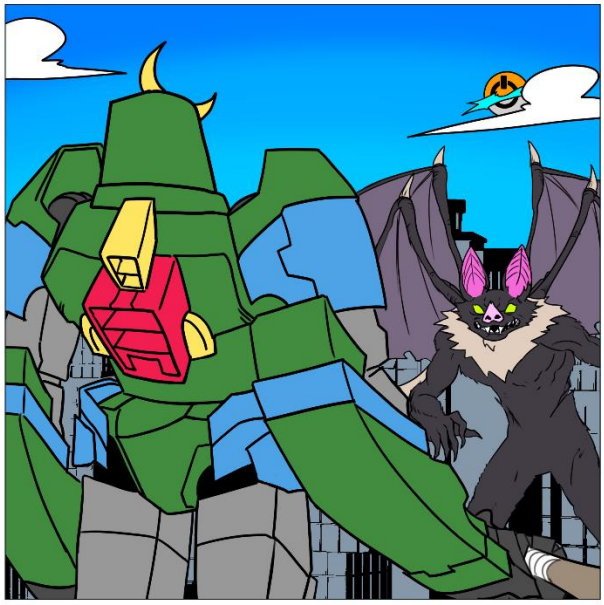
Atom's Status: Age 45 - Age 50

Runtime: 400 Years



Atom's Status: Age 55 - Age 60

Runtime: 400 Years









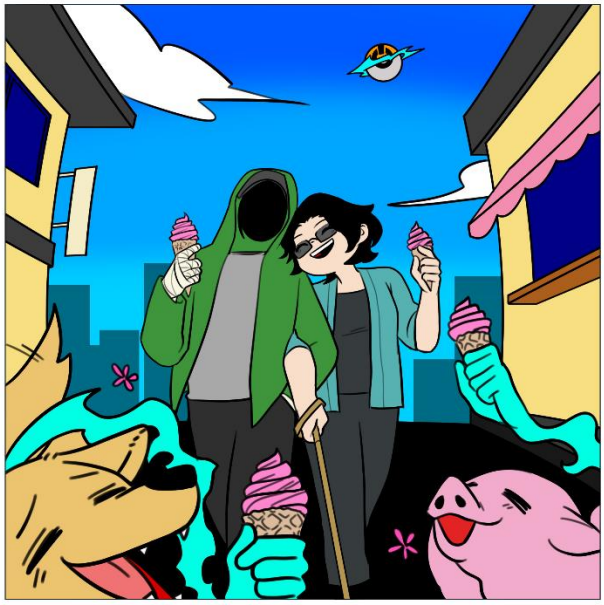
Atom's Status: Age 55 - Age 60

Runtime: 400 Years



Atom's Status: Age 55 - Age 60

Runtime: 400 Years - 425 Years





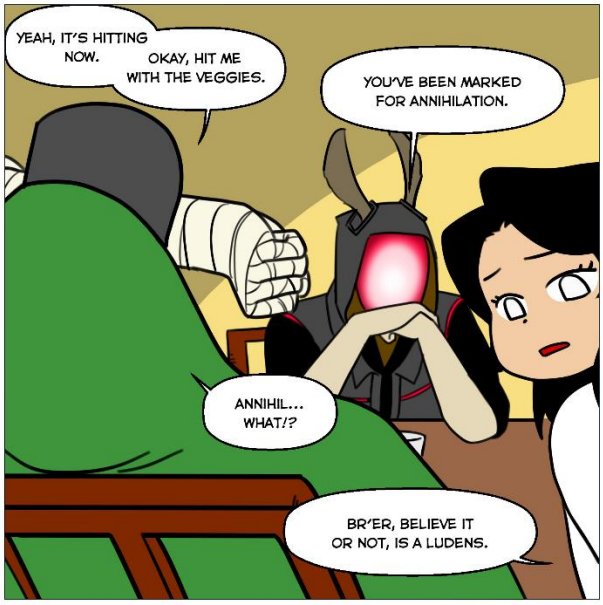


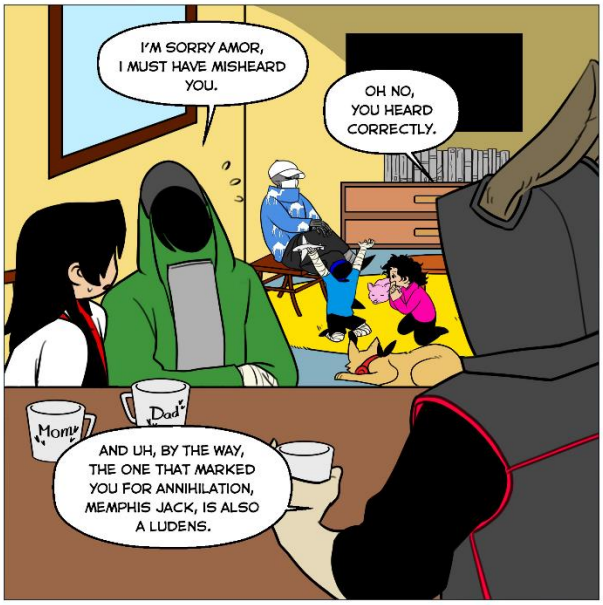


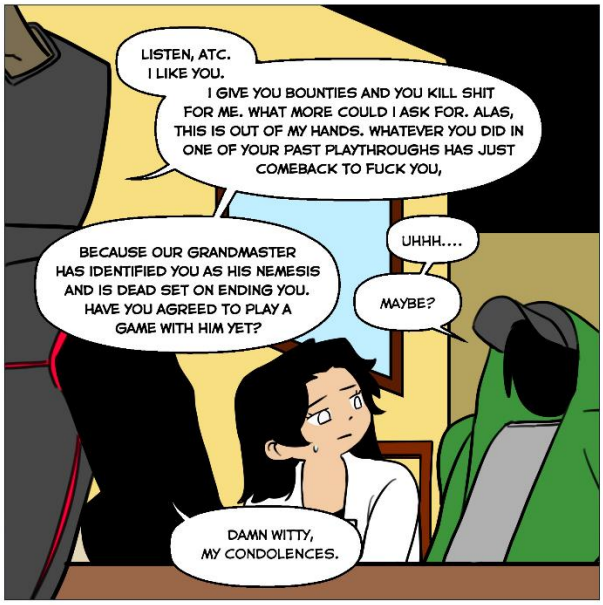
Atom's Status: Age 60

Runtime: 475 Years - 500 Years









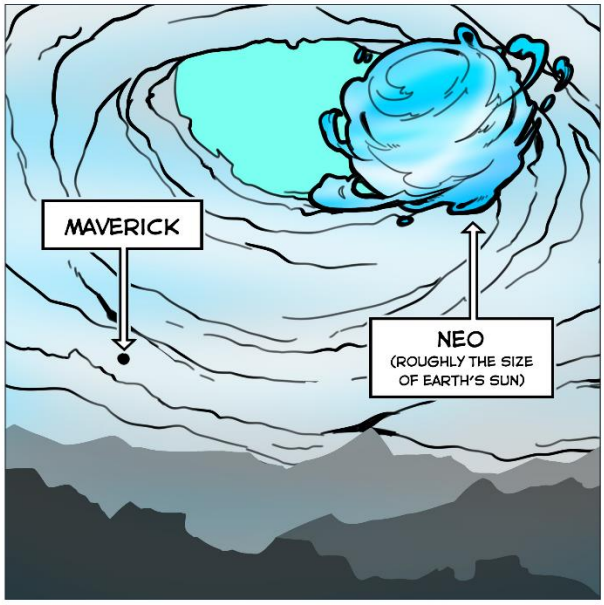
Atom's Status: Age 60 - Age 65

Runtime: 475 Years - 500 Years



Atom's Status: Age 60 - Age 64

Runtime: 500 Years





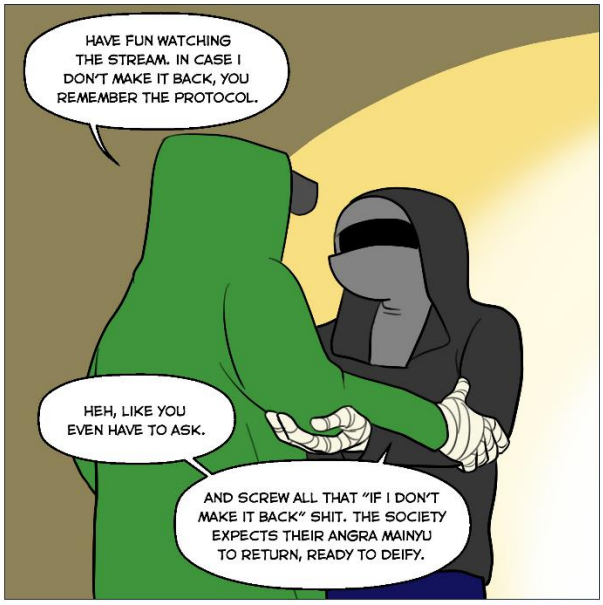


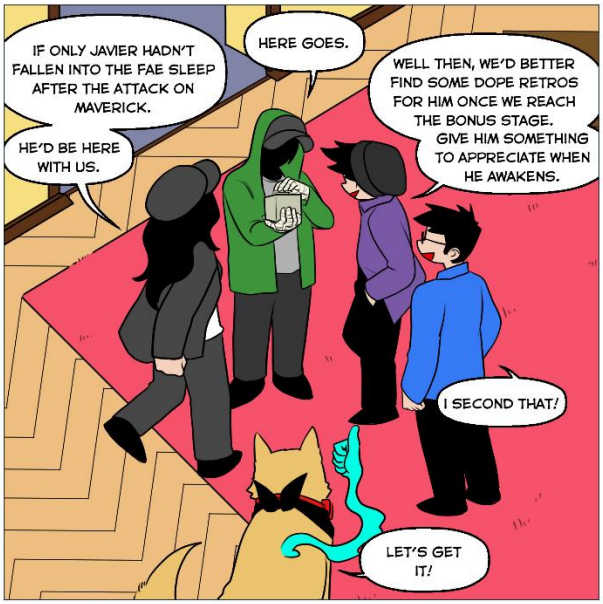


Atom's Status: Age 64

Runtime: 500 Years









Atom's Status: Age 65

Runtime: 500 Years



Atom's Status: Age 65

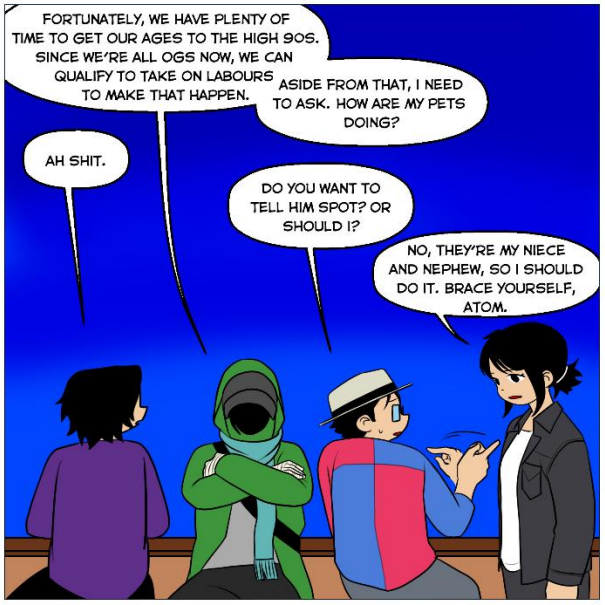
Runtime: 501 Years - 600 Years



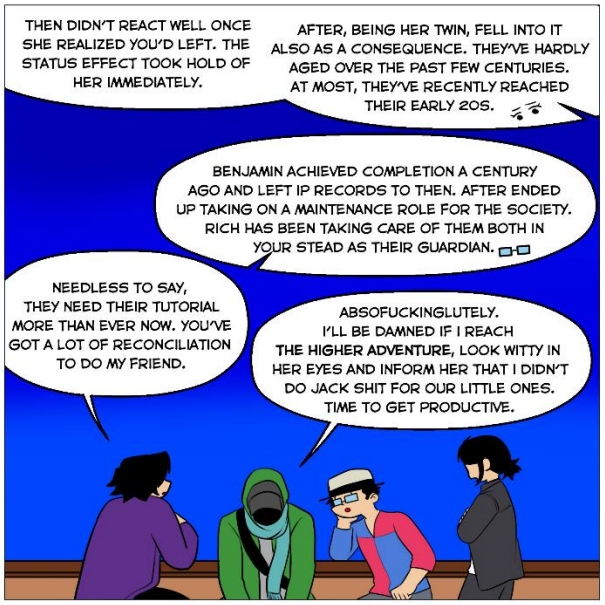
Atom's Status: Age 70 - Age 80

Runtime: 750 Years



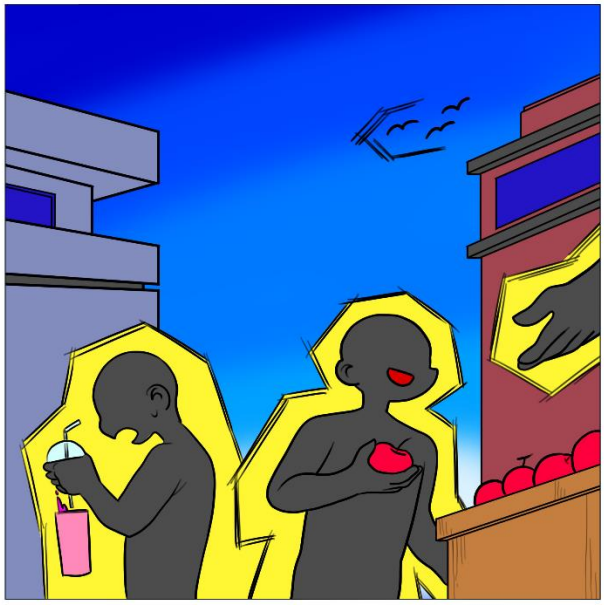


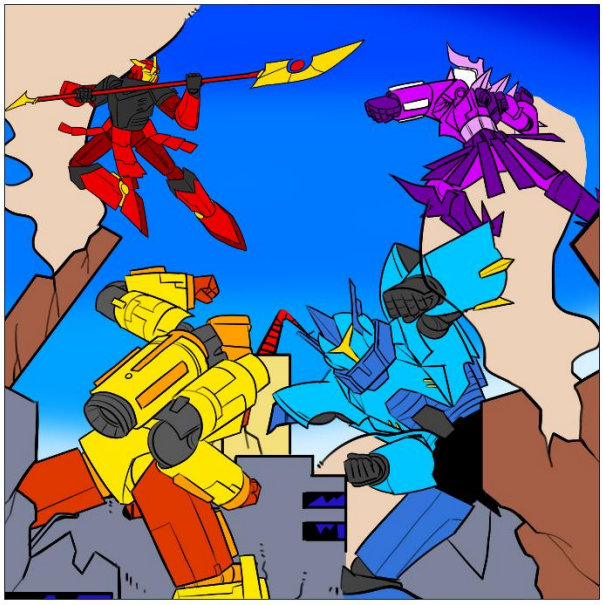




Atom's Status: Age 90 - Age 95

Runtime: 950 Years



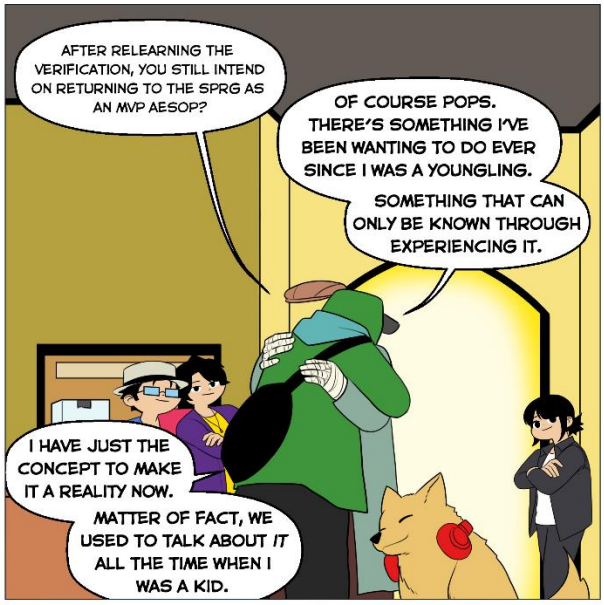




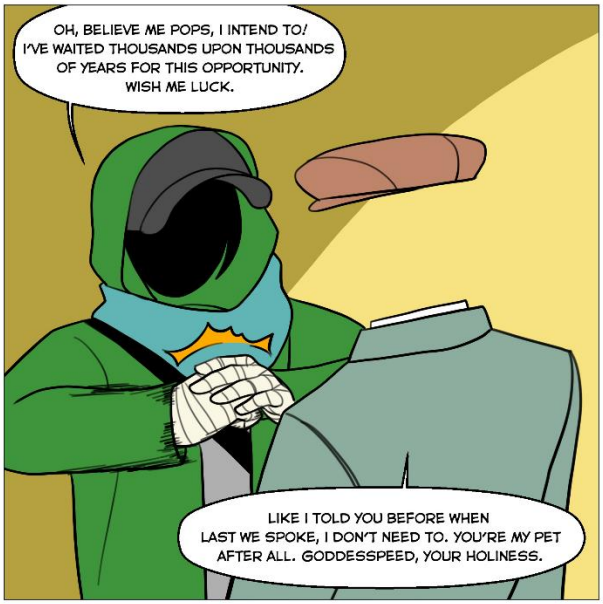


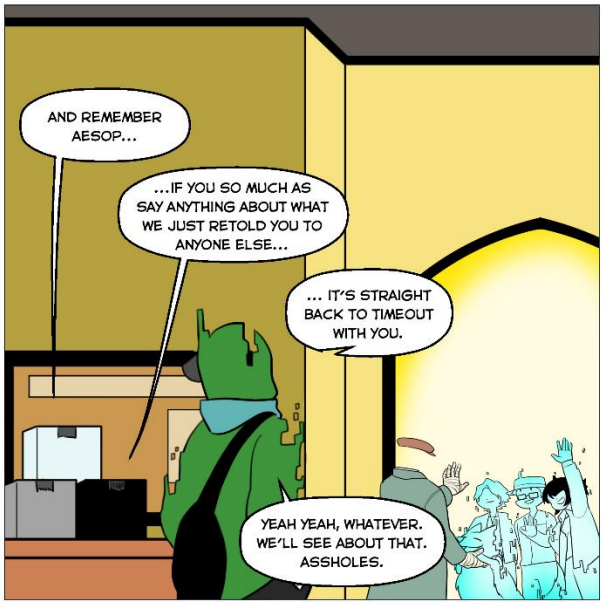
Atom's Status: Age 98

Runtime: 950 Years









Atom's Status: Age 100

Runtime: 1000 Years



Atom's Status: ???

Thanks For Playing





THE WALKTHROUGH TESTAMENT

I

I’ve a strange tale to tell you. A tale that the ants tell themselves whenever solipsism comes to greet them. A tale about a deity named Atom Tony Coleman and the peculiar setting that he inhabits.

The young god was fast asleep in his room, re-experiencing his past Struggles whilst treading the Dreamtime. The following events destined to transpire upon his awakening have yet to be told, until now.

ATC leaves his bedroom and heads into the kitchen to have breakfast.

ATC is confronted by Laforgeyuhan, his Mirror, who is cooking pancakes.

Roswell arrives in the living room via Fast Travel and stops ATC from attacking Laforgeyuhan.

Asking his Pet to take a seat at the dining room table, Roswell elaborates on Laforgeyuhan’s true nature and Role to ATC while the trio eat their pancakes.

Satisfied, yet still wary of his Mirror, ATC decides to refocus his Attention towards his Simulacrum training.

Upon finishing their breakfast, Roswell takes ATC to the Simulacrum Hobby Shop on their Surveillance.

Laforgeyuhan elects to stay behind and clean the dishes.

At the Hobby Shop, ATC selects his first, miniature Simulacrum model kit.

After making the purchase, Roswell and ATC return home.

Roswell instructs ATC to Assemble the model, as it is a required step towards becoming a Simulacrum driver.

ATC spends a good amount of Runtime learning how to Assemble his kit.

To aid in this, ATC acquires the STOICISM Console per his Mirror’s advice.

Additionally, ATC communicates with Javier about tips and tricks for Assembling a Simulacrum via Repertoire, as Javier has also started his Simulacrum training.

Eventually, ATC succeeds in completing his first Assembly and gives Roswell a good news text.

With the first step completed, Roswell informs ATC that they'll be heading to the "Rapid City" DMV the following morning.

Upon hearing from the Shogun that he'll need to pass a written competency test to acquire his driver's permit, ATC studies up for the rest of the evening.

The next day, ATC and Roswell enter the DMV after waiting behind a long ass line.

ATC wasn't amused.

Passing his written exam with ease, ATC is awarded his driver's permit. The young Sisyphus stresses to his Tutorial that he'll be making appointments to the DMV going forward, unaware that his change in attitude was pre-planned by Roswell, who wanted him to experience the pain of a non-appointment visit to the DMV.

Satisfied, Roswell arranges to take ATC to a special Station called a Junkyard so that he may practice his Simulacrum handling.

Some Runtime later, the Shogun and his Pet depart for their destination via the Fast Travel Glitch.

Arriving at the Junkyard, ATC marvels at the sights and sounds around him. After allowing his Pet some time to digest the scenery, the Shogun calls out to him.

ATC downloads the Simulacrum Grimoire, per Roswell's instructions, and uses said Grimoire to absorb his miniature Simulacrum model into his Configuration.

Now visible on his Simulacrum Grimoire, ATC summons his Simulacrum back onto the field in its Kaiju-form, completing the Simulacrum creation process.

Upon witnessing his Pet christen his Divine Will, Roswell asks ATC to transport the both of them into the Simulacrum's cockpit.

"I want you to imagine us both inside of your Simulacrum. Think back to what it was like when we were inside PERUN's cockpit. Breathe easy, grasshopper. You'll do fine," taught the Shogun.

ATC imagined both himself and the Shogun inside of his Simulacrum. After holding the thought for a second, the duo was teleported into a homely room.

Upon entering the cockpit, ATC changed its interior before selecting a fighting game stick as his style of Wheel.

Ready to get crackin, ATC sent Roswell a thumbs up.

With a nod, Roswell instructed ATC to transform the Form Factor of his Simulacrum into a car. ATC, at his command desk, sifted through multiple Simulacrum Shortcuts.

Finding the Form Factor Shortcut, ATC tapped on the “car” option.

ATC’s Simulacrum, dubbed CAMUS, transformed into a 4-wheel vehicle. ATC found himself in the driver’s seat, while Roswell sat comfortably in the passenger seat.

ATC, directed by Roswell, drove towards a wider area away from the Junkyard’s haulers and scavengers.

Making it to an open area the size of a football field, ATC parked next to another car.

Exiting CAMUS, ATC and Roswell noticed a red panda goddess the size of a petite woman conversing with a tall ebony god with dreads at the adjacent car.

ATC, overhearing the duo conversing about the upcoming Jungle Gym Challenge, moved to introduce himself before inquiring about said duo’s insights.

Ozzie and Zey, the red panda goddess and ebony god respectively, politely made ATC’s acquaintance before revealing to the Gakusei that they’re both siblings and Phasers.

“Zey’s the little one. I’ve got about a few decades of Runtime on him,” bragged Ozzie.

“Damn. I love you too sis,” responded Zey sarcastically.

The Normie siblings informed ATC that there’ve been rumors on Narcissus of late about the succeeding Jungle Gym Challenge being revamped to require Simulacrums.

“Apparently, our first ever Jungle Gym Challenge was deemed too “easy” by the CLEP Committee. I’m guessing they're trying to thin the number of Attempters this go-around. My squirt of a Brother Pet here doesn’t have his license yet. I figured I’d get some practice in by “tossing him around”,” revealed Ozzie.

“Wait! That’s why you really brought me out here! I thought this was supposed to be driving practice,” said an astonished Zey.

“This is “driving” practice dummy,” replied Ozzie.

The back-and-forth squabbling amongst the siblings amused Roswell.

ATC, on the other hand, couldn’t help but shake his head at the two’s petty banter.

Having finished contemplating a thought, the Shogun asked the siblings if they’d be competing in the upcoming Expedient CLEP, to which Ozzie confirmed “yep”. Zey, going along with his sister’s lingo, echoed her sentiments.

ATC, excited at the thought of the upcoming competition, asked Zey and Ozzie if they’d like to help one another train.

Thinking nothing of it, Zey and Ozzie agreed to the idea. With Roswell in agreement as well, ATC began learning how to use his Simulacrum competently alongside the siblings.

Following a period of Runtime, ATC became more competent and comfortable at handling his Simulacrum’s three Form Factors: Kaiju, car and divineship.

Zey, having successfully earned his driver’s license before ATC, provided the Gakusei with some tips and tricks on passing the driver’s license test before departing the Junkyard with Ozzie to prepare for the upcoming School Phase.

Satisfied with ATC’s progress, Roswell surprised the lad with a special arrangement he made with Benjamin.

“Uncle Stew is offering you an entry level Role at IP Records. Additionally, if or when you acquire your driver’s license, he’ll also offer you a place to rent for cheap in “Rapid City”. What say you, grasshopper?” revealed Roswell.

ATC accepted the Opportunity with enthusiasm.

Like I’d say no that, thought the Gakusei.

Accepting the answer, Roswell promised his Pet that he'll follow-up with Benjamin and return with a work schedule for ATC.

With a pathway to "Rapid City" now open to him, ATC resolved to complete his Simulacrum training, before immediately assigning himself a Quest to obtain his driver's license.

Choosing to delay his driver's test to a later date, ATC decided to prioritize getting good at his upcoming job first.

It didn't take long for ATC to receive his work schedule from Roswell.

Inside their Abode, the Shogun went over how ATC would move to and from the Surveillance.

Roswell handed ATC a unique doorknob, before asking him to insert it into a nearby wall.

Upon doing so, a Magical outline of a door materialized in front of the Gakusei.

Opening the Magical door, ATC stepped into IP Record's basement before looking back at his Tutorial, who was still standing on the other side.

Roswell revealed to ATC that Benjamin created a Bypass, affording the Gakusei instant access to and from IP Records without needing to Fast Travel.

Until ATC acquires his license, this'll be how the Gakusei gets to and from work.

With his work schedule and means of transportation in hand, ATC began his working career under Benjamin's tutelage.

Now an employee at IP Records, ATC spent a month of Runtime learning how to manage the record store.

During this period, ATC made the acquaintance of a Polarity named Charlotte, a second Phaser and frequent patron of IP Records.

Charlotte, in Animus form, revealed to ATC that the initial details of the next Jungle Gym Challenge had been published on Narcissus and that it'll allow for Companies this time around.

As for how hard the Jungle Gyms would become because of these changes, the Polarity was unsure.

ATC asked Charlotte if it'd like to Collaborate with him in preparation for the next Challenge, to which the latter refused.

Charlotte revealed that it's in a team already but wishes ATC the best of luck.

The Gakusei exchanges Repertoire IDs with the Polarity before the latter departs the record store.

Some Runtime later, while ATC is stocking some records, Benjamin approaches and reveals to the Gakusei his plans to open a satellite store. Alas, this lucrative Opportunity would require an additional employee to be hired.

ATC recommends Javier to Benjamin, who accepts the proposal.

ATC runs the idea by Javier, who is beyond enthusiastic about it. Afterwards, ATC hands Benjamin the Fae's contact information.

Javier, receiving the blessing of his Tutorials, begins working at IP Records with ATC upon accepting Benjamin's Gig offer.

Using an Entanglement, courtesy of his Tutorials, Javier installed his own Bypass inside IP Records, granting the youth access to his new workplace from his distant Haven.

Together again in a mutual location, ATC and Javier bonded over work whilst training their fighting capabilities for a good amount of Runtime; in particular, taking advantage of the Rival Network's perks.

One day, while working at IP Records, ATC and Javier are introduced to a Fae goddess named Spot Funokoshi via Benjamin.

Spot, a professional gambler, is also a 2nd Phaser and investor in Benjamin's record store enterprise.

Aside from being the former Shogun's favorite patron, an aura of mystery concealed Spot's Build. Her abnormal wealth being the sole hint to her true nature.

Having been informed of the duo's robust Reputation via Benjamin, Spot asked ATC and Javier if they're still planning on participating in the Jungle Gym Challenge.

Upon hearing ATC and Javier reaffirm their Intent, Spot invites the duo to lunch to discuss a proposition she has in mind for them.

Benjamin tells ATC and Javier to go on their lunch break.

“Don’t worry about rushing back here once your lunch break is over. Take as much Runtime as you need to learn from ol’ Spot,” stated Benjamin.

The trio of young deities departed IP Records and relocated their conversation to a different venue.

At a nearby cafe, Spot unveiled her plan to enter and conquer the Jungle Gym Challenge.

Incentivized by Benjamin’s high opinion of the pair, the Fae goddess presented a Collaboration to ATC and Javier, asking for their aid in taking on the Expedient.

As for her reasons for wanting to compete, the goddess was hesitant to say for now.

“Accept my proposal and I’ll follow through with an explanation in the Hypothetical. Scouts’ honor,” said the Dhampir as she drank from a blood bag.

ATC, thinking back to his and Charlotte's initial conversation, asked Spot to confirm the news about Companies being allowed, to which the Fae reaffirms.

“The next Expedient will allow all Attemptees the option to Collaborate, with the winning team receiving Degree Diplomas for all of its Collaborators should they win,” explained Spot.

Not wanting to pass on a good Opportunity, ATC and Javier agree to Collaborate with Spot and conquer the Expedient together.

With a Hallelujah reached, a pleased Spot informed ATC and Javier of a property she owns within Elfame that she’d like to introduce them to.

“I installed a hidden Bypass beneath a random overpass that leads straight there. Let's head there now while the Genre is still nice,” said Spot.

Departing the cafe, the trio made their way to Spot’s overpass. Locating her concealed Bypass, Spot activated it before welcoming ATC and Javier to an abandoned parking garage on a Haven called New Deck City within Elfame.

“Welcome to the Kickback! Faru vin hejme!” said Spot.

“Kun plezuro!” replied Javier.

Passing through the Bypass, ATC and Javier found themselves on the top level of the Kickback.

Javier, losing his marbles upon stepping foot on the “soil” of his Godhood, couldn’t help but geek out.

As the duo explored their new surroundings, they quickly realized that they weren’t alone.

Spot, seizing the moment, introduced ATC and Javier to her other Collaborators.

First up were the feline siblings and 1st Phasers named Jack and Jill. The niece and nephew of a legendary con artist respectively, the duo served as Spot’s informal information brokers.

ATC and Javier also made the acquaintance of a kooky crocodile deity named Joseph Whetstone, a 2nd Phaser and aspiring blacksmith. Preferring to be called “Joe”, the croc deity’s love of Knicknacks and their prowess emanated an otherworldly enthusiasm.

The Fae trio were Spot’s oldest friends; and although said trio had no interest in taking on their version of the Expedient, they were, nonetheless, happy to offer ATC and Javier their unique talents for a fee.

Following their brief tour of the Kickback, ATC and Javier agreed with Spot to make her abandoned parking garage their base of operations for the upcoming School Phase.

With an HQ established, ATC began Expedient training alongside Spot and Javier.

Taking the advice of Jack and Jill, ATC and his newly formed Company settled on exploring the vast underground networks of New Deck City to gain Struggle and Experience Points for the bullshit ahead.

Additionally, should the trio come across certain materials during their excursions, Joe offered to use said materials to improve the Company’s Knicknacks.

Following the passage of more Runtime, ATC approached Roswell to schedule his driving test.

II

After scheduling and confirming his test date, the Gakusei made double sure that his driving knowledge and capabilities were on point.

On the day of the exam, Roswell Fast Traveled both himself and ATC to the DMV, all the while circumventing the atrocious wait time in the process.

ATC checked into his scheduled appointment, before swiftly using the restroom to calm his anxiousness. Taking a seat beside the Shogun upon his return, ATC meditated until his test examiner arrived to claim him.

Leaving behind Roswell, ATC followed the test examiner to a testing Playground at the back of the DMV.

The test examiner summoned a Shortcut, tapping on it several times before turning the vacant Playground into a giant obstacle course.

The test examiner broke down the rules of the exam to the Gakusei. In order for ATC to pass his test, the young Sisyphus must demonstrate his driving competency and handling of both the Kaiju and car Form Factors of his Divine Will.

The divineship portion, while optional, is a requirement to pass if ATC wants to travel to other Havens and Stations inside of his Simulacrum.

Summoning CAMUS, ATC willed both himself and the examiner into CAMUS' cockpit.

Upon taking their seats in front of CAMUS' viewscreen, the reserved test examiner asked ATC to begin the Kaiju portion of the exam once the Gakusei had finalized his operational checks.

ATC breezed through the Kaiju and car portions effortlessly.

Having dozed off a little because of ATC's smooth driving, the examiner then asked ATC if he'd like to take on the optional flying portion as a bonus for passing his test.

ATC accepted the offer before swiftly acing the flying portion as well.

Returning to his Tutorial victorious, ATC proudly displayed his new driver's license as he, Roswell and Laforgeyuhan exited the "Rapid City" DMV.

Fully confident in ATC’s self-sufficiency, Roswell informed his Pet that he’ll be finalizing the special arrangement he made with Benjamin to find an adequate place for ATC to move into on “Rapid City”.

Suddenly saddened by the thought that he'll be leaving the only home he’s ever known, ATC braced himself for the changes heading his way.

While waiting for Benjamin and Roswell to finish his move-in arrangements, ATC continued his Collaboration with Javier and Spot while working more shifts at IP Records.

III

Another period of Runtime came and went, leading to a gracious shake up in ATC's Run.

Upon finishing his latest shift at IP Records, ATC was approached and informed by Benjamin that the alternative record store he'd been preparing was now primed and ready for business.

The former Shogun asked ATC to meet him at the new store's address the following morning instead of clocking into his usual shift.

The following morning, ATC, alongside Roswell, moseyed over to Benjamin's satellite record store.

The Tutorial-Pet duo arrived in time to greet a Fast Traveling Benjamin.

Benjamin and Roswell surprised ATC with the revelation that the satellite store contains a basement level that ATC can cheaply rent out, with Benjamin serving as his landlord.

Additionally, should ATC accept the promotion, Benjamin will assign him the Role of store manager, effectively giving him free reign over the place.

Knowing that ATC has an Expedient and School Phase to get through, Benjamin informed his "Nephew Pet" that he can work the satellite store whenever he likes, so long as said store generates revenue, be it actively or passively.

Beyond ecstatic, ATC accepted the arrangement and spent a day or two of Runtime moving from his Tutorial's Abode on the Surveillance to his new basement dwelling.

Javier, Spot, Jack, Jill and Joe happily assisted ATC's move while checking out his new pad.

Upon finalizing his move-in, ATC spent a VERY long period of Runtime building up the new record store.

Using saved Karma to purchase a Homunculus–whom he decided to call Jeff–to manage the storefront, the Gakusei modified his robotic helper to automate online orders, assist customers with music recommendations and perform basic upkeep.

Thanks to utilizing his acquired know-how, ATC successfully established a passive income stream that could grant him the freedom to be away from the business at his discretion.

More Runtime passed…

One day, while managing the satellite store with Javier and Jeff, ATC and co. received a surprise visit from a giddy Spot.

The Fae goddess unveiled the news that the Expedient for "South Dakota" was fast approaching, with the festivities set to occur in a few more months.

Upon Spot suggesting their Company should conduct a road trip to "Sioux Falls, SD" to check out the Expedient for recon purposes, ATC and Javier agreed with her and began prepping for the trip.

On the day of the Expedient, ATC, alongside Javier and Spot, drove to "Sioux Falls, SD" from "Rapid City, SD".

Upon landing at a downtown parking lot, ATC and co. stumbled upon a Haven-wide block party and proceeded to mingle. Making their way to some benches surrounded by food carts and large Shortcut screens, the Company hunkered down to chillax and observe the Expedient.

On one of the many large Shortcut screens, a floating location called Sumeru the Amusement could be seen. Originally an old divine fortress used during the First Theomachy, the heavenly base was eventually repurposed into an amusement park.

ATC, tipsy yet stoked at what he was seeing on the larger Shortcuts, couldn't help but talk aloud about his, Javier's and Spot's chances of making it to the next Expedient and winning.

Upon bragging that the trio could easily make it to Sumeru, a voice called out ATC's hubris.

“A bum ass nigga like you making it up there? Negro please,” said a commanding yet arrogant voice.

An ebony god fitted in a backwards baseball cap, shades, street wear and a bomber jacket with a hoodie underneath it appeared out of nowhere. Sporting one hell of a proud grin, the black deity couldn’t help but roast ATC.

Behind the ebony god were Charlotte, Zey and Ozzie of all deities! Their sudden appearance alongside ATC’s new Opp surprised the Gakusei. Unfortunately, the young Sisyphus was too antagonized to return their faint greetings.

As ATC motioned to remove himself from the bench, he was sitting on to confront the antagonizing god, Spot seamlessly performed a scan of the shade-wearing deity’s Configuration with a Strategic Choice from her NEOFEMINISM Console.

What the goddess saw spooked the shit of her.

The bomber-jacket wearing ebony god was a Therianthrope.

“ATC, drop it! Whatever is going through your mind right now, don’t act on it! Let’s just leave,” pleaded Spot.

Despite the Dhampir warning ATC not to “take it there”, ATC had already decided to “take it there”.

“Who the fuck is you?” asked ATC.

The ebony god introduced himself as Grendel Tyrone Adonis, before eagerly asking ATC to watch his tone before he “dislocates his fucking jaw”.

“Ayo, if you want a Fade, let me know now! I’ve got nothing but time, my nigga,” said an amused GTA.

ATC, without a second thought, rushed Grendel.

GTA, pleased as peach, effortlessly blocked ATC’s attack using nothing but the Vibe from his Certainty alone, all the while keeping both his hands in his pockets.

Time for a scrap.

Opp Fight: Grendel Tyrone Adonis (GTA)

HP: 20

Opp Fight Song: Virginia by Clipse

Company: ATC (17)

Risk: Insurmountable

It's a wrap bruh. I can’t help you. Dude is just that nice with the hands. Oh shit, my bad! Ol’ boy has his hands in his pockets. Cot damn that’s disrespectful. Sheesh.

Let me go through a brief rundown as to why you’re going to hold this “L”. Grendel's Vibe hurts you for 1 HP every time it touches you.

Alas, without Glitches and Approaches to aid you from afar, you’ve got no choice but to get up close and personal to lump him up. Expect to receive back what you’re planning to dish out.

Also, while you’re still under the Tussle’s effects, you can at least employ whatever Spells you’ve obtained up to this point to deal…well…whatever measly damage you can muster.

When either ATC’s HP falls to 1 HP or two minutes pass, the Therianthrope will instantly drop you, ending the battle.

ATC, unable to breach GTA's Vibe, begins to tire out. Spot and Javier comment on the horrifying power that GTA possesses.

GTA's Folk are Spawned with a heritable Miracle that's considered to be, by many in the SRPG, unfair. The LONGNIUS Miracle allows the user's attacks to bypass their target's defenses, in absolute terms.

Outmatched in every way possible, the Gakusei ends up being tossed around like a ragdoll via the Therianthrope's Vibe.

Tired of boredom, GTA immediately breaks one of ATC's ribs using a shoulder twitch that directs a blast of Certainty towards the Sisyphus' abdomen.

ATC, in immense pain, passes out.

As he does so, the Expedient taking place within Sumeru emanates sounds of excitement via the speakers coming from the surrounding Shortcuts.

While some deities were fixated on the Expedient CLEP taking place, other deities could be seen forming a crowded circle, observing and recording the aftermath of ATC's first duel on their Controllers.

At the same time, Javier and Spot rush towards the fallen ATC.

GTA, unimpressed, tosses an elixir towards ATC's direction, saying that if the Fade weren't such a bore, the Gakusei would be dead already.

"Legal deicide for another day, head ass," said Grendel as he returned to Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte.

Spot, noticing the nearby elixir, swiftly obtained it before feeding the vial to the unconscious ATC.

Javier, checking his fallen Collaborator's vital signs on a Company Shortcut, slowly breathed a sigh of relief.

Runtime passes…

ATC, awakening in his basement apartment, is visited by Roswell at the exact same time.

Roswell, now at ease upon seeing his awakened Pet, notifies ATC that he was informed of the Gakusei's precarious status via Benjamin after Spot and Javier reached out to the record store owner.

Roswell teleported ATC back to the latter's basement dwelling with Benjamin’s aid.

When asked how long he was out, Roswell reveals to ATC that he’d been recuperating for a few weeks.

ATC, upon hearing this, freaks out, believing he’d missed the start of the School Phase.

Fortunately, Roswell calms his Pet down, reassuring the Gakusei that he hadn’t missed anything.

“The upcoming School Phase begins in a few days,” said the Shogun.

Roswell then asks ATC if he’s still determined to compete in the next Expedient, knowing what he knows now about his competition.

ATC reassures Roswell that he’s not backing down and that he’s got a Score to settle.

“I’m getting my Runback in, period,” proclaimed the groggy Gakusei.

Roswell, happy to see his Pet back in good spirits, reminds the Gakusei to call him for any advice should he need it.

Following Roswell's departure, ATC quietly gathered his thoughts before catching up with Spot, Javier and the other’s back at the Kickback.

Now knowing who they’re up against, ATC and the Company resolved to tackle the upcoming Jungle Gym Challenge with renewed vigor, eager to surpass their current limits.

ATC, however, is forced to apologize first and treat his comrades on New Deck City to the Haven’s best hotpot locales, on account of his knucklehead actions.

More Runtime passes…

On the first day of the brand-new School Phase, ATC meets up with Spot and Javier outside of the satellite IP Records store.

The trio proceed down a road towards their respective schools.

IV

ATC and Spot parted ways with Javier, with the latter departing down an alternative path towards a different college he'd enrolled in.

Making their way onto Oni Technical College's campus, ATC and Spot agreed to meet up at the campus' CLEP building in the afternoon.

Finding and settling into his first class at Oni, ATC was suddenly greeted by a friendly god sitting adjacent to another god that looked identical.

Introducing himself as Malcolm Vé Ryland, the friendly deity welcomed ATC to Oni before introducing his twin brother Milo Vili Ryland.

Upon mentioning to ATC that there'd have been rumors about him circulating around campus about how badly he got his ass kicked in a Fade, Malcolm announced that he and his brother had conceived an interesting proposal that they'd like to present to the Gakusei.

ATC, noticing that Milo hadn't said a word so far, asked Malcolm what was up with his twin. The contemplative Milo could be seen with earbuds in his ear, all the while sifting through pages of an NPC comic called "Sharknife".

Malcolm, amusingly, revealed to ATC that he and Milo used to be a single deity before they were Observed in their Spawn by their Tutorials.

The RNG, being a dick, split the infant deity into two "halves" upon said Observation. One twin is predisposed to seeing the world "half-full" (Malcolm), while the other sees it "half-empty" (Milo).

Fortunately, the RNG's meddling conferred onto the twins a unique Miracle that allows the pair to connect with each other's Configurations, giving them access to each other's "psyches".

An embarrassed Malcolm couldn't help but admit to ATC that he'd lost a five-dollar bet with Milo early in the morning and was now tasked with learning the initial lessons of the day while the other could rest easy.

Able to communicate and share information telepathically, one twin could learn from the other while said other could be off doing something else entirely.

ATC, bummed that he lacked access to such a Miracle like the twins', hilariously sulked. Milo, using telepathy, reminded Malcolm about their proposal to ATC before the topic deviated further.

Before Malcolm could ask the question, however, the class' bumbling professor suddenly waltzed into the classroom, profusely apologizing for being late.

ATC and the Rylands decided to hold off on their discussion. The trio doubled down on their college classes for the remainder of the day.

Following their last class, ATC and the Rylands met up at the campus' courtyard, where Malcolm finally revealed the proposal to the Gakusei.

The Ryland twins had made the decision to enter the Jungle Gym Challenge as a Company and were wondering if ATC would like to join their team.

"Anyone quick enough to jump into a Fade is someone I'd want watching my back!" exclaimed an upbeat Malcolm to ATC.

ATC, feeling mutual, agreed to the proposal before establishing a Hallelujah with the Brother Pets.

The Gakusei, swift with a follow-up, made mention of the Company he'd formed with Spot and Javier already. The Rylands agreed to the Gakusei's idea of joining the latter's team.

With a Hallelujah reached, ATC and the Rylands proceeded towards the campus' CLEP building.

Reuniting with Spot inside the building's lobby, ATC introduced the Fae to the Normie twins; Spot, seeing the nonchalant Milo for the first time, became instantly smittened.

The Dhampir immediately recomposed herself before refocusing back on the task at hand.

ATC explained to Spot that he'd just formed a Hallelujah with the brothers after making their acquaintance in his first class.

Having zero complaints about having two additional Collaborators join the squad, Spot graciously welcomed the twins to the Company.

Approaching the CLEP counter, ATC and the others registered for the Expedient, officially waiving their right to take the Traditional version of the CLEP in the process.

After signing a death waiver, ATC and the others received their CLEP memory cards.

The CLEP attendant, upon handing said cards over, explained that the memory cards will serve as recorders for their Jungle Gym progress.

“Each time your Company successfully conquers a Jungle Gym via defeating said Gym’s Subboss, your memory cards will glow. Consider it a sign that your progress has been saved, however,” explained the CLEP attendant while generating another Shortcut, “if the Subboss senses your imminent defeat at its hands, it’ll present you with an Escape Shortcut. Understand that using it will disqualify you all from participating in the rest of the Challenge. Conversely, if you beat the Subboss in combat and want to challenge it again, you’re free to do so!”

The CLEP attendant continued, revealing that the structure and nature of the Jungle Gym Challenge had been switched over from an “obstacle course, ninja-warrior” themed “arena” into a “survival horror” themed “arena” to account for the inclusion of Companies in this version of the Challenge.

Once all 4 Subbosses have been defeated and their essences recorded onto ATC and Co’s memory cards, the young deities will officially qualify for the upcoming Expedient CLEP within Sumeru The Amusement at the end of the current School Phase.

With approximately 49 years of Runtime remaining before the next Expedient CLEP begins, ATC and Co. have a “five” decade deadline to overcome the Jungle Gym Challenge.

Despite no longer being able to take the Traditional CLEP at the end of the current School Phase, the CLEP attendant still stressed the importance of attending classes.

“Passing courses in this Phase will allow y’all the option to transfer your grades over to the next School Phase. If your Company fails to qualify for the Expedient CLEP, you’ll at least have a contingency plan in place. Why spend another 50 years of Runtime in school when you don’t have to,” advised the CLEP attendant.

Thanking the CLEP attendant for the insights, ATC and Co. depart the CLEP building.

With the Rylands now a part of the Company, ATC and Spot decided to introduce the brothers to the Kickback and their other Collaborators via the overpass Bypass.

ATC, Spot, Milo and Malcolm arrive in Elfame, where the Rylands make the acquaintance of Javier, Jack, Jill and Joe.

Following a recap of what the Company had learned so far at their respective colleges, ATC and the Company agreed to take on each Jungle Gym per “decade”.

If successful, the Company will have enough Runtime remaining in the School Phase to train for the Expedient and prepare for an inevitable confrontation with GTA and his Company.

With a Game Plan established, ATC and Co. began preparations to take on the first Jungle Gym of their current decade: the EARTH JUNGLE GYM.

EARTH JUNGLE GYM

After preparing and finishing up personal Gigs and Quests, ATC and Company readied their Inventories before hopping into ATC’s Simulacrum.

Plotting a course to Dastardly, Haven of the EARTH JUNGLE GYM, ATC directed his Simulacrum through the Border Highway.

During the road trip, ATC and Co. came across Highwaymen and hostile cryptids fiending for trouble.

The Gakusei and his Collaborators swiftly liquidated their Foes into Fertilizer via a Galaga-style mini-game.

Eventually, ATC and Company arrived at Dastardly.

Settling down on a landing lot made for Simulacrums, ATC and Company disembarked before immediately receiving directions to the EARTH JUNGLE GYM from a few friendly locals.

As the Company approached the landing lot's exit, they unexpectedly ran into GTA, Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte; the Rival Company had just returned from finishing their stint over at the EARTH JUNGLE GYM.

GTA, still delighted over punking the EARTH JUNGLE GYM, couldn't help but press ATC upon noticing him and his entourage. The Gakusei could do nothing but take the abuse.

Disregarding the Sisyphus' existence just as quickly, GTA departed the Haven alongside Zey, Charlotte and Ozzie to continue their Jungle Gym Challenge. Before leaving, however, Zey decided to impart ATC and his Company with some surprising advice.

Even more shocking was GTA's sudden inclusion in the advice giving.

"Any "place" that looks "comfy" in a Jungle Gym is a "safe place" to be. Some food for thought ATC," said Zey.

"And another thing dipshit," GTA added upon turning his head towards ATC's direction with his signature grin, "mind your P's and your Q's. You'll know what I mean when you see it "tumbling" by."

Relying on his STOICISM Console to keep his cool, ATC replied with a sarcastic "thanks" before watching GTA and his Collaborators leave inside of the latter's Simulacrum, called BEOWULF.

Hopping into a rental car to conserve personal "fuel" for their Simulacrums, ATC and Company proceeded towards the EARTH JUNGLE GYM.

On occasion, the Company would resupply at rest stops called Save Points or crash at a motel if fatigue started setting in.

Eventually, the Company arrived at the outskirts of the EARTH JUNGLE GYM. During the approach, ATC and Company noticed an eerie mist covering the ghost town.

Upon entering the ghost town's perimeter, a strange veil passed through the young deities, giving each of them a feeling of a slight chill.

"The hell was that?" whispered ATC to himself as he caught sight of a parking lot area.

Parking and exiting the rental car, ATC and Co. noticed other vehicles parked around them, suggesting that other student Attemptees had made their way inside of the Jungle Gym ahead of them.

As ATC and Company began their trek towards the misty town, the Gakusei couldn't help but ask an open-ended question about the strange chill he felt when they entered the EARTH JUNGLE GYM's vicinity.

Milo, happy that someone finally brought "that" up, explained that the strange chill came from the Company entering a unique Instance called a Stomach.

"An Instance is a kind of pocket dimension that creates a self-contained copy of a location," Milo elaborated.

Malcolm, chiming in, couldn't help but add that Stomachs were a phenomenon exclusive to Dungeons, and as such, suggested that a Dungeon Egg must be located somewhere within the ghost town.

The cheerful deity, for a moment, turned serious. To Stress how much danger the Company was now in, Malcolm chose to use an analogy to describe a Dungeon Egg's Stomach.

"In the same way that a baby Basilisk has deadlier venom than an adult because of its inability to control the venom's potency, Dungeon Eggs uncontrollably project their Stomach's outward, instead of inward," gushed Malcolm suddenly.

"Adult Dungeons," Malcolm continued, "prefer to Zap their Food into their Stomachs in a process called Devour. Dungeon Eggs, on the other hand, must project their Stomachs externally to "Devour" their Food. Until a Dungeon Egg hatches, this is its main Mechanic."

Javier, impressed with the twins' know-how, inquired about how the two knew so much about Dungeons.

Malcolm, as if on cue, began going on an excited tangent about his love for the SRPG's lifeforms, with Milo explaining that his brother's cryptid obsession became a "contagion" he couldn't help but absorb thanks to their MNEMOSYNE Miracle.

Laughs aside, the Company eventually found themselves stumbling into the EARTH JUNGLE GYM's downtown area. ATC and Company came across a lot of dead students. Limbs, entrails, pus, etc.

Malcolm, while wincing, revealed that a Dungeon Egg's Stomach is more volatile than an Adult's. In part, because of said Egg's urgency to absorb the Belief of anything it considers Food.

"To obtain the Belief it so desperately needs, the Stomach will summon unique cryptids called Yokai. Their purpose? Eviscerate AND consume anyone or anything dumb enough to get caught lacking inside their progenitor's domain," explained Malcolm.

Dungeons, seeing all lifeforms as Food, can "expand" their Stomachs to accommodate for the enormous amount of prey they'll consume throughout their lifespans.

Upon hearing this, Spot deduced that there had to be a ton more students in similar Stomachs like themselves, hence the reason for there being a lot of vehicles parked both in and around the EARTH JUNGLE GYM's domain.

Alas, the Company's lack of situational awareness would swiftly come back to bite them when ATC and Company failed to notice a Tumbleweed roll past them.

Immediately, the Company was set upon by a group of EARTH YOKAI.

Having only arrived at the EARTH JUNGLE GYM, ATC and co. were clueless as to where they could find shelter. The young deities, backed into a corner, began feeling the pressure mounting as more EARTH YOKAI appeared to replace their fallen.

Before all hope was lost, a fellow student Attemptee called out to the Company from a nearby diner. ATC quickly bolted for said diner, with Javier, Milo, Malcolm and Spot following suit.

ATC and Company successfully entered the diner and graciously befriended its student survivors.

Exchanging notes, ATC learned that the establishment he and his Collaborators had arrived in was called a Safe Point.

Safe Points are Enchanted buildings that protect their occupiers via masking their Configurations from their Foes' detection.

The surviving Attemptees express to ATC and Co. their Game Plan to flee the Stomach after failing to deduce the Dungeon Egg's location within the ghost town.

Malcolm, upon hearing this, creatively comes up with an Asspull and explains that the Dungeon Egg must be in an area of the ghost town that has the highest concentration of Belief.

Malcolm, opening an app store Shortcut, downloaded a Belief Counter Grimoire before proposing that the Company use it to pinpoint the Dungeon Egg's exact location.

Upon being taught how to identify Safe Points from the student survivors, ATC and Company bid them farewell before departing the diner. The Game Plan was as follows: bounce from Safe Point to Safe Point until the Company reached the Dungeon Egg's location.

Along the way, ATC and Company Vanquished all EARTH YOKAI that ran up on them.

Eventually, the Company reached a Safe Point next to a government building.

The government building, emanating a high concentration of Belief according to Malcolm's Counter Grimoire, quickly became the Company's final destination.

Busting in from the front, the wary Company made their way into the lower levels of the government building. Coming across a giant vault door, the Counter Grimoire began issuing an irritating alarm.

The Company readied themselves before opening the vault door. Inside, the Phasers spotted the Dungeon Egg and accessed its Subspace using their Controllers.

Zapped into the strange Subspace, ATC and Co. found themselves inside an underground cavern fused with the aesthetics of a surrealist painting. ATC and Company parkoured their way to the bottom.

Javier, intrigued by the nature of the Subspace, speculated that the CLEP Association's Sorcerers must have manipulated the gestating Dungeon's mind into this neat obstacle course that they were currently navigating.

At the bottom of the surreal cavern, The Company came face to face with their first Subboss.

They proceeded to ROLL THE DIE!!!

Subboss Fight: Genbu Vaisravana

HP: 100

Subboss Fight Song: Earthquake by The Epitome (Madlib & Oh No)

Company: ATC (17), Spot (18), Javier (16), Malcolm (17), Milo (17)

Risk: Normal

Time for a Subboss Fight! GENBU, despite his stature, isn't all that formidable. Well, assuming you came with Spells and Choices that can lower ol' boy's Incentive.

As the Earth Subboss, GENBU bolsters a defense that can render even the mightiest Simulacrum hit a dud. Expect to only deal 0.025 damage inside a Simulacrum unless you up your attack power.

Milo and Malcolm's Simulacrums, EPICURUS and EPICTETUS respectively, are the go-to for buffing and debuffing if you lack Metagames with those capabilities.

Additionally, Javier's Simulacrum, APOLLO, comes with a dope Spell that can double your fellow Collaborators' Magical potency. I'd suggest you apply it to end GENBU quickly if the Fade takes too long.

Aside from those insights, this a Fade of attrition. Renew your buffs and debuffs when they expire, stay healed and defend when necessary.

Once GENBU hits 0 HP, use the Exploit Command that appears to end the battle.

Beating GENBU causes the Company's memory cards to glow green, signifying that they've captured the Subboss' essence.

The Company is then Booted out of the Dungeon Egg's mind.

Back outside, ATC and Company returned to their rental car, noticing fewer vehicles in the parking lot.

The Company deduced that some of the Attemptees must have successfully escaped.

The Company, tired yet content, executed their return trip back to the landing lot.

Upon returning the rental car, ATC and Co. departed for "Rapid City".

On the drive back, ATC randomly questioned his decision to purchase a rental car in the first place.

Javier, Spot, Milo and Malcolm roast the absentminded Gakusei for it.

FIRE JUNGLE GYM

During the "second" decade of the School Phase, ATC, Milo and Malcolm participated in a Volunteer Gig at a cryptid conservatory in "Sioux Falls, SD".

Surprisingly, the trio ran into Ozzie and Charlotte, who were visiting the conservatory for a course assignment.

Charlotte, in its Anima form, struck up a conversation with Malcolm in a flirtatious way.

Ozzie, on the other hand, revealed to ATC and Milo that she and her Company had already Vanquished their 2nd Jungle Gym. The red panda goddess, feeling friendly, decided to share some insights regarding the Gym's difficulty.

"If you haven't completed the FIRE JUNGLE GYM yet, I suggest you do so now. Word on Narcissus is that a bunch of goofies decided to set up a lick operation there, not realizing that they'd just waltzed into a Stomach. Dumbasses," reported Ozzie.

Milo, absorbing Ozzie's words, asked if she was referring to the rumor of Highwaymen frequenting the area surrounding the FIRE JUNGLE GYM, to which the red panda goddess annoyingly confirmed.

ATC thanked Ozzie for the heads up, offering to treat her to a drink sometime as a show of thanks. The panda goddess, politely declining, instead asked the Gakusei to stay alive instead.

"That'll be thanks enough," replied Ozzie.

Upon wishing Charlotte and Ozzie a thoughtful farewell, ATC asked Milo why Malcolm looked unusually flustered.

Milo, nonchalantly, revealed to the Gakusei that Malcolm has a "thing" for Polarities.

ATC, shaking his head in amusement, couldn't help but be impressed when Malcolm revealed he'd scored a date with Charlotte.

After a much-needed break, the trio resumed their Gig of assisting the conservatory's visitors.

Towards the end of the Volunteer Gig, ATC stumbled upon a familiar entity: the Kaiju-bull Boss that tore up Javier's home Haven during the Gakusei's first Raid. Said Boss was relaxing in an enclosed Playground; one mirroring the kind of environment the Kaiju-bull used to reside in.

Milo and Malcolm, curious about ATC's strange behavior, received the rundown from their invisible Collaborator about the Raid he and Javier were involved in that resulted in his Tutorial delivering this specific Kaiju-bull to the conservatory.

Following the Volunteer Gig's conclusion, ATC and the Rylands departed for the twins' Pantheon business to enjoy some Gargantuan sushi from the latter's Tutorials.

On the way out, ATC caught a glimpse of the Kaiju-bull's new designation, codenamed GILGAMESH, BULL OF HEAVEN.

The Gakusei couldn't help but find the nickname "amusing", before departing the conservatory with the Ryland twins.

A period of Runtime came and went…

After resolving more personal Gigs and Quests, ATC and Company prepped their Inventories before plotting a course to their next Jungle Gym, located on a Haven called Wholesome.

Upon arrival, ATC and Company received directions to the FIRE JUNGLE GYM from a passerby.

Additionally, said passerby provided the Company with a heads up that the FIRE JUNGLE GYM had become a battleground between rival Highwaymen syndicates.

"Word on the street is that those cocksuckers have started beefing amongst themselves over the possession of your Challenge's Dungeon Egg. As dumb as that sounds, those Eggs can sell for a lot of Karma on the Blackmarket. Watch yourselves out their kiddos," advised the helpful passerby.

Well, aint this about a bitch, ATC thought to himself.

Undeterred, ATC and Company thanked their benefactor before initiating their trip to the FIRE JUNGLE GYM.

Having pooled together some Karma for fuel funds, as well as storing a few canisters of Simulacrum gas within their Inventories, ATC's Company no longer had need of using a rental car.

Instead, the Company would take turns driving one another's Simulacrums.

Following some Runtime on the road, ATC and Company entered a ruined ghost town detailed in burning debris, violated Simulacrums and a fuck ton of corpses. The entire scene looked like a genocide.

Using Malcolm's Belief Counter Grimoire, ATC and Company pinpointed the Dungeon Egg's location: a lone mansion at the far end of the FIRE JUNGLE GYM.

Swiftly arriving at their first Safe Point, ATC and Company repeated their tactic from the EARTH JUNGLE GYM and began moving strategically towards the mansion.

Along the way, ATC and Co. confronted and Vanquished many Highwaymen and FIRE YOKAI.; in addition, the Company assisted their fellow student Attemptees who'd also entered the same Stomach.

Arriving at the dilapidated mansion, the Company continued fighting their way underground. Upon entering and navigating a surreal lab, the Company arrived at another vault door.

Opening the vault door, ATC and Company stumbled upon a Dungeon Egg preparing to hatch.

According to Malcolm's hypothesis, the Highwaymen's repeated attempts at trying to reach the Dungeon Egg had, instead, made the divine bandits an abundant source of Food. This unusually stupid boon was beginning to show its devastating consequences.

Wasting little Runtime, ATC and Company dived into the Dungeon Egg's Subspace using their Controllers. The race against the proverbial clock had begun.

Inside the Subspace, the Company parkoured their way across a hellish cityscape before advancing to the top of a building where the FIRE JUNGLE GYM Subboss awaited.

Subboss Fight: Suzaku Virudhaka

HP: 110

Subboss Fight Song: Canned Heat by Jamiroquai

Company: ATC (19), Spot (18), Javier (18), Malcolm (17), Milo (17)

Risk: Hard

Roll them sleeves up, because this Subboss is a doozy. SUZAKU's Subspace is constantly crumbling around you. The building rooftops are the only safe places in this domain.

Whenever SUZAKU charges up an attack to destroy the building that the Company is on, you'd do well to utilize the Exploit Command that appears.

Failure to move to a different building using said Exploit will result in the Company falling into the inferno below.

Obviously, that'll lead to a Game Over.

Environmental dangers aside, SUZAKU's attacks are the most irritating of the Subbosses. All its attacks apply a burn status effect that reduces your HP by 0.0025 points per second. Thankfully, Spot's Simulacrum SOPHIA can remove the issue with a Company-wide Choice that halves the chances of a status effect being incurred.

If you failed to unlock that Choice for her before you started this fight, your Run is cooked (pun intended).

Aside from that, the Fade progression is straightforward. Simply follow SUZAKU across the Subspace's rooftops, Dodge or Parry its attacks, and follow through with your usual Game Plan.

Once SUZAKU's HP hits 0 and that Exploit Command option pops up, use it to finish the Fade.

Acquiring SUZAKU's essence, the Company's memory cards glowed red, signaling their triumph over the FIRE JUNGLE GYM.

ATC and Co., suddenly Booted out the Subspace, reappeared outside of the lone mansion. Instantly, a rumbling could be felt beneath their feet.

Now running, ATC summoned his CAMUS before warping himself and the Company into it. The Simulacrum shifted into its divineship form just as quickly.

Flying away from the Jungle Gym, ATC and the others observed a giant, larva Dungeon erupting from underneath the ground. The entire mansion had become nothing more than a memory.

On their way back to "Rapid City" from Wholesome, the Company noticed law enforcement Simulacrums and emergency divineships zooming right past them within the Border Highway.

The Company jokingly pointed out that any Attemptees who hadn't completed the FIRE JUNGLE GYM prior to this moment were officially shit out of luck.

Thank "mom" we didn't use a rental car this time, mused ATC.

WATER JUNGLE GYM

During the "third" decade of the School Phase, ATC could be seen kicking it with Milo and Spot at a popular fishing lake in "Spearfish".

As the trio socialized, a wandering Sisyphus dressed in an assortment of clothing casually waltzed up towards them, accompanied by Zey of all deities.

Milo, recognizing the unknown Sisyphus, greeted him sincerely, much to ATC and Spot's surprise.

The wandering Sisyphus, reciprocating the greeting, introduced himself as Jones.

Zey, a little high from a blunt he'd smoked not too long ago, revealed he'd just come from a Volunteer Gig and had made the acquaintance of Jones there, who was also volunteering.

Jones, a fan of fishing, invited Zey to join him for a quiet catch or two upon concluding their Gig, to which the Normie obliged.

Milo, noticing his fellow Collaborators' confusion, moved to enlighten ATC and Spot about his and Jones' relationship.

"Jones is a regular at this lake. On occasion, both him and I like to chat and trade tips about the art of fishing whenever the two of us are in the same vicinity," explained Milo with a rare smile, "I've known him since I was Youngling."

ATC, curious about Jones, became eager to ask the OG Sisyphus about life outside of a Surveillance.

Jones, just as eager to oblige, provided ATC with some of his takes on the SRPG.

Curiously, at a certain point in the conversation, Jones subtly reversed the questioning towards ATC. The OG Sisyphus asked the Gakusei something unusual.

"Have you ever "recalled" anything from your previous Runs?" asked Jones.

"Uhhh, no? I guess," replied ATC as he rubbed the back of his head, "then again, I DO have Existence Deficiency. For all I know, I could potentially wind up remembering something hella random in the Hypothetical."

Upon ATC mentioning his Existence Deficiency, Jones became eerily silent. The OG quietly mumbled to himself, "MJ, you lucky bastard" before chuckling.

ATC, curious about the chuckling, couldn't help but inquire. Jones, refocusing back on the Current, disregarded its importance to the Gakusei.

"Oh, it's nothing. I'm just reminiscing about something I learned about decades of Runtime ago," replied Jones.

After an hour or so of Runtime had passed, Jones excused himself from the gathering, bidding ATC, Zey, Milo and Spot a thoughtful farewell before Fast Traveling to parts unknown.

Zey, upon realizing that he'd a Sorcerer's appointment to attend to, swiftly provided thanks to Milo and the others for a chillaxing time.

“Oh, right! Before I leave, let me do y’all another solid! The other day, I knocked out the WATER JUNGLE GYM with sis, Char & GTA! All I’ll say is this: hope y’all can breathe underwater! Okay, late!” yelled Zey as he departed for his medical appointment.

Satisfied with their outing and catches, ATC, Milo and Spot departed for the Kickback. There, the trio provided the other Collaborators with some fish to grill. At the same time, the Company began strategizing their next moves.

With their immediate Opportunities completed, ATC and Co. readied their Inventories before charting a course to the WATER JUNGLE GYM, which was located on the Haven of Soggy.

After a few random dogfights on the way to the Haven, ATC and Co. touched down on one of Soggy’s many landing lots.

Asking around for the WATER JUNGLE GYM, ATC and Co. learned that said Gym is located on a coast located far east of the Haven.

Gathering their items and itineraries, ATC and Co. made their way to the WATER JUNGLE GYM.

Upon arrival, the Company entered the somewhat submerged ghost town.

Per usual, ATC and Co. began tracking down the Dungeon Egg whilst battling WATER YOKAI. When smart to do so, the Company moved strategically from Safe Point to Safe Point.

Meeting up with a group of exhausted student Attemptees who’d also made it to the closest Safe Point next to the Dungeon Egg, ATC and Co. pinpointed their target: an abandoned naval base.

Working alongside their fellow Phasers, ATC and Co. began their final trek. Whilst working their way through the more submerged parts of the ghost town, an inconvenience occurred.

A stealthy Tumbleweed rolled past a distracted ATC, causing an aquatic Midboss shaped like a Kraken to generate and erupt from the depths of the water around them.

Fleeing on top of floating debris whilst moving across building rooftops, ATC and Co. dodged the Kraken as it devoured a few Attemptees.

Making their way inside the abandoned naval base before the Kraken could reach them, the Magically dried Company dove underwater and swam to a submerged vault located at the base’s underbelly.

Readying themselves, ATC and Co. entered the vault. Accessing the Dungeon Egg per usual with their Controllers, the Phasers entered the Subspace.

Materializing inside of an aquatic vortex, The Company parkoured their way to the bottom of the domain via hopping to and from floating debris of coral, concrete and stone.

Landing on a flawless stone platform, the friends confronted the WATER JUNGLE GYM Subboss.

ATC and Co. knuckled up for a battle they weren’t expecting.

Subboss Fight: Seiryu Dhrtarastra

HP: 120

Subboss Fight Song: Jabberjaw Running Under Water by Pain

Company: ATC (20), Spot (18), Javier (19), Malcolm (18), Milo (18)

Risk: Easy

This is a “timed” fight.

Why do I say this, despite there not being an actual timer? Well, if the encroaching vortex surrounding you is any indication, you’ll “drown” if you don’t take out SEIRYU swiftly.

Fortunately, this clown can be easily Vanquished using the following Strat. SEIRYU’s main method of attack involves producing Magical water balls and shooting them at the Company.

If you've leveled up Javier’s ROMANTICISM Console to Lvl. 15 by this point in the Run, you should be able to equip a unique lightning Metagame called “Walden” to the Dhampir.

As you avoid SEIRYU’s attacks, energize the water orbs with Javier’s lightning Choices before knocking them back with a Parry from ATC’s Third Strike. Each hit does 25 damage to the WATER GYM Subboss. Once you do the math, you’ll drop this bum before you take a “water nap".

Hit that Exploit Command when you get SEIRYU’s HP to 0 to end the Fade.

Per usual, upon Vanquishing the Subboss, ATC and Co. observed their CLEP memory cards glowing a distinct blue, solidifying their “W”.

Booted to the outside of the WATER JUNGLE GYM, the Company arrived in time to witness Roswell’s Sect incapacitate and capture the Kraken.

The Shogun had received notice of the Midboss’ presence from the CLEP Association.

ATC met up with Roswell afterwards and informed his Tutorial about his college adventures thus far.

With the Kraken “neutralized”, Roswell Fast Traveled the Company back to “Rapid City”.

From there, the Shogun proceeded to treat his Pet and fellow Collaborators to a hibachi as a reward for surviving yet another day in the “game of life”.

WIND JUNGLE GYM

In the “fourth” decade of the School Phase, ATC accompanied Roswell to a major Volunteer Gig at “Ellsworth AFB”, bringing Javier and Malcolm along.

“Ellsworth AFB” was holding a memorial festival for the fallen. The base’s commander, in a gesture of Goodwill, invited the Shogun and his Samurai to the gathering to honor the Shogunate’s sacrifices.

Serving as visitor Walkthroughs and custodians, the godly trio spent their Runtime enjoying the festivities.

Towards the latter half of the Gig, ATC entered a nearby museum honoring the Simulacrum pilots of the Second Theomachy to do some cleaning, before noticing GTA talking to Roswell.

The interaction, observed by the Gakusei, was puzzling.

Overhearing the distant conversation further, ATC was surprised by GTA's comments concerning how impressed he was that ATC and his Company had lasted this long in the Challenge.

As ATC continued to eavesdrop from afar, a familiar voice broke his concentration.

"You're not that slick at being lowkey my friend," said Charlotte in Animus form.

ATC, catching his breath, collected his nerves before asking Charlotte what it was doing here.

Charlotte, amusingly shaking its head with a soft smile, stated that it and GTA were attending the base festivities as visitors (obviously) and were just on their way out when Roswell bumped into them.

GTA, an admirer of the Adventurer turned Shogun, proceeded to ask the OG Sisyphus some pertinent questions.

Just as the Gakusei was getting into the dialogue, a sharp whistle disrupted his and Charlotte's discussion.

GTA, who'd just finished his talk with Roswell, waved Charlotte over.

The shade-wearing Xenolith, with his malicious smirk, flipped ATC off before departing with the Polarity.

Paying it no mind, ATC responded by waving bye casually, much to GTA's chagrin.

After watching his two Opps walk away, ATC returned to Javier and Malcolm to assist them with their work.

Roswell approached his Pet sometime later to see if he and his Collaborators needed any further assistance in wrapping up their tasks.

ATC, thumbs upping his Tutorial, instead asked about the Shogun's conversation with GTA, to which the Shogun replied that GTA was asking for his advice on which military branch he should enlist in as preparation for joining INTERPOL later in his Run.

ATC, dumbfounded, learned from Roswell that GTA is descended from a long line of deities whose Tutorials have either served in law enforcement Roles and/or military Roles.

“That proud lad is eager to continue the Pantheon tradition,” said Roswell.

Additionally, ATC learned from Roswell that GTA has come to respect ATC's stubbornness and that he’s looking forward to running back their Fade, with the Gakusei’s Company now in the crosshairs as well.

ATC, realizing that GTA had been playing psychological power moves on him the entire time, reaffirms his Intent to meet the Xenolith’s challenge.

The sudden invigoration of being that much closer to the Expedient invoked in the Gakusei an “ingenious” Game Plan to best his Opp. ATC, now strangely confident, reassured his Tutorial that he’s got an “ace up his sleeve”.

Roswell, suspiciously intrigued, replied that he’s curious to see what that “ace” could be, before assisting his Pet, Javier and Malcolm with wrapping up their event clean up.

Some Runtime later, after getting their Inventories ready and wrapping up all Opportunities available to them, ATC and Co. conducted a course for the WIND JUNGLE GYM.

Arriving at the Haven of Dustbowl, the Company settled into the landing lot before asking around for the WIND JUNGLE GYM’s location.

Hilariously enough, the Company learned from a group of returning Attemptees that the ghost town was recently raised up towards the Haven’s Consensus after a Tumbleweed triggered a beanstalk to erupt from underneath the Jungle Gym’s foundation.

Rather than fly up to the ghost town, ATC and Co., instead, executed the decision to climb up the beanstalk for the additional Suffering.

Making their way to the divine beanstalk, the Company began an epic climb to the top, battling WIND YOKAI along the way.

Arriving in the WIND JUNGLE GYM, Malcolm’s Counter Grimoire immediately pinpointed the Dungeon Egg’s location to the top of a skyscraper.

Per usual, ATC and Co. relied on their Game Plan to move from identified Safe Point to identified Safe Point, until at last getting within the vicinity of the skyscraper.

Journeying to the top of the Jungle Gym’s skyscraper, ATC and Co. come across the familiar Dungeon Egg vault door.

After readying themselves, ATC and Co. unlocked and entered the vault.

Accessing the Dungeon Egg's Subspace once more with their Controllers, the Company were Zapped into a Subspace dominated by a raging cyclone.

Instantly, the WIND JUNGLE GYM Subboss arrived and attacked the Company without warning.

Subboss Fight: Byakko Virupaksa

HP: 130

Subboss Fight Song: Fly by Sugar Ray

Company: ATC (21), Spot (18), Javier (21), Malcolm (20), Milo (20)

Risk: Deadly

Just stay alive. That's the best piece of advice that I can give you.

BYAKKO starts the Fade by using a DECISIVE called "Anemoi Thuellai" to halve ATC and Company's HP, CP and stats.

I highly suggest you get in your Simulacrums swiftly to recuperate, as BYAKKO can dish out 5 HP worth of damage each hit. Put Milo and Malcolm on buff and debuff duty, Spot on healing duty and Javier on defense duty while keeping BYAKKO aggroed to ATC.

With that said, I have some good news. All you need to do to end the battle is drop BYAKKO's HP by half.

Go all out with your Choices and Spells until the Fade is done. Use items as needed to stay in the fight.

The Company, overwhelmed by BYAKKO’s onslaught, were left in a precarious position. In a disrespectful move, BYAKKO presented the Company with an Escape option, pissing the Phasers off.

Then came an "inconvenient" blessing in disguise. Out of nowhere, a giant wolf-like Simulacrum arrived, dealing a barrage of heavy blows before unleashing a Decisive that Vanquished BYAKKO.

ATC and Co. were then Booted out of the Subspace. Back outside in the WIND JUNGLE GYM, the Phasers swiftly realized that their CLEP memory cards had not been updated with BYAKKO’s essence.

Pissed off and panicking, ATC and Co. were confused as to what the hell had just occurred.

Suddenly, ATC received a message from GTA via Repertoire, admitting that it was him that dealt the finishing blow and that he’s issuing ATC and Co. a “Bonus Challenge” in exchange for BYAKKO’s essence.

Should ATC and Co. win GTA’s “game”, they’ll earn the Opportunity to copy BYAKKO’s essence from GTA’s memory card to theirs.

After telling ATC to meet him and his Company at the summit of “Mt. Rainier” in “Washington State”, GTA ends the convo with another message, stating that if the Gakusei and his Collaborators can best him in a Simulacrum Fade as a competent Company, he’ll “throw them a bone”.

ATC, now in dire need of assistance, texted Benjamin to see if he could Fast Travel both him and the Company to “Washington State”.

Benjamin, having been there plenty of times, agreed to take ATC and Co. there after being further informed about their dire situation.

The record store owner advised his honorary Nephew Pet and his friends to take care of any lingering business that they still have before coming to see him at IP Records.

Upon getting their priorities in order, ATC and Co. met up with Benjamin at IP Records. The former Shogun proceeded to Fast Travel both himself and the Company to “Seattle, Washington”.

Upon arriving and checking into a hotel, The Company bid Benjamin farewell before departing in their Simulacrums.

Arriving at “Mt. Rainier”, the Company began a surreal ascent towards the summit, all the while battling any cryptids that came their way.

At the summit, ATC and Co. found GTA chillaxing with Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte.

GTA, bidding his Opps welcome, summoned his Simulacrum BEOWULF, officially initiating his Bonus Challenge.

ATC and Co. summoned their Simulacrums in kind.

With Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte serving as livestreaming judges, GTA beckoned ATC and Co. to knock him off the summit within 5 minutes.

Should they fail, the Company won't have to worry about making it to the Expedient anymore.

Opp Fight: BEOWULF, Divine Will of GTA

HP: 50

Opp Fight Song: Juice (Know The Ledge) by Eric B & Rakim

Company: ATC (21), Spot (18), Javier (21), Malcolm (20), Milo (20)

Risk: Hard

This is a simple fight with brutal consequences.

BEOWULF, being GTA’s Simulacrum, can bypass ALL defenses and attack ATC and Company’s HP directly.

Substitute ain't going to cut it with this bloke.

In addition, each of GTA’s attacks will push its target towards the edge of the “arena”. If ATC is knocked off the summit, it's Game Over.

With that said, I've some uplifting news. BEOWULF doesn’t have that much HP either; on top of that, unleashing your strongest attacks on GTA will also push him off the summit eventually, earning you an automatic win as well.

Either way, I wish you the best of luck. A lot can happen in 5 minutes.

ATC, using a Decisive, is able to knock BEOWULF off the summit after the latter effortlessly beats Milo, Malcolm, Javier and Spot in short order.

Amused, GTA returned to the summit. A god of his word, the Xenolith automatically updates the Company's memory cards using his Controller.

Giving ATC a heads up that their next Fade at the Expedient might be a fatal one, GTA advises the Gakusei and his Company to Age Up like crazy before departing "Mt. Rainier" with Zey, Charlotte and Ozzie.

Barely victorious, ATC and Co. returned to Benjamin, weary about their chances at winning the approaching Expedient.

The OG Sisyphus, seeing a silver lining, assured the Company that they're still in the game, despite the odds against them.

Encouraged by Benjamin to enjoy themselves after overcoming their decades long trials and tribulations, ATC and Co. proceeded to enjoy their Runtime in "Seattle" as a prize for overcoming the JUNGLE GYM CHALLENGE.

The Opportunity for training could wait until later.

V

With Runtime to spare before the start of CLEP season, ATC and Co. held a bonfire hangout over at the “Grand Canyon” in “Colorado”.

Not long after getting high, grilling some smores and knocking out some drinks on the “Grand Canyon’s” ground floor, ATC and the Company focused their thoughts on the Hypothetical.

In the distant background, “Paul Bunyan’s” Knicknack could be seen.

ATC, curious about the axe, asked his fellow Collaborators if any of them knew the story behind it.

Jack and Jill, sipping on THC seltzers, hilariously informed ATC of a local Legend involving a drunken Xenolith of the Giant variety that tried to cleave the Station in two.

“According to legend, Ol’ “Paul Bunyan” took on a Mini-Game for some Karma. He failed, obviously,” said a laughing Jill.

“But hey! He at least left us this gnarly canyon. No idea why he left his Knicknack behind though. He was probably too wasted to care,” added Jack with a restful tone.

“Damn shame I’m not a Giant. I’d love to take that Knicknack back to the Atelier at Uni and study its composition,” chimed in Joe.

“Hmmm, interesting shit,” replied ATC as he consumed a piece of his Tussle medication.

Following some idle chatter, a calm silence washed over the Company as they gazed up towards the nightly Consensus.

Spot, no longer Softlocked, decided to give another heartfelt thanks to everyone present that helped her overcome her debilitating status effect.

Feeling the time to be right, ATC asked Spot how she even ended up becoming Softlocked.

Spot, comfortable with sharing her identity, revealed that she's the Sister Pet of Witty Thaovi Mugen, a missing Fae goddess who is considered to be their Godhood's Matron.

"Spot Melissa Mugen is my full name. Call me looney, but you can never be too careful telling everyone and their grandma who you really are when your sister has robbed a lot of deities," said Spot drunkenly.

Javier freaks out upon hearing this.

"Wait, wait, wait! You're the sister of the Immaculate! I didn't even know she had a sister! Okay Javier, pause for a sec. I've got some questions. So many questions!" said Javier with enthusiasm.

ATC, confused, asks who she is.

Javier, dumbfounded, chews ATC out for forgetting the story they were told about Witty during the Dirge.

Paying ATC and Javier's banter no mind, Spot decided to fill everyone in on her Pantheon's Backstory.

Jack, Joe and Jill, already privy of Spot's identity, took a moment of silence. Javier, sensing the change in his fellow Faes' demeanor, slowly started putting "two and two" together as Spot began her monologue.

Spot recounted the tale of how her Sister Tutorial, Witty, earned her legendary Alias from Fortune.

By stealing the Asura Hegemony's nuclear arsenal from their base of operations, "Castle Transylvania", Witty ended the Assimilation of Nights and was christened "The Immaculate" by the Sublime Axiom.

Following the Assimilation of Night's conclusion, Witty's Company of Privateers informed a Youngling Spot that Witty fell into the Fae Sleep because of a forbidden Choice she utilized to steal the 13th Dracula's nuclear trump card.

"The former leader of the Asura Hegemony was our Uncle Tutorial. You could say my sis and unc's "squabble" was a family one," revealed Spot before continuing her story.

To ensure Witty's safety from any vengeful Vampyrs fiending to liquidate her, Witty's Club, called Hiden, spread the rumor of her "disappearance" after moving the slumbering goddess to a hidden, underground castle facility beneath the capital Haven of Elfame.

A young Spot, heartbroken at learning of Witty's state, fell into the Softlock status effect as a consequence of being unable to cope.

Therefore, Spot has been unable to Age Up normally for the past 100 years of Runtime and had only hit her teenage Growth Spurt shortly before meeting ATC and Javier.

By overcoming an insurmountable obstacle (e.g. the JUNGLE GYM CHALLENGE), Spot's Configuration was able to cure itself of the Softlock.

ATC and Co. finally come to an understanding of Spot's excitement and insistence for wanting to take on the JUNGLE GYM CHALLENGE upon hearing the Dhampir conclude her tale.

After thanking the Company for the "millionth" time, Spot promises to introduce ATC and Co. to Witty once she awakens.

Additionally, the Dhampir revealed that Hiden's last message to her was that Witty's Configuration was nearing the end of its self-healing process, meaning she'll awaken right when the Expedient ends.

Spot hopes to show Witty her Degree Diploma upon her awakening.

ATC, in unison with the other Collaborators, promise to make it happen before enjoying the rest of their bonfire party under the watchful eye of "Paul Bunyan's" axe.

Following the bonfire party, ATC and Co. spent the remaining Runtime of the School Phase training until they all reached their Current Age Cap.

The Age Cap is a Mechanic used by the SUBLIME AXIOM to limit the Struggle Gains of certain deities to nearly 0 to encourage said deities to change up their Run's trajectory.

By the arrival of the 49th year of the current School Phase, the CLEP season had recommenced.

From the “spring” of the 49th year of the School Phase to the “spring” of its 50th year, Traditional CLEPs were ongoing daily.

Students, competing in game show style exams, were either awarded credits or disappointment.

During this period, Sumeru The Amusement was reopened to serve as an amusement park once more. Eager deities from all over the SPRPG frequented its heavenly attractions and rides.

Behind the scenes, however, the Statue of Sumeru was being primed and readied for the Expedient CLEP itself.

In the 50th year of the current School Phase, following the completion of the Phase’s final Traditional CLEPs, the Expedient CLEP was fully on.

Prepping his Inventory before meeting up with Roswell and Benjamin upstairs above his basement apartment, ATC was suddenly conflicted with a dumbass decision.

Towards the end of their training decade, ATC and Javier desperately utilized as much of their Rival Network’s lucrative Gigs to break the Age Cap.

Alas, the Suffering on offer was no longer of any value to ATC or Javier, leaving them both “stuck” at Age 24.

Back in the Current, ATC mused about whether he should still use his “trump card”: fighting without taking his Tussle.

The Gakusei had hoped to hit Age 25 before the Expedient so that he could be free from his Existence Deficiency and fight GTA at full Effort. Alas, that would no longer be the case.

With his trump card all but foiled because of the Age Cap, ATC decided to take a risky gamble in the hopes of beating GTA at the end of the Tiebreaker segment.

Deciding not to take the Tussle, ATC gambled on him beating GTA before a Meltdown occurs, hoping to defeat him fast enough to Age Up using his full abilities (untapped Glitches and Approaches).

Upon convincing himself that this was a good idea, ATC threw his Tussle dispenser in the trash.

Laforgeyuhan, always present, offered ATC a grave warning.

“Don’t do it,” advised the Mirror.

ATC, not giving a fuck anymore, dismissed Laforgeyuhan’s remark, infuriating the Mirror.

ATC rendezvous with Roswell and Benjamin, who then Fast Traveled themselves over to Sumeru The Amusement, where the others were waiting.

It's do or die now.

Onto SUMERU THE AMUSEMENT!!!

VI

ATC, Roswell and Benjamin arrived at the heart of Sumeru The Amusement, with Laforgeyuhan in tow.

Right on schedule, the trio Fast Traveled into the vicinity of Milo, Malcolm, Spot, Javier and the foursome's respective Pantheons, friends and associates.

ATC reacquainted himself with the Descartes before greeting the Ryland Pantheon and a few members of Hiden who'd arrived to cheer Spot on.

Walking together for a time, ATC and Co. eventually caught sight of the Statue of Sumeru, where the Expedient CLEP was set to occur in less than an hour.

Bidding their Pantheons and mutual acquaintances farewell, ATC's Company departed for the Statue of Sumeru to register for the Expedient.

Inside the Statue, ATC and Co. approached one of many CLEP kiosks and presented their completed memory cards to it, registering their Configurations for the Expedient CLEP.

Upon passing through a deadly laser grid that slices and dices anyone who's Configuration isn't marked for participation in the Expedient, ATC and Co. arrive in front of a towering bodhisattva statue.

Amidst a plethora of other student Attemptees, ATC and Co. catch sight of GTA, Charlotte, Zey and Ozzie congregating next to a large, gated entryway; their backs turned away from the Company.

Malcolm and Javier conduct a quick count and deduce that there are 24 total Attemptees. Compared to the hundreds of Attemptees who participated in the previous Expedient, the cause of the sudden drop this time around could only be because of one thing.

"Grim," said Spot upon contemplating morbid thoughts.

ATC, noticing Laforgeyuhan from a distance slowly shaking his head at him, became irritated.

I'll show you homie, thought a heated ATC.

Eventually, the sound of the CLEP commentators' booming voices came bellowing from the speakers high above, welcoming the Attemptees to the Expedient before stating the rules established by the CLEP Association.

Divided into two sections, the **Battle Royale** and the **Tiebreaker**, the Expedient CLEP was elaborated on as follows.

"For the Battle Royale portion, all qualified teams, solo or otherwise, are to climb their way up the statue's numerous levels and environments to the Tiebreaker that sits atop the Statue's head as a crown. The teams that make it to the stadium in under two hours will battle one another in the Tiebreaker portion," stated the 1st CLEP commentator.

"In the event that only one team is left standing, the surviving team will automatically win the Expedient, regardless of whether they made it to the Tiebreaker. During the ascent up, all participants will be assaulted by both cryptids reared by the CLEP Association, as well as the Ultimate Subboss of Sumeru called SAKRA; a Golem created via a fusion of the four Jungle Gym Subbosses," stated the 2nd CLEP commentator.

"If Sakra catches you, it's an automatic disqualification Folks," announced both CLEP commentators.

Unlike the JUNGLE GYM CHALLENGE, no student is under penalty of death. Should a student's HP fall below a certain threshold, the bodhisatta will activate and Zap the weakened Attemptee to the Tiebreaker's audience. This is a rule specifically meant for the Battle Royale portion. Anything goes for the Tiebreaker portion.

ATC and the Company's Controller's were updated with a timer via their student Grimoires, beginning at 120 minutes.

Upon the count of three, the Statue of Sumeru opened its massive entrance at the base of the bodhisattva.

ATC and Co. darted inside and began their trek, following behind GTA's Company who'd already secured the lead.

Along the way, the Company battled cryptids, both familiar and new, as well as their fellow student Attemptees.

Upon making it to the penultimate level of the Statue, ATC and Co. encountered Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte guarding the way up to the Tiebreaker.

GTA was nowhere to be seen, implying that he'd already made it to said Tiebreaker.

Spot, Milo and Malcolm immediately engage Charlotte, Ozzie and Zey, providing ATC and Javier ample time to slip by them and continue their way up towards the Tiebreaker.

To prevent Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte from making it to the Tiebreaker to even the odds, Spot, Milo and Malcolm prepared for an intense rumble.

Opp Fight: Zey, Ozzie & Charlotte

HP: 24 (each)

Opp Fight Song: At All by Kaytranada

Company: Milo (23), Malcolm (23), Spot (23)

Risk: Hard

This Fade is a unique one. After a certain amount of Runtime has passed, SAKRA will arrive to end the battle. However, if the Company is bested before then, it’s Game Over.

On the flipside, if you’re able to defeat the three deities before SAKRA’s arrival, you’ll be awarded with some serious XP.

Sounds simple enough right? Well, it would be if your three Foes weren’t a serious threat. Charlotte’s ANDROCENTRISM and GYNOCENTRISM Consoles can dish out some debilitating debuffs, on top of allocating highly potent healing Approaches to its Collaborators. I suggest you take it out first.

As for Zey and Ozzie, those two pack a punch, dealing 2 HP of damage per assault.

What makes getting jumped even worse are the Normie siblings’ CONSUMERISM and HEDONISM Consoles respectively.

Both can drain your Certainty swiftly with their asinine Choices, so double down on the evasion. With Zey on rollerblades and Ozzie on a skateboard, they’ll be harder to hit than usual.

Make sure to use either Spot’s NEOFEMINISM Console or Milo’s IDEALISM Console to Substitute your Collaborators CP for HP if you’re taking too much damage.

If you’re able to best all three Opps before SAKRA arrives, the RNG will reward you with a Drop of five unique items that’ll allow you to boost your five Collaborator’s Knicknacks to a new tier of power.

If not, no worries. There'll be more Opportunities to level up the Company’s arsenal.

Both teams are Zapped by SAKRA, sending the six deities to the Tiebreaker's audience.

With Spot, Malcolm, Milo, Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte disqualified, the remaining Attemptees left to compete are ATC, Javier and GTA.

Spot, Milo and Malcolm, healed up thanks to Sumeru's restorative nature, are reunited with their Pantheons, fellow Collaborators and the two OG Sisyphus.

Conversely, Zey, Ozzie and Charlotte are situated on the opposite side of the stadium. Seated, healed up and ready to cheer GTA on.

The time had arrived, with ATC and Javier facing off against GTA amid the Tiebreaker.

Although ATC began feeling weary thanks to his Existence Deficiency's growing instability, the Gakusei reinforced his confidence that he can overpower GTA and Age Up with his full power unlocked before he incurs a Meltdown.

Before the CLEP commentators began sounding off the countdown to the Tiebreaker bout, the energetic pair took a moment to remind the viewers, both at home and in person, of the rules of the encroaching Fade.

VII

ATC and Javier faced down Grendel Tyrone Adonis in the center of The Tiebreaker arena.

In the audience, Roswell, Benjamin and the others watched on.

Grendel, no longer feeling the need to hold back, put in maximum EFFORT before generating a dense amount of Certainty around his fists.

To give you an idea as to how his punches would feel, imagine getting hit by brass knuckles.

Now in an Orthodox boxing stance, GTA made his goal clear to ATC and Javier: ***Get em' outta of here, fatally or non-fatally.***

ATC, realizing that this'll be a brutal 2v1 Fade, looked to Javier.

The friendly Rivals nodded to one another before summoning their Knicknacks in response.

With all in attendance, the CLEP commentators gave the go ahead for the Tiebreaker to commence.

ATC and Javier charge GTA, with all three screaming, "Roll the Die!!!"

Opp Fight: Grendel Tyrone Adonis, Prodigy of the Xenoliths

HP: 25

Opp Fight Song: Bronx Zoo Freestyle by J. Cole

Company: ATC (24), Javier (24)

Risk: Normal to Terminal

Time to catch a Fade. This'll either be a long one or a short one depending on how quick your Parry or Dodging is.

GTA's LONGINUS Miracle will bypass all Substitute attempts, so don't even bother putting 'em up. Also, I want you to be mindful of this first part of the battle.

GTA can deal 2 to 5 HP worth of damage each **hit** depending on your performance in the battle. His PRAGMATISM Console can crit like a bitch. Fuck around **AND** you **WILL** find **OUT**.

Fortunately, ATC is now able to use Glitches and Approaches. If you suck at Dodging or Parrying, throw on ATC's Fast Travel Glitch. While it'll allow you free Dodges, you can only use it a finite number of times during Fades.

Use it wisely.

Javier's NOSFERATU MODE is another bonus to alleviate the Fade's difficulty. Throwing it on will fortify Javier's stats, HP and CP by double the amount and increase his evasion to absurd levels. However, the form will deplete the Dhampir's HP by 0.0025 points per second so long as it is active. Be mindful of this during the scrap.

Once GTA hits 14HP, he'll transform into his BRUTE MODE and knock Javier out of the Tiebreaker arena. ATC will reunlock his GRIND Form upon seeing this.

USE IT IMMEDIATELY or its Game Over. GTA isn't going to WAIT for you to use it.

Once ATC is in the GRIND, simply maintain your GAME PLAN until GTA hits 0HP. Keep in mind the level of ATC's CP. If it drops to 0, it's also Game Over. Keep the Gakusei's CP up to stay in the battle.

Once GTA’s HP reaches 1, a brief cutscene will play. After it ends, simply execute the Exploit Command before ATC hits the ground to end the Fade.

ATC, in his Grind form, hits GTA with his final attack at the exact same time that GTA counterattacks. Both deities knock one another out of The Tiebreaker arena.

Just before ATC touches the out of bounds area surrounding the arena, the Gakusei uses his Fast Travel to teleport himself back to the arena, securing his Company's victory.

However, as the crowd roars with awe over the unfathomable bout's conclusion, ATC notices that he can no longer move his body. His Grind Form, thankfully fizzling out, gives way to the dreaded Meltdown status effect.

Afflicted with a radiation sickness of Uncertainty, ATC writhes in agony, causing all who are present to be both confused and dumbfounded.

Instantly, Roswell looks over to Benjamin and requests that he contact both the Shogunate and Roswell's Sect. With a nod, Benjamin Fast Travels.

Roswell tells Milo, Malcolm, Spot, Javier, their Pantheons and Collaborators the urgency of the situation and tells them to evacuate.

ATC's screams cause Roswell to Fast Travel to his Pet instantly.

Laforgeyuhan, just as swift, materializes right next to the Tutorial-Pet duo.

Javier, just as confused as everyone else, immediately uses a powerful potion to help the fallen GTA recuperate.

Roswell asks Laforgeyuhan *two, specific questions*: both *when* **and** *how* long did ATC stop taking his Tussle, to which the Mirror answers truthfully; all the while throwing a slick comment ATC's way.

With a powerful sigh, Roswell contemplates the following events that are about to take place, before looking upwards at the Forecast.

"Give him a Reprieve, would you? A final request from your faithful follower," asked Roswell silently.

Following the quiet request, Roswell ordered Laforgeyuhan to channel the Uncertainty out of ATC's Configuration and towards the Consensus.

Laforgeyuhan warns that the consequences will be most deadly and that THE SUBLIME AXIOM is going to have a field day with this blunder of ATC's.

Roswell accepts the consequences and reaffirms the command to the Mirror.

Laforgeyuhan, in response, effortlessly absorbs ATC's Uncertainty into himself.

After talking more shit to ATC, Laforgeyuhan aims his finger towards the sky and shoots the Uncertainty into the Consensus via a thin yet concentrated beam.

Unlike ATC's first Raid, which involved a "Break-In" forming on the Consensus, the Uncertainty beam produced from Laforgeyuhan's skeletal finger flat out destroys "Sioux Falls'" Consensus in its entirety.

This very act causes the RNG to trigger something 10x worse than a Raid.

FORTUNE, THE SUBLIME AXIOM wills into existence a **Renovation**.

VIII

ATC opens his peripherals, gradually realizing he’s lying on his childhood bed within his old bedroom on “Rapid City’s” Surveillance, surrounded by his Company.

Spot reveals to the groggy Gakusei that Roswell had Fast Traveled them all to safety, right as the RNG generated a Raid of cryptid ships outside of “Sioux Falls”.

Milo and Malcolm comment that “Sioux Falls’” Consensus got completely vaporized by ATC’s Uncertainty, almost as if it were a paper napkin being burnt to ash by a flame.

ATC, paralyzed with guilt, confesses to his Company as to why he had his Meltdown.

After the Company rightfully drags ATC through the dirt for his bullshit decision, Laforgeyuhan materializes in front of everyone before telling ATC that he can “unfuck” his situation by going back to “Sioux Falls” to help fight against the Renovation.

ATC, without hesitation, agrees wholeheartedly and is shocked to hear Benjamin agree with him as the former Shogun enters his room.

Benjamin, just as eager to get into fray, tells ATC that he’ll Fast Travel both him and the Company to “Sioux Falls” to join in on the action

According to Benjamin, the entire state of “South Dakota” will have to hold out until the Shogunate’s forces arrive, revealing that the Renovation event doesn’t just affect one Haven, but multiple locations within the same space all at once.

With cryptid armadas attacking places like “Spearfish”, “Rapid City”, “Brookings”, “Madison”, “Deadwood” and other locations, it's all hands-on deck.

Benjamin, with a snap of his bandaged fingers, teleports ATC and Co. back to “Sioux Falls” while he stays behind to help fight off the “Rapid City” armada.

ATC, Milo, Malcolm, Spot, Jack, Jill and Joe materialize into an urban city warzone, taking place at the heart of “Sioux Falls”.

Settling into a nearby cafe that’s been abandoned, Jack, Jill and Joe “set up shop” to provide a place for ATC and Co. to restock consumables, upgrade their gear and recuperate before running back outside into the mayhem.

After much prep time, ATC and Co. blitz out to fight the invading cryptids while assisting whomever they come across.

During the battle, ATC’s Company encounters GTA’s Company. Putting aside their differences, the nine deities team up to protect civilians, Bystanders and beat back the “space invaders”.

Then came a thunderous explosion, catching both Companies off guard.

Gilgamesh, the Boss that was being kept in the “Sioux Falls” cryptid conservatory, escapes from its captivity and begins rampaging towards ATC and the other’s direction.

Two gigantic hands, called Lughs, generate from Gilgamesh’s body, horrifying Malcolm in the process.

“Oh shit! That ain't good! That ain’t good at all! Brace yourselves everyone! We’ve got a potential Final Boss heading straight for us,” yelled Malcolm.

Boarding their Simulacrums, the two Companies prepare to throw down with the Boss of Heaven.

Boss Fight: Gilgamesh, Boss of Heaven

HP: 140

Boss Fight Song: Lost In Space by Apollo 440

Company: ATC (25), Javier (25), Spot (25), Milo (25), Malcolm (25), GTA (25), Charlotte (25), Zey (25), Ozzie (25)

Risk: Deadly to Terminal

Good news!

All you have to do to win this Fade is drop Gilgamesh's HP by half to end the battle! Sounds easy, right?

Okay then…what's the bad news? Gilgamesh's normal attacks can take away 20HP per hit. Oh, and the bastard has Lughs, so if he combos anyone in the Companies, it's adios.

Thankfully, you've got Zey's ANANSI, Ozzie's KHONSU, Charlotte's RANMA, and GTA's BEOWULF to back you up. With a second Company in the fold, you'll be using the rare CONGLOMERATE system.

While maintaining a safe distance from the Lughs, direct one Company to debuff and agro Gilgamesh. Buff and attack with the other Company when the timing is right.

Flank and lump up the raging bull when it occasionally tires to up the damage!

This next part is important. Fuck up and you'll get an early Bad Ending.

Utilize the Exploit Commands that pop up throughout the Fade to save any civilians or Bystanders that come your way. Doing this will boost your Incentive, allowing you to stay in the scrap longer.

And who knows? Some of those "good" Deeds might come in handy in the event of a "criminal" trial.

I digress. Once the raging Kaiju bull’s health drops to half, a cutscene will play. Press the Exploit Command on time as ATC to end the Fade.

Fail to do so, and you’ll receive a very special Game Over.

Kebobs anybody?

After receiving enough damage, Gilgamesh buckles under weariness.

With one last burst of Certainty, Gilgamesh charges towards the Companies; looking to gore something.

Inside his CAMUS, ATC charges the Boss in an attempt to hold Gilgamesh back.

Out of nowhere, both ATC and Gilgamesh are Zapped to “Seattle, WA” by the RNG.

Milo, Malcolm, Spot, Javier, Charlotte, Zey, Ozzie and GTA are left speechless as to what they’ve just witnessed.

IX

ATC and Gilgamesh land right smack dab in the middle of downtown “Seattle, Washington”.

Due to the damage CAMUS had sustained during the battle at “Sioux Falls, SD”, ATC’s Simulacrum is out of commission.

The Gakusei disembarked his downed mecha before dismissing it.

Nearby, an unconscious Gilgamesh began to convulse violently, screaming in agony.

Laforgeyuhan, materializing next to ATC, suddenly received a phone call from the Trifecta on his Controller.

ATC, alongside the citizens of “Seattle”, watched in horror as Gilgamesh was torn apart from the inside out, revealing a Kaiju-sized, mutli-faced “centaur” with multiple arms, exiting from the corpse of the former Boss.

Laforegeyuhan, finishing his phone call with the Trifecta, informed ATC of some unsettling news.

“Well Camel, I’ve got good news and bad news. Which one do you want first?” asked the Mirror.

A moment of your Runtime dear reader.

During Roswell’s youth, the Shogun did Fortune a solid. As a reward for the Feat, THE SUBLIME AXIOM rewarded the aspiring Adventurer with a **single “get out of jail free” card**.

Thankfully for ATC, Roswell never fucked up like he did, since that very same “card” the Shogun never needed to use was about to be utilized on the terrified Gakusei.

THE SUBLIME AXIOM gifted ATC with the Reprieve that was originally meant for his Tutorial.

Unfortunately (haha), he'll have to “earn” it.

The multi-armed Final Boss, now called KING GILGAMESH, began fucking “Seattle” up.

Laforgeyuhan informs ATC that he’s been thrusted into the legendary “Final Boss Challenge”.

According to the Mirror, ATC must Vanquish the King in under 40 minutes using the “Reprieve” the SUBLIME AXIOM will soon give him.

Failure to do so will result in the King using a powerful Black Magic Spell called “Colonization”, which will warp the Haven into a fertile Station, eradicating all within it.

As the Mirror instructs the Gakusei, The Forecast creates an unbreakable Consensus around “Seattle”, preventing all from getting in or out of the doomed Haven, including any Sisyphus and/or Ludens.

If ATC succeeds and saves “Seattle”, FORTUNE “might” ensure the continuation of ATC’s Run.

A special Shortcut appears in front of ATC, called a Bequeath. On the Bequeath’s screen is the name of ATC’s “Reprieve”, called the Drive.

The Drive will grant ATC a powerup that’ll temporarily make him Age 99, with a time limit mirroring the 40-minute deadline as previously stated.

Laforgeyuhan jokes that ATC is getting a sneak peek at how powerful he **could** become should he survive this Final Boss Challenge.

ATC, mad at himself beyond reasoning for how much he’s fucked up, accepts the “Reprieve” via a tap on the screen.

Instantly, ATC loses color and turns into a baseless gradient hue of black, white and gray. He pixelates completely like he’s a 16-bit sprite.

Summoning Third Strike, “Aesop” bats his hand with it.

Without a word, the temporary Self-Hero Fast Travels in front of the King and smashes his face in with a swing of his Knicknack

It's Up.

Time for a **Mythical Fade**.

Final Boss Fight: King Gilgamesh, Aspiring Ruler of The Heavens

HP: 150

Final Boss Fight Song: Implosionatic by Hot Hot Heat

Company: “Aesop” (99)

Risk: Normal to Hard

Let’s get it!

See that bar up above King Gilgamesh’s HP. That “piece of the shit” bar is called the Casualty Meter. Essentially, if that shit fills all the way up via a lot of deities dying during this Mythical Fade, the King will cast Colonization, leading to a Bad Ending.

I know right!

With that said, you’re going to want to kill the Final Boss fast!

Thankfully, ATC has temporarily regained his original power as “Aesop”.

While you’re out of a Simulacrum during this Fade, you won’t need it.

The 9999 CP you have in this form will make Substituting a breeze. Additionally, as “Aesop”, ATC’s normal attacks will dish out 1 HP worth of damage per hit.

Approaches will also induce a knock back that’ll send the King flying across insane distances.

See where I’m going with this?

“Superman-punch” the King’s ass as far away from “Seattle’s” urban areas as much as possible to slow the Casualty Meter down.

“Aesop” can also Auto-Parry and Auto-Dodge if you so choose. I say this since you’ll need to utilize “Aesop’s” ultimate Decisive to end this Mythical Fade. Since the ultimate attack can only be unleashed using attacks absorbed from Blocks or Parries, it’ll be convenient to utilize the Auto options if the Guard action proves to be too much.

Use Approaches to knock King Gilgamesh into the wilderness areas of “Seattle”, making sure to heal, Block, Parry or continue the offensive.

Once you’ve generated enough power to unleash the Ultimate Decisive, hit that Exploit Command to end the Mythical Fade.

With 0.01 seconds left on his Drive timer before depowering, “Aesop” decapitates the King with the built-up Uncertainty contained within his Third Strike via Blocking and absorbing the King’s blows throughout the Fade.

The temporary Self-Hero converts the accumulated Uncertainty into a small, glowing sniper rifle bullet. Striking it like a batter at a batting plate, “Aesop” unleashes his original Decisive from back in the Prior, called Second Impact.

What was once King Gilgamesh’s head had now become a cavity of flesh, blood, viscera, pus and bone; all pouring down upon the city streets below like stormwater.

Despite how ruined the Haven had become because of the Mythical Fade, with an innumerable number of bodies coating the urban jungle, “Seattle” had been “saved” by “Aesop”.

The Drive, having at last dissipated, reverted “Aesop” back into ATC, who immediately fell unconscious.

Swiftly, Roswell appeared, catching his falling Pet before he could meet the earth.

“Thanks “mom”,” said Roswell.

No sooner had Roswell given Fortune his blessings, a contingent of powerful Samurai appeared in front of the pair.

Leading the unit was the Hachiman, right-hand of the Ahura Mazda.

Surveying the destruction, chief among them the carcasses of both Gilgamesh and its Randomized offspring, King Gilgamesh, the Hachiman could do nothing but make a clicking sound with his tongue.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk. Oh dear, we are in trouble,” said the Hachiman casually as he slowly turned his head towards the incapacitated ATC.

Looking up at Roswell, the Hachiman gave a familiar greeting to the Shogun.

“Ros,” said the Hachiman.

“Coldwell,” replied the Shogun.

With a snap of his bandaged finger, Coldwell Fast Traveled the incapacitated Gakusei to a special cell on Spinoza, the Haven of the Sisyphus Shogunate.

Returning his Attention to Roswell, Coldwell spared no words for what was said next.

“Your Pet is to be sentenced to Seppuku. No if’s, and’s or but’s. The Ahura Mazda requests your presence, **now**,” ordered Coldwell.

“But of course,” replied Roswell with disappointment.

And thus, the Shogun and the Hachiman Fast Traveled, along with the elite Samurai unit, to the Haven of Spinoza.

With so many dead, injured, ruined or in grief over the fallout of ATC’s actions, one thing was for certain.

The bill had come due.

X

Upon ATC's recovery from his Mythical Fade, he was brought before the Ahura Mazda, the Hachiman, the Amesha Spenta and other Sisyphus in a Tribunal.

The Hachiman stated the reasons why the Gakusei was to be Seppukued.

"Based on information received during and after this recent Renovation, our investigation has concluded that the Sins committed were voluntary in nature; as such, the loss of Runs, loss of property and, sadly, loss of a Boss has egregiously damaged the Goodwill we've cultivated with the other Godhoods," stated Coldwell.

Standing next to ATC, in his defense, was Roswell. Behind the Tutorial-Pet duo, blade sheathed yet at the ready, was Laforgeyuhan.

In the audience, watching with bated breath, was Benjamin, quietly livestreaming the proceedings so that Javier, Spot, Milo, Malcolm, Jack, Jill, Joe, Charlotte, Zey, Ozzie and GTA could perceive the trial as well.

To counter the Hachiman's argument for Seppuku, Roswell listed off ATC's accomplishments; ranging from his heroic performance in his 1st Raid, his Reputation for Volunteering, assisting the helpless during the Jungle Gym Challenge, receiving supportive testimonies from other deities who respect ATC's Build, and, of course, the Reprieve that ATC received from "mom".

Despite ATC's past triumphs, the Ahura Mazda admonished Roswell for even trying to defend ATC's Current Build.

The Supreme Shogun of the Sisyphus swiftly backed up the Hachiman's reasoning by mentioning that those same "triumphs" of ATC's had also fed his hubris, culminating in him doing what he did.

To demonstrate this, the Ahura Mazda commanded Laforgeyuhan to recount the interaction that ATC had had with the Mirror on the day of the Dissent.

Laforgeyuhan summoned a Shortcut depicting said exchange.

Following the replaying of ATC's damaging words and his tossing of the Tussle, the Ahura Mazda pointed out that the Reprieve ATC was gifted was illegitimate by default, as it would allow the Gakusei to be rewarded for his **voluntary** stupidity.

Using the example of a law enforcement officer setting up crimes so that said officer can take the credit for solving them later, ATC's actions, in the eyes of the Ahura Mazda, appeared no different.

Tired of the Tribunal, the Ahura Mazda announced his judgement and found ATC to be "incompetent".

As punishment, the Gakusei was hereby sentenced to Seppuku, effectively immediately, as a gesture of Goodwill to the Deep State.

Roswell, sensing Laforgeyuhan's killing intent, readied his final Game Plan.

Upon the Ahura Mazda asking if anyone had any last words to say to ATC, Roswell announced his offer of Penance.

Presenting his offer for Penance, Roswell revealed a shocking item in his Inventory: the Final Dungeon.

All in attendance were either awestruck or shocked.

The Hachiman, an old Collaborator of Roswell's from back in their college days, admonished him for asking the Shogunate to sacrifice his Run in place of his Pet's.

The Ahura Mazda, impressed by Roswell's paternal love for ATC, decided to humor the situation; as decreed by the Supreme Shogun, Roswell was granted his Penance.

In exchange for taking ATC's place, Roswell must head for the Final Dungeon ASAP, where THE SUBLIME AXIOM will await to hand him an Existential Fade.

Because of his heavenly Reputation, Roswell was granted a short grace period called a Last Meal.

During a Last Meal, the deity set to be Vanquished is given a small window of freedom to take care of any lingering tasks. This is called Last Arrangements.

If Roswell fails to use the Final Dungeon by the end of the Last Meal, ATC will be Vanquished.

The Ahura Mazda, however, wasn't finished with ATC's sentencing. The consequences of the Gakusei's stupid actions were still fresh as hell in the minds of a lot of deities.

Just because the Ahura Mazda was allowing ATC to keep his Run, didn't mean he got off scot-free.

The Ahura Mazda excommunicated ATC from the Shogunate, effectively making him a Hikkomori, or a deity without a Godhood.

To add to that, the Ahura Mazda also announced that the “United States Military” is actively looking for recruits.

The Shogunate has a brotherly relationship with the “US Military” and occasionally sends them eager Sisyphus Gakusei as recruits.

As such, ATC will be among the new batch of Gakusei scheduled to be shipped off to a random BMT by month’s end.

Until ATC receives his military orders and swears his initial Oath of Enlistment with a special recruiter of his established branch, he’ll be sitting in a Glitchless cell right here on Spinoza.

Roswell, accepting those terms graciously, asked if he could place ATC on house arrest in his Abode on the Surveillance instead, preferring that his Pet do that.

The Ahura Mazda, indifferent, grants the suggestion, knowing that any attempt to defy his judgement will end in his favor regardless.

With ATC and Roswell’s fate decided, the Ahura Mazda adjourned the Tribunal.

Benjamin swiftly meets up with ATC, Roswell and Laforgeyuhan to discuss the Shogun’s Final Arrangements.

Before getting too carried away in their discussion, the foursome Fast Travel away from Spinoza, as dallying around for too long following the Ahura Mazda's judgement could potentially instigate more trouble.

XI

ATC meets with an “Air Force” recruiter while on house arrest.

The recruiter reveals to ATC that a raffle was used to determine which military branch the Hikkomori should be assigned to, before telling ATC to consider himself “lucky” that he ended up being conscripted into the “Air Force”, and not the other branches.

Upon receiving his military orders to report to “Lackland AFB” by month’s end for BMT, ATC swears his Oath of Enlistment and signs his involuntary enlistee contract.

In the days leading up to Roswell’s departure, ATC observed his Collaborators’ graduation ceremony via a couple of livestreams and video uploads on Narcissus.

Later, using Repertoire, ATC updated himself on the status of “South Dakota” via his Collaborators. While the loss of Runs and numerous livelihoods was still apparent, the collective resolve of the state’s citizenry to start anew was a sign of hope.

ATC, upon hearing the updates and reflecting on his past actions, felt contentment that he was about to pay the price for his stupidity.

In a group chat, Spot reveals to ATC that she, alongside the Rylands and Javier, have timed their Eremition flights to occur on the same day that ATC is scheduled to fly out of “Rapid City”.

“We’ve got something important to give you. Think of it as a farewell present,” revealed Spot.

Satisfied that he’ll get to see his Collaborators one last time before they all start their Eremitons, ATC logs off Repertoire to prepare for his change in Relativity.

On the day preceding ATC’s flight, the Hikkomori was taken to a special Station located within Zarathustra via Roswell and Benjamin.

Arriving in a quaint setting, ATC and his two OGs materialized in front of a cottage.

Roswell reveals to his Pet that he’s finalized his Last Arrangements and is handing over his remaining possessions to ATC as an inheritance.

Until ATC completes his involuntary military conscription, however, he’ll be unable to utilize his new assets, including the cottage in front of him.

Roswell guides ATC to a nearby Memorial. Within it contains the totality of the Shogun’s insights and memories that he’s accumulated over the course of his Run.

Serving as an existential guide for ATC to reference whenever he reaches the appropriate Ages to access them, the Memorial of Roswell will help ATC unlock additional Opportunities as he continues to progress his Run.

Benjamin and Laforgeyuhan watch on as Roswell hands over his legendary Knicknack, called WARP, to ATC.

“I won’t be needing this anymore. Let it serve you as it did me,” said Roswell resolutely.

ATC, blade in hand, swears to his Tutorial that he’ll Redeem himself and become a mighty Adventurer.

“This I swear on my Run, GG,” announced a tearful ATC, kneeling on one knee as if he were to be knighted.

Strange, ATC suddenly thought to himself as he returned to his feet.

Not once in his Run thus far did ATC ever think to call his Tutorial by the letters “GG”, nor could he recount where and why those letters suddenly left his lips.

Fortunately, the Hikkomori’s unusual thoughts were disrupted by some parting words from Roswell.

“I’ve no doubt. You’re my Pet after all. I’ve nothing to worry about. Still, I need you to always keep these following words in mind, grasshopper,” stated Roswell as he placed a hand on ATC’s shoulder, “Fortune favors those who don’t give up.”

After exchanging one last hug, ATC tells his Tutorial that he’ll see him again in THE HIGHER ADVENTURE, and once they reunite, he’ll regale him with tales of his future Adventures.

Content with his fate, the Shogun bids his Pet, the latter’s Mirror and his best friend the best of luck before eventually Fast Traveling to parts unknown to begin the Optional Final Boss Challenge.

ATC, still in a state of shame, turned to his Controller to observe the aftermath of his Dissent on Narcissus. Tapping on a news article concerning the devastation, the disgraced Sisyphus wanted a fresh reminder to reinforce his desire for Penance.

Mistakenly reading the total number of estimated casualties from the article as “1998”, the Hikkiomori’s stomach imploded once he realized that he skimmed over the three zeros at the end of “1998”

Yeah, time for me to pay the price. I’d better remain grateful that my dumbass is still breathing, mused ATC with determined self-loathing.

ATC, Benjamin and Laforgeyuhan produced a moment of silence before returning to the Surveillance.

The following day, Benjamin hands ATC an envelope along with a cardkey, encouraging him to seek out the Sisyphus Ronin for protection in place of the Shogunate.

Despite the confusion, ATC accepts the suggestion from his honorary Uncle Tutorial and Fast Travels to the “Rapid City” Airport.

Now Age 25, ATC no longer has Existence Deficiency.

Arriving at the airport, ATC reunites with the Collaborators.

Spot hands ATC his Degree Diploma.

After sharing their Eremition plans, ATC and the Company vow to meet up in the fabled Haven of Maverick to become the highest version of themselves.

Departing to their respective gates, ATC and Co. begin their Eremitions.

Eremition

ATC runs into GTA of all deities whilst waiting for boarding to begin in the airport terminal.

ATC and GTA bury the hatchet, feeling no need to continue their beef.

GTA informs ATC that he's heading off to Special Forces training as part of his Eremition.

When ATC asks about GTA's Collaborators, the Xenolith reveals that he and his Company received "honorary" Degree Diplomas by the CLEP Committee as part of the latter's PR attempts to save face following the Dissent.

"Char's bound for culinary school to get into the Culinary Guild. Zey's off to Elfame to specialize in Simulacrum Alchemy. And as for Ozzie, she's going backpacking to see where her interests lead her," reports GTA.

Right as GTA finishes speaking, the announcement for boarding is echoed.

ATC and GTA board their respective flights to their BMTs, but not before expressing an interest in resolving any lingering issues between them via a trip to the Cavern of Resolve next, they meet.

Upon boarding, ATC reflects on his upbringing and gives thanks to his Tutorial and Collaborators for helping him get this far in his Run.

Knowing that the rest is up to him now, ATC resolves himself before falling asleep on the divine plane bound for "San Antonio, Texas".

Upon landing, ATC is sent to “Lackland AFB” on a bus.

For the next 25 years of Runtime, ATC busts his ass to make it through BMT, under penalty of Seppuku should he fail to graduate.

Without the usage of his Controller, according to the rules of his BMT, ATC loses contact with his Collaborators for those two and a half decades of Runtime.

Nearing the end of his time in BMT, ATC meets a fellow Sisyphus by the name of Rich Culbard, who he’s seen repeatedly around the base.

Rich replies with similar sentiment as the duo perform a kitchen detail in one of the base’s many dining facilities.

Rich, assuming that ATC is a Sisyphus Ronin, asks him which Franchise he Reps, before ATC shuts him down.

When ATC asks why Rich made the assumption, Rich reveals that for an In-Born Sisyphus Ronin to complete their Eremition, they must choose and serve in any branch of any military of their choosing, with the expectation that once they finish their enlistment, they’ll return to the Ronin with new information regarding said military’s Strategies and secrets.

“To do so is the only way for an In-Born Ronin to become an Apostle,” Rich finishes.

After conversing more for a bit, ATC confirms Rich’s inquiry as to whether he wants to join the Sisyphus Ronin.

Rich, both intrigued and excited, states to ATC that he’ll be the first Hikkiokmori attempting to become an Adopted Ronin in over 200 years of Runtime.

Before Rich can get ATC into the fold, however, they’ll need to finish BMT in one piece and make it to a location that has a Sisyphus Ronin Franchise.

Following the conclusion of BMT, ATC and Rich are transferred over to "Wichita Falls, TX” to complete their technical military training for another 25 years of Runtime.

Afterwards, the duo is assigned their first duty station together, being sent to a small base on Lothering, “Montana”, much to ATC and Rich’s chagrin.

With no Ronin Franchises near or in Lothering, ATC and Rich spend another 50 years of Runtime BSing their way through their military service.

During this period, ATC utilizes the leave he's accumulated to see his Collaborators in person, who are all going through their own trials and tribulations within their own Eremitions.

For Spot, she's entered a legendary, yet deadly race called the Bifrost GPX, as part of her Game Plan to get into the Speedrunners Guild.

For Milo, he's training with the Surfers as part of his plan to enter the Culinary Guild. In preparation for his admission, the pessimistic god is training for a deadly period where most aquatic Stations and Havens experience something called Gargantuan Season.

For Javier, he's preparing his first Magical LP as part of his training to help him ace his Minstrel Credential exam. Assisting him in this endeavor is the same deity who gifted him his bucket hat long ago, who's decided to take Javier on an epic tour of the SRPG as a roadie.

As for Malcolm, the optimistic twin, he's training for an extreme sports competition called Odin, which has a massive cash reward that Malcolm wants to use as a kind of "research grant" to help finalize his research for his PHD cryptid dissertation.

While making his Cameos, ATC fills his Collaborators in on his own exploits as well, with some within his Company wishing him the best of luck in getting into the Ronin, let alone completing his military enlistment in one piece.

Around their 25th year mark at Lothering, ATC and Rich are deployed to the "Middle East" to take part in a notable conflict called the Flame Assimilation.

During the Flame Assimilation, ATC and Rich meet up with and Collaborate with GTA during a horrifying battle towards the Flame Assimilation's end.

ATC and Rich, upon returning from their deployment, speculate on the motivations behind the initiators of the Flame Assimilation; in particular, a Demogorgon terrorist group called Untitled.

Untitled, believing in a prophecy created by Nostradamus, decided to initiate the Flame Assimilation to hasten the coming of the 13th Titanomachy.

Despite being obliterated by the combined military forces of “Pangaea”, the actions of Untitled have left behind feelings of paranoia and hopelessness amongst their victims.

After ruminating about the circumstances surrounding Untitled’s actions, ATC and Rich decide to dismiss the issue entirely to focus on an uplifting bit of news.

As a reward for their service during the Flame Assimilation, ATC and Rich are given the option of choosing where they'd like to PCS next from Lothering.

After some convincing from Rich, ATC decides to pick “Kadena AB”, located in “Okinawa, Japan”, as their next duty station.

According to Rich, there is a Reputable Franchise located on the Haven that can easily help ATC get into the Ronin faction.

Upon receiving their PCS orders, ATC and Rich wrap up their remaining Runtime on Lothering, “Montana” before heading off to “Okinawa, Japan”.

XII

After arriving, settling in and completing their in-processing at “Kadena AB”, ATC and Rich sought out a random door with a card reader installed on it.

The duo made their way to downtown “Naha”.

Upon finding said card reader door, ATC followed Rich’s lead as the latter opened the door using the card key given to the former by Benjamin.

Once inside, Rich took ATC on a swift tour of the “Okinawan Agartha” before introducing the latter to the leader of the “Okinawan” Team named RBJ.

Upon Rich vouching for ATC’s Build and providing the “Okinawan” Polemarch with Benjamin's envelope, the complacent RBJ decided to issue ATC the Four Errands Gig.

For the First Errand, ATC had to survive getting “jumped in” by several Ronin for a total of 4 minutes.

After surviving the scrap, the Hikkomori was then tasked with heading into a Swapmeet and acquiring a vintage video game Retro for his Second Errand.

Upon locating the specific Swapmeet required to complete said Errand, ATC traveled to “Tokyo, Japan” on the day the specific Swapmeet was scheduled to materialize.

While waiting to enter the ladybug Swapmeet amidst a sea of excited Tourists, ATC encountered a goddess wearing sweatbands around her eyes.

Introducing herself as “Kiara”, the goddess expressed interest in helping ATC out upon learning that he’d never gone on a Scavenge before.

Once the Swapmeet became open for travel, the pair formed a Company before entering the Swapmeet via the Swapmeet Grimoire.

The god and goddess duo arrived inside a surreal, liminal space called Bardo.

ATC, following Kiara’s lead, traversed perplexing hallways and stairways until they reached a portal called the Queue.

Upon entering and exiting the Queue, ATC and Kiara arrived at a Stage.

The location and year was Paris and 2001 respectively.

Kiara explained to the aspiring Ronin that all Tourists have a maximum of 120 minutes to explore a Stage before they're Booted back to the SRPG.

When ATC asks Kiara if they can voluntarily leave before the timer ends, Kiara confirms that leaving early is also an option.

ATC pinpoints a location likely to have the vintage video game he's looking for and heads there, with Kiara accompanying him.

Kiara warns ATC that the longer they stay in the Stage, the more chaotic it'll become; with said Stage inevitably summoning Nonsense to try and kill them.

"Usually, us Tourists wait for the Nonsense to arrive so that when the chaos starts, we can freely pilfer any nearby NPC stores for Retros without the fear of said NPCs putting up a fight," explained Kiara to ATC.

Taking her words to heart, ATC committed Kiara's advice to memory before deciding to take it easy until the Nonsense began populating the Stage.

The duo decided to grab some smoothies in the meantime, whilst also taking the Opportunity to get better acquainted with one another.

Out of nowhere, ATC and Kiara found themselves witnessing a sudden explosion.

True to Kiara's words, the Nonsense began materializing spontaneously, attacking all Tourists and NPCs in the immediate vicinity.

ATC, distracted by the chaos, swiftly lost sight of Kiara before having to defend himself against encroaching Nonsense.

Realizing that now's the perfect time to get his video game Retro, ATC booked it to the shop in question, while battling Foes along the way.

Arriving at a random ass pawn shop amidst the action, ATC found it in ruins, along with its deceased NPC owner and employees.

Searching the destroyed establishment for the item in question, ATC was unable to locate it and began growing frustrated.

Out of nowhere, Kiara called out to ATC from outside the pawn shop.

Meeting up with Kiara outside, ATC discovers that she has the Retro he’s looking for.

When ATC asks her to hand it over, Kiara playfully refuses, claiming its “finders’ keepers” in a Stage.

ATC, not playing games, challenges her to a Fade for it, to which the goddess playfully agrees, before making an imperceptible dash past the Hikkomori.

ATC, extremely pissed now, chases after her.

Opp Fight: Kiara

HP: 40

Opp Fight Song: Poison by Bell Biv Devoe

Company: ATC (30)

Risk: Normal

Start running! This is more of a stamina test than a Fade.

Put simply, catch up to Kiara.

As you chase the speedy goddess across Paris, you'll come across Tumbleweeds. And I mean A LOT of Tumbleweeds. Avoid them as much as possible, as it'll increase the distance between you and her.

If too much distance is created and you lose track of her, it's Game Over.

With that said, if you keep the aforementioned in mind, then you'll catch up to her eventually.

Hell, if she decides to get "complacent" during the chase and involve herself in a scrap or two, then that'll give you some extra Runtime to catch up to her.

Once you've closed the distance and confront Kiara, simply execute the Exploit Command that appears to end the encounter.

Out of breath, ATC fails to apprehend Kiara.

Teasing ATC, a distracted Kiara is attacked from behind by a Nonsense, but is saved by ATC via his Fast Travel.

Surprised yet thankful, Kiara hands the Retro over to ATC as thanks after the duo slays the Nonsense.

Out of breath yet victorious, the pair is Booted back to the SRPG along with some Tourists who've survived.

Upon arrival, ATC loses track of Kiara. Chuckling to himself, ATC decides to call it a day before making it back to the "Okinawan Agartha", thus concluding his Second Errand.

Upon his return, ATC meets up with Rich, who is unsettled. When ATC asks if anything has happened, Rich decides to show ATC instead of informing him.

The duo made their way to a square in the middle of the "Agartha", where ATC caught sight of what had Rich spooked. A horrifying exchange was taking place amongst a group of Ronin.

Said exchange wasn't going to end pleasantly.

A well-dressed Sisyphus in an old-fashioned hat, accompanied by an elite unit of Ronin, could be seen towering over a trembling RBJ, who was anxiously begging for another chance to prove his competency.

At the same time, surrounding and witnessing this pathetic display was the entire "Okinawian" Team. All Ronin were eerily silent, for they knew that a Punchout was about to occur.

The well-dressed Sisyphus, tired of the sad display, ordered RBJ's Mirror to Seppuku the incompetent bastard, for becoming a liability.

The Mirror, without hesitation, disemboweled his Camel before decapitating the poor fool.

What was left of RBJ had now painted the ground of the "Agartha" in an exquisite coat of crimson and decoration. RBJ's Mirror, upon sheathing his blade, disintegrated into pixels.

"Damn, what I missed?" said Laforgeyuhan with a cup of coffee in his hand.

The sudden appearance of ATC's Mirror completely freaked out both him and Rich.

The noise from the trio caught the Attention of the well-dressed Sisyphus.

Upon noticing ATC alongside Rich, the pragmatic Sisyphus made a "come here" gesture with his finger to the pair.

Rich swiftly heeded the command, with ATC following suit nervously.

With the issue of incompetence "addressed", the well-dressed Sisyphus introduced himself to ATC as Jay Knight, the Roninyamakasi of the Sisyphus Ronin and left-hand to the Angra Mainyu, whom is the equivalent to the Ahura Mazda from the Sisyphus Shogunate.

After learning of ATC's Current progress to join the Ronin from the deceased RBJ, Jay Knight asked ATC if he'd returned with the vintage video game Retro he was tasked with acquiring.

ATC, very nervously, confirmed as such, producing the cartridge from his Inventory.

"Lucky you. Had you failed and returned empty handed, you'd have joined that bum over there in Timeout," said Jay coldly.

Taking over as his examiner, Knight obtained ATC's Retro and modified it into a Fable OD cartridge.

Upon handing it back to ATC, Knight informed the Hikkomori that his Third Errand will be a simple one: "beat the game".

"Complete the Gig and you'll be rewarded with instructions for completing the Fourth and final Errand," stated Jay.

However, before departing to continue his inspection of the numerous Sisyphus Teams under his Jurisdiction, Knight warns ATC to have some healing potions on hand before starting the modified game, much to ATC's confusion.

ATC politely excused himself before departing the "Agartha" with Rich as swiftly as possible.

Following the fatal encounter, ATC sought out and purchased a Fable OD before going his separate ways from Rich to complete his Third Favor.

ATC found a quiet place to begin his initial playthrough on the metafictional handheld. Upon dying in the game for the first time, ATC took internal damage before spitting out blood.

ATC, after recovering, texted Rich for answers as to what had just happened to him.

Rich reveals that the modified Retro is laced with a Curse that damages the player every time they die in-game and is often utilized as a form of Correction to maintain discipline within the Sisyphus Ronin.

Understanding what the dangers are now, ATC thanks Rich before continuing his playthrough, carefully navigating his way towards the Retro's conclusion.

After surviving the finale, ATC obtained a text message on his Controller from the Retro.

Upon opening it, ATC learned what his final Errand was: the Hikkomori must travel to "Saitama, Japan" and slay an infamous Midboss lurking underneath the Haven called Lulz.

Arriving in "Saitama, Japan", ATC located his quarry's home and navigated his way through an underground channel, via the text's instructions.

Making it to the location dictated, ATC played COUNTRY MUSIC from a giant boombox, per the text's instructions, to summon Lulz.

A pissed off Lulz appeared and attacked ATC like he owed him money.

Midboss Fight: Lulz, The Hydra Of Saitama

HP: 100

Midboss Fight Song: Cotton Eye Joe by Rednex

Company: ATC (35)

Risk: Easy to Normal

Yeah, I know right!

This Midboss fight song slaps! Our Hydra friend, however, disagrees. Fortunately, this is a straightforward Fade.

The battle is split into two phases. During phase one, Lulz will pursue ATC throughout the underground channel. Idiot isn't that bright thankfully. Keep an eye out for the Exploit Command whenever you're near a pillar. Depending on Lulz's actions when you press the Command option, ATC will either force Lulz into ramming a pillar or wrapping its head around it.

Either way, once this incapacitates Lulz, go all out on it until its head is destroyed. After a short while, Lulz will regrow a new head and an additional one. Repeat this process until Lulz has grown seven heads.

After the brief cutscene, ATC will permanently regain the GRIND.

Now onto phase two. Simply reduce each head's HP low enough

to finish them all off with a single GRIND attack. If Lulz's heads are defeated with either a non-GRIND finisher or aren't killed simultaneously, they'll regenerate.

Once you've dispatched all of Lulz's heads using the GRIND, hit that Exploit Command to end the battle.

Upon slaying Lulz via cauterizing its decapitated stumps with Magic, ATC collected one of its heads as proof of his success and placed it in his Inventory.

ATC returned to the “Okinawan Agartha” victorious and handed Jay Knight the head of Lulz.

The Roninyamakasi, satisfied with ATC’s accomplishments, prepares to officially induct ATC into the Ronin proper via a special ceremony.

XIII

Jay Knight begins the Induction ceremony in the deceased Polemarch's quarters. ATC, alongside Rich and a few important Ronin, participated.

Revealing a special gourd, Jay explains to ATC that the liquid contained within it is a form of sake mixed with the Angra Mainyu's blood.

Due to the Angra Mainyu's unique nature as a Shinigami, any that ingests his blood will receive a special boost to their attributes.

However, in exchange for the boost in power, the drinker is spiritually bound to the Angra Mainyu and is Cursed with a murderous intent to kill all Psychopaths, let alone anyone who wants the smoke.

ATC, fully aware of the line that he's about to cross, accepts the conditions with some hesitation.

Upon drinking his cup of San de Sangre, ATC feels a deep sense of mania upon the thought of maiming everyone and everything around him.

Calming himself, ATC notices that Rich, Jay and the other Ronin present had their weapons prepped in case ATC lost it in experiencing his initial bloodlust.

Officially a Ronin now, Knight informs ATC that since he's bound for Maverick, he'll need to Log-In with the Maverick Team via one of the Team's Franchises upon arrival.

As the leader of the Maverick Team, Jay warns ATC that failure to Log-In on time will result in Correction. Point, blank, period.

Upon leaving the “Okinawan Agartha”, ATC and Rich decide to grab a bite to eat at a Hotspot restaurant to celebrate ATC’s successful induction.

While there, ATC notices Kiara kicking it with a tranquil goddess at a nearby booth.

Upon noticing ATC, Kiara and the Ronin chop it up, with ATC thanking Kiara for her assistance during his Scavenge. Rich and Laforgeyuhan, sipping some brew from a distance, are hoping that ATC gets a win from “shooting his shot” towards his feminine counterpart.

Kiara introduces her Collaborator, named Trish, who is a Fae like herself.

ATC, surprised he never bothered to ask Kiara what her Godhood was, confirms with Kiara that she is indeed a Fae as well.

When ATC asks Kiara for her Repertoire ID so that they can stay in touch, the blind Fae goddess makes the decision to let ATC down easily, saying that it's “not the right time” for either of them.

ATC takes the rejection like a champ and wishes Kiara the best of luck on her Run, before watching the two Fae goddesses depart the establishment.

Rich cheers up ATC before they bounce, with Laforgeyuhan surprisingly showing some respect towards his Camel for once.

Runtime passes…

Rich is honorably discharged prior to ATC's and tells him he'll see him in Maverick.

ATC is reminded by Rich to "Log-In" with their Franchise in Maverick the moment he's off the hook from the "Air Force".

The two Ronin bid each other farewell before Rich departed "Japan" for Maverick.

On his last day in the "Air Force", ATC rendezvous with his Collaborators on Repertoire, where they all arranged to meet at a vacant building that Milo recently purchased as part of his Game Plan to start up his restaurant business.

ATC changes up his wardrobe before departing "Kadena AB" with his DD Form 214 in hand.

Bidding farewell to "Kadena AB", ATC breathed a sigh of relief, having successfully finished his period of indentured servitude to the "United States military".

ATC, rubbing his bandaged hands together, utilized his Fast Travel to return to the Station in Zarathustra that Roswell had left for him.

The time to become a full-time Adventurer had at last arrived.

ATC arrives at the cottage that Roswell bestowed upon him within Zarathustra and settles in before visiting Benjamin in "Rapid City".

ATC reunites with the former Shogun at IP Records and informs him of his experiences serving in the “Air Force”.

When ATC asks Benjamin how he was able to craft his Induction recommendation for the Ronin, the OG reveals that he was Spawned into the Ronin before defecting to enlist in the Samurai for personal reasons. It was there that he met and befriended Roswell during the First Theomachy.

After saying his farewells to Benjamin, ATC booked a flight to Maverick.

An unusual Haven, Maverick is occasionally Zapped by the RNG to random places within Monad and can often be found moving across various Heavens.

Fortunately, Maverick is currently present within the “North America” Heaven, which saves ATC some Runtime and Karma.

Arriving in Maverick, ATC follows up with his Collaborators via Repertoire and learns that they’ll be arriving at the Haven at separate moments of Runtime.

As ATC prepares to book it to his new Franchise to “Log-In” before he’s considered late, the aspiring Adventurer is approached by a smiling deity rocking a fedora.

Introducing himself as Memphis Jack, the deity reveals that he’s a traveling salesman who plys his trade in “Pangaea” and mentions to ATC that he’s been a fan of his ever since he watched his bout with King Gilgamesh on Narcissus.

The fedora wearing deity presents ATC with a handshake as a welcoming gesture.

ATC, humbled yet ashamed, shakes Memphis Jack’s hand and expresses his appreciation despite feeling it isn’t warranted. Given how and why the Mythical Fade occurred in the first place, ATC would rather forget about it for the remainder of his Run.

Memphis Jack, undeterred, explains that the SRPG has selective memory and that ATC will have plenty of Opportunities to improve his Reputation.

After offering his services to ATC should they run into one another in the future, Memphis Jack departs for places unknown.

ATC, out of morbid curiosity, uses a Scan Choice from his PRAGMATISM Console to ascertain Memphis Jack’s status, only to be disappointed by the salesman’s weak attributes.

Realizing that Memphis Jack is just a Normie puts ATC at ease, despite not knowing why he felt uneasy about his new acquaintance.

ATC double checks the time and realizes he's going to be late for his “Log-In” and books it to the Maverick “Agartha”.

Arriving late, ATC reunites with Rich, who introduces him to two other Ronin they’ll be Collaborating with in the Hypothetical named Wendy and Sam.

After swapping Repertoire IDs with his new Ronin Collaborators, ATC braces himself for the Correction he’s about to receive before introducing himself to the Dimoirite of his new Franchise named Wood.

After reprimanding ATC for taking his sweet ass time “Logging-In”, Wood puts ATC on notice by giving him a minor Correction as punishment.

ATC must bring the heads of 10 Demogorgons during tomorrow's Happy Hour or risk losing his head instead.

ATC accepts the Correction before being brutally dismissed.

Rich, Wendy and Sam cheer up ATC by taking him out to get some pho.

Rich, somewhat casually, informs ATC of his Game Plan to Vanquish their Current Dimoirite at an upcoming Grievance scheduled to take place in the next 25 years of Runtime.

Hearing the term “Grievance” used in that manner for the first time, ATC is enlightened a little further by Wendy and Sam’s swift explanation.

“Every 25 years of Runtime, the Polemarch of a Ronin Team holds what is called a normal Grievance for two purposes,” explained Wendy as she, alongside ATC and the others, headed for the restaurant’s exit.

“Purpose number one is to update our Team on the current status quo within our faction. As for the other reason…,” added Sam as she held open the exit door for her Ronin brethren.

“It's to help the Team weed out the feeble among us via a promotion Fade. If, for example, your Current boss rubbed you the wrong way and you want 'em out of the picture, you’ll get a shot to do so at a Grievance without the fear of Seppeku. Just know that all promotion Fades are fatal, so it's best to have your Final Arrangements settled if you’re planning on wilding out,” said Rich.

“Hmmm, interesting. Well then, that leads me to my next question,” replied ATC as the foursome began a stroll down a chillax street, “ya’ll mentioned “normal Grievance”. Does that mean we do other kinds too?”

“Yep, sure do! Once a century, our Angra Mainyu holds what’s called a “Succession Grievance”. That one follows the same format as a regular Grievance, but on a more grandiose scale,” answered Wendy.

“The Succession Grievance takes place on our main Haven within Zarathustra, called Duzakh. It's also the only time that us Ronin are allowed to challenge either the Roninyamakasi or Angra Mainyu to a promotion Fade without incurring a Seppuku,” explained Sam.

Taking in the insights of his fellow Ronin, ATC made a mental note of what’s to come.

The following day saw ATC head out during Happy Hour to bag some Demogorgons.

Out and about, a productive ATC went on a deicide stroll. Killing Devils up to no good along the way, ATC removed their heads from their corpses with brutal efficiency.

Towards the end of his Correction, ATC noticed a cryptid puppy being attacked by a pair of Demogorons from “New Jersey”.

ATC violently dispatches the Jersey devils and rescues said little puppy.

Placing the puppy in his Inventory, ATC made it back in time to his Franchise at their Trench and delivered the Demogorgon heads to Wood, completing his Correction.

Fast Traveling back to his cottage, ATC removed the puppy from his Inventory and settled the cryptid pup into her new home.

Deciding to adopt the puppy as his Daemon, ATC bestowed his new spiritual companion with the name of “Hornet”, naming her after the title character of an old TV show he used to watch with Roswell centuries ago as a Youngling.

While waiting for his Collaborators to arrive in Maverick, ATC began training Hornet. Having learned “American Sign Language” while in the “Air Force”, ATC teaches it to Hornet upon discovering that she can use Lughs.

Runtime passes…

After receiving word from Milo and Malcolm that they’ve finally arrived in Maverick, ATC picks up Hornet and meets up with the Rylands in front of Maverick’s Adventurers’ Guild branch.

Reuniting with Milo and Malcolm in a moment of hype, ATC learns from the Rylands that Spot and Javier will be arriving later in the day and that they’ll register for their Adventurers’ Guild membership on their own Runtime.

“Last I heard, those two had Fae business to address. That and the fact that they’ve their own Guild business to attend to first,” revealed Milo to ATC.

“Right, right. Minstrel and Speedrunner Guild business,” replied ATC.

With ATC’s ol’ Company now back together, for the most part, the Rylands decided to give the Ronin an update on their own endeavors.

Milo elaborates on his admission into the Culinary Guild alongside Charlotte of all deities. Embarrassingly, the young chef also revealed that he recently became an Oracle after eating Mad Honey in "Nepal" during the Culinary Guild’s admissions celebration.

Malcolm talked about starting his academic career at Maverick's main university as a professor and a Sorcerer following his time competing in Odin.

"Believe it or not, Ozzie was also a part of the Odin competition," revealed Malcolm.

"No shit! Now that's a surprise! On that note, I ended up Collaborating with GTA during a deployment. But I can tell you all about that later. We should head inside and get productive," replied ATC.

Upon entering the establishment, the trio became awestruck at the activity occurring around them within a space mirroring a tavern and an arcade. After briefly reminiscing about his days with Roswell inside the "Rapid City" Adventurers' Guild, ATC and Co. approached the Guild receptionist desk to register.

The Guild barista, verifying their graduation status via Narcissus, asked the trio for a convincing reason as to why the Guild should accept them as Adventurers.

The trio provided the barista with tales from their Eremitions as their reason for why they should be inducted.

Satisfied, the Guild barista finished the trio's enrollment into the Adventurers' Guild.

ATC also had Hornet registered as his official Guild Daemon and was given a special black bandana from the Guild to put on her as proof of her status as an Adventurer.

Right before ATC, Milo, Malcolm and Hornet depart the establishment, the Guild barista asks the Ronin if he'd like to start a Club with his Collaborators while she still has their Attention.

"Sure, why not! What do I need to do?" asked ATC.

"Oh, nothing too demanding! Simply input a name of your choosing into this naming Shortcut that I've just produced, and you'll be good to go," replied the barista.

ATC, wanting some ideas, asked Milo and Malcolm for some recommendations. Sadly, the twins hadn't a clue as to what to call their potential Club.

"I've got nothing. Too focused on finishing my restaurant's setup," said Milo.

"Yeah, I'm in the same head space too. My mind is too focused on finalizing my syllabuses," said Malcolm with an embarrassing chuckle.

After a moment of reflection, ATC recalled being referred to by the words "Grasshopper" by his deceased Tutorial and "Sharpshooter" from the "one that got away".

"I've got it," announced ATC.

Typing the words, "Grasshopper Sharpshooter", into the naming Shortcut, the Ronin became annoyed when the name was denied upon confirming his input.

“Yikes! It looks like that name is prohibited from being entered. Weird, but dems the rules. You’ll have to pick another option,” replied the barista in an awkward tone.

Yeah, fuck that. I’m about to get creative, thought ATC as he retyped the same name, but in a novel way.

“<GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> huh. Wow, that worked! Congrats! Your new Adventuring Club has been established,” replied the guild barista with amazement.

“Well, that was weird,” added Milo as he, ATC, Malcolm and Hornet exited the Adventurers’ Guild.

“True that,” replied ATC.

Ready to get started working their way towards Completion, ATC and his companions shifted their trajectory towards the location of Milo’s budding restaurant called “The Byte Joint”.

Settling into The Byte Joint, Malcolm realized he had to depart to prepare for and finalize his coursework for the upcoming School Phase. Promising he’ll return right when Spot and Javier are expected to arrive, the cheerful professor left ATC, Hornet and Milo.

Upon assisting Milo with finishing his business setup, ATC and Hornet were treated to the pessimistic god’s improved cooking as thanks for their labor.

By evening, Spot and Javier arrived at The Byte Joint with Malcolm in tow. A joyful reunion amongst ATC and his Collaborators was held.

Having successfully joined the Speedrunners' Guild and Minstrels' Guild respectively, Spot and Javier revealed that they'd just finished their registration at the Adventurers' Guild and are now looking forward to helping ATC in the Hypothetical if need be.

When asked by ATC and the Rylands about their delay in making it to Maverick, Spot and Javier elaborate that they'd just finished attending the Fae coronation ceremony where Spot's sister, Witty Thoavi Mugen, had fully taken on the role of Matron.

"Nice! The Immaculate is back in action! How's she doing? Any chance you'll still be able to introduce us to her Spot!?" asked Malcolm with enthusiasm.

After a chuckle, Spot explained that her Sister Tutorial had to take some time off to recover from her centuries worth of Fae Sleep.

The ramifications of her forbidden Choice had put her body and Configuration in an unusual place.

"While I can't say too much, since that'd be snitching, all I'll say is that my sister is taking it easy for once in her Run. Even did a little globe-trotting before returning to accept her Role," said Spot as she took a sip from a blood bag.

"As for me introducing you all to her, that isn't going to be possible right now. She's got a lot on her plate to take care of, chief among them being the Asura Hegemony," concluded Spot.

"Spot's right unfortunately," added Javier while tuning his sitar, "I talked to the Immaculate myself after the ceremony and learned from her that the Vampyrs are all too eager to get their Runback.

She’ll be preoccupied for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, we should all focus on getting to Age 100 so we can all get up out this bitch!”

“Agreed,” said Milo.

After concluding their business at The Byte Joint, ATC and his Collaborators began their gradual hustle to reach the upper Ages within their Runs.

In-between fulfilling his Ronin obligations, such as Tagging the Opps, collecting “protection” Karma, capturing and performing Operation on unsuspecting Opps and Collaborating with the Speedrunners to run drugs as mules, ATC and Hornet doubled down on the numerous Adventures available to them at the Adventurers’ Guild.

Although the Ronin and his Daemon were gradually accumulating minor victories from their Adventures, ATC and Hornet failed to find the Guarantee within the numerous Scavenges they undertook.

At around 275 years of Runtime, ATC and Hornet received a direct Commission from an unknown client. A simple food delivery Gig, ATC and Hornet made their way to The Byte Joint to pick up the food from Milo, of all deities.

Curious to see who requested his cooking, Milo decided to accompany ATC and Hornet to their destination.

Arriving at their destination, a random Station in “Africa”, ATC, Hornet and Milo were shocked to find Jones there, who revealed himself to be the Gig client.

After completing the delivery, ATC, Milo and Hornet were informed by Jones to stick around.

Before ATC could ask why, a Raid suddenly generated outside the Station.

ATC, Hornet and Milo hopped into battle alongside the Havenless to defend the Station, all the while being in awe at how effortlessly Jones was Vanquishing the Raid's forces on his own, mothership and all.

Watching the OG Sisyphus fight reminded ATC of Roswell's performance during his first Raid centuries prior.

Following the brief Raid, Jones gave ATC, Milo and Hornet his thanks before asking the invisible Adventurer how he was faring as a Ronin.

When ATC asked the OG why he was inquiring, Jones revealed that he's the Angra Mainyu before telling the trio his full name: Gaasyendietha Midway Jones.

ATC is speechless, knowing who Jones is now. When Milo asks why ATC is in shock, the invisible Adventurer replies by pointing out that Jones is the leader of the Sisyphus Ronin.

Gaasyendietha disregards his Reputation before expressing his approval at how much ATC has accomplished thus far in his Run, before revealing that it was he who gave Benjamin the cardkey, on top of suggesting to the former Shogun that he encourage ATC to join the Ronin.

To ATC's profound shock, he also learns from Gassyendietha that Benjamin is the Angra Mainyu's Pet as well.

ATC, feeling comfortable now, jokingly asks Gaasyendietha to train him sometime, to which the Angra Mainyu surprisingly agrees to, but under two conditions.

If ATC can acquire the Guarantee and become the new Roninyamakasi at the upcoming Succession Grievance, then Jones will personally elevate ATC's skill level.

ATC, stumped at the conditions presented to him, is thankfully "thrown a bone" by Jones, courtesy of a gracious Enigma.

The Angra Mainyu reveals that the Swapmeet method of getting the Guarantee isn't the only way to acquire it and provides ATC an Enigma that'll lead him to an Optional Dungeon containing a special Mimic that can give ATC a Guarantee under certain conditions.

When ATC asks Jones why he's giving him preferential treatment, the Angra Mainyu warns the Adventurer to not "look a gifted horse in the mouth" before Fast Traveling.

ATC, Milo and Hornet head back to Maverick afterwards, all the while talking about the events that had transpired.

Some Runtime later, ATC attends his first Ronin Grievance, where he witnesses Rich challenge Wood to a promotion Fade, culminating in Rich Vanquishing his former leader with a brutal combination of CQC and his ABSURDISM Console.

Now the new Dimoirite of ATC's Franchise, Rich makes the Adventurer his new Theoroi as well.

Following the Grievance, ATC takes to his new duties just fine, all the while keeping his new Quest to train under Jones in the forefront of his mind.

One day, ATC and Hornet decide to hit up the Optional Dungeon that Jones alluded to via the Enigma and proceed to head there.

Arriving at the unusual Optional Dungeon, ATC and Hornet access it and battle their way to the special room where the unique Mimic awaits.

ATC and Hornet encounter Memphis Jack outside an elevator leading to the Optional Boss room and make some purchases.

During his shopping, ATC notices a golden ball of yarn in Memphis Jack’s Inventory, with the label “Coming Soon” attached to it.

ATC asks Memphis Jack about it, who proceeds to tease that it's a rare item he’ll be offering soon, and that said item can chart an easier path to hard-to-reach locations.

Ready to commence the festivities, ATC and Hornet bid Jack farewell before entering the elevator.

The duo performs function checks on their firearms before disembarking.

In front of the pair is a Cauldron. Per the Angra Mainyu’s Enigma, ATC tosses a random coin from his Inventory into the Cauldron.

The room around the pair turns into a surreal arena, with the Cauldron transforming into a powerful Mimic called a Pair Dadani.

“Run it,” announces ATC as he and Hornet prepare to turn the Pair Dadani into a fable.

Optional Boss Fight: Egibi

HP: 200

Optional Boss Fight Song: Thuggin by Freddie Gibbs & Madlib

Company: ATC (44), Hornet (44)

Risk: Easy

Haha this bloke’s a joke! Time to smoke this clown! By this point in the Myth, ATC and Hornet should have more than enough power to reduce this mimic to pixels.

Hopping in a Simulacrum and throwing up a Substitute will trivialize the damage ol’ cauldron head here can output. Put ATC’s PRAGMATISM Console to use and blitz this mimic with multi-hit Approaches.

Thanks to Hornet’s GUN NUT Miracle increasing her chances of landing critical hits with guns, modify the Daemon’s Readiness to light up the mimic from afar whenever possible. That shit’ll wrap up this Fade swiftly.

Each time you remove 50 HP from Egibi’s health pool, the mimic will manipulate its abacus to shapeshift the environment against you.

If you know what the term “bullet hell” means, then you’ll understand this next part. Avoid the environmental projectiles as you make your way towards Egibi’s bitch ass.

Hit that Exploit Command when you get close to the mimic and you’ll cease that bullshit.

Repeat the above until the mimic is finished. Oh, and be mindful if you decide to use the GRIND.

Upon Vanquishing Egibi, ATC is awarded a Guarantee, on top of an Age Up as a bonus.

Additionally, ATC notices that a new Miracle had been unlocked for him at random.

Known as the CONSISTENCY Miracle, the Ronin became baffled upon reading the Miracle’s description. Grinning a devious, invisible smile, ATC began contemplating how best to use his new Miracle’s power for the upcoming Succession Grievance.

Departing the Optional Dungeon, ATC and Hornet hit up the Byte Joint to celebrate.

When asked by Milo what ATC intends to do with the Guarantee, ATC responds by saying that he’ll use it once he reaches Age 65 or higher, reasoning that being around that Age will give him a better chance at surviving the Bonus Stage.

Following the celebratory hangout, ATC spent the remaining years of Runtime leading up to the Succession Grievance secretly training his new CONSISTENCY Miracle, on top of attending to his Ronin and Adventuring duties.

XV

At 300 years of Runtime, ATC, Rich and their Franchise travel to the main Hood of the Ronin, Duzakh, within Zarathustra to attend the Succession Grievance.

Upon arrival, ATC and his Franchise settle into an area mimicking the largest American football stadium ever conceived.

Gassyendietha, arriving via Fast Travel, bids his fellow Ronin a grand welcome before hearing his Consilium announce their respective Teams.

After dishing out some pertinent information to his faction, Gassyendietha announces the official start of the Succession Fade, where any among the Apostles present can challenge either him or Jay Knight for their Roles.

Gassyendietha, despite being locked at the Age of 66, is proof that it takes more than just Age and good luck to make it in the SRPG.

A few Ronin, including two amongst the Consilium, challenge the Angra Mainyu as the first challengers, only to be Vanquished with ease via Jones' impeccable speed.

ATC watches Jones' movements and style closely, both in awe and in fear of the Angra Mainyu's might.

Rich jokingly comments that "thousands of years of Runtime will do that" once he catches ATC in a dumbfounded state.

With no further Opps left to offer a challenge, Jones concludes his part in the Succession and hands it over to Jay Knight.

Now Knight's turn, the Roninyamakasi extends his challenge to all for his Role.

ATC immediately teleports to the Succession Field via Fast Travel.

ATC, ready to test himself, challenges Knight, who amusingly accepts.

"Any last words Coleman?" asked Knight.

"Do you have your affairs in order?" replied ATC in a dismissive tone.

After the exchange of words, ATC and Knight clash blades as Gassyendietha watches with amusement.

Despite ATC being at a disadvantage in terms of Age, Miracles and Choices, the Adventurer charged forward with his new trump card at the ready: CONSISTENCY.

Opp Fight: Jay Knight, Roninyamakasi of the Sisyphus

HP: 60

Opp Fight Song: RIP Kevin Miller by Isaiah Rashad

Company: ATC (50

Risk: Deadly

If you’re not a pro at either Parrying or Dodging at this point in the Run, then pack it up right here. The Roninyamakasi’s AMERICAN PRAGMATISM Console is a heavy hitter.

The experienced Ronin will employ a Strat of hitting you from afar with a bullet or two until you decide to close the distance.

Soon as you do that, he’ll clap back with a barrage of multi-hit Choices and Spells. Use a Substitute and ready a counter Choice once you decide it's time to get up close and personal for the Fade.

At 25 HP, Knight will unleash the GRIND and bust out dual-wielding blades. This is when you tap into the same GRIND and go on the Parry defensive. Whittle down the Ronin’s remaining HP with counterattacks and a Decisive or two until you unlock an Exploit Command.

Use it, employ the CONSISTENCY Miracle and the Fade will end.

Just as Jay is about to end ATC with his charged Decisive, the Adventurer uses his CONSISTENCY Miracle at the last second, cutting off both of Jay's arms.

No sooner did the Roninyamakasi fall to his knees, his head free falled to the ground.

Five seconds of CONSISTENCY was all it took for ATC to "disarm" and decapitate his Foe, securing his victory.

All Ronin present rose in silence, in both awe and in shock, including Rich, Wendy and an excited Sam rooting for ATC amidst the quiet.

Gaasyendietha claps his hands before Fast Traveling to ATC's location.

Taking a moment to pay his respects to Knight's remains before adding said remains to his Inventory to cremate him later, Gaasyendietha declares ATC his new Roninyamakasi as all erupt into a roarious praise.

As promised, Gaasyendietha informs ATC that he'll train him once he properly settles into his Roninyamakasi Role.

All present pay their respects to their fallen Ronin, including Jay, before giving kudos to ATC.

Afterwards, the Succession Field became a large-scale BBQ in one fell swoop.

After some period of Runtime getting used to being the new Roninyamakasi, as well as becoming a more Reputable Adventurer, ATC finally approached Gaasyendietha for special training, to which the Angra Mainyu eagerly accepted.

During their first training session, Gaasyendeitha asked ATC to showcase the technique he used to Vanquish Knight.

ATC, while at first playing dumb, swiftly uses his CONSISTENCY to block an unexpected strike from Jones.

After jokingly calling out ATC for attempting to hide his Miracle, a frantic ATC received an explanation from Jones as to why he made the inquiry.

Gaasyendietha reveals to the Roninyamakasi that the CONSISTENCY Miracle is a power exclusive to the Establisher, before asking ATC if it ever dawned on him that he might be “Aesop’s” latest Playthrough.

ATC, to Jones’ surprise, reveals that he came to that same conclusion a while back during the Flame Assimilation, yet kept it quiet since it wasn’t something that everyone needed to know.

Gaasyendietha, now puzzled, again asked ATC if he could recall **ANYTHING** from his past Playthroughs, to which ATC replies that he cannot.

ATC then comments that his GG taught him that lingering on the past for too long ruins the present moment. For him, he’ll only find satisfaction at besting **FORTUNE, THE SUBLIME AXIOM.**

ATC asks Gaasyendietha how he knows so much about “Aesop” and the CONSISTENCY Miracle, to which Jones reveals that it's because he was the second Sisyphus that “Aesop” created, becoming the Establisher’s first Protégé.

ATC, speechless, recalls never being taught too much about the Shogunate’s history.

The Roninyamakasi informs his Angra Mainyu that his GG (huh…weird) hadn't exactly taught him the full history of the Sisyphus, with Roswell once informing ATC that, "certain aspects of the Sisyphus' Prior history were subjected to something called the "Damnatio Memoriae" and thus made privy to only Senseis via **THE GRAND SECRET**".

Gaasyendietha, slightly annoyed, replies that the butchering of the Sisyphus' Prior history was probably because he was the one who initiated the **SISYPHUS SCHISM** in the first place, thus incentivizing **THE SUBLIME AXIOM** to retaliate via subjecting Gassyendietha to Damnatio Memoriae.

ATC asks Gaasyendietha what made him cause the **SCHISM** all those millennia of Runtime ago.

Jones explains that he had a disagreement with the Chiranjivi over whether "**AESOP**" had succeeded in besting **FORTUNE** & acquiring the **VERIFICATION**.

A young Gaasyendietha wanted to undertake the **OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS CHALLENGE** next to confirm with the Trifecta of "Aesop's" fate, arguing with the six Sisyphus created after him that they should keep their Godhood aligned with their Master's teachings.

The Chiranjivi, however, argued that the answer to "Aesop's" fate could, instead, be found somewhere out there in the unknown parts of the SRPG.

The six, original Sisyphus of the Chiranjivi, having convinced themselves that undertaking the **OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS CHALLENGE** without understanding it better would only end in an absurd endeavour, refused to heed Gaasyendietha's insights.

""You'd have us drown in the same "pool" as our master without first understanding said "pool's" intrinsic nature? How foolish an idea brother", they'd said to me," snickered Gaasyendietha.

With Gaasyendietha getting nowhere in trying to persuade his 6 brethren to steer the Godhood towards attempting the Challenge, the 2nd Sisyphus made the irreversible decision to renounce his Role as a Samurai.

Now the 1st Ronin, Jones swiftly prepared to leave for an unknown Haven to further his training and Aging in solitude so that he may finally prove to his misguided Folk that “Aesop” had indeed succeeded in acquiring the Verification.

Despite only being a teen deity at the time, Jones became possessed with a determination to achieve Deification, acquire his own FINAL DUNGEON and attempt the OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS CHALLENGE.

Alas, what Jones couldn’t foresee next would forever split apart the Sisyphus. The popularity and charisma that Jones cultivated prior to his departure Incentivized many Sisyphus into renouncing their Roles as well to join the 1st Ronin on his Quest.

The Chiranjivi, viewing the sudden exodus as a threat to the stability of the GODHOOD, tried to prevent both the departure of Jones and his followers from Spinoza.

The dispute resulted in the SISYPHUS CIVIL ASSIMILATION, followed by the SISYPHUS SCHISM.

Neither side won the CIVIL ASSIMILATION, leading to the two factions of the Sisyphus splitting ways, forever traumatized by the meaningless deaths that came with it.

Consequently, for triggering the events that split apart the Sisyphus, Gaasyendeitha was Cursed by THE SUBLIME AXIOM with the Damnatio Memoriae status effect.

Now Christened with the Alias of ANGRA MAINYU, Gaasyendietha was made into the “Bane of the Transparent”.

The newly formed Sisyphus Shogunate, in response to THE SUBLIME AXIOM’s decree, modified their PRIOR HISTORY in observance of Gaasyendietha being “redacted” by FORTUNE.

ATC, amazed at the bullshit, asks Gaasyendietha the reasoning behind FORTUNE “redacting” him.

Jones, shruggly, theorizes that it was probably due to the MECHANIC OF MAJORITY RULE.

Jones concludes his story by saying that the Ronin became what it is now out of self-preservation, due to having to rebuild from scratch during the MANIC times of the PRIOR.

ATC then asks Jones the reasoning behind him being perpetually stuck at AGE 66, to which Jones replies that ATC will need to survive his training with him and find out, since that’s what the duo is here to do, instead of continuing the chit-chatting.

For the next 99 years of RUNTIME, between BSing with his Collaborators and fulfilling his godly duties, ATC trains with Jones and gradually increases the duration of the time he can spend in CONSISTENCY to a total time of 7 minutes.

Assisting in ATC’s development of both his swordplay, gunplay and Certainty control was his participation in Tags with the Angra Mainyu.

During one Tag Gig, where ATC, Hornet and Jones went on a Vanquishing against a renegade Ronin Team that somehow removed the penalty of Seppuku off themselves, the Sisyphus duo ran into Memphis Jack randomly peddling his merchandise.

Gassyendietha, a Collaborator of the salesman, revealed to ATC that he befriended the Normie awhile back and often purchases items from Memphis Jack as most Folk do.

“You’ve a handy e-Commerce Grimoire, Jack. Came in clutch multiple times when I needed emergency coffee,” thanked Gaasyendietha to the smiling salesman.

“No worries. Glad my hustling disease is serving the common good,” replied Memphis Jack.

ATC, recalling an old conversation he had with Memphis Jack a long time ago, asked the salesman about the special item that can create detours.

Gaasyendietha, suddenly intrigued by ATC’s inquiry, asked Jack about the item as well.

“Ah! You’re referring to the Ariadne. It’ll be on sale soon. I’m amazed that you even remembered that,” responded Memphis Jack to ATC.

“You and me both homie. If I stumble across an Opportunity, I take notice,” replied ATC.

“Fascinating. I’ll commit that to memory as well,” acknowledged Gaasyendietha.

Following an exchange of coffee bean recommendations, as well as a few item purchases for the road, ATC and Jones bid the smiling salesman a fond farewell before completing their Vanquishing.

During their Runtime spent training together, ATC learned from Jones that the latter made the attempt to Deify at the Age of 66 a few thousand years ago but spontaneously ran into a “problem” while in Recent, the Underworld of the Gods.

“Said “problem” is an AFFLICTION unlike anything ever seen in the SRPG, one so massive that it even created a GODHOOD,” Jones once recounted to ATC.

Jones further explains that the “problem” forced him to equip an extremely rare item called a Xian, which stops the SUFFERING process, thus preventing AGE UPs from occurring.

Jones fears bringing his “problem” to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE and thus refuses to AGE UP until he achieves ABSOLUTION.

ABSOLUTION, ATC recalls from his GG’s lessons, is the purification of one’s CONFIGURATION through an act of personal Significance.

Jones details that his “problem” prevents him from dying, as it resurrects him immediately.

Matter of fact, at a certain point, Gassyendeitha admits that he even went as far as seeking out and befriending a Ludens so that the latter could kill him. Sadly, not even a Boogeyman of the gods could dispatch him, due to his “problem’s” unusual, metaphysical nature.

For Jones to be rid of his “problem”, a DUEL of SUCCESSION to relieve himself of his EXISTENTIAL BURDEN to prove AESOP right must take place. “This”, Jones states to ATC after completing a Tag together, “is one of two means that I know of that can give me ABSOLUTION, thus eradicating my “problem”.”

When ATC inquiries about the “other option”, Jones replies that he'll be revealing said “other option” at the upcoming Succession Grievance.

Suspicious, ATC carefully agrees to go along with his Angra Mainyu’s machinations.

Following the arrival of ATC’s 400th year of Runtime, the Roninyamakasi and his Team Fast Traveled to Duzakh to see what news the Angra Mainyu would bring to them and the faction.

The following events that transpired upon ATC’s arrival would later come to be known amongst the ants as the “Pandomonium of The Sisyphus”.

Some serious John Wick shit was about to transpire.

XVI

Per usual with the Succession Grievances, ATC and his Maverick Team arrived on Duzakh and settled into the Succession Field.

ATC, taking his place next to Gaasyendietha on the Field, stood in silence as he observed the Angra Mainyu announce what he was alluding to during his past conversations with the Roninyamakasi.

Gaasyendietha announces that after receiving a recent Fortune Cookie from THE SUBLIME AXIOM, he's decided to remove his Xian and move on to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

Jones' announcement causes confusion amongst the Ronin present in the audience, now absent-minded over the manner of Succession.

Holding his Flock's attention, Jones alleviates their anxiety by announcing the Final Succession Fade.

Generating a stadium-sized Shortcut, Gaasyendietha proclaims the location of the Atman, which is the original Simulacrum.

Located on a hidden Haven that "Aesop" personally used for research purposes called Laotzu, Jones continues his announcement by pointing out that on Laotzu, there exists a special Dungeon containing the Atman called the Archive of The Establisher.

Horrifying the Sisyphus in attendance, especially ATC, was the location of Laotzu.

Located near a metafictional boundary called the Firmament, the secret Haven could be seen situated in the distant vicinity of a mobile, sentient black hole called the Behemoth.

“The rules of the Final Succession Fade are as follows,” stated Gaasyendietha, “the first Ronin to reach the Archive and access the vault containing the Atman will be crowned the next Angra Mainyu. Consider this an alternative method of promotion aside from Vanquishing me.”

Due to the special nature of this Fade, Gaasyendietha announces that this Opportunity for Succession will be extended to the end of the following day.

ATC, Rich and the other Sisyphus’ Controllers are updated with a timer attached to a new Gig issued by Jones, detailing the time remaining to complete said Gig: 36 hours.

“Any and all pertinent details for reaching the Archive are contained within that Gig I’ve assigned to you all. I’ll await all brave enough to make it to Laotzu. Be it Vanquishing me first or finding the Atman as an alternative, the fate of our Folk is in all your hands now,” declared Jones to his Apostles.

ATC, dumbfounded by the sudden twist, saw Jones approach him after his declaration. The Angra Mainyu, standing close to ATC’s ear, whispers to the Roninyamakasi that there is “more than one way to reach the Archive safely” and informs ATC to seek out their “mutual acquaintance" for a way forward before Fast Traveling to Laotzu.

As the Consilium and their Teams begin plotting out how best to proceed, ATC meets up with Rich, Wendy, Sam and the rest of the Maverick Team to Game Plan.

Upon overhearing that at least half of the Ronin present will be pursuing Jones to Laotzu via Mundi, ATC tells Rich to meet him at the Byte Joint on Maverick later in the evening.

Being a little more specific, ATC affirms that he has a Game Plan already but needs some more time to implement it first.

“Say less homie, I got you,” replied Rich.

ATC breaks from his Team and Fast Travels to Maverick. Upon arriving, ATC reaches out to Memphis Jack via a text message on Repertoire and asks if he’s free. Upon receiving a swift reply, the two agree to meet up at a random cafe to discuss business.

With Laforgeyuhan and Hornet along for the ride, ATC arrives at said cafe and finds Memphis Jack seated with a cup of coffee.

Greeting the salesman before taking his seat at the booth, ATC asks Jack if his Ariadne had finally been put up for sale, to which Jack responds that it has, but with a catch.

Realizing that Jack will only part with the item he needs in exchange for a friendly game of ATC’s choosing, to be played at some point in the Hypothetical, the Roninyamakasi makes the deal without a second thought.

Upon handing over the Ariadne to ATC, Memphis Jack asks the Sisyphus a shocking question. One that the Roninyamakasi hadn’t heard from Gaasyendietha until now.

“Is ol’ Gaasyendietha really going to go through with his plan to eradicate the Fae,” asked Jack with a tone of intrigue.

Confused, ATC questions Jack, with the latter revealing something horrifying about the “problem” that Jones is carrying.

“Your Angra Mainyu is the unwilling host of a metaphysical parasite called the Prime Nosferatu. Kinda weird that he hadn’t revealed that to you, considering you’re his Roninyamakasi,” explained a smiling Jack.

Hearing Memphis Jack’s insight spurred ATC to head to the Byte Joint immediately, with Jack in tow.

Arriving at the Byte Joint in the evening, ATC, alongside Hornet, Laforgeyuhan and Memphis Jack, reunited with Spot, Javier, Malcolm and Milo.

“Welcome back bro. Do you want the usual?” asked Milo.

“I sure do. Can I also get an “SOS” with that order,” replied ATC.

Upon hearing the phrase “SOS” leave ATC’s lips, the Collaborators flipped their moods from chillax to deadly serious and shifted their conversation to the back of the restaurant to hear out what ATC and Memphis Jack had to say.

ATC presents his Succession Gig to his Company, generating it as a Shortcut for all to see. Tapping on the Shortcut at certain intervals, ATC and Co. analyze the specifics surrounding the Archive.

Taking on the form of a Kaiju-sized praying mantis, the Archive of the Establisher is seen meticulously trekking across a holographic urban landscape. Delicate were its movements, which left the buildings surrounding it untouched.

Memphis Jack, recalling his past conversations with Gaasyendietha, elaborates on the Angra Mainyu's Game Plan to rid himself of his parasitic passenger.

"Let me see. Let me see. Ah! Now I remember. Ol' Jones once informed me of "Aesop's" Atman and how its improper use could lead to the eradication of one's Configuration," began Memphis Jack while sipping from a cup of caramel macchiato, "I remember this one time, while Jones and I were out drinking, where he confided in me his willingness to subject himself to Annihilation, so long as it meant the death of the Prime Nosferatu."

"Ol' Jones was depressed during that drinking sesh. His research into the Atman and its capabilities gave him a cold realization. To Annihilate himself would also doom the Fae Godhood to follow suit, being that their Configurations have a "dial-up connection" to their progenitor," continued Jack as he casually sipped his brew.

Memphis Jack further reveals to ATC & Co. that, up until recently, Gassyendietha hadn't found a way into "Aesop's" Vault, where the Atman currently resides.

"Although, that evidently appears to no longer be the case, given the current situation," concluded Memphis Jack, still sipping his macchiato.

Milo, oddly suspicious of Memphis Jack's words, questioned the validity of the salesman's insights.

"Uh huh, and we're supposed to take your "coincidental" information at face value just because? Why should any of us believe what you're saying," asked the pessimistic chef.

“Who ever said anything about trusting my words? You’re grown deities. Whether you take my words into consideration is up to you. With that said, it was nice knowing your Fae Collaborators,” replied Jack, still smiling.

Memphis Jack’s insights spur ATC and Co. into action. Realizing that there’s more at stake than just a simple manner of Succession, ATC receives the full support of his Collaborators.

Before using the Ariadne, ATC asks Jack an interesting question about Gaasyendientha.

“Hey Memphis, I’ve one last thing I want to ask you, and it's been bugging me. Do you have any idea as to why he’s going through with this Succession shit then? Like, why didn’t he just “Quit” already if he could allegedly enter the Vault now?” asked ATC.

“Good question. You’ll just have to ask him when you see him,” Jack replied as he tipped his hat towards the Roninyamakasi.

With less than 24 hrs. remaining before the Succession Gig ends, ATC and Co. depart from the Byte Joint, but not before meeting up with Rich and his Franchise outside said Byte Joint, as ATC had promised.

Rich passes over temporary leadership of his Franchise to Wendy, stating that if he’s Vanquished while assisting ATC, she’ll continue leading the way.

After Wendy chastises Rich for his morbid words with the reveal that she’s not planning on raising their upcoming Spawns by herself, ATC congrats Rich before promising Wendy he’ll ensure Rich’s safe return.

“Ayo ATC! Make sure my Fiance comes back with all his limbs attached! Don’t bring me back a bum!” shouted Wendy lovingly to a departing ATC and Rich.

“I love you too bitch,” replied Rich lovingly.

With everyone ready, ATC uses the Ariadne, which leads the Company to a random wall near Maverick’s waterfront district.

The Ariadne reveals a hidden Bypass, made invisible via a Spell.

Memphis Jack, tagging along for “insurance purposes”, explains that the Bypass that the Ariadne revealed is but one of many passageways to the Archive.

ATC and Co., curious as to why and how a Bypass such as the one they’re about to utilize was installed, figure they’ll learn why once they enter Laotzu.

The Company passes through the Bypass, with Memphis Jack wishing them the best of luck with their Gig.

Upon entering Laotzu, ATC and Co. stumble upon a night-time city consumed in urban warfare.

The combatants were the Sisyphus Ronin and another faction of Sisyphus whom ATC and Rich had never seen before. Even stranger, the duo observed, were the stealthy yet durable garbs worn by this new faction.

In the far-off distance of Laoztu, moving meticulously, was the Archive. Towering above everyone, the entity nonchalantly glided above the Company and the wider urban conflict.

Immediately, ATC and Co. begin making their way to the Archive, all the while battling any Ronin they came across, with some seeking to Vanquish ATC for his Roninyamakasi Role.

Halfway through the trek, ATC and the Company are ambushed.

A Company of the unknown Sisyphus faction approached ATC before asking him to state his identity.

ATC answers cautiously, all the while having his weapons, Choices and Magic at the ready alongside his Collaborators.

Introducing himself as Barbarossa, the leader of this 3rd Sisyphus faction, the Zurvan orders the withdrawal of his Company's weapons as a show of Goodwill to ATC, stating that Gaasyendietha had mentioned to him that not only would the Roninyamakasi be coming to Laotzu, but that ATC is also the Current Playthrough of "Aesop".

Agreeing that being out in the open just to chit-chat wouldn't be such a good idea, ATC and Co. accompany Barbarossa and his forces to a nearby subway entrance, hidden from view.

The group trek for a while until they come upon a wider area containing a larger group of the unknown Sisyphus. All present were sheltered inside of a Safe Point.

ATC and Rich, hungry for answers, pressed Barbarossa.

What the Zurvan said next shocked the two Sisyphus Ronin and the Company.

“We, the Sisyphus Chonin, are a hidden faction of our Folk. Under orders from “Aesop”, we’ve been tasked with continuing the traditions set forth by the Self-Hero in the event that either a Civil Assimilation and/or Schism splinters the Godhood,” stated Barbarossa.

Charged with safeguarding the Establisher’s most cherished secrets & Enigmas, the Chonin specialize in acquiring all manner of Relics and items to advance “Aesop’s” abandoned research into the nature of the SRPG itself.

Preferring to acquire their valuables via theft, influence or payment, the Chonin utilizes a clandestine force called the Sisyphus Shinobi.

Members of the Shinobi, called the Sisyphus Ninja, function more like a Guild than a military, and often plant their members within various SRPG organizations to covertly further their goals.

Well, that explains the Aridane Bypass we used, thought ATC.

“Gaasyendietha was originally made the Chonin’s Zurvan by Aesop shortly before the Establisher initiated the 1st attempt at the Optional Final Boss Challenge. That went out the window when the Chiranjivi attacked him,” stated Barbarossa.

Rich comments that Jones was likely preparing to head to Laotzu to lead the Chonin full-time after breaking from the Chiranjivi, only to have hundreds of thousands of Sisyphus approach him in a bid to join him on his journey.

ATC ends Rich’s hypothesis with the assumption that the 6 Proteges, upon seeing the mass movement behind Jones, initiated the Civil Assimilation in a desperate attempt to keep the Sisyphus Society together.

Barbarossa confirms the duo's theorizing, stating that Jones repurposed the survivors from his side of the Civil Assimilation into the military arm of the Chonin, naming them the Sisyphus Ronin.

That didn't mean that both groups were privy to one another, however.

To ensure absolute secrecy, Jones kept the Chonin's existence a secret from his Ronin, as the Ronin's existential trauma from the Civil Assimilation could've potentially affected the Chonin's Gig in a negative way.

Milo and Malcolm swiftly reason that all the fighting that they've been involved in up until now on Laotzu is likely a case of the Ronin confusing "friends with foes", resulting in this Pandemonium happening all around them.

As for why Jones would cause all of this, ATC questions Barbarossa, who reveals to ATC that the events playing out right now were all intended to lead the Roninyamakasi to the Archive so that he can open the way forward to the Atman for the Angra Mainyu.

"Only "Aesop" and his Playthroughs can open the Atman's vault. It'll never open for another," explained Barbarossa before generating a Shortcut to show ATC and Co. ", but onto a more important question. You wish to know the story behind Gassyendietha's motivations. Allow me to show you."

Immediately after the Prime Nosferatu's infection of Jones in Recent, the 2nd Sisyphus went on to become the mysterious 4th Calamity of the SRPG, initiating the Nosferatu Plague of the 1300s upon returning to the SRPG during that period of the Current.

Watching Barbarossa's Shortcut, Spot and Javier recall learning from some Fae OGs about some eyewitness reports of a grotesque cryptid—resembling a vampire bat—rampaging throughout "Europe" during the Plague.

"I remember during a bedtime story that sis once told me about the beast appearing out of nowhere in "France" before it went on a consumption spree," recounted Spot.

"No sooner after that'd happened, the first Zombies were born," said Javier.

ATC and Co. reasonably conclude that the eyewitness accounts that Spot and Javier had mentioned were likely that of a transformed Gaasyendietha. But as to how and why the 2nd Sisyphus still looks and behaves normally is still a mystery.

Barbarossa reveals that Jones uses his Simulacrum as a "cage" to contain himself whenever the Prime Nosferatu attempts to hatch. Jones was in his Simulacrum at the time that he became mysteriously infected. For whatever reason, being inside his Simulacrum forces the Prime Nosferatu into a kind of temporary hibernation.

However, the resulting Uncertainty from the Prime Nosferatu is so potent, it radiates outside of Jones' Simulacrum, turning it into the vampire bat abomination as told in the SRPG's history books.

Following his 1st transformation, Gassyendietha issued the Chonin with a Gig to create a special Playground within Laotzu to help keep him locked up whenever he needs to transform, thus explaining why his 4th Calamity form never resurfaced in "Pangaea" after the Nosferatu Plague.

ATC finally figures out why Gaasyendietha behaves the way that he does.

“Like removing a tapeworm, dude wants that thing out of him no matter the cost. Not just for his sake, but for everyone else's," said ATC as he watched Barbarossa dismiss his Shortcut.

When ATC asks Barbarossa where Jones is now, the Chonin replies that he’s unsure and that the Angra Mainyu only told him that “he’ll know if or when “Aesop’s” Vault has been opened and that he’ll reappear to its opener once it happens”.

After giving the Chonin a heads up on the upcoming Ronin Intrusion, the Angra Mainyu Fast Traveled to parts unknown.

Knowing that Jones set this all up to get his preferred outcome one way or another, ATC and Co. decide to press on to the Archive itself.

ATC, more determined to best his first disciple from a Prior Playthrough and claim the Role and Alias of Angra Mainyu for himself, announced he was ready to depart.

Should the Adventurer and his Company fail, the Fae would be Texas BBQ.

ATC suspects that Jones' willingness to help him wasn’t only because he’s “Aesop’s” Current Playthrough, but also because him BEING “Aesop” makes him Jones’ “insurance” as well.

ATC and Co. ask Barbarossa to lead them through the tunnels so that they can get as close to the Archive as possible without needless fighting.

“I’d rather avoid the Fades happening above,” said ATC.

Barbarossa humbly agrees and after making some swift preparations, proceeds to lead ATC’s Company forward.

XVII

With Barbarossa's aid, ATC and Co. make it to the nearest subway exit beside the walking Archive.

Along the way, the Company battles and dispatches all Random Encounters that come tumbling their direction.

Making it to the surface, Barbarossa wishes ATC and Co. the best of luck before the Roninyamakasi and his Collaborators use their Controllers to enter the Archive.

ATC and Co. materialize inside of the ground floor an abandoned apartment building.

The Zurvan, speaking through the Company's Controllers, informs ATC that "Aesop's" Vault door is the roof access door, and that they'll need to reach it to get to the Atman.

Barbarossa also warns ATC and Co. to stick together, as each door inside the Archive leads to unusual "Subspaces" that "Aesop" created for his research experiments. To reach the Vault, the Company will have to navigate through the various "Subspaces" until they reach the top floor.

Proceeding through the Archive, ATC and Co. end up being split apart into groups by a wandering Tumbleweed.

Undeterred, the Company worked their way up towards the rooftop access in the following Companies: ATC, Hornet & Milo, Malcolm & Javier, and Spot & Rich.

Along the way, the divided Company Vanquished the few Ronin that successfully made it inside, chief among them being some Polemaches, alongside other abominations.

Finally reuniting outside of the roof access door, the Company took the time to recover whilst ATC and Rich checked their Controller's timer, which showed a few hours remaining on their Succession Gig timer.

Standing in front of the roof access door, ATC placed his bandaged hand on the handle.

Opening flawlessly, ATC and Co. passed through the "Vault door" and made their way up to the top of the Archive.

Above the Company was a giant-sized disco ball with the computer power symbol on its surface. The surrounding environment looked like a flickering, multi-colored square dance floor.

As ATC and Co. look up at the Atman, a presence appears behind ATC & Co.

Final Succession Fade

Gassyendietha, clapping his hands, congratulates ATC on making it to the Atman, claiming him to not only be a worthy Successor, but also a worthy Playthrough of his progenitor.

Understanding fully well that ATC now knows why he subjected both the Ronin and Chonin to his scheme, Gaasyendietha asks ATC to let him access the Atman so that he can achieve “Absolution” and end the Prime Nosferatu.

“And risk ending the Fae! Not a chance homie,” ATC counters, before adding, “and besides, I’m here aren’t I. Let me be the one to liquidate you instead.”

Gaasyendietha, laughing, summons his legendary Knicknack called Shiva, right as a massive Simulacrum generated behind him.

“Haha, okay then. If you really want that Succession Fade so badly, allow me to oblige,” replied the Angra Mainyu.

Known as Shura, the Angra Mainyu’s Simulacrum mimicked the 2nd Sisyphus' movements like a reflection. This phenomenon was something that neither ATC nor his Collaborators had seen before.

“What kind of Simulacrum is that!?” asked Javier.

“That’s not a Simulacrum. It's a Numen,” said Barbarossa as his voice reverberated from the Company’s Controllers.

“Nu…what!?” said ATC before Jones’ Vibe recaptured his Attention.

Gassyendietha, claiming to ATC that the ease of their training sessions must have gone to his head, makes it clear that he’s going to erase whatever hope the Roninyamakasi might’ve had in thinking he could best him.

“You’re not my “master” anymore. Not by a long-shot homie. You’re nothing more than “insurance”, and now that I no longer need you, I’m canceling my “policy”,” proclaimed Gaasyendietha.

“Roll the die then bitch,” replied ATC.

Round 1. **Time to rumble!!!**

Opp Fight: Shura, Numen of the Angra Mainyu

HP: 132

Opp Fight Song: Only The Strong Survive by DJ Krush (feat. CL Smooth)

Company: ATC (59), Rich (53), Milo (51), (Malcolm 51), Spot (50), Javier (55), Hornet (59)

Risk: Hard

I suggest you use the Company’s Simulacrums for this one. Shura’s normal attacks dish out 10 damage per hit, and that’s before you factor in the other Choices and Spells in Jones’ arsenal. In addition to employing debuffs and debilitating status effects, Gaasyendietha will randomly put Shura in a defensive stance.

Be prepared to either Dodge or Parry the ensuing counterstrike, or you'll regret it.

Another thing to note is Gaasyendietha himself. He can’t be targeted throughout the fight, so just unload on his Numen.

While ATC will be unable to use his CONSISTENCY Miracle for this encounter, you’ll still have the option to utilize the GRIND if need be.

Keep up the pressure, apply heals and buffs and keep the Collaborators alive until Shura’s HP is halved. The battle will end once this occurs.

ATC and Co. fight Shura and Gaasyendeitha to a standstill, until the Angra Mainyu suddenly falls to the ground in pain.

As Uncertainty emanates off Jones, Malcolm reasons that Gaasyendietha might be succumbing to the Prime Nosferatu's control, as the metaphysical entity now feels itself to be threatened.

Jones, immediately boarding Shura, tells ATC and the Company to access the Atman and flee Laotzu.

"Head for a barren Station or deserted Haven. "I'll find you," yelled Gaasyendietha through Shura before Fast Traveling to parts unknown.

With no time left to spare, ATC and Co. fly into the Atman and arrive inside an…arcade cafe?

The strange cafe's two floors were filled with amazing furnishings and arcade cabinets.

The arcade cafe perplexed ATC and Co., who were soon called over by a gray cardboard box, who introduced itself as Noriginality, The Unforeseen.

Congratulating them on making it to the Atman, the strange gray box generated a naming Shortcut before asking ATC to put a name in for their Atman to complete its construction.

The Company asks Noriginality what even "is" the Atman, right as ATC hurriedly puts in a name on the Shortcut.

Gaasyendietha, still too present in ATC's mind for him to remotely give a shit about asking questions, was the priority.

After attempting to put in a familiar name in a familiar way, the entry was denied to ATC. Unphased, the Roninyamakasi began "rewording" it.

At the same time, Noriginality revealed that the Atman is the Ultimate Simulacrum, made via a fusion of multiple Simulacrums with the Atman's chosen driver. The power from it is so immense that not only can the Atman fight Superbosses, it might even have the potential to Vanquish Revelation, the Ultimate Boss if all Crew Members of the Atman are Deified.

"Uhhh, what!?" replied the Company upon hearing that last part from the Unforeseen.

"Well would you look at that! You finished naming the Atman! Good on you!" replied Noriginality to ATC.

ATC finishes inputting his Atman's new name: <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>

Noriginality, upon reviewing the name choice, laughs, says "how cute", before Booting ATC and Co. from the strange arcade cafe before they can even utter another question.

ATC and Co. arrive inside an apartment room with furnishings. In front of them, on a large Shortcut, was a vast hill of greenery. ATC and Rich comment that the vibrant scene looks familiar to them. At the same time, Javier, Milo, Malcolm, Hornet and Spot explore the other parts of the Atman's space.

The foursome stumbled upon some rooms with massive Cauldron setups, connected to decent-sized Shortcuts serving as monitors. A scene familiar to a PC gamer's setup.

ATC grabs the Atman's Wheel and accesses its UI via the cockpit's Shortcut and realizes that they were all dropped off by Noriginality on "Lothering, Montana".

Rich freaks out and rushes to check the Atman's UI as well.

As the Company all reconvene in the living room cockpit of the Atman, wondering what the situation is, the Atman suddenly begins sounding an alarm.

Accessing the Atman's UI, ATC spots a massive object engulfed in a flame of Uncertainty teleporting sporadically towards their location.

The Company, knowing its Gaasyendeitha, hunker down beside ATC as he primes <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> for combat.

Forcing the Atman to clap its hands together, ATC commands <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> to reveal a giant baseball bat from said hands.

"Time to relieve some ignorance. Batter up!" yells a hyped ATC, who decides to call the stick "Socrates".

As soon as the transformed Gassyendietha arrived, the monstrosity clashed with the Atman like a baseball player hitting a homerun.

What followed next would be considered by the ants to be a moment equivalent to that of the 1st atomic bomb being utilized.

Round 2. **FIGHT!!!**

Opp Fight: Gaasyendietha, 4th Calamity of the SRPG.

HP: 444

Opp Fight Song: Moochie by Boldy James & The Alchemist

Company: <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> (300)

Risk: Deadly to Terminal

Get ready to put in work.

The possessed Angra Mainyu is a wild animal with Evil as the Incentive. Homie ain’t playing. So, you gotta kill this muthafucka. Fortunately for you, you’ve got “Socrates”. Batter up! Expect each hit to deal 15 points of damage.

On top of having powered up versions of the Company’s Choices and Spells, the Atman also has a dope Switch-Up ability.

You can switch between combat styles by Switching Up who controls the Atman. “Socrates” will change to match the Driver’s weapon preference as well. Wanna give ol’ boy the hands, switch to Spot. Rinse and repeat if you’re bloody thirsty enough.

“Lothering, Montana” isn't important, so feel free to go crazy on the Prime Nosferatu. The bastard has a dangerous Approach that’ll suck 30 HP away from you if it breaks your Guard or counters your Parry. Keep that in mind.

At about 300 HP, Gaasyendietha will Fast Travel you both to “Charlotte, North Carolina” at random. This is where it gets sketchy. That meter at the bottom of Gaasyendietha’s HP bar looks awfully familiar huh.

Let’s give a round of applause for the return of the Casualty Meter.

Remember that annoying piece of shit from the Mythical Fade. It's back! Yeah, beat Gaasyendietha before that meter fully fills or its Game Over. Once Gassyendietha is at around 120 HP, you both will Fast Travel to the “Uyuni Salt Flats”.

Wind down Gaasyendietha immediately after you avoid his Decisive, called “Shura’s Wrath”, and finish him off with <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>’s Decisive, called “Baptism”, once that Exploit Command appears to end the battle.

After battling from “Lothering, MT” to “Charlotte, NC”, the Company & Gassyendietha Fast Travel to the “Uyuni Salt Flats”.

Once there, the Atman manages to sever the “dial-up connection” by "quarantining" the Prime Nosferatu using an exclusive Decisive called Baptism.

Jones returns to normal, completely purified yet weakened from the battle.

ATC hands the Wheel over to one of the Collaborators and tells Rich he’s going down to the surface to settle the Succession Fade fairly, now that the immediate threat has been neutralized.

The Company decided to livestream ATC and Jones’ interaction, as to assuage any confusion within the SRPG at present following the cataclysmic battle, as well provide the surviving Ronin a status update on the Succession.

The Atman flies higher into the air to give ATC and Jones some room in case a ground fight erupts between the two.

ATC uses his Fast Travel to head to the ground and confronts a kneeling Jones, whom ATC tosses an elixir to.

Jones, in a state of euphoria, catches and drinks the elixir, fully recovering before facing ATC.

Jones, on his feet again, contemplates the strangeness of feeling at one with existence, before his train of thought is broken by ATC’s yell.

ATC challenges Jones to a fatal Fade to determine the new Angra Mainyu.

Feeling satisfied overachieving Absolution in an unpredictable way, Gaasyendeitha agrees to one last Fade, eager to see if ATC can not only Vanquish him but even bring the Society back together.

After a moment of concentration, ATC activates his CONSISTENCY Miracle and charges Gaasyendietha.

If the Roninyamakasi fails to defeat his boss before his CONSISTENCY runs out in under 7 minutes, his Run is finito.

Final round. **Roll the die!**

Opp Fight: Gaasyendietha Midway Jones, Angra Mainyu of the Sisyphus

HP: 66

Opp Fight Song: Knights Of Cydonia by Muse

Company: ATC (60)

Risk: Hard to Deadly

You've got seven minutes to beat the Angra Mainyu. Failure to do so before ATC's CONSISTENCY Miracle switches off will result in a unique death scene followed by a Game Over screen. Pretty gnarly when you think about it.

Grim fates aside, this'll be a bitter struggle. The CONSISTENCY Miracle only provides you with a fighting chance, not an insta-win. Gaasyendietha is a legendary swordsman for a reason. In addition to dealing 20 HP per normal attack, the 1st Ronin's ANNIHILATIONISM Console can deteriorate ATC's CP in minutes.

On top of that, the 2nd Sisyphus can utilize the GRIND at random moments throughout the Fade to sneak in some punishing blows.

My only advice is this: fight like a force of nature. Even the odds by using the GRIND CONSISTENTLY when the Angra Mainyu drops his Guard to stay in the fight.

Once Jones drops to 10 HP, he'll charge up for his ultimate Decisive, "Paradise Lost".

Vanquish the Angra Mainyu before he unleashes his final attack to end the Fade.

ATC deals Jones a fatal slash just as his CONSISTENCY runs out.

Following the final clash, ATC digs WARP into the ground to maintain his standing. The amount of damage he's sustained, while significant, is non-fatal.

As the Company broadcasts the aftermath of the Fade for all of Narcissus to see, ATC and Jones exchange parting words.

With some convincing by ATC, Gaasyendietha decides to remove his Xian to "save" himself at the last minute and moves onto THE HIGHER ADVENTURE, achieving Completion instantly.

As the former Angra Mainyu achieved DIVINE MADNESS and moved up towards a stranger existence, ATC stood tall as the SRPG's new Angra Mainyu.

XVIII

News of ATC's victory spreads far and wide throughout the SRPG. And while the collateral damage from the Final Succession Fade was still being tallied, the consequences could've been worse.

Roughly 3/4 of the Ronin who made the journey to Laotzu had all but perished in the ensuing Pandemonium. In addition, the existence of the Chonin had now become apparent to the rest of the Ronin Faction.

Thanks to the live feed depiction of ATC's victory over Jones, the Ronin pledged their fealty to the new Angra Mainyu without question.

Knowing the truth behind Jones' past and the Role of the Chonin, ATC, with Rich and Barbarossa's aid, began the painful process of integrating the surviving Chonin with the remaining Ronin.

While slow, the process was proving to be productive.

Due to Jones' untimely defeat, ATC was called upon by the Deep State to answer for Gaasyendietha's actions, especially considering the Final Succession Fade's devastation.

Not wanting to cause another conflict, ATC and the Deep State agreed to maintain the secretive Hallelujah that Gaasyendietha had made with them since the SSC's inception: ***to do the Gigs that the Sisyphus Shogunate refuses to do, in adherence to the Shadow Social Contract***.

To further make amends for the 4th Calamity's rampage, ATC decides to contribute some of the Ronin's wealth to the Remix efforts being conducted across the affected Havens.

After assisting Javier and the Minstrels' Guild with the Remixes, as well as finalizing the restructuring of the Ronin and the Chonin into a new Sisyphus Society with Barbarossa and Rich's help, ATC is rewarded with a surprise promotion party by all the deities he's assisted.

On "New Year's Eve", a large swath of Maverick was closed off for a massive block party, with bodies upon bodies of deities pouring out of nearby establishments; from a distant viewpoint, the scene looked like something out of a Dirge, but more chillaxing.

The action at Milo's original Byte Joint, now a rising restaurant franchise, was explosive.

ATC, chilling and greeting Collaborators he hadn't seen in over a century of Runtime or so, felt a sense of calm for the first time in a long while.

Catching up with Jack, Jill and Joe, the Angra Mainyu reacquainted himself in their endeavors.

Jack and Jill successfully entered the Pioneers' Guild, where they serve as professional information brokers and surveyors. As for Joe, that mad lad successfully opened a blacksmith Atelier business that's swiftly becoming a well-known Arsenal vendor in the SRPG.

An even bigger surprise to the Angra Mainyu, courtesy of Javier, was his reintroduction to the Minstrel's little Sister Pet, now an adult goddess with a medical Credential. Simone, having selected the Haven of Guilds as the place to finish her residency requirement, congratulated her oldest friend for his accomplishments so far. Jokingly, the Dhampir warned ATC not to end up a patient, as that Role doesn't suit him. The Angra Mainyu hilariously responded with "no promises".

Even GTA, now a prized member of INTERPOL, arrived to give his Rival some kudos.

Hell, for old times' sake, the relaxed Xenolith even offered the Angra Mainyu a friendly Fade in the Hypothetical to gauge the other's progress. ATC obliged.

Tagging alongside GTA, to ATC and the Company's surprise, was Charlotte, Zey and Ozzie. The trio, with Vibes radiating unique experiences, greeted the Angra Mainyu with updates on their Runs.

First up was Zey, who revealed that during his Eremition in Elfame, he assisted Spot's attempts to join the Speedrunners' Guild via winning the legendary Bifrost GPX.

"I'll spare you the more in-depth details for later. What I will say is that ol' Spot here doubled dipped into an illegal street racing tournament at the same time to build her Simulacrum up for the Bifrost. That shit was sketchy," recalled Zey nervously chuckling to ATC.

As Spot sipped her THC seltzer, pretending not to hear Zey, the ebony god concluded his update with the reveal that he's currently working amongst some Giants on a Station in "Antarctica" as a Simulacrum Alchemist. Zey's current project, involving the outfitting of the Giant Xenoliths in a Simulacrum inspired suit, was well underway.

As for Ozzie, the red panda goddess revealed her current Role of being a miner for the Explorers' Guild. After backpacking for her whole Eremition, Ozzie fell in love with the discovery aspect of her wandering and decided to throw in her lot with the Explorers. It was during her stay in the "Southwestern United States" that she competed in Odin with Malcolm, ending up in third place behind another deity who took second, while Malcolm took first.

"I still can't believe you two competed in that self-termination exhibition," said Milo.

"Hell yeah, we did! And besides, I love skateboarding. Plus, your ditzy brother here bet me five dollars that I wouldn't compete. And yes, I'm still carrying that five," replied a haughty Ozzie glancing over at a whistling Malcolm.

As for Charlotte, currently in Anima form, the Polarity revealed that after it had returned home to attend a culinary school for Eremition, it went on to take on a cooking competition to enter the Culinary Guild afterwards.

"I wasn't all that surprised when I ran into Milo there," said a reminiscing Charlotte.

“You and I both. Matter of fact, I'll admit, I was surprised when we were both put into the same entry team,” replied Milo, demonstrating another rare smile.

As the two would go on to explain to ATC, the Culinary Guild entry competition involved the aspiring chefs presenting their self-made recipe books to the Culinary Guild’s entry critic. If approved, each chef would then be randomly put into teams of three, with the goal of prepping selected meals from each team member’s cookbooks to serve to a panel of judges. If successful in earning the panel’s approval, the trio of aspiring guild members would officially be inducted.

“What a misadventure that was. We made it in though,” chuckled Charlotte.

“Hear, hear,” replied Milo as he downed some warm sake.

“Hell yeah. I lowkey miss my Eremition, but alas, it is what it is. Oh, I almost forgot. Congrats on your Immortal Bistro business getting another star,” replied Malcolm to the blushing Polarity.

For the first time ever since their college days, ATC and GTA’s Companies spent their time together enjoying each other's presence, instead of viewing the other as an Opp.

As the deities mingled, Spot, suddenly receiving a text on her Controller, looked to it for a brief moment before giggling to herself.

Tapping ATC on his shoulder and asking the Sisyphus to meet her on the roof of the Byte Joint, Spot seamlessly transitioned her way through the crowded attendees of the Byte Joint.

ATC, after BSing with a few more familiar faces, Fast Traveled to the Byte Joint’s rooftop to hear out the Speedrunner.

Spot reveals that her sister, Witty, wants to meet ATC sometime in the Hypothetical and wants to know if he’d be interested in seeing her.

ATC, not wanting to pass up a chance to meet an Urbanlegend, gave Spot the answer she was hoping to hear, hoping to not come across as thirsty in the process.

Spot, amused all the same, says she’ll hit up Witty, find a good time that works for her and pass it along to ATC.

Following ATC's promotion party, the new Angra Mainyu received a text from Spot one day while hanging out with Hornet on an Adventure.

The message sent by Spot revealed that Witty was down with seeing ATC now if he'd like, or if he can't make it, they can meet up sometime later.

ATC & Hornet Fast Travel to Spot instantly, spooking the Fae. Hilariously, the duo decided to let Spot know in-person that they've got some Runtime to spare.

Spot, ATC and Hornet use a Bypass to enter Old Maverick, an older Haven situated in between the "United Kingdom" and "France".

Spot reveals to ATC as they pass through the Bypass' wormhole that Witty was raised by her Tutorial on Old Maverick, long before Spot was Spawned.

Chit-chatting with Spot about the little details concerning her and Witty's past, the trio eventually make their way to a mall owned by Witty, called "**Dedeco & Paira**".

Arriving inside, ATC is amazed at the retro decor of the location, reminding him of his childhood.

ATC, snapping back to the game, caught sight of a young-looking Fae, blind yet graceful in movement. Despite feeling like he'd seen her from somewhere before, ATC dismissed the idea.

The blind Fae goddess could be seen on a ladder, carefully putting books from her Inventory into the bookshelves. Despite her blindness, she had the physique of a gymnast.

Spot, surprising ATC in a manner like how she used to prank him during their college days, yells out for Witty from behind the Sisyphus after using her super speed to sneak up on him.

Witty climbs down and makes her way to Spot and an irritated ATC using her guide cane.

ATC and Witty are swiftly introduced to each other by Spot, with the god and goddess giving each other a somewhat casual greeting.

Spot decides to "use the restroom", leaving ATC and Witty to talk.

Witty congratulates ATC on his promotion to the Role of Angra Mainyu, with ATC humbly downplaying it.

ATC, in turn, notes he wasn't expecting Spot's sister to be blind, comparing Current Witty to the images of her younger self that could be seen on either Narcissus or the inside of a history book.

Witty, downplaying herself as well, states that she's just a humble "entrepreneur" now, having left both her Privateering and regular thieving days behind her.

Witty asks ATC if he'd like to know how she lost her eyesight. The Angra Mainyu provided her with the response she wanted to hear.

ATC, using the opening that Witty gave him, asks her out on a date, saying that he'd like to treat her to a bowl of pho while she regales him with the full story.

Witty, swift with an answer, accepts the offer and tells ATC that he can either hit her up via text or he can just drop by Dedeco & Paira and ask for her.

ATC, keeping his cool despite his enthusiasm, agrees to Witty's suggestion before exchanging both their Repertoire IDs and Controller numbers with one another.

Right on cue, Spot "returns" from the restroom.

After Spot tells Witty she wants to take ATC around Dedeco & Paira for a dope tour, Witty and ATC say farewell to one another before the latter is led away by Spot.

After Witty disappears, Spot begins hounding ATC about the details between his and Witty's conversation.

Following the meetup at Dedeco & Paira, ATC and Witty began dating and gradually learned about one another over a decent period of Runtime.

At one point, Witty reveals to ATC that she's Kiara, which surprises yet affirms ATC's suspicion in his familiarity with her. The reveal solidifies the growing feelings between the two deities, eventually culminating in a suggestion by Witty one day.

Witty, confident and Incentivized, asked ATC if he'd like to engage in a Fae Dance with her. ATC, learning from Spot and Javier over the centuries, understood that a Fae Dance was the mating ritual of the Fae.

Here's how it works dear reader.

A female Fae courts a would-be suitor and asks for a special Fade to determine if said suitor is worthy of being the Fae goddess' partner. If successful, the Nosferatu within the Fae's Configuration imprints on the suitor. If not successful, the Nosferatu will purge all romantic feelings from the female Fae permanently, removing all chances for the suitor to do the Dance over.

ATC, understanding the weight of Witty's words, happily accepts.

Word somehow gets back to the Fae that their Matron is preparing to engage in a Fae Dance, sparking many Fae, including Spot and Javier, to investigate ATC and Witty's ensuing dance via Magic and Shortcuts.

ATC and Witty head to the River Styx on a Station called Charon within "Greece", seeing it as a fitting place to let loose.

The two deities, facing off, used their Certainty to stand on top of the River's Styx's surface, giving each other a nod before rushing one another.

Soulmate Fight: Witty Thaovi Mugen, Matron of the Fae

HP: 60

Soulmate Fight Song: Dance On Me by Goldlink

Company: ATC (60)

Risk: Losing “The One”

I ain’t got much to say about this one.

This is a “romantic Fade”, so you won’t be killing one another. Just normal attacks with a side of Dodging, Blocking, blah blah blah.

Wait! I just remembered something important! Witty will use her unique version of the GRIND once her HP drops below 20.

You might want to counter that with either ATC’s GRIND or CONSISTENCY Miracle.

Aside from that, apply the usual buffs and debuffs and “sweep” ol’ girl off her feet.

I’m rooting for you lovebirds!

ATC, using his CONSISTENCY, romantically catches Witty before she can fall underneath the water.

Witty's eyes glow a faint yet vibrant white for a moment, before returning to their milky-white hue of blindness.

In that briefest of moments, the Nosferatu parasite within Witty's Configuration imprinted itself onto ATC's Configuration. The Fae Dance had ended successfully.

Witty, flustered, pats her pockets for her sunglasses, before ATC puts them on her face. During the Dance, ATC pulled a fast one on the Matron and swiped her sunglasses after she took them off to fight seriously.

This realization turned the Dhampir on.

The Angra Mainyu, now super cheerful, asked Witty if she'd like to go grab some food. The Fae, head over heels, smoothly agreed.

From that point forward, ATC and Witty entered into a Labyrinth and began spending most of their Runtime together.

To further help ATC in both his Adventuring and Society endeavors, Witty introduces him to a secretive Dungeon network called the Blackmarket, home to illicit sellers and traders. During Witty's Privateering & Thieving days, the Blackmarket Network became her go to place for all manner of Opportunities.

Through Witty, ATC makes the acquaintance of the mysterious figure in charge of the Blackmarket Network.

Going by the name of Br'er, the enigmatic rabbit deity, hiding his face behind a cyberpunk mask, agreed to offer ATC exclusive deals and offers upon Witty vouching for her lover.

As the couple said their farewells to Br'er before leaving his establishment, the rabbit deity noticed something unusual yet familiar about ATC's Configuration.

Thinking too much of it, Br'er dismisses the irregularity and goes back to his usual business.

When ATC asked Witty how she met Br'er on their way out, the Matron reveals that the pair's initial encounter occurred sometime after Witty's Father

Tutorial, Arsene Mugen, had achieved Ascension. Br’er and the deceased gentleman thief were close friends.

“Right around when I abandoned my original name,” said Witty.

“And what was that name?” asked ATC.

“It's Aaliyah. You’re the only other deity, aside from Spot and my Club, that I’ve told that too,” replied Witty with a soft yet melancholic smile.

Wrapping his arm around Witty, ATC thanked the Matron for entrusting him with her secret, before the couple departed for parts unknown.

For the next 74 years of Runtime, ATC and Witty experienced a period of fluctuating highs and lows within their Labyrinth.

Even amongst deities, romantic relationships are still a bitch.

XIX

One day, while out and about, Witty, Hornet and ATC stumbled upon a Tumbleweed.

Witty, agitated by the sudden Random Encounter, had been anxious all morning.

She'd discovered something in her Configuration and was in urgent need to tell ATC about it.

Yet, for hilarious reasons, Witty was often prevented from finding the time to do so, in part because of bad RNG.

ATC, feeling swamped from working on his Angra Mainyu Quests & Gigs while maintaining his ranking within the Adventurers' Guild, was out of Witty's reach.

Eventually, ATC made himself scarce and departed with Witty to a rural part of Maverick.

Just as Witty was about to inform ATC of her news, a sabretooth Cryptid came rushing towards them, courtesy of a Tumbleweed.

The Matron dispatched it with ease using her cane sword, being infuriated at the same time.

ATC and Hornet watched the ensuing curb stomp; all the while being dumbfounded.

After calming Witty down, ATC sat his goddess on top of the dead sabretooth, before offering to fight her in a popular fighting game, courtesy of the Fable OD.

Witty, feeling better, agreed and started playing with ATC.

At ease and without thinking, Witty casually informed her Soulmate about what had been bothering her.

“I’m pregnant,” reveals the goddess.

ATC, flabbergasted, asks Witty to repeat herself, to which she does.

At first, ATC is conflicted, unsure that he’s fit to be a Tutorial, considering his reckless and sociopathic actions in the past.

Witty, hearing none of it, assuages her Soulmate’s fears and apprehensions

“I’m no paragon either amo. I’ve done my fair share of work in the past. Sure, we might be terrible deities, but that doesn’t have to be the status quo for our Legacy,” said Witty.

ATC, now confident in his upcoming Role as a Father Tutorial, began contemplating how to prepare for the arrival of his and Witty’s Pet.

Both deities broke the news to their closets Collaborators and Folk, with said info spreading far and wide via Narcissus.

Spot, ecstatic over becoming an Aunt Tutorial, began thinking up ideas for a Pet Shower.

Javier, aware of Witty's prowess in fighting games, brings up the idea for all of them to compete in the upcoming Lightsout, a popular fighting game competition.

Despite the Lightout taking place close to the Matron's "due date", ATC and Witty agree that the prize money would make for a suitable gift.

As ATC and Witty spend the upcoming months prepping for the arrival of their Pet, the couple trained alongside their Collaborators for the coming Lightsout.

When the Lightsout finally arrived, ATC and Co. attacked the competition with gusto.

While ATC and Co. were ultimately eliminated from the competition, Witty and Hornet did flawlessly, making it to the semi-finals.

Before Witty could begin her match, the Dhampir felt an uncomfortable sensation in her Configuration.

"Uh, amo. My Configuration just Chimed," said an anxious Witty.

"Bloody RNG," said ATC to himself in response.

Forfeiting her place in the semi-finals, Witty departed with ATC to a nearby hospital; Spot, instinctively, decided to come along.

Following the couple’s departure, Hornet successfully won the finals of Lightsout, securing the ‘W’ for ATC and Co.

Hornet, Milo, Malcolm, Javier and other acquaintances of ATC and Witty immediately headed for the hospital afterwards to find out the status of their friends’ Pet.

After settling into a waiting room, ATC greeted his associates and Collaborators, before announcing that Witty successfully Replicated not one, but two Spawns.

Shocked in a good way, the Collaborators swiftly followed ATC to the newborn nursery.

Looking at his two little ones in the Pet nursery, ATC took note of a visible goddess infant and an invisible god infant, side by side.

Witty, appearing well-rested yet a bit fatigued, revealed that she pulled her Daughter Pet out of her Spawn first, with ATC doing the same for their Son Pet in the adjacent Spawn a few seconds later.

As such, the Daughter Pet is named Then, while the Son Pet is named After.

Br’er, Witty’s longtime Collaborator and honorary member of Hiden, arrived to give a gift of his own to Witty.

After poking fun at Witty for fulfilling a random ass Prophecy he made about her during her Privateering days, Br’er takes another look at ATC; still bothered by what he’s seeing on the Angra Mainyu’s Configuration.

Keeping what he knows to himself for now, Br’er wishes Witty and her new Pantheon his best before departing.

ATC and Witty look at one another, already plotting out a Game Plan for their new little ones.

ATC learns from Witty a year or so after departing with Then & After from the hospital that the Daycare device he was raised in is based on how goddesses nurse their young before letting them out into the wild.

Placing Then & After into her Configuration via a special Grimoire exclusive to her called the Azoth, Witty nurtures her and ATC’s Pets until they reach the Age of 3.

Wanting their Pets to take on a different Run than themselves within the SRPG, ATC agreed to Witty’s idea of using an NPC technique called the Suzuki Method to rear Then & After into pursuing the arts.

Then Helena Coleman, born a Fae & After Roswell Coleman, born a Sisyphus, began to learn multiple instruments, amongst other activities such as Volunteering.

Like their honorary Uncle Tutorials, Milo and Malcolm, Then & After developed an exclusive form of the MNEMOSYNE Miracle between them that allowed the two to communicate with one another telepathically. Unlike Milo and Malcolm, who used to be a single deity before being split in two by the RNG, Then & After had an unusual side effect because of said Miracle.

If one fraternal twin gained a status effect, the other twin would gain the same thing. At the same time, both would be alleviated of the same status effect should it go away for either of them.

As such, Then & After began Aging Up at a similar pace.

In terms of Build, Then took after ATC more, while After mirrored Witty similarly.

Lessons from Javier about his line of work and the music he’s crafted as a Minstrel helped spur Then & After into imagining a similar way of life for themselves.

Additionally, visits to Benjamin--who was in the midst of accomplishing his Final Arrangements--over at IP Records helped fuel the twins' love for records.

Inevitably, this led to the siblings cultivating a hobby of vinyl collecting and sound recording.

A deadly incident occurred during a period of Runtime when the twins were around Age 7.

Then & After, using a combination of multiple instruments, midi controllers and synthesizers, created a dual record called THC & ARC; a self-titled EP named after the twins’ abbreviated names.

The RNG, haphazardly, weaved Uncertain elements from the Fabric of the SRPG into their EP, turning the twins’ vinyl record into a Philosopher Stone without them even realizing it.

Fortunately, the twins handed over their project to Javier as a gift, hoping that their initial attempt at making a record would prove to their honorary Uncle Tutorial that the duo has what it takes to become Minstrels.

Javier, upon realizing how dangerous the EP was after inspecting it with some other high-ranking Minstrels, had the THC & ARC EP sealed up in a vault on the Haven of “El Dorado”.

ATC and Witty, upon hearing the news from Javier, were more surprised at how unsurprised they were at hearing of the Feat their little ones had achieved.

Alas, the Sisyphus-Fae couple did their best to provide their Pets with as normal of an upbringing as they could possibly give them.

Some years later, After asked his Tutorial about the time that he won a **coin-flip game against a Ludens**.

ATC, walking with After, began reminiscing about that situation, which occurred not that long ago from the Current moment.

It was shortly before After had attained his child Growth Spurt. Then obtained the same Growth Spurt earlier due to a goddess’ existential nature maturing faster than a god's.

ATC would never forget the look he saw on Witty’s face when she and Br’er greeted him one day after he’d returned from an Adventure with Hornet.

Br’er had information ATC needed to hear. And as far as Witty was concerned, she’d be DOA if said info were delayed a second of Runtime further.

XX

Witty tells Br’er to tell ATC what he told her a few hours ago.

Br’er reveals to ATC that he’s been marked for Annihilation by a Ludens.

ATC, beyond annoyed and dumbfounded, blows Br’er off before Witty tells ATC to scan Br’er.

ATC does so and says, “the fuck!?”

Br’er is revealed to be a Ludens; something that ATC couldn’t perceive when he intially scanned him years ago when they first met.

Br’er reveals to ATC that the Ludens possess an exclusive Miracle called the ADMIN’s PRIVILEGE, effectively making them the Angels of the SRPG.

ATC, somewhat worried now, asks Br’er to repeat what he said about him being “marked for Annihilation”.

Br’er gives a massive sigh before offering his condolences to ATC.

“I’m sorry Atom, I truly am. But what I’m about to say next is the truth and nothing but the truth. One of your prior Playthroughs has, effectively, fucked “you” over for the rest of your time within the SRPG,” said Br’er casually.

Br’er explained to ATC that if he doesn’t know or can’t recall the legend of the Ludens Godhood, then he’ll give him the TL;DR example.

“I’ll use your ass as a case study,” Br’er started explaining to ATC.

Br’er continues, telling ATC that at some point in the Prior, one of his past Playthroughs must have done some terrible, evil shit to a Youngling, something on the level of what can be found on the NPC’s Dark Web.

Upon dying from “that I shall not describe”, said Youngling, pitied by THE SUBLIME AXIOM, was Respawned into Recent as a Ludens.

Ludens are driven by an urge to extract holy vengeance against their creator or Nemesis. They’ll forgo moving on to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE until either the Deed is done, or they receive their own Verification in the news that their Nemesis has moved on to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

Ludens have a single weakness: they can’t ***start*** fights, period. They can, however, instigate and manipulate moments into an inevitable conflict with their target(s).

One such method the Ludens utilize to entrap their targets is a dangerous drug called Ambrosia. Serving as both plugs, dealers and producers of the stuff, the boogeymen seek out the feeble minded and coax them into taking Ambrosia. If said deities are predisposed towards being addicts, it is even better.

Once that happens, well, if you’ve any experience dealing with drug addiction, you can see where I’m going with this.

If, however, an aggressor attacks a Ludens first. Well, RIP.

A Ludens' shadow, called a Pandora, will devour and Annihilate their Opp entirely. Configuration and all. Absolute cessation of existence.

Games of any kind are a Ludens' preferred method of devouring deities. Thanks to the ADMIN's PRIVILEGE, a Ludens will always win a game they play, no matter its simplicity or complexity.

As such, the Ludens always offer the playing of a game as an alternative method of payment for their services and/or goods, knowing that the true reward is greater than the merchandise they carry.

If their buyer happens to be an Ambrosia addict, the Ludens will, instead, offer to supply them with the stuff in exchange for a game.

Br'er, shaking his head, tells ATC that the mark on his Configuration isn't just any ordinary mark of Annihilation. It's the mark of a Grandmaster.

The Grandmasters are the strongest entities in the SRPG (second only to the Caregiver) and are the spiritual leaders of the Ludens.

Br'er goes on to inform ATC that not only did one of his past Playthroughs fuck up and produced a Ludens, but said Ludens also said, "fuck it, let me put in work" and rose to the rank of Grandmaster within the Ludens' caste system of Arcadia.

Br'er asks ATC if he's already accepted a game from anyone in recent memory.

ATC says he did and names the culprit “Memphis Jack”.

Br’er says “fuck” to himself.

ATC asks if Memphis Jack is a Grandmaster.

Br’er confirms ATC’s question before turning to Witty, informing her that her Fiance is cooked.

ATC asks Br’er what he means by that.

Br’er tells ATC that if he ducks a game with a Grandmaster, he can kiss his ass and the entire Haven he’s on goodbye, because the Grandmaster will send the Enforcer of the Ludens, a Superboss called Coyote, to drown said Haven in the divine waters of Neo.

Alternatively, if ATC goes through with the game, he’ll die, regardless of the game he chooses.

“It can be a video game, it can be checkers, it can be fucking hopscotch, rock, paper, sissors, whatever! Dude…you’re done,” says Br’er.

ATC, thinking for a moment, recalled something his Tutorial had taught him when he was younger, following his first Raid.

ATC, hopeful once more, swiftly disagreed with Br’er upon realizing his hidden trump card.

“Not at all. I’ve got something in mind,” replied ATC, high as a kite.

Br’er, having heard it all, gives his best to ATC, since talking to a dead god walking is an asinine exercise in futility.

After patting Witty on her shoulder and informing her to get her Fiance’s Final Arrangements in order, Br’er looks back at ATC and tells him that whatever he has in mind, he’d better execute it swiftly.

“It won't be long before ol’ Memphis Jack comes knocking,” warned Br’er.

ATC asks Br’er why he’s even telling him all this. Br’er responds with three reasons. 1.) Witty’s fam, 2.) He likes ATC because he and Hornet kill a lot of shit for him that he can’t be bothered with killing himself, 3.) Memphis Jack fucked him over with a policy he enacted during his last term as President of Euchronia.

“Fuck that guy. Aight I’m out. Peace!” said Br’er before leaving Witty’s residence.

Wishing Br’er farewell, ATC and Witty relocate themselves to an empty part of the house to discuss the former’s Game Plan.

ATC tells Witty that he has a Glitch that can nab him the win. Not wanting to reveal anything more, for fear that Memphis Jack could be listening somehow, ATC tells Witty to trust him before the two head over the Byte Joint to let the other deities know about ATC’s predicament.

Then came the day, when ATC received a text from Memphis Jack.

On the same day that After Aged Up to Age 10 and had his 2nd Growth Spurt, the question of the game came up.

Memphis Jack, feeling livelier than usual in his tone, asked ATC if he's up for the game that was promised, to which ATC gladly replies that he is.

Jack, delighted at the response, follows up and asks ATC to meet him at the Maverick Overpass Crossroads by the end of the day, trusting that he'll follow through with his agreement from decades prior.

Seated at the Byte Joint as this exchange took place, ATC, surrounded by both his Collaborators and a few frequent patrons, gave a nod to his companions before quietly removing himself from the establishment. Meeting Witty outside, who was taking in the Genre with Then and After, ATC informed his Soulmate and Pets that he's about to "go on that long walk" they talked about.

Witty, still a little nervous, expressed confidence in ATC's gambit.

Upon telling Then & After that their Father Tutorial has to leave for a bit to play a game with an old acquaintance and that he'll be back before long, ATC hugs his Pets before returning his Attention to Witty.

ATC and Witty embrace, with the Matron of the Fae telling her Soulmate that she's still iffy about the gambit, to which ATC replies that after spending enough Runtime researching the Ludens alongside Barbarossa and successfully testing his Strat against Br'er, he'll return victorious.

Witty jokingly tells ATC not to have "too much" fun, before ATC replies with "no promises amor", before Fast Traveling to Memphis Jack's location.

At the Overpass, ATC and Memphis Jack come face to face on opposite sides.

Memphis Jack asks ATC if he’s come up with a game for them to play, to which ATC replies that he has.

The Angra Mainyu pulls out a coin and tells the Grandmaster that they’re going to play a simple coin-flip game.

Memphis Jack, amused at the simplicity, asks ATC which side he wants to bet the coin will land on.

ATC, to Memphis Jack’s surprise, states that he chooses the coin’s edge as his “side” of the coin to win.

Memphis Jack, frowning for the first time, asks ATC why the decision.

ATC replies with a rhetorical question, before stating that they should both leave it up for FORTUNE to decide who is more favorable.

Memphis Jack, unusually suspicious, decides to go ahead with the game, preferring to flip the coin himself.

ATC agrees with the Grandmaster, before Jack summons the coin from ATC’s hand over to his hand.

The Grandmaster, thinking his victory is assured, prepares to “roll the die”.

Nemesis “Fight”: ATC, The Once & Future Self-Hero

HP: 65

Nemesis Fight Song: IM BROKE by J.Robb (feat. ROMDERFUL)

Company: Memphis Jack (???)

Risk: LOL

Whenever you’re ready, choose either “heads” or “tails” and flip ATC’s coin to end the battle.

Haha, I wish you the best of luck.

The coin flipped upward, before flipping down, landing on its edge.

For the first time in the history of the SRPG, the Grandmaster stared at the outcome, eyes opened in shock.

After a brief second of silence and astonishment, Memphis Jack's facial expression returned to normal before acknowledging ATC's unprecedented Feat.

Telling ATC that he's off the hook for the debt he "would" have owed the merchant for acquiring the Ariadne, Memphis Jack tilts his fedora and gives his respects before departing.

ATC, seized by a deep-rooted fear the entire time, breathed a sigh of relief after avoiding a fate worse than death.

A Reward Shortcut appeared before ATC from THE SUBLIME AXIOM, rewarding him with a rare item called a Token for Achieving the following Feat: **Bested a Ludens in a game.**

The Token allows ATC the Opportunity to summon his Mirror into a battle after a short period of Runtime has passed, guaranteeing ATC absolute victory due to his Mirror's invulnerability.

Keeping the reward he earned from THE SUBLIME AXIOM to himself, ATC returned to the Byte Joint to tell all who were present about the tale of his legendary coin flip game against a Ludens, whom he bested flawlessly.

Of all the Feats that "Aesop" achieved during his time in the SRPG, to the ants, this one would be their all-time favorite.

XXI

On ATC's 499th year of Runtime, Witty received a special Quest in her Seniority Grimoire.

A Sabbatical had been issued to her, allowing her the chance to Deify and remove her Overlimit.

Keeping the details of her Sabbatical to herself, Witty only confided to ATC, Spot and her OG Collaborators from Hiden.

After making her preparations, Witty departed to Deify and bidded her Pantheon farewell.

By the start of ATC's 500th year of Runtime, Witty returned a Fairy with her eyesight restored and her Certainty elevated.

Ecstatic, ATC and Spot met up with Witty in private, where she unveiled an exciting item.

In Witty's Inventory was Then & After's 1st EP.

Stupefied, ATC and Spot pressed Witty for answers.

Witty's Sabbatical, it's revealed, was to infiltrate the Haven of "El Dorado" and steal the vinyl record turned Philosopher Stone.

Hearing Witty recount her latest heist sparked a thought in both ATC and Spot's minds.

Not too long ago, the entirety of "Pangaea" became restless after receiving news of a high-stakes theft occurring on "El Dorado"; chief among the missing Relics was Then & After's EP.

Other items taken included the fabled Knicknacks Excalibur and the infamous Spear of Longinus. No trace or evidence of the Misadventure had yet to be detected or analyzed, with INTERPOL calling it an "almost" perfect crime.

Witty reveals she got her old Club, Hiden, back together again for one last Gig (the "El Dorado" heist), before they all achieved Completion. Additionally, Witty jokingly admitted that she might have allowed her kleptomaniac tendencies to get the best of her during her Sabbatical.

Now in symbiosis with her Nosferatu, Witty had become a Fairy, just like her Mother Tutorial before her.

The Deified Matron had gained a natural immunity to sunlight, no longer needed blood for sustenance and obtained other purifying perks; in particular, a perfected form of the Decisive she used to steal the nuclear arsenal that made her an Urbanlegend.

Witty's delay from returning to the Pantheon sooner was because of her wanting to spend some Runtime with Hiden for the final time before they all permanently went their separate ways. One last Gig completed.

"That and waiting for the heat to die down," said Witty, drinking a THC seltzer.

ATC asked Spot if her recent disappearances had anything to do with Witty, to which the Dhampir informed him that she'll fill him in later.

ATC, Spot and Witty agree to keep this heist a secret from Javier, of course.

Eager to celebrate Witty's return, ATC, Hornet and After decided to go out and grab something for Milo to cook at the Byte Joint for Witty, while the Defied Matron, Then and Spot headed over to the Joint.

Upon ATC recounting his coin-flip tale to After, the father-son duo was immediately taken by surprise when a massive explosion erupted from afar.

From afar, a great white shark with the muscular body of a pit bull could be seen rampaging and devouring anything in its path.

ATC, alongside Hornet, immediately grabs After and flees to a nearby alleyway as the great white shark cryptid continues its mayhem.

Back at the Byte Joint, Witty and the other Collaborators witness the chaos from afar and access Narcissus to see the great white shark cryptid in action.

Despite its "small" size, the great white shark cryptid appeared to be impervious to most attacks from the nearby deities, including a few Simulacrums already at play.

Witty and ATC get in touch with one another via their Controllers and agree to meet up at one of the many emergency Safe Points located underground, where they could better secure their Pets' safety.

Milo, not wanting to abandon his restaurant, announced that he'd be hanging back to protect his business in case the great white shark Cryptid heads his way. To Milo's surprise, he's joined alongside Malcolm and Spot, who refuse to leave him behind.

Upon hugging Spot and telling her and the Rylands to stay alive and flee, if necessary, Witty departs the Byte Joint with Then.

Before losing sight of the great white shark cryptid, Witty took the time to run a Scan Choice on it using her NEOROMANTICISM Console to get pertinent info.

Upon finishing, the Fairy and her Daughter Pet continued their journey to where ATC and After were located. Reviewing the scanned info, Witty conjured up a horrifying face.

"Seriously!?" exclaimed Witty.

Meanwhile, ATC, Hornet and After arrived at an underground Safe Point and met up with Barbarossa, who reported that Rich was helping the Ronin fight off the great white shark cryptid alongside the other divine factions and Guilds.

The defense was doing poorly as well.

Barbarossa unveiled details concerning the great white shark cryptid that had ATC freaking out.

"That great white shark cryptid is the infamous Superboss named Coyote. Only unleashed on the unfortunate souls that cross the Ludens," revealed Barbarossa in an unsurprised tone.

The Zurvan continued, “Said cryptid tearing apart most of Maverick right now is the offspring of an entity called Tiamat. The Mother Guardian of Arcadia, Tiamat sends its “pups” to locations that the Ludens want cleansed as its proxy.”

ATC, full of dread now, suddenly heard a large noise bellow from behind him. Turning towards a large Shortcut in the Safe Point, ATC, After and Barbarossa witnessed Coyote “evolve” into an even larger size, now reaching the size of a Final Boss.

Even more disturbing was the second head that emerged from Coyote’s evolved body.

Bringing up his Bestiary Grimoire, Barbarossa conveyed to ATC that the moment Coyote grows another head and evolves into its elderly form, it’ll cast Neo.

ATC concludes that they’ll need to summon the Atman to stand a chance, and that he’ll need to meet up with the other Collaborators to get it to full power. Otherwise, Maverick doesn't stand a chance.

Upon ordering Hornet to stay with and protect After, ATC leaves his Son Pet under Barbarossa’s care before Fast Traveling to the Byte Joint.

Right as ATC departed, Witty and Then arrived at the underground Safe Spot.

ATC arrives at a ruined Byte Joint and tracks his Collaborators down via their Vibe, only to find Milo wounded and passed out, with Spot and Malcolm attending to him.

ATC is told by Malcolm that Milo used an OG Knicknack given to him by their Father Tutorial called Gungnir to give Coyote a debilitating Curse. However, because Milo wasn't at the Age of an OG, he was required to give up 10 Ages to utilize the legendary Spear.

Milo, being incapacitated, makes summoning the Atman at full power impossible, as his Simulacrum is a necessary component for unlocking <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>'s might.

With Spot and Malcolm attending to Milo and the chaos between an evolving Coyote and Maverick becoming more and more destructive, ATC went ahead with the decision to summon the Atman in a weakened state as a last-ditch effort to stop the Superboss.

Right before the summoning, Witty contacts ATC on his Controller, cutting his pondering off.

Witty reveals that she has a Game Plan and has already informed Javier about it. ATC, eager to know what his Soulmate might propose, tells Witty he'll Fast Travel to her location after getting Milo to a nearby Safe Point with Spot and Malcolm's help.

Upon relocating Milo to another underground Safe Point, ATC bids Spot and Malcolm farewell before heading to Witty's Current location, meeting up with an already fatigued Javier at the same time.

Witty removes Then & After's EP, along with the Excalibur Knicknack, from her Inventory before handing them both over to Javier.

The Minstrel, amazed yet unsurprised at what he'd been given, is told by Witty that those items are their last chance at besting Coyote.

ATC tells Javier about Milo's condition, spurring the need to use the EP and legendary Knicknack to Augment the Atman into a temporary Form that can Vanquish the Luden's enforcer.

ATC swiftly summons the Atman while Javier tells Witty that she's "still got it", much to the Fairy's embarrassment.

As ATC and Javier enter the Atman, Coyote begins growing its third and final head.

Inside <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>'s cockpit, Javier sets up a DJ deck and begins playing the THC & ARC EP.

A Shortcut from Javier's setup generates, presenting a unique and interesting interface to Javier. One mirroring a rhythm game involving the matching of colored segments of the UI with certain parts of Javier's DJ deck.

Javier announces to ATC that he'll be using the Excalibur Knicknack as a "fee" to activate the Wishing component of the EP.

"Our Wish will turn the Atman into a valiant knight capable of slaying a Superboss," announced Javier.

Upon preparing his Certainty to begin and maintain the Wishing process, Javier started playing Then & After's EP.

As <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> began its transformation, ATC noticed Coyote growing even further.

With its third head fully formed, Coyote evolved into the majestic form of a muscular humanoid figure with three great white shark heads, complete with swim trunks.

Its disfigured, two-headed hunchback version ceased to exist.

Coyote summoned its MFG before shooting a dense bullet of Uncertainty through Maverick's Consensus and into Mundi.

Said bullet of Uncertainty transformed into a sphere of water, gradually growing into the size of the NPC's sun.

Seeing this, ATC and Javier received a warning on their Controllers from THE SUBLIME AXIOM that in five minutes, Coyote will hit Maverick with the Neo Spell and that they best kill it now.

Just as Coyote aims its MFG, locking onto a defenseless <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>, Javier finalizes the Wishing setup and activates the Wish.

<GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> turns into an epic street knight, complete with a spiked version of "Socrates" and a beastly shield with a strange symbol on its surface.

The armored "megazoid" uses its new shield just in time to block Coyote's blast.

Without hesitation, Sir <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> charges towards the Superboss, amidst the ruins of Maverick.

Superboss Fight: Coyote, Lord Enforcer of The Ludens

HP: 555

Superboss Fight Song: No Blood No Sweat by Mach Hommy

Company: Sir <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> (444), Witty (77)

Risk: Deadly to Terminal

You're on the clock with this one I'm afraid. Coyote hits like a linebacker and is nice with its MFG. To win, you'll need to reduce the Enforcer's HP to half within 5 minutes. Thanks to Javier, the Atman can deal an easy 10 to 20 points worth of damage per hit.

Get in, throw on those buff and debuff Choices and Spells and Meditate when necessary to heal.

The first phase of the Fade will take place in downtown Maverick. No need to worry about casualties this time around. It ain't gonna matter if the timer runs out.

Deal around a quarter of damage to the boy's HP and watch the dope cinematic where Coyote blasts you into Mundi.

Time for the 2nd phase. Coyote will utilize nearby Prima as cover while shooting crazier amounts of ammunition at you. The Shield of Naranathism that you acquired can take some of the damage, but not much. Dodge homie.

Additionally, flinging the Shield of Naranathism towards Coyote's Prima cover(s) will daze the Enforcer. Go in and lump it up.

Once Coyote's HP is down to half, you'll switch control to Witty on top of a building. I hope to goddess you didn't fuck around and let that timer go low. You'll need that stubborn clock as far from zero as possible so that the Matron can execute the HOUDINI Decisive correctly.

While Witty charges up to unleash her contingency, you'll also have to fight Opps being summoned from random Tumbleweeds.

Witty as a Fairy is busted, so the bums aren’t the concern. Simply execute the Exploit Command once it appears to end the battle.

Witty utilizes her ultimate Decisive, called HOUDINI, and removes Neo from the trajectory of Maverick just before it makes contact with Sir <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>.

Coyote, now drained of its Uncertainty, leaves itself open to Sir <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>.

Fully charged up with the Choice it was originally intending to use against Neo, Sir <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> decides to hit the weakened Superboss with it instead.

The Atman Fast Travels behind Coyote and instantly Vanquishes it with a unique Decisive called HOMERUN.

Said Decisive safely Zaps Coyote’s remains back to Maverick, where it reappears dead on top of the Haven’s buildings.

Sir <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> lands back on Maverick and returns to normal.

Javier, having nearly exhausted all of the Certainty in his Configuration to sustain the Wishing process, falls into the Fae Sleep, right as ATC notices and rushes to his Collaborator.

ATC takes Javier’s unconscious body out of the Atman, before handing him over to some medical personnel at the scene.

Seeing the destruction of Maverick forces ATC to recall some dark memories; specifically, memories of past Raids and Assimilations. The sight leaves him seething.

Upon making his way through a sea of grieving deities, in search of any familiar faces he can find, ATC catches sight of Witty, who looks unusual.

Witty, revealing that she was the one who teleported Neo from Maverick and into the trajectory of the Behemoth near the Firmament, did so using the perfected version of her Father Tutorial's ultimate Decisive, called SLEIGHT.

Having used HOUDINI in such a way that defies the logic of the SRPG, the impressed SUBLIME AXIOM had started the Ascension process for Witty, who had obtained not one, not two, not three, BUT four Achievements during her SRPG Run. An accomplishment unheard of yet thought to be unattainable.

Witty, about to leave for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE, tells ATC that she always knew this would be her exit, before reassuring her Muse that he, Then & After will be alright.

Handing ATC her Engagement Ring, Witty tells him that she'll see him on the "other side", before kissing him goodbye.

Spot, arriving alongside a recovered yet severely weakened Milo and Malcolm, rushed to her Sister Tutorial. Struggling to fight her sorrow, Spot hugged Witty as the latter attempted to comfort her "Pet".

Milo, weakened yet standing, gave a faint farewell alongside Malcolm to the Immaculate. Rich, arriving too late to see Witty off, witnessed her Upload reach its conclusion.

Witty gradually rose as she walked away from her loved ones, being whisked into the air before disintegrating into pixels entirely.

At the Age of 77, with a Runtime of 777 years, Aaliyah “Witty” Thaovi Mugen left the SRPG for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE via Ascension and became a Saint consequently.

All of Maverick would begin a grieving process that wouldn’t end for a long period of Runtime.

Said period of death and renewal for the citizenry would become known as the Actualization, lasting a total of 200 years of Runtime.

A heartbroken ATC, losing confidence in himself, steadily made his way through the ruins of Maverick, leaving his grieving Collaborators behind.

Heading to where Then & After were located, to tell them that their Mother Tutorial wasn’t coming back, ATC fell into the Softlock status effect.

XXII

Towards the end of ATC's 500th year of Runtime, the depressed Sisyphus reunited with Milo at the top of a building overlooking the entirety of the city-state Haven.

Having not seen each other for months since Coyote's attack on Maverick, the two Collaborators decided to catch up after getting back in touch with one another via Repertoire.

Giving each other status reports on the other Collaborators, ATC and Milo exchanged notes and gained an understanding of how fucked their situation had become.

To begin with Javier, the Dhampir was still stuck in the Fae Sleep.

As ATC relays to Milo, Simone has been giving him regular updates on her Brother Pet's condition.

"To think she'd become a doctor, not knowing that she'd be treating her brother as a patient. You can't make this shit up," said ATC.

When the Angra Mainyu asks how Malcolm and Spot are doing, Milo calms the Angra Mainyu's nerves first with the news that his twin is doing just fine.

"Not that surprising, to be frank. Considering that my brother is predisposed towards seeing the silver lining in just about any situation, regardless of how fucked up said situation is," said Milo.

As for Spot, Milo relayed to ATC that the Fae goddess was doing better than expected. Despite losing her Sister Tutorial, Spot had been successful in not falling back into the Softlock status effect.

According to Milo, "Joe, Jack and Jill have been keeping her spirits up, alongside her Speedrunner Collaborators."

ATC, feeling somewhat better now, comments to Milo that his duties to the Society have been a challenge. Alas, the workload that's congesting his Planner Grimore is helping him cope with his grief.

ATC continues confiding in Milo, telling him how anxious Then & After had become since Witty achieved Ascension.

Then, now restless, always double-checks to see if ATC is still present. After, more level-headed, can do nothing but console his Sister Pet.

It's at this point that Milo asks ATC a shocking question.

"Dude, how long have you been Softlocked?" asked Milo.

ATC asks Milo how he knows, to which Milo replies that he's an Oracle and "foresaw" this conversation some Runtime ago.

ATC informs Milo that he became Softlocked moments after Witty had Ascended.

"I've done just about everything. Bounties, Gigs, whatever. Nothing works. I can't seem to think of anything else that would be insurmountable enough for me to overcome at my current Age that I can cure myself," confided ATC.

Milo, after telling ATC that "just because the Game dealt them a "bad hand" doesn't mean that they're out the fucking Game", suggests to the Angra Mainyu that he use the Guarantee and take on the Bonus Stage to cure himself.

ATC, having forgotten all about the Guarantee, regains his resolve and agrees to Milo's suggestion.

Knowing that summoning the Firesale could lead to a do-or-die scenario, ATC and Milo agree to prepare for it, find Collaborators willing to roll with them and take it all on come "New Years Eve".

On "New Years Eve", a plethora of deities gathered in wait for the Firesale's summoning, with rumors of its arrival having circulated via ATC and Milo.

The two deities, figuring that the Firesale is just what Maverick needs to help it bounce back, decided to spread the Firesale rumors to generate intrigue.

Minutes away from pressing the Guarantee, ATC & Hornet meet up with Spot, Milo, Malcolm and Rich inside Maverick's Adventurers' Guild, surrounded by other familiar acquaintances, Collaborators and patrons.

Bringing Then & After with him, ATC entrusts his Pets to Rich, having named him the twins' Guardian immediately after Witty Spawned them.

ATC tells Then & After that their Father Tutorial is about to undertake an important Quest he's been working towards since he was around their current Ages and that he'll be back soon.

With the events of the Firesale expected to stream on Narcissus, ATC tells Then & After to root for him before hugging the twins.

Upon promising Then & After that he'll come back to them, ATC leaves them both with Rich, whom he also gives a heartfelt goodbye to.

ATC presses the Guarantee, causing all Controllers within the Guild to let out a notification sound.

Walking outside with the Collaborators, ATC looks up at a golden Kaiju scarab beetle nesting on the Forecast: the Firesale had arrived.

With bated breath, ATC and Co. entered the Bardo of the Firesale and made their way to the Queue.

Following a surreal trek through the Bardo, ATC and Co. arrived inside of a cavern-like space, where the Queue was located.

Just before ATC and Co. could pass through the Queue, Laforgeyuhan appeared in front of ATC to deliver a message from THE SUBLIME AXIOM via a Fortune Cookie.

The Fortune Cookie read, "Prepare for Annihilation or Walk Away Now and Forever Be Barred from Deification,"

ATC looked up at Laforgeyuhan, who affirmed FORTUNE's words.

The Mirror, for some odd reason, suggested to ATC that he "flip a Token" to decide on whether he should go through the Queue or not.

ATC, getting the hint, uses the Token he earned from his game with Memphis Jack. Upon doing so, the Token activates the time-limit for Laforgeyuhan's summoning (15 minutes).

When asked by his Collaborators as to what he just did, ATC replies with the word "insurance", using air quotes alongside Hornet, who was doing the same thing with her Lughs.

ATC and Co. pass through the Queue, arriving at a crowded crossing at Shibuya, Japan within Reality. The year of the Bonus Stage was 1999.

ATC is reminded by Malcolm that unlike a normal Stage, a Bonus Stage is only 30 minutes long and that they need to book it to the nearest store and acquire a Black Label Retro that ATC can use for his Deification.

Out of nowhere, Memphis Jack arrives with a Black Label Retro in his hand and calls out to ATC.

The Grandmaster expressed his condolences to the Angra Mainyu and his Company over the tragedy that befell Maverick and offered the Black Label Retro to ATC as a grieving gift.

When Jack lets it "slip" that he accidently let Coyote off the leash while he was "walking" him on Maverick that day, ATC notices Spot losing her cool and tries to calm her down.

As ATC tries to convince Spot of the futility of her anger, Jack brings up Witty's real name (Aaliyah) when "asking" both ATC and Spot if she was a casualty.

"Was it Witty? Or was it, say, Aaliyah? I'm terrible with names," asked Memphis Jack in a tone that made it sound like he was bulletproof.

During the back and forth, Milo and Malcolm noticed the Forecast suddenly appearing in the sky, replacing the NPC's moon with its computer power symbol glowing green.

As the environment around all the deities and NPCs begin to flicker to different time periods of the NPC's history, ATC sighs as Spot tilts her head to him, eyes glowing a light blue, rearing to go.

As soon as the Forecast announces "Bonus Stage" in the minds of the deities, ATC says "fuck it" upon looking over at Hornet.

With a nod, both the Angra Mainyu and his Daemon pull out automatic weapons, face Memphis Jack down and unload their clips into the Grandmaster.

"Bingo," said Memphis Jack as he began putting earbuds into his ears. The bullets departing from both ATC and Hornet's firearms converged into a small sphere before turning into a floating, combat knife in front of the Grandmaster.

The Angra Mainyu and his Daemon ceased their firing before drawing both WARP and Third Strike respectively. Milo, Malcolm and Spot swiftly followed suit.

The NPC’s entire planet instantly turned into a “glitch storm”, which the Naranathists would later come to call the Randomizer.

ATC’s first strike on Memphis Jack allowed the Grandmaster to retaliate.

With Laforgeyuhan less than 13 minutes away from appearing to give ATC an instant win, the Angra Mainyu, his Daemon and college Collaborators braced themselves for a futile struggle.

With the entire SRPG watching the events now unfolding–even the Ludens–on the Bonus Stage, ATC says “Incertitudinem Amplecti”, before locking in.

Memphis Jack, equipping his magnum revolver Knicknack in one hand and his bullet knife in the other, gave a casual sigh before uttering those familiar words that the Fortuitous live by.

Roll the die.

Nemesis Fight: Mephistopheles Jackson, The Grandmaster of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER

HP: -108

Nemesis Fight Song: Kane Train by Machinedrum (feat. Freddie Gibbs)

Company: ATC (65), Hornet (65), Spot (59), Milo (50), Malcolm (60)

Risk: Fucking Impossible

Best of luck homie.

This guy is rocking both the ADMIN'S PRIVILLAGE Miracle AND the NARANATHISM Console. Add Krav Maga and CQC to the mix and shit becomes perilous.

Stay alive until Laforgreyuhan arrives.

Oh, and be mindful of the random time travel Zaps. The last thing you want is a random bullet getting lodged in your skull if you wind up on a World War I battlefield lacking.

Anyhow, hit that Exploit Command option once it appears to end the greatest beatdown you've just incurred in the entirety of the Run.

In the 4th timeline of the Randomizer, ATC and Co. are soundly defeated. Hornet is limping, due to being shot by Memphis Jack earlier in the initial scrap.

Just as ATC is about to be Annihilated by the Grandmaster via his Pandora, Laforgeyuhan arrives and saves the Company.

Surprised a 2nd time, Memphis Jack gives ATC his respect for pulling out another trump card at the last minute.

Because neither Laforgeyuhan or Memphis Jack can Vanquish one another, due to their invulnerability, the two have reached a stalemate, which isn't going to fly.

In response, Memphis Jack summons FAUST, the Numen of Fortune, which casts a rare status effect called Flawed on both Memphis Jack and Laforgeyuhan.

At the cost of making his Configuration "asymmetrical", Memphis Jack can freely Vanquish Laforgeyuhan, which in turn, will also Annihilate ATC. However, Memphis Jack can no longer use the ADMIN's PRIVILEGE so long as he's Flawed, making him beatable.

Laforgeyuhan, in response, performs Synchonicity on ATC, granting the Sisyphus access to his Numen. As for why ATC can use his Numen now, the Sisyphus' Mirror admits that he held back on the Synchronicity years prior out of laziness.

Laforgeyuhan states to ATC that he'll need to damage FAUST just enough for the Mirror to strike a fatal blow on the Grandmaster, as Jack can't fight well against Laforgeyuhan if he's too distracted controlling FAUST to kill ATC.

With less than 15 minutes remaining before the Bonus Stage ends, ATC takes to his feet and readies himself as the Forecast transitions ATC and Co. to the 5th timeline of the Randomizer.

Back on Maverick, Then and After, with their peripherals fixated on the illuminating Shortcut broadcasting the Bonus Stage, say "Get em dad," quietly at the same time.

Do or die, ATC and his Numen DOSTOEVSKY engage FAUST while Laforgeyuhan clashes with Memphis Jack.

The time had finally come for the **Impossible Fade**.

Arch-Nemesis Fight: FAUST, NUMEN OF THE SUBLIME AXIOM

HP: 108

Arch-Nemesis Fight Song: flashinlites_ by cay caleb.

Company: ATC/DOSTOEVSKY (130), Laforgeyuhan (65)

Risk: Terminal

You've got until Laforgeyuhan's HP reaches 0 to Vanquish the NUMEN OF THE SUBLIME AXIOM.

On top of that, Memphis Jack WILL attack you if or when he gets the chance. Always be mindful of the battlefield.

Using DOSTOEVSKY, ATC can damage FAUST using his Super Simulacrum as the proxy. You're at max power for this battle, so go ALL OUT!!!

Due to the Flawed status effect, neither you, Laforgeyuhan, Memphis Jack or FAUST can be healed.

Translation: Someone's getting folded, period.

Hit, Dodge and Parry better than the other guy and you'll come out on top in the nick of time.

Once Faust's HP hits 0, execute the Exploit Command and witness the brutally awesome finale to the Impossible Fade!

ATC willfully sacrifices one of his arms to tank a vile attack from FAUST, granting Laforgeyuhan the window he needs to hit the distracted Memphis Jack with a fatal slash.

At that moment, the Company transitions to a ruined version of the NPC's Okinawa Naha crossing.

Memphis Jack, laughing while bleeding out, gives full credit to ATC for his insane sacrifice, before pointing out that Hornet isn't doing too good.

ATC looks over at Hornet as his Daemon begins to violently convulse in agony. The Sisyphus loses his composure as he can do nothing but watch his beloved dog deteriorate from the Curse inflicted on her by Jack's bullet.

Jack, dismissing FAUST, allows himself to attain Completion. Upon earning the Alias of Grandmaster during his younger days in the Prior, Jack had earned this exclusive option, granting him permanent leave from the SRPG.

Jack leaves for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE as Hornet is reduced to a pile of entrails.

The Randomizer subsides, thus ending the Bonus Stage. All deities who didn't die are Booted back to SRPG.

The entire SRPG is left speechless upon witnessing the end of the Bonus Stage's live broadcast from Narcissus.

ATC and Co. fought Memphis Jack to an unfathomable draw. Hell, the bout even forced the latter to "flee" from the Fade.

Yet sadly, the victory seemed Pyrrhic at best.

ATC passed out from his wounds as various medical personnel arrived to treat all surviving deities who'd returned from the Firesale.

Some Runtime later, awakening in a hospital bed, ATC discovers that his missing arm had been restored. Surrounded by gifts and get-well items, the Sisyphus gradually came to his senses and mused about his situation.

Laforgeyuhan appears at the same time and gives a wary ATC news.

Spot, Milo and Malcolm have survived; thankfully recuperated. ATC, due to his injuries sustained during the Impossible Fade, was out cold for a week.

Then, After, Rich and a plethora of deities came to pay their respects to the Angra Mainyu while he was unconscious, with Laforgeyuhan citing the Feat that ATC pulled off as so unprecedented that many are starting to identify the Sisyphus as an authentic Self-Hero in the making.

Upon noticing Hornet's red headphones next to his hospital bed, ATC grieves Hornet's passing after remembering what few details he could recall during the finale of the Bonus Stage.

Breaking ATC out of his brief misery, Laforgeyuhan tells the Angra Mainyu to open his Inventory.

ATC does so and realizes that the Black Label Retro that Memphis Jack goaded him with is now in his Inventory, signifying the Opportunity for Deification.

Knowing that not obtaining the Cheat Code again would render his losses moot, ATC decides to play the Black Label Retro video game via his Fable OD.

Strangely, the Black Label Retro was already primed for Fable OD compatibility, leading ATC to suspect that Memphis Jack must have modified it somehow.

Starting the game in the dead of night, ATC notices that he's playing an invisible figure like himself in an undisclosed location.

After playing for a few minutes, ATC enters a room with a young child in a cage. Inside the room are items normally used for torture.

ATC, realizing what he's playing, looks at Laforgeyuhan with an expression only the Mirror can read.

Laforgeyuhan confirms that the game ATC is playing is Memphis Jack's rom hack depicting the events that led to his creation.

As a final "fuck you" to ATC, Memphis Jack modified the game to such an extent that the Sisyphus must reenact the "steps" his evil Playthrough made that created the Grandmaster in the first place.

ATC, no longer in a place mentally to even put up a defense, begins playing the game.

What followed for the next 3 hours was unspeakable. The type of shit you'd find on the Dark Web.

During the short period that ATC played the game, the Sisyphus sobbed uncontrollably as he performed unspeakable acts via the gameplay, thinking of Then & After all the while.

Before ATC finished, he rushed to his hospital room's toilet and vomited, upon committing the worst act of all to the nearly dead Youngling.

After the Youngling perished, ATC moved his despicable avatar out of the torture room, completing the game.

At that moment, a message flashed before ATC's eyes, causing him to recall so much information all at once that he almost incurred the Psychosis status effect.

Suddenly, a divine lightning bolt strikes ATC yet doesn't harm him.

Falling onto the hospital floor from his bed, ATC's body shakes in a state of horror.

Laforgeyuhan, with a stomp of his blade's scabbard on said hospital floor, announces that the Individuation has begun, calling ATC a Shinigami in the process.

XXIII

INDIVIDUATION

Laforgeyuhan informs ATC that the two of them must depart for Recent immediately to begin the Sisyphus' version of Deification called the Individuation.

The lightning bolt that struck ATC, according to the Mirror, is called a Smite and is the method that THE SUBLIME AXIOM uses to turn a deity into a Sisyphus, with the exception being the Ludens.

ATC, still unnerved by the Smite, talks aloud about how being Smited felt like he was experiencing a Meltdown.

Laforgeyuhan reveals to ATC that he isn't imagining things and that by witnessing the "Truth" once more, FORTUNE has replaced ATC's Cheat Code with a modified version that will cause ATC to experience an even greater Meltdown than the one he almost experienced as a youth in the next 24 hours.

"Fortunately," continued the Mirror, "we'll be entering into Recent, the UNDERWORLD of the FORTUITIOUS. The sooner we get there, the sooner your Meltdown timer will lengthen. At most, you'll have a couple of centuries of Runtime to complete this task. All a part of the Individuation process."

ATC carefully checks his Build status via a Shortcut and notices that his Class has been changed from "Gakusei" to "Shinigami".

Additionally, a status effect called Indignation was noticed, temporarily changing ATC's Belief conversion from Certainty to Uncertainty, putting ATC in a "permanent" state of CONSISTENCY.

As ATC struggles to process his deteriorating situation, Laforgeyuhan tells ATC that if he has any affairs he'd like to handle, he should do so now.

ATC drafts a letter explaining his Current situation and makes copies of it.

Afterwards, the Shinigami and his Mirror depart the hospital, but not before ATC is given a special white and red training gi by his Mirror that can scale upwards with the wearer's Age, thus increasing their durability.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan head to Roswell's secret Station within Zarathustra to leave behind ATC's current items, including WARP.

The Mirror explains to ATC that he's only allowed access to items obtained in Recent, and that THE SUBLIME AXIOM will bar ATC's access to Recent if he attempts to circumvent this rule.

ATC must battle using only his fists, Spells, Glitches and Choices during the Individuation process.

"The Indignation status effect," according to Laforgeyuhan, "is FORTUNE's way of making up for your item and weapons prohibition. To keep things fair."

"Gee, thanks," replied a seething ATC.

With the initial preparations for the journey finished, the Camel and his Mirror departed for the Byte Joint, Adventurers' Guild and Rich's Abode to leave behind the farewell letters.

ATC saved his and Witty's shared Abode for last.

Arriving to see his Pets fast asleep in their room, the Shinigami left behind two unique letters for them.

ATC kissed Then & After's foreheads before admitting how he's pained that he can't help them heal from the losses they've suffered during this period of Actualization.

As ATC and Laforgeyuhan leave the former's home, the duo run into Rich.

The Ronin, having Fast Traveled to find ATC, had just acquired his Collaborator's letter.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan confirm to Rich that the former needs to Deify.

ATC reaffirms that the Succession protocol is in effect, per the letter, and that ATC hands the Role of Angra Mainyu over to Rich in his absence.

Rich, saddened, promises ATC that he'll take care of Then and After as their Guardian and hold down the fort with the Society until ATC's safe return.

After a bro hug, ATC and Rich go their separate ways.

Laforgeyuhan leads ATC to an abandoned mall in downtown Maverick, seeing it as a good space to install a Backdoor.

ATC recalls the concept of the Backdoors while watching Laforgeyuhan produce a special Entanglement, modified by Black Magic.

Attaching the unique Entanglement to a wall, the Mirror turns the enchanted doorknob, completing the Backdoor's creation.

The Mirror informs ATC that they're about to enter Hades, the HELL side of Recent, and that their goal is to make it to another Backdoor within Hades that'll get them to Elysium, the HEAVEN side of Recent.

ATC, wanting to ask questions, is interrupted by his Mirror, who wants them to leave for Recent now, as ATC is still in danger of experiencing a Total Meltdown.

Laforgeyuhan explains that he'll give an "exposition dump" once he and the Camel arrive in Elysium.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan enter the Backdoor and arrive in the Permutation of the First Theomachy ("WWI").

The duo make it to their Elysium Backdoor during the bloodiest battle of the Assimilation. While traveling, the Shinigami and his Mirror caught a glimpse of a teen Roswell and Benjamin battling for dear life during the "Battle of the Somme".

ATC, during the excursion, discovered that he's "invisible" to all the deities, save the cryptids. This, ATC learns, is a consequence of being a Shinigami within Recent, according to Laforgeyuhan.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan arrive in Elysium, which has the appearance of a rural place vibrant in tranquility and solitude. In the blue skies above the land are giant sized bubbles, called Permutations.

The view and vibe echoed Frutiger Aero.

High above, per usual, is the Forecast.

Laforgeyuhan reveals to ATC that Elysium is the realm of **Nostalgia** itself. Additionally, it also acts as a hub that links the various Permutations of Hades together.

Making their way to a nearby town, Laforgeyuhan explains to ATC that the town they're heading to is a part of a redundant network of other towns within Elysium that call themselves “Anywhere”.

Waltzing down a convenient trail, Laforgeyuhan further informs ATC about Recent.

“Oh, and just a heads up. If you see shadows underneath any of the residents we’re about to encounter, it's because Elysium is part of the Demogorgons’ domain,” said the Mirror.

“Huh!?” replied ATC.

Be it by accident, courtesy of the RNG, or intentional via a Backdoor, the Demogorgons that currently reside in Elysium have their own individual reasons for traveling to the SRPG’s version of the past, same as ATC.

Upon arriving in Anywhere, ATC and his Mirror locate a nearby tavern and head there for some rest.

Making the acquaintance of the tavern's owner named Blackburn, a Fiend in its 90s, ATC learns more about Elysium and the Demogorgons that reside here.

Blackburn, an abnormal Polarity and Retired Sorcerer turned tavern owner spending its current Runtime studying the Prior, informs ATC that there's plenty of places offering room and board in exchange for Gig work within Anywhere, as Elysium is devoid of all danger outside of Hades.

Pointing out a nearby orphanage for both Toddler & Youngling deities who either ended up Spawned into Elysium on accident via the RNG or winding up there via a Backdoor, Blackburn informs the Shinigami that the establishment is offering free room and board in exchange for the completion of custodial Gigs.

ATC, feeling sentimental about Then & After, agrees to check out the establishment and parts ways with Blackburn, eager to follow-up with the OG Demogorgon at a later moment.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan arrive at the establishment, known as Fostercare, to apply for the room and board Gig. They meet the orphanage's director, a tranquil goddess named Ereshkigal Madison, who welcomes them into the quaint establishment.

ATC inquires to the director about the custodial Gigs that he'd heard from Blackburn to which Ereshkigal Madison confirms that the room and board arrangement is still on-hand and asks ATC if he's a Shinigami.

Once ATC confirms his status, Madison follows up by saying that it's becoming rarer to see a Shinigami in Elysium, stating that ATC has become the newest Sisyphus to arrive in Recent after a long period of Runtime.

After ATC is taken to his new room by Madison, she heads off to go and fetch the orphaned deities she is currently in charge of.

“Figured it would be a good idea to get them acquainted with you sooner than later,” said Madision as she left ATC’s room.

Following the director’s departure, ATC and Laforgeyuhan begin conversing about their current objective. The Mirror suggests to ATC that he look at his Planner Guild to verify that his Total Meltdown timer had been lengthened.

ATC confirms that it has, with the timer’s length going from a measly few hours to a length of 199 years of Runtime and some change.

With the Individuation process officially secured, Laforgeyuhan informs ATC that he’ll need to enter six more Permutations of Hades in a specific order to gain access to their primary location: Arcadia, Prime Permutation of the SRPG.

Located in Arcadia is a monolithic building called the Tower Of Power, which holds underneath it a metafictional tunnel leading directly to the Ground of All Being, the location where the Individuation process comes full circle, leading to a Sisyphus’ Deification.

“Completing your Individuation Quest will not only cure you of your modified Cheat Code, but also grant you Choices, Spells and potentialities beyond your Current knowledge,” finished the Mirror.

ATC questions Laforgeyuhan on how to access Arcadia once the 7th and final Permutation is Crossed.

In response to his Camel's inquiry, Laforgeyuhan holds up the same Entanglement he used to open the Backdoor and states that THE SUBLIME AXIOM will reward ATC with a specific Entanglement to Arcadia once he succeeds.

"However," stated Laforgeyuhan, "it'll be a one-way trip once we cross the threshold. Translation. We're not returning until you either Deify or die."

Right as Laforgeyuhan finishes his "exposition dump", Ereshkigal Madison returns to ATC's room and asks the Shinigami to come down to the first floor living room.

Upon arrival, ATC is introduced to seven young deities of various Godhoods, including a Sisyphus Youngling, to the Shinigami's surprise.

Upon silently scanning the little ones, ATC verified that they were all normal, aside from one of the Younglings who had the Godhood of the Demogorgon. Stranger still was the strange asterisk next to each orphans' Godhood. The Shinigami swiftly evicted the strange observation out of his mind before addressing his new charges.

The Demogorgon Youngling, going by the first name of Levi, politely introduced himself to ATC, alongside the other orphans. ATC, a bit stumped yet thinking about Then & After even more now, fell back into his old Tutorial ways and graciously introduced himself to the seven orphans to further break the ice.

Madison explains to the seven Younglings that ATC will be helping around the establishment, to include repairs if need be.

Additionally, the Shinigami will also assist the Younglings in completing their Gigs and furthering their maturation in a mentor Role.

ATC, a bit shocked at the reveal that he'd be mentoring these orphaned deities, gave a weird head tilt at Madison, whose close-eyed smile brought to mind the Ludens.

When ATC asks Madison if she is a Ludens, she merely answers with a "yes" and a "no".

Madison tells ATC to think of her as nothing more than a "Caregiver".

Exhausted from crossing the first Permutation still, ATC became too fatigued to inquire further.

Madison tells ATC to rest up, stating that he can start working on his custodial Gigs upon awakening.

Following his hiring, ATC spends a full century of Current Runtime maintaining the Fostercare as a custodian. From simple repairs to cleaning between hard-to-reach surfaces, the Shinigami kept up the preservation. When downtime was inevitable, the Shinigami would aid the seven temporal orphans in their chore Gigs, Volunteer Gigs, and other tasks assigned to them by Madison.

The seven orphans, in awe of ATC's Vibe and Age, would often ask the Shinigami about his many Adventures and Misadventures he'd undertaken so far in his Current Run.

Levi, a fan of the game of Go, would often challenge ATC to a few games whenever the Shinigami had the time. Despite the Demogoron Youngling failing to outmaneuver and secure his mentor's territory, the lad appreciated the insights being taught to him.

ATC, feeling somewhat relieved at playing a Role he'd long since abandoned, came to see the seven orphans as if they were his own Pets.

Madison, satisfied with ATC's work ethic and his willingness to take his mentor Role seriously, decided to throw in a bonus to his "pay" by relaying reliable intel to him. Info pertinent to making his Crossings through the remaining six Permutations a success.

In order from 2nd to 7th, ATC entered the following Permutations with Laforgeyuhan: The Colonization of the "Americas", The Assimilation of "Tamerlane", The "Taiping Rebellion", The Famine of "British India", The Assimilation of "Genghis Kahn", and lastly, the 2nd Theomachy ("WWII").

Upon surviving the final Crossing, ATC obtained the Entanglement of Power as a reward for completing his Crossing Quest; additionally, the Shinigami Aged Up to Age 80 during that period of Runtime.

Following his return from his 7th and last Crossing back to the Fostercare, ATC informs Madison of his resignation as orphanage custodian, stating that he and his Mirror have now entered the final portion of his Individuation.

Strangely, ATC noticed that Levi and the six other orphans were nowhere to be found.

Ereshkigal Madison reveals that not too long after ATC left for the “WWII Permutation”, Levi and the six orphans had made up their minds to head into Hades and make their way to the Current SRPG.

ATC, confused as to why they’d do that, is informed by Madison that he should understand their reasoning far better than anyone, since he was a Youngling with aspirations once.

Ereshkigal Madison notes to ATC that the stories he told the Younglings were what sealed the deal amongst them. ATC contemplates Madison's words carefully.

No longer having any orphans to look after, Madison asks ATC if he’d like her to accompany him to Arcadia to see him off, to which the Sisyphus obliges.

On the clock still, ATC finds a good spot to use the Entanglement of Power and opens a Backdoor to a strange landscape showcasing aesthetics mimicking 1950s America and South Asia.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan are told by Madison that they’ve now stepped onto the Haven of the Ludens, called “Utopia”.

ATC, worried as to how he’ll make the Final Crossing to the Tower of Power, asks Madison if the Ludens can willfully Annihilate him because of what he did to Memphis Jack.

Ereshkigal Madison, chuckling, reveals that the Ludens are indifferent to visitors of their Zone, or “Intruders” as the Ludens like to call their visitors.

“It’s the Prime Permutation’s variant of cryptids that you’ll want to watch out for instead,” said Madison as she pointed towards some nearby Arcadian cryptids, “keep an eye on them, as they’ll attack any and all Intruders unless stopped by a Ludens.”

Adding to ATC's astonishment, Madison reveals that some of the Ludens find ATC to be an impressive Intruder for how he fared against their Grandmaster in the recent Fade.

"You've got some fans, Shinigami. That'll make your time getting to the Tower of Power a lot easier, I suspect," said Madision.

Madison sends a map to ATC's Inventory. On said map is a route leading directly to the Tower of Power, with the "Sea of Trivia" being the last obstacle between ATC, Laforgeyuhan and their final destination.

Feeling closure, Madison bids ATC and Laforgeyuhan the best of luck on their final leg of the journey, estimating that if ATC heads straight to the Tower of Power without making detours, he should have a decade or more of Runtime to spare when he reaches the Tower.

As Ereshkigal Madison returns to Elysium through ATC's special Backdoor, the director tells ATC to text her after he achieves Deification so that she can take him back to his Current SRPG.

Nodding with the conviction to see this Individuation through, ATC bids Ereshkigal Madison farewell before he and Laforgeyuhan begin the disturbingly tranquil trek to their destination.

A trek that would nearly take up almost the rest of the Runtime left on the deadline for ATC to complete his Individuation: 99 years of Runtime.

RESPECTION

ATC and Laforgeyuhan's Final Crossing through "Utopia". was a bit more random and nerve-racking than initially expected.

Making their way into a few Luden towns, ATC and Laforgeyuhan gradually learned about the Luden's culture and their weird way of navigating a land far vaster than the Shinigami could've comprehended.

"Utopia", Haven of the Ludens, is a "planet" the size of a multiverse, as ATC learned from talking to several Ludens; most of whom were working trades from blacksmithing to farming to illicit drug production.

To travel instantaneously from one area of "Utopia" to another, the Ludens utilize giant Rabbitholes.

Upon meeting a Luden cartographer named "Magellan" and performing a Gig or two for him, ATC's Euchronia map is updated with marked Rabbitholes showing the quickest way to the "Sea of Trivia".

Together with Laforgeyuhan, ATC made steady progress traveling across "Utopia" via the Rabbitholes as detailed by "Magellan".

During the trek, ATC's interactions with the other Ludens inspired the Shinigami, unlocking new abilities and insights regarding his understanding of the SRPG. From learning that the Ludens craft most of the Relics and rare items typically found in the SRPG's Dungeons, to understanding their unique caste hierarchy rooted in the game of Chess.

Ludens, unlike the other Godhoods, settle ALL manners of disputes in the form of games.

Divided into the following castes from lowest to highest, the Ludens caste system is structured as follows: Pawn, Bishop, Knight, Rook, Royalty & Grandmaster.

To acquire better Opportunities amongst the Godhood, Ludens must win important chess matches to move up the caste. Conversely, losing just as many can either bump down or keep a Ludens locked within a caste.

King and Queen Ludens of the Royality Caste are the only ones allowed to run for positions of political power, be they Judge Roles, Legislative or Presidential Roles.

Ludens who successfully finish their time in office are Retired into the Grandmaster Caste, where they remain until they achieve Completion.

Receiving these additional insights gave ATC pause at times. Knowing the lengths that Memphis Jack went through to ensure his Nemesis' demise had given the Shinigami a small feeling of respect.

Whilst traveling, ATC and Laforgeyuhan witnessed three bizarre events.

The first event saw the duo meeting Tiamat for the first time.

Enjoying a Ludens espresso with the Mirror one day, ATC and Laforgeyuhan witnessed a flying nursing shark appear from the sky.

After looking around for a brief minute, the Kaiju-sized orange nursing shark did an “all clear” flip before retreating from whence she came.

The second event that followed was the Camel-Mirror duo observing a Ludens acquiring a Red Spawn that Spawned out of nowhere, indicating that a Youngling had just been unjustly Vanquished in the SRPG.

The third event was haunting.

While passing through a town that had the characteristics of late 19th century Argentina, ATC and Laforgeyuhan came upon an auction mimicking a slave trade. What was on sale wasn’t “slaves”, however. Captured deities, be they Normies or Demogorgons, were being sold as livestock and food. Observing an excited Ludens Youngling jumping for joy as her Tutorials purchased two deities to be consumed later instilled a moment of uneasy stillness in ATC.

Considering the circumstances that had led the Shinigami to this precise moment, ATC couldn’t bring himself to judge the ethics on display. As far as the Sisyphus was concerned, he’d every reason to be on that auction as “foodstuffs”.

Prior to reaching the “Sea of Trivia”, ATC and his Mirror stumbled upon a concert being played in the capital of “Utopia”, called “Eden”.

Out of all the locales that the duo had visited, “Eden” was the only location on “Utopia” that had the look and feel of a late 1990s metropolis.

To ATC and Laforgeyuhan’s shock, the headliner was Javier!?

ATC Fast Traveled his way to Javier after his performance. The Fae, now without his signature bucket hat, gave his childhood Rival a brotherly embrace.

ATC, full of bewildering questions, had his nerves calmed when a female Ludens approached the Shinigami.

To ATC's amazement, the female Ludens introduced herself as Lilith Grace Jackson, the Pet of Memphis Jack and Current President of "Utopia".

Javier reveals to ATC that he met Lilith during his Eremition centuries of Runtime ago while he was working as a roadie alongside his mentor, Juan Quixote.

"My amo here helped me fine tune my Absurdity skills, clenching me the pass for my Minstrel Credential exam," said Javier.

Unbeknownst to Javier, who had a brief fling with Lilith before parting ways, the Madam President of the Ludens had become pregnant from said fling and Replicated a rare hybrid deity called a Primordial.

Choosing not to open the Spawn, Lilith decided to keep it safely hidden within her Configuration, preferring to wait until the right moment to reconnect with her Fae lover and give him the honor of opening their Pet's Spawn.

Alas, when Lilith's Tutorial decided to unleash Coyote on Maverick proper to kill ATC for cheating during their coin-flip game, Javier got caught up in the chaos, nearly dying.

Lilith used a Spell to stabilize Javier's Configuration before it went into Overlimit after the Minstrel played the THC & ARC EP and transported said Configuration to her location in "Utopia", giving Javier's body the chance to enter the Fae Sleep.

Javier, unfortunately, can only reawaken in the SRPG via using the Luden's special Permutation elevator called Babel, due to his Configuration being imbued with certain aspects of a Ludens, rendering him temporarily bound to their ADMIN's PRIVILEGE.

Javier, however, is too busy working on his Sabbatical to return just yet. His Deification Quest requires him to cure Tiamat's migraine via performing songs at select locations on "Utopia", making Javier endeavors an unprecedented Feat in the making.

ATC, relieved to see his first Collaborator in great spirits, instilled the depressed Shinigami with a kind of hope he hadn't felt in nearly two centuries of Runtime.

In turn, ATC shares his reasons for why he is in "Utopia" as well, leading to Javier expressing his condolences.

Before ATC and Laforgeyuhan depart for the "Sea of Trivia", the Shinigami and his Mirror are introduced to Javier and Lilith's Pet named Odyssey, who had recently reached the Youngling Class.

Noticing Odyssey playing on the Fable OD, ATC shares his love of gaming with Odyssey and reveals his old Youngling dream of making his own game someday. Odyssey, a fan of ATC already thanks to learning of him from his Father Tutorial, says he'll be the first in line to buy ATC's game once it's made!

ATC and Laforgeyuhan depart "Eden" and access the last Rabbithole they need to reach the "Sea of Trivia".

Upon popping up on the other side, ATC and Laforgeyuhan encounter a vast ocean of creamy, sweet milk.

In front of the duo were fleets of cruise line ships; each one eager to take its passengers to parts unknown across the “Sea of Milk”, which it, in and of itself, comprised 70% of “Utopia”.

Like the Rabbitholes on the terrestrial side of “Utopia”, the liquid side had whirlpools that could be utilized to cross the expanse that is the “Sea of Trivia” with a quickness.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan, under the advice of Lilith from earlier, sought out a Ludens sea captain named Davy for assistance on reaching the Tower of Power, due in part to Davy owing Lilith a solid.

Heading to the nearest coastal city next to them to track down Davy, ATC begins to panic once he realizes that he only has a few more months left on his Quest deadline before he dies, upon double-checking his Planner Grimoire.

Laforgeyuhan roasts ATC for pursuing Side Gig after Side Gig during their journey instead of prioritizing the Individuation first and foremost.

Fortunately for ATC, he and Laforgeyuhan are able to track down Davy at a fish-n-chips spot, where the Luden offers to buy the Shinigami a meal for the upcoming sail.

Heading to a different dock in the coastal city, ATC and Laforgeyuhan board Davy’s motorboat, which proceeds to transport them at unimaginable speeds to the Tower of Power, situated on a lone island.

Dropping off ATC and Laforgeyuhan, Davy wishes them the best, before telling ATC that he sort of reminds him of a Shinigami he once met when he was a younger Luden.

Specifically, a dandy Sisyphus dressed in old-fashion clothing whose Vibe emanated grace and novelty.

ATC smiles an invisible smile as Davy drives away.

The Tower itself, a radio tower, revealed a stairway underneath it leading underground. ATC and Laforgeyuhan descend into the depths.

The length of the stairway was so asinine that it depleted the remaining amount of time on ATC’s Quest deadline by the time he and the Mirror arrived at the end.

ATC and Laforgeyuhan arrived at the end of the staircase, whose exit revealed an underwater location with a massive crater lying at the bottom.

Floating everywhere were Spawns. Some were awaiting their next Reload from THE SUBLIME AXIOM, while others were being randomly Zapped back to the Current SRPG.

Laforgeyuhan announces that they’ve made it to the Ground of All Being.

Floating down to the crater, ATC realizes he has a mere 15 minutes left to finish the Quest and asks Laforgeyuhan what needs to be done to finalize the process.

Laforgeyuhan draws his blade from his scabbard and tells his Camel that they must engage in the Fade of Individuation.

What causes ATC to lose his shit is when Laforgeyuhan reveals that, for a Sisyphus to Deify, they must best their Mirror in combat and Assimilate said Mirror back into one’s Configuration.

Per The Grand Secret, this fact is kept hush hush.

ATC, sick and tired of the bullshit, charges forward. It's either victory or Timeout.

Shadow Fight: Laforgeyuhan, The 1st Mirror

HP: 85

Shadow Fight Song: Function by Cicero (feat. GoldLink, April George, Cheakity)

Company: ATC (85)

Risk: Inconsequential

As crazy as this sounds, you'll need to allow ATC's Deification timer to reach zero. Doing so will win you the battle.

While you wait out the timer, you'll need to stay vigilant. Laforgeyuhan will unleash his full might to Vanquish you. All Choices, Spells and Decisives you've acquired up to this point will be at his disposal as well.

Use your best Strats, stay healed and counter whenever possible. Once you survive long enough for the Quest timer to reach zero, the battle will end.

ATC, despite his best efforts, is unable to defeat his Mirror before the Quest deadline expires, causing ATC to experience the start of a Total Meltdown.

As ATC writhes in pain from the Uncertainty in his Configuration, Laforgeyuhan questions if ATC “truly understands what he intrinsically is”.

The Shinigami loses consciousness from the pain.

ATC awakens as a Youngling, in his old room on his Surveillance, believing he’d just experienced the most batshit crazy dream ever.

The Youngling walked into his living room and saw his Tutorial, Roswell, playing a game.

The Shogun greets ATC and asks him if he slept well, to which the Youngling replies that he had a rough dream and wants to tell his Tutorial about it.

ATC watches Roswell play an ant simulation game before telling Roswell about his Adventures in his “Dream”.

When ATC stops his recounting at the Individuation Fade, Roswell asks ATC if that’s the end of the story, to which ATC replies that it isn’t.

At that moment, Roswell’s ant avatar from the video game he’s playing dies during gameplay, sending him to the “Continue? screen”.

Roswell offers ATC his video game controller, asking him if he’d like to either play this game with him or head outside their Abode to continue his Adventures.

ATC chooses the latter, stating he’s gotta know how his story ends and that he’ll play with him again just to tell him the rest of his Wonder Tale afterwards.

Roswell gives an “atta boy” response to ATC and wishes him off as the Youngling gets up, makes a cup of coffee, downs it and hypes himself up before proceeding out the front door into blinding lights.

Back in the Ground of All Being, ATC’s body disintegrates into pixels.

The Total Meltdown, it seems, has finally taken ATC.

After witnessing the demise of ATC’s original form, Laforgeyuhan claps his hands and welcomes back the Self-Hero as his form glows white.

In front of the glowing Mirror, a New Game Plus Shortcut appears requesting a name be inputted.

The glowing Mirror puts in the name “Aesop Tony Coleman” into the naming Shortcut.

Next, a Character Creation Shortcut appears, which the Mirror proceeds to utilize to change his appearance to a long, green coat version of himself.

Before finalizing his appearance, the glowing Mirror selects an accessory to equip called “Alliyah’s Scarf”.

Upon pressing submit, the former Mirror turned Defied Sisyphus rematerializes.

The Self-Hero had returned.

Feeling high as a kite, ATC took in his surroundings before looking up at the surface of the Ground of All Being, staring at the Forecast.

With a chillax sigh, ATC snapped his fingers, causing the waters of the Ground of All Being to part.

Like he’s Moses or some shit.

ATC Fast Travels to Elysium.

Outside of Anywhere, ATC stretches and tests out his new Defied form, happy as happy can be.

XXIV

PRE-TITANOMACHY

ATC, humming to himself after taking stock of his situation, remembers Madison's request to contact her after achieving his goal.

The state of being Deified, to the Sisyphus, felt like he was in a perpetual high that he could switch on and off at will.

Shooting the director a text, ATC received a swift reply from Madison.

Agreeing to meet up at Blackburn's tavern, ATC Fast Traveled to the establishment.

Upon reuniting with both Madison and Blackburn, the latter expressed amazement at ATC's Defied Vibe.

When asked if anything had changed within his Configuration by Madison and Blackburn, ATC replied that he'd begun reexperiencing brief flashes of events from his Prior Playthroughs, but nothing out of the ordinary.

Blackburn, unphased, comments that experiencing memories of previous Runs is a natural perk of being Defied, as it increases the wisdom and insight of the deity.

ATC reveals he’s yet to recall his first Playthrough as “Aesop”, suspecting that it might be THE SUBLIME AXIOM’s doing.

Regardless, ATC is ready to return to his version of the Current SRPG and asks Madison how it can be done.

The Caregiver reveals that all ATC has to do is follow the temporal trail his Configuration left behind when he first entered Recent, called Breadcrumbs, and reach the location he first arrived in.

Once there, a unique exit called a Bookmark will appear via a Shortcut, offering to take ATC back to his version of the SRPG.

Madison decides to accompany ATC to ensure that he doesn’t get lost returning to his Current timeline, stating she has something important to tell him, per a conversation Blackburn had with her recently.

Before leaving, the Fiend offered ATC a bowl of Pho with a bottle of warm sake on the side as a going away gift. The Sensei was all too happy to oblige.

Upon finishing a well-earned meal, ATC and Madison departed Blackburn’s tavern while wishing the OG Fiend a fond farewell.

ATC and Madison entered the original Permutation that ATC and Laforgeyuhan had exited from two centuries of Runtime prior.

Upon entering, however, ATC discovered that the Permutation wasn’t the same one from before; that being the era of the First Theomachy.

Instead, ATC and Madison had arrived in an unknown Permutation of the SRPG set somewhere in the 2XXXs.

Arriving in the ruins of an unknown city, recently bombarded to ruin, ATC pondered as to what had happened in this Permutation.

Madison, after a moment, realizes that they've entered a version of the SRPG that had just concluded its Titanomachy; specifically, the 12th one.

When ATC asks Madison why this Permutation wasn't the same one he'd exited from previously, Madison replies that it's likely the RNG's doing.

Like Roswell before him, ATC curses the bloody RNG as he and Madison begin the melancholic walk to where ATC's Bookmark is located.

Wondering what happened, ATC asked Madison what caused this destruction, to which Madison answered as they inched closer to their destination.

"The destruction around us," according to Madison, "was caused by Revelation, the Ultimate Boss."

The Caregiver continued, explaining that "Revelation initiated an evil Black Spell called Rain, dropping Uncertain artillery all over every corner of the SRPG that either had or has deities."

"Specifically, deities that aren't Demogorgons, Sisyphus or Ludens," revealed Madison.

ATC, unusually mesmerized by the end of civilization, asked where this Revelation was hiding at now, to which Madison replies that “Revelation exists within every deity in the SRPG who is Currently playing out an unrealized Run.”

“I’m talking about your wage slaves, revolutionaries, blah blah blah,” continues Madison.

“The deities in those Roles have a piece of Revelation gestating within their Configuration. Revelation, is in essence, the embodiment of “quiet desperation”. If a certain Mechanic within the SRPG is triggered, time will freeze, allowing the pieces of Revelation to exit their hopeless hosts and merge into the Ultimate Boss of Negation.

Madison concludes her “exposition dump” by revealing that what she and ATC had stepped into is a past version of the SRPG that is in the early stages of being Terraformed by Revelation’s Spell, making way for the Demogorgons to settle into the ruins and usher in a new Expansion of the SRPG.

When ATC asks Madison about the connection between the Demogorgons and the Titanomachy, Madison reveals that the Demogorgons were once a Godhood called the Titans.

The Titans, according to legend, are as powerful as the Sisyphus, and under certain conditions can even rival the power of a Ludens.

Before the Prior, which is the early history of the SRPG as documented by ancient Records and artifacts crafted by Prior deities, there was the Unknown.

In the period of the Unknown, there were only the Titans, the Ludens and the Normies. The Titans made up most of the divine population, whereas the Normies made up the minority.

Due to the imbalance of skill and Opportunity between the two Godhoods, the Titans became decadent and complacent with their Roles in the SRPG, causing the Normies to become Softlocked in the process.

FORTUNE, seeing the issue, initiated a Directive to depower the Titan Godhood into a lesser form. To destabilize the SRPG back into a state of progress, there had to be chaos.

What followed was a period of exquisite torment called the “Apocalypse of the Titans”.

The Titans became the Demogorgons and, in their collective Psychosis, slaughtered each other and any Normies they came across.

A few deities who lost their will to continue their Run decided to “Quit” for the first time to escape their torment; this event, which occurred during the worst moments of the Apocalypse, became known as the “Exogenesis of the Fortuitous”.

By the end of the Apocalypse, only a third of the SRPG’s divine population had survived; specifically, not returning to the SRPG as Spawns.

The Normie survivors of the Apocalypse swiftly sanitized any Records of the Unknown period, for fear that the knowledge of the Titans could potentially lead to another Directive being issued by THE SUBLIME AXIOM.

As for the few remaining Demogorgons that survived, they decided to use their newly acquired Black Magic to create the first Backdoors, seeking to return to the “recent” past of the SRPG to change things and prevent FORTUNE’s Directive.

THE SUBLIME AXIOM, however, predicted that this would happen and created a pocket dimension called Recent that isolates all Permutations of the SRPG into its own “omniverse”, to maintain the stability of the Actual Permutation aka the Current SRPG aka the Current.

Sadly, for the first Demogorgons–upon realizing the futility of their Quest–they soon discovered that they'd become trapped in Recent, never truly finding their way back to the Current SRPG.

The lucky few that stumbled upon Elysium eventually established Anywhere, whose infinitesimal vastness gave way to it being a kind of hub for all “time travellers”.

The first Demogorgons, wishing to maintain their vision of a better SRPG, created the Innovation as a bible for all Demogorgons and potential Titans to look to for guidance. Such was the secrecy of the insights contained within that the Demogorgons wrote it in an encrypted language of mathematics that can only be understood by either a Demogorgon, a Titan and/or a Ludens.

At the beginning of the Prior, the surviving Normies of the Apocalypse and their descendents began rebuilding the divine civilization anew.

Alas, it wasn’t long before it became clear to the Prior Normies that they too were at risk of becoming Demogorgons if they met certain conditions.

And thus, a cycle of violence and prejudice began to form between the Normies and the Demogorgons, with the latter taking on the tradition of traveling into Recent to either defy their fate and/or escape to absolute safety.

The success of the Apocalypse sparked within THE SUBLIME AXIOM a new protocol based on the Demogorgon's failed Quest to change the trajectory of the SRPG via time-travel. This would become known as the Titanomachia Protocol.

To prevent the deities of the Current SRPG from ending up decadent and degenerate like the Titans, FORTUNE would inevitably Reload a few "Titan Spawns" into Elysium.

Once discovered by a resident of Anywhere, said potential Titans would be removed from their Spawns and grow up in blissful ignorance.

Typically, as part of their rearing within Elysium, these potential Titans would grow up reading and studying both literature and ancient Records of the Unknown period, including the Innovation.

These potential Titans' hunger and curiosity of wanting to see the Current version of the SRPG festers within them until they achieve their teen Growth Spurt.

When a potential Titan comes of Age and decides to leave Elysium, they must Cross the Permutations of Hades, with the hope that they'll reach the Current SPRG eventually.

The Suffering that the potential Titan(s) accumulates as they gradually get closer to a viable Backdoor turns them into a Visionary.

When a potential Titan finally arrives in the Current SRPG and finds it wanting, they'll achieve an Epiphany. This moment is what turns a potential Titan into an actual Titan.

Once that occurs, FORTUNE assigns the Titan the Quest of initiating a Titanomachy, with instant access to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE being the reward if certain objectives are met.

The Innovation is the Book of the Titans, detailing the lost insights and wisdom of the Unknown period as written by the OG Titans aka the first Demogorgons.

In it is a specific passage about a method of "restarting the past within the present".

The OG Titan's came up with the above after realizing that their attempts to defy the Directive from within Recent would be all but futile.

To realize this wish of "restarting the past in the present", the Titans must acquire FORTUNE's failsafe, called The Pause, and decrypt it using 13 Relics created by the Ludens called the Keygens.

Reason being? The Pause is contained within a mysterious object called the Rosetta Stone.

If all 13 Keygens are utilized and The Pause is activated, Revelation will be unleashed to sanitize the entire SRPG.

Madison reveals to ATC that Revelation was created to help eviscerate Calamities like the Prime Nosferatu, or any other "foreign intruders" that come from outside the SRPG.

"Ol' Gassyendietha becoming the Prime Nosferatu's host, yet keeping said parasite contained way back when has saved the SRPG from being "rebooted" 10x over.

Glad he finally got a “satisfying ending”,” stated Madison cheerfully.

“Holy shit…fucking noted,” said a willfully high ATC.

“Anyhow, Revelation holds no opinion for why it is summoned. It does as it was created to do. Equal opportunity for all, save the Sisyphus and the Ludens. That Cheat Code has kept your Godhood quite cozy over the “millennia”. Good job “you”,” replied Madison calmly.

The Caregiver continued, explaining that if Revelation is successful in Terraforming the SRPG, the Demogorgons are given a mass Salvation from FORTUNE in a process called Rapture, turning them into the new Normies.

Afterwards, the new Normies attempt to rebuild civilization anew in the attempt to restore their Titanhood, only to perpetuate the inevitability of another Titanomachy at some point occurring in the Hypothetical.

Madison nears the conclusion of her "exposition dump” by telling ATC that since the start of the Prior, there’ve been twelve Titanomachias that’ve occurred.

“Out of all of the Titanomachias that were waged since the founding of the Prior, only one has been thwarted,” finishes Madison as she and ATC near the location of ATC’s Bookmark.

ATC, overwhelmed by the information that Madison has laid on him, asks Madison once more who she really is.

Madison, with a motherly chuckle, reiterates that she’s nothing more than a “Caregiver”.

Madison redirects ATC's Attention towards a shimmering silhouette near a destroyed wall, to which Madison confirms that it is ATC's Bookmark.

Due to being in a Company with ATC, Madison confirms that she can come along with ATC to his Current SRPG, preferring to tell him the news she'd acquired from Blackburn in a safer location.

Upon interacting with his Bookmark, a Shortcut generated in front of ATC, asking him where he'd like to return to within the Current SRPG.

ATC chooses Roswell's Station as his destination, wanting to ease himself back into a sense of normalcy after surviving his hellish journey.

ATC and Madison arrive at Roswell's Station, in front of Roswell's cottage.

It has been 200 years of Current Runtime since ATC had left for Recent.

ATC finds the old items he was forced to leave behind at the start of his journey and adds them back to his Inventory.

After reclaiming Hornet's headphones and his Knicknack WARP, ATC finally learns from Madison that his Current SRPG is due a Titanomachy.

Blackburn revealed to Madison that it'd detected several potential Titans entering the Current SRPG sometime after ATC & Laforgeyuhan left for Arcadia.

ATC, freaking out, asks how accurate Blackburn's information is, to which Madison replies that Blackburn is not only a proficient Sorcerer, but also a damn good Oracle as well.

“When Blackburn starts blabbering like a nerd who gets asked about their favorite hobby, it's legit,” affirmed Madison to ATC.

Madison relays to ATC that Blackburn “estimates”, and I quote, that “it’ll take no more than 100 to 200 years of Runtime from where you’re at right now within your version of the Current before a Titanomachy is declared. I argue that it's more or less been the average amount of time that a Titanomachy typically occurs once a Titan makes their way into the Current,”.

Uh, end quote.

ATC, knowing he has some time to spare before things get dicey, asks Madison for some advice on how to proceed before she departs back to Elysium.

Madison suggests to ATC that he reexplore his past actions as “Aesop” by taking on Labours, seeing it as a way for him to resurrect his legendary Reputation and gain allies for the conflict to come.

Madison also hands ATC a copy of the Innovation, stating that it might come in handy, so long as he knows someone who can translate it for him.

ATC, feeling a bit anxious yet determined to get through this final period of his Run, decides he’ll take the long way back to Maverick by hitting up the other Heavens and taking on any Labours he can find, now that he’s reached beyond the Age of 80.

Before Madison departs, ATC informs her that it’ll be hard to talk about his experiences in Recent since he’s now bound to The Grand Secret as a Sensei, to which Madison chuckles and snaps her fingers.

ATC asks what was with the finger snap, to which Madison replies that she Retconned the Grand Secret, now making it obsolete and giving ATC and any other Sisyphus free reign to talk about it.

Madison also reveals to ATC that his sword WARP is one of the 13 Keygens and that he'd do well to "hold on tight to it".

As Madison opens her own Backdoor back to Elysium, ATC asks her for the final time who she is, to which Madison simply replies that she's, again, just a "Caregiver" and that ATC should do well to not "look a gifted horse in the mouth" before waving goodbye to him and exiting the Current SRPG.

ATC, after a moment of contemplation, refocuses his mind on the task at hand. A Quest appears in his Planner Grimoire; specifically, one with a focus on preparing for the 13th Titanomachy within less than two centuries of Runtime.

Before ATC can begin his Titanomachy Game Plan, a strange text message appears in his Controller's inbox.

Checking it, ATC is perplexed by the sender, who goes by the handle of "AC".

The message read: **DON'T DELETE THIS. I KNOW WHO YOU ARE. YOU DON'T KNOW ME YET, BUT YOU WILL. I HAVE A WARNING TO GIVE YOU. FORTUNE IS ONTO YOU. WHEN THE TIME COMES, I'LL SEND YOU A FOLLOW-UP MESSAGE WITH A UNIQUE TITLE. ONCE YOU SEE IT, YOU'LL KNOW WHAT IT'LL MEAN. LATE. - "AC"**

ATC swiftly deleted the spam message, saying "weird" to himself before getting his mind back on the Quest(s) at hand.

To kick off his return tour of the SRPG, the Self-Hero relocated himself to a nearby Adventurers' Guild branch to reactivate his member status.

Back in business, the Sensei initiated a divine journey to take on any available Labours on each of the Heavens.

Labours are legendary Gigs only available to OGs.

In addition to Vanquishing what few Labours he could find, ATC also prioritized assisting the Havenless deities on their Stations.

With lame options at their disposal to defend themselves against the RNG's bullshit, the Havenless deities who received aid and resources from the Self-Hero swiftly pledged their allegiance to him.

Through these two methods, ATC began building a "Transparent Militia" for the Assimilation to come.

Although decentralized from one another, the individual deities whom ATC had either befriended or saved during a Labour would answer the Sensei's SOS if needed.

While on his return tour, ATC became aware of a popular mobile card game that he hadn't known about until his return to the SRPG.

Created by a private, for-profit Company called Foreshadow, the smash hit mobile card game "Every Moment of Everyday Ever", or EMOEE for short, had taken the SRPG by storm.

The appeal of the game, according to a young fan whom ATC had encountered while in “Taipei, Taiwan”, was its cryptocurrency feature.

“Anytime you win a match, you earn Finito coins, which is Foreshadow’s cryptocurrency! The value for each coin is ridiculous! I’m talking about five figure numbers! Everyone and their Tutorial is pouring their Run savings into EMOEE just to hit big,” explained the young fan to ATC.

“Interesting. When did this, um, EMOEE first release?” asked ATC.

“Oh! I think it was about a century of Runtime ago. Some content creators and Finessers on Narcissus began promoting and featuring EMOEE on their platforms. It blew up hella quick after that,” answered the young fan.

As the young fan and ATC continued to chat, the OG Adventurer decided to check Narcissus to see if he could find a picture of Foreshadow’s founder(s).

To ATC’s surprise, nothing came up in the search results. Believing that the young fan might have an answer, ATC inquired about the owner of Foreshadow’s identity.

“I’ve no idea, sir! Believe it or not, that ongoing mystery is what made the game explode in popularity in the first place. No one has yet to unmask the identity of EMOEE's creator. The only thing we know about them is their initials: DG,” explained the young fan.

Despite feeling iffy, ATC decided to drop the issue and move on with his Run. Thanking the young fan for his Runtime, ATC excused himself before departing.

“Yeah, fuck all that mobile game shit. Think I’ll stick to the old ways,” ATC said to himself as he walked away.

It wouldn’t be for another 50 years of Runtime before ATC made it back to Maverick. And what a welcoming it would be.

RECONCILATION

50 years of Runtime had come and gone. Upon completing his latest Labour, ATC set his peripherals on returning to the Haven of Guilds.

Arriving on Maverick, or New Maverick as its citizens had come to call the city-state following Coyote’s attack, ATC couldn’t help but take in the profound sight of a Haven resurrected.

Wandering the streets of New Maverick, the Self-Hero couldn’t help but reminisce about his pre-Deified days.

Needing some supplies, ATC noticed a nearby Panther Hunger and decided to make his way into the famous supermarket chain to grab an item or two. Hitting up aisle 10, the Self-Hero stocked up.

While exiting the store, ATC stumbled upon a commotion before observing a frantic deity running past him towards the exit in a hurry.

Pursuing the fleeing deity was a young god, probably around Age 16 or 17, wearing an “asset protection” vest.

ATC, with a snap of his fingers, Fast Traveled the fleeing thief back towards the young asset protection employee.

The young god, noticing the kind gesture, moved with swiftness before sweeping the thief off his feet and apprehending him.

Reading the lad’s movements, ATC concluded that the young god must be a Dexterity Fae.

Upon handing the would-be thief over to the proper authorities, the asset protection employee approached ATC to thank him.

Introducing himself as Road, the young Fae handed over a Byte Joint coupon to the Sisyphus as a show of thanks.

“You should hit up the main Byte Joint restaurant sometime! My Tutorials would be more than happy to have your patronage. Especially after you went out of your way to make my workday suck less,” said Road before realizing that he was still on the clock.

After wishing the Sensei a fond farewell, Road Ryland returned to his asset protection duties with a renewed sense of resolve.

ATC, contemplating if Road is the Pet of who he thinks he is, dismisses the notion before refocusing his Attention to continuing his New Maverick exploration.

In the evening, ATC relocated himself to the original Byte Joint, all the while showing amazement at Milo’s accomplishments for turning it into a Renowned franchise over the past few centuries of Runtime.

Upon entering the familiar establishment, ATC identified Milo, Malcolm and Spot instantly; while the familiar trio looked somewhat the same, their Vibes and new appearances conveyed a sense of profound maturation to the Sensei.

Also present in the Byte Joint was Road, now off the clock and chillaxing. Joining Road, yet assisting Milo behind the counter, was a young ebony goddess with a cheerful disposition.

Holding up the free meal coupon that Road gave him, ATC playfully asked aloud if the Byte Joint was still open for customers.

Road, upon seeing ATC, waved and greeted the Sisyphus while putting away his small notebook and pen. Calling for his Tutorials, Spot & Milo, Road explained to the couple that ATC is the same Sisyphus from earlier that he was telling them about.

To both Road and the young ebony goddess’ surprise, Spot immediately walked up to ATC and started poking him. Jokingly inspecting ATC, the OG Dhampir wanted to confirm if the Sensei was just a figment of their imagination.

“It's me, Spot. No need for the poking,” said ATC.

Upon realizing the meaning of those words, Spot mustered her strongest hug before hitting ATC with it.

“I KNEW, I KNEW, I KNEW IT!!!” yelled Spot joyfully.

Milo and Malcolm, excited beyond words, joined the Fae to welcome ATC back to the “world of the living”.

“Pay up bro,” said Milo with a smile.

“You got me,” replied Malcolm as he handed Milo five bucks with a smile.

“Uh, what’s that?” said ATC as Spot finished hugging him.

“Malcolm bet me that you wouldn’t make it back from your Deification Quest. I disagreed with him, and it just made me five dollars richer,” explained Milo.

“Wait, SERIOUSLY!? You of all deities made that bet against me Mal!?” said ATC in shock.

“Well, considering how brutal the circumstances were at the time, I couldn’t help but lose some of my toxic optimism. Guess Milo and I "swapped" dispositions for a time. Strange eh,” replied Malcolm while rubbing the back of his neck with embarrassment.

“Hey dad. Who’s he?” asked the ebony goddess to Malcolm.

“Oh, just an old Collaborator, Joyce. We go all the way back to our college days. Alas, that’s a tale for another day,” replied Malcolm to his Daughter Pet.

ATC is informed by Malcolm that Milo and Spot performed the Fae Dance and got together after the Firesale and Replicated seven gods, with Road being the youngest of their Pets. To say that the Self-Hero was perplexed by the news would be an understatement.

As for Joyce, Malcolm reveals that he and Charlotte entered into a Labyrinth following ATC's initial departure. From there, the duo Inherited Joyce from one of the many Spawns that Reload across the SRPG.

Deciding to close the Byte Joint early, Milo lets Joyce clock out and depart with Road so that the OGs can continue their catching up in peace.

Locking up the front doors, the reunited Company headed up to chillax on the Byte Joint's roof. There, ATC and co. shared sake, a blunt or two and roasted one another over their OG appearances.

Milo and Malcolm revealed that they Deified some time ago after receiving their Sabbaticals.

Spot has also received her Sabbatical, yet for personal reasons, hasn't Deified yet. When asked why by ATC, the OG Dhampir simply states that "some things needn't be revisited".

ATC, thinking about Then & After, inquiries about his Pets' wellbeing to the others.

To ATC's relief and horror, the Rylands reveal that while Then & After are both alive and well, they've both become Softlocked due to ATC's abandonment of them.

Rich, it is revealed, has been keeping Then & After out of trouble during ATC's absence, leading to them working modestly paid Gigs.

They've yet to earn their Degree Diplomas, however.

ATC, filled with guilt over what's befallen his Pets' Runs so far, begins thinking of a way to get them back in order and free from the Softlock.

The Self-Hero, contemplating the obstacles in front of him, brings up the news of the coming Titanomachy to Milo, Malcolm and Spot.

With roughly 100 years of Runtime left for them to prepare before the Current Titans declare a Titanomachy, ATC suggests that they all develop a contingency Game Plan while enjoying what little peace they might still have.

Due to the Deep State's petty politics and inherent incompetence, ATC and Co. agree to keep their Titanomachy Game Plan decentralized from them.

Spot, Milo, Malcolm and ATC agree to perform Labours together to get as high up in their 90s as possible.

Additionally, Spot offers to assist ATC in establishing Conglomerates, as she's gained a massive log of Collaborators and acquaintances from all Runs of the Game during her time as a Speedrunner.

Remembering GTA, Charlotte, Zey, Ozzie and Javier, ATC reminds Milo, Malcolm and Spot that they should check up on them and see if they can invite them into their Game Plan.

ATC concludes that he’s going to go see how Rich is doing before getting the Society back under his control, after that, he’ll be attending to his Pets' Softlock situation.

With a Hallelujah established, ATC and Co. began setting in motion their Titanomachy Game Plan.

Not that long after reuniting with his Sister Pet-In-Law and the Rylands, ATC Fast Traveled to Duzakh to reunite with Rich after sending him a text.

The two brothers-in-arms greeted one another within the Sisyphus Society’s stronghold within Zarathustra.

ATC discovers that Rich is due to Deify now that he has a Black Label Retro of his own, before informing the latter of the coming 13th Titanomachy.

ATC regains his Angra Mainyu Role after it becomes clear that Rich will need to Deify immediately.

Rich reintroduces his four Pets to ATC, before the latter discovers that Wendy and Sam had been Vanquished a century of Runtime earlier during his absence in a Renovation.

Upon expressing his grief over the loss of his two Franchise Collaborators, ATC assumed command of the Sisyphus Society once more.

Barbarossa, greeting ATC with an overwhelming level of enthusiasm, took to advising ATC on the present progress of the Society as Rich began his preparations to leave for his Individuation.

ATC is informed by Rich of After’s current Gig working as a maintenance technician for one of the many fronts of the Society: a hotel.

ATC decides to pay After a visit before attempting to see Then, giving his friend Rich the best of luck on his upcoming trials.

After, now a young adult Sisyphus, is seen leaving a work site, somewhat irritated over his Role. The tired Sisyphus is shocked and baffled when ATC Fast Travels to his location.

After and ATC share a heartfelt reunion, with ATC telling After to quit his Role immediately, as they’ve more important matters to attend to.

Catching up with After, ATC learns that Then fell into a deep depression after being unable to reconcile the abandonment that ATC inflicted on them causing her to incur the Softlock status effect.

“That letter you left us was a good luck charm at first. Then would carry it with her everywhere she went, believing you’d come back to us soon. She was confident during the first decade of Runtime,” said After as his tone gradually became hesitant.

“Before long, a decade became half a century of Runtime. Multiply that half times two and you get a solid 100. By that point, I no longer saw the same Then that I once knew. Something inside her had “died” the moment she concluded that you were gone from our Runs forever,” finished After.

Because of their existential bond as twins, After caught the status effect immediately as well.

Benjamin left IP Records to the twins as the last of his Final Arrangements before he removed his Xian and obtained Completion, heading up to THE HIGHER ADVENTURE not too long after ATC and Laforgeyuhan had entered Recent.

Then has been managing IP Records ever since yet is still conflicted over her desire to become a Minstrel alongside After. However, until Then reconciles her feelings towards ATC, neither she nor After will be rid of their Softlock.

After wanted to join the Ronin branch of the Society initially, mostly out of anger and angst over losing his two Tutorials so swiftly at a young Age.

Rich knocked him on his ass upon learning of his Intention before putting him under the employ of Barbarossa instead.

ATC, placing his hand on After's shoulder, vocalized to his Son Pet that Rich was smart for making his decision, explaining that he'd have killed Rich already if he'd allowed After to join the Ronin in a joking tone.

After concludes his recap of his and Then's meager Struggling by saying that they're getting somewhat closer to getting their Degree Diplomas, yet the pace of their Runs has made even that a difficulty.

ATC informs After of his Game Plan to meet with Then at IP Records in "Seattle", despite After's warnings about her current disposition.

Sensing a discrepancy, After mentions something weird to his Tutorial.

"Uh pops. IP Records is in "Rapid City", not "Seattle"," said After upon catching his Tutorial's words

“Oh snap, you’re right! My apologies, pup. Sheesh, my Age is starting to catch up with me. Must be the brain ROT,” replied ATC embarrassingly.

Upon biding his Son Pet a paternal farewell, ATC took some Runtime to prepare himself for his reunion with his Daughter Pet.

Appearing in front of IP Records, ATC entered the homely space, asking an indifferent employee at the register if he could tell him how to reach the owner or manager.

Informing ATC that he’ll grab her from the back, the indifferent employee slothed his way towards the back of the store.

Moments later, the Angra Mainyu froze in place. His peripherals caught sight of a Fae goddess emerging from the back who looked damn near like her Mother Tutorial.

Then, upon seeing ATC, felt the coolness leave her body. Her hearing became selective, because it failed to register her employee’s words.

“Yeah, uh, this is the customer that was asking for you. I haven’t taken my 15 yet, so I’m gonna go do that…yeah,” said the indifferent employee who’d left just as fast as he returned.

Then, feeling like an abandoned Youngling again, failed to find her breath as she tried to voice her contradictory emotions. In a deluge of tears, the sobbing goddess stormed out of IP Records.

“I’m sorry pup,” ATC whispered to himself.

Calmly exiting IP Records amidst the eyes of interested patrons, the Angra Mainyu followed his Daughter Pet.

Closing the gap between them, ATC Fast Traveled in front of her. Then, emotional and distraught, proceeded to strike her giant of a Tutorial multiple times in his torso, yelling at him for taking his sweet ass Runtime coming back.

ATC comforts Then, telling her he hadn’t gone a day without thinking about her or After and that he’s here to make “the wrong things right again”.

Using his Controller, ATC asks After to meet him at a familiar location, to which After replies affirmatively before setting off for said location. ATC Fast Travels Then and himself over to After before taking them to the Kickback.

The Kickback, now a bustling hangout for young deities, is thriving with activity. Spot’s decision to gentrify it into a multi-level mall did wonders for restoring its notoriety.

ATC, arriving with Then & After, steered his Pets through the bustling Kickback and up to the top floor, which was sealed off by Spot. Upon arrival, ATC cracked a smile and thanked Spot for keeping the top level the same as it looked during Startlinera.

ATC informs Then & After of his Individuation, revealing his Intention to get them out of their Softlock via a special Game Plan he’d been devising since learning of their condition.

To go along with the good news, ATC warned his Pets of the coming 13th Titanomachy.

The Angra Mainyu reveals to Then and After his intention to train them, making the removal of the Softlock their goal.

Then, with encouragement from After, decides to place her faith in ATC once more, agreeing to spar and train with their OG Tutorial.

Following some reminiscing, the Pantheon departed Elfame.

At around 850 years of Runtime, ATC learns from Simone, now a Fairy herself, that Javier had awakened from his Fae Sleep.

Traveling to Javier's Abode on New Deck City in Elfame, ATC reunites with his first Rival. At the same time, the Sensei is surprised to see both Lilith and a now teen Odyssey with Javier.

Javier reveals to ATC that his Pet and Muse wanted to check up on him after he awakened from his Fae Sleep.

Having made the journey back to the Current SRPG via Babel, the Fairy wasted little time creating his newest LP; specifically, one inspired by his Adventures in Arcadia.

To celebrate his return and promote his newest record, Javier has orchestrated a heavenly Remix Tour; one that'll take him to each Heaven.

ATC informs Javier about Then & After's Softlock situation before convincing his oldest friend to take them on his upcoming tour as roadies. Javier accepts the idea, still remembering the twins' level of musical brilliance.

Hearing that Then & After have yet to acquire their Degree Diplomas, Javier suggests to ATC that they transfer their transcripts to the Minstrel College of Dilla.

Javier figures that having the duo finish their CLEPS at Dilla will help them make up for the lost years of Runtime they've spent being Softlocked.

Concluding that this method will be sufficient to cure Then & After of their Softlock at their present Ages, ATC agrees to Javier's proposal, before following up with the promise that he'll hand them over to the Fairy Minstrel within 25 years of Runtime.

Upon warning Javier about the coming Titanomachy, the Angra Mainyu received a heartfelt thanks from the Fairy, promising to be ready for ATC's SOS.

Upon giving the Current Madam President of "Utopia" and her Pet his best wishes, ATC bids Javier and his Pantheon farewell before departing Elfame.

ATC continues training with Milo, Malcolm and Spot on building up Conglomerates with various deities via completing Labours and Gigs. The old friends reached an average Age of 95 by the time ATC's Runtime reached 875 years.

Teaming up with Road and Joyce on some of their escapades during the lead up to the 13th Titanomachy, the Sensei couldn't help but feel like his college self when around them. Road's blunt yet well-meaning nature, along with Joyce's thoughtful Idealism emanated the traits they Inherited from their Tutorials.

Road, aspiring to join INTERPOL, is shocked when ATC reveals that he personally knows the Current Grand Inquisitor, whom he used to beef with during his college days.

Promising to recommend Road to GTA the next he sees him, ATC advises the young Dhampir to consider starting up a private investigation Side Gig in the meantime.

Joyce, Inheriting a love of both cryptids and cooking from her Tutorials, reveals to ATC while out hunting one day that her Tutorial Charlotte is prepping for her to take over the Immortal Bistro once she finishes her studies. ATC, seeing a lot of Malcolm in her, advises Joyce to write books on her interests in the Hypothetical to improve her maturation.

ATC hands Then & After over to Javier to begin their prep for Minstrel school. To succeed, Then & After must conquer an entry exam to get into the Minstrels' College of Dilla. The twins begin their roadie Role with their honorary Uncle Tutorial, excited to see Javier awake and healthy after so many centuries.

Upon Stressing to his Pets to have fun while they learn, ATC bids Then & After goodbye with a heartfelt hug.

Bit by bit, little by little, the Angra Mainyu steadily built up the Sisyphus Society in preparation for the 13th Titanomachy.

From sending the Ronin to Vanquish Raids the Shogunate didn't have the time to deal with, to ensuring that the Havenless deities whom ATC had formed Conglomerates with were regularly supplied via the Shinobi, ATC's Transparent Militia worked and grew quietly.

While still at odds with the Shogunate, the two Sisyphus factions remained tolerant of one another, due in part to the Society's recent acts of charity.

At 899 years of Runtime, ATC attended Then & After's entrance exam at Dilla, the Haven of the Minstrels.

Waiting outside the examination area, ATC couldn't help but think back to a time when his Tutorial was waiting for him to pass his driver's license test at the "Seattle DMV".

Wait a sec…why the hell did I think of "Seattle" again, thought ATC.

Then & After emerged from their examination victorious. They've cured themselves of the Softlock by earning acceptance into the Minstrels' College of Dilla.

Javier, arriving to congratulate the twins, silently comments to ATC that "the twins would've aced the entry examination anyway, since they've been prodigies for a while now."

"Heh looks like my little ones have finally gotten their Runs back in order. My Muse can rest easy now," replied ATC as he patted Javier's shoulder.

On "New Year's Eve", ATC and his Collaborators threw a celebration party for Then & After.

ATC, happily perplexed, met all seven of Milo and Spot's Pets during the partying; additionally, the Sensei was caught off guard upon learning of Road's rare Miracle called MADLUCK, a unique power only available to the 7th Replicated Pet of two deities that is Observed to be a God and whose older Replicated siblings are also gods.

Needing some fresh air, ATC, Milo, Malcolm, Spot and Javier met up with GTA, Charlotte, Ozzie, Zey, Jack, Jill and Joe at the top of the Byte Joint.

Minus Spot, all OGs present had become Deified.

ATC handed four floppy disks to GTA and his OG Company, explaining that the data on the disks contains information about the 4th Titanomachy.

The Angra Mainyu reveals that he tracked down and reassembled the original Akashic Records with Barbarossa's aid during the past century of Runtime.

Learning that he, as "Aesop", had stopped the 4th Titanomachy upon reviewing the Akashic Records, the Angra Mainyu compiled the pertinent information into the floppy disks for dissemination.

Entrusting what tips and tricks the Establisher created after winning the 4th Titanomachy to GTA and his Co., ATC prays that the disks' insights will help his counterparts survive the coming "mosh pit".

With minutes away from midnight, ATC and Co. poured some sake, formed a circle and began the countdown to the new year of Runtime.

Upon hitting 0, the deities down their cups as the Genre of the Haven Flipped to a tranquil one, initiating ATC's 900th year of Runtime.

At any moment now, the start of a Titanomachy could begin.

THE 13TH TITANOMACHY

By the summer of ATC's 900th year of Runtime, the Sensei and his Collaborators could be seen chillaxing inside the original Byte Joint.

ATC, sensing a chill in the air, received a sudden text from his Daughter Pet.

The message read: **DAD! YOU NEED TO WATCH THIS ASAP! - Then**

Below the message, ATC noticed, was a link to a livestream.

Before ATC could click the link, Jack and Jill rushed through the front door in a panic.

The feline OGs hastily informed ATC and Co. of a wild broadcast occurring on Narcissus.

ATC, suspecting that Then's message could be connected, proceeded to open the message's link in a wide Shortcut for all to see. Milo, Spot, Malcolm and Javier turned their Attention towards the unusual livestream being projected.

Hosting this live broadcast was the popular video game developer and publisher Foreshadow, the creator(s) of the lucrative EMOEE Grimoire that exploded in popularity roughly 250 years ago.

Thanks to their pioneering form of cryptocurrency called Finito, Foreshadow had acquired pertinent influence over the past centuries of Runtime.

Due to the mindless consumption of the Downtrodden who distrust the Deep State and its financial system, Foreshadow earned an unfathomable amount of Karma from the addictive purchasing habits of the SRPG's deities.

The Current broadcast was assumed by fans and critics to be another announcement of Foreshadow's upcoming services and products to the general population; chief among them, an update to EEMOE. Just another, ordinary showcase from the for-profit Company.

And yet, when ATC opened the Foreshadow link on the wide screened Shortcut, the Sensei and his allies were instead greeted with their worst fears.

Rather than the typical broadcast of a narration revealing the latest and greatest from Foreshadow, complete with release dates, a charming god of addictive charisma was instead observed.

Not a Configuration alive had ever heard or seen this god until now.

Introducing himself as Foreshadow's founder and current CEO of the Dark Guild, the suave yet competent god who helped found the Corporation uttered a name that sent a chill down ATC's spine.

"NO FUCKING WAY! ARE YOU SERIOUS!?" yelled ATC at the Shortcut.

Formally making the acquaintance of "Pangaea" for the first time, Levi Saklas Maverick, the Chairman of Foreshadow, reveals his Titan Godhood to the audience and announces the MANDATE OF HEAVEN.

Revealing that Foreshadow was just a front for the Dark Guild, Levi states his Godhood's Intention of Terraforming all of "Pangaea" ***unless*** certain demands are met.

Upon warning the viewers and their Seraphim of the Current deadline, set to end after the next two Flips, the Arch-Titan smoothly laid out his demands.

Levi reveals that he and his six siblings are after 13 specific Relics called the Keygens and that the Deep State is aware of the hidden locations containing said Keygens.

If, after two Flips, the Dark Guild fails to acquire all 13 Keygens, "something "monumental" is bound to happen," in the words of Levi.

Levi concludes his threat by stating that he's looking forward to his Hypothetical negotiations with the Deep State and suggests that the citizens of the SRPG press their political representatives ASAP to see reason.

The moment those last syllables escape his lips, the Arch-Titan snaps his fingers.

In an instant, every Controller with a downloaded EMOEE Grimoire is rendered inactive, effectively turning the affected Fortuitous into Bystanders & Examples.

Additionally, for shits and giggles, the Dark Guild proceeds to cripple the Karma system as well.

“Yeah, about that. I figured some “Incentive” would do you all some good in rounding up those Keygens. I suggest you make **haste**,” replied a smug Levi.

The Arch-Titan ends his broadcast by making a Checkmate move against a brick wall he was playing against during his whole madvillain monologue.

ATC, shocked that the one spearheading the 13th Titanomachy and the Dark Guild is his former protege, informs his Collaborators about their Opp immediately.

Out of nowhere, ATC receives a text from none other than Levi himself, who asks ATC to meet him in the Dreamtime tonight, as he’s already begun receiving ideal responses to his declaration and is in the process of negotiating for the Translators that he’s after.

ATC, heeding the text, warns his Collaborators about the proposed meeting.

Later that night, ATC enters the Dreamtime in his sleep.

Milo, Malcolm, Javier, Spot, Jack and Jill surround their sleeping friend, ready to awaken the Sisyphus should the Arch-Titan try anything.

ATC, arriving in his corner of the Dreamtime, receives a swift invite from Levi to enter his Dream.

ATC arrives via teleporting to Levi’s Configuration Address. Upon seeing his protege for the first time in centuries, the Sensei notices a Go board on a table in front of the two.

ATC, seeing that Levi wants to play a game while discussing business, decides to humor him.

ATC and Levi proceed to play a game of Go like they used to back in Elysium.

Levi eagerly answers ATC's questions about how and why he's starting a Titanomachy.

The Arch-Titan states that after he and his six "siblings" left for the Current SRPG, they endured and experienced horrors beyond their knowledge while Crossing through various Permutations.

"Shit trying to kill you on principle is one hell of an Incentive to find an exit strategy," said Levi as he moved his white go-ishi.

Levi continued, stating that either by the RNG's will or sheer "dumb luck", both he and his six Collaborators had arrived in a Permutation that had begun its 12th Titanomachy.

The 12th Masakado of the Demogorgons, sensing Levi and the others' unique Vibes upon entering the Permutation, summoned them all to him.

The 12th Masakado, named Atlas Maverick, revealed to Levi upon meeting him that he was his Tutorial and that THE SUBLIME AXIOM had deemed that Atlas would eventually reunite with his Pet to prepare him and the six potential Titans for the inevitable 13th Titanomachy.

Upon finishing their training, the 12th Masakado directed Levi and the six potential Titans to a Backdoor that led straight to the Current SRPG.

The Dark Guild CEO reveals that it didn't take long for both him and his "siblings" to achieve their Epiphanies upon entering the Current. Following their evolution into actual Titans, the seven deities started Foreshadow in secret while also executing an "aggressive takeover" of the Dark Guild.

Using the Karma generated from their EMOEE Grimoire as Titanomachy funding for their Dark Guild activities, Levi insidiously revealed that his enterprise had been flooding the Heavens with the self-destructive drug Ambrosia to cripple the divine populace.

"Shout-out to the Ludens for supplying us with the goods. And an additional shout-out to all the morons who think they can control it all. I swear, the dope game will never go out of business; so long as there's a high and mighty dipshit on a regulatory power trip," said Levi contently.

ATC, immediately face palming himself, knew exactly where Levi had found the inspiration for his executed Game Plan.

"Why the hell did I have to go and tell you all about the story of the two "Opium Assimilations" and the "Assimilation on Drugs"," sighed ATC as he moved his black go-ishi.

"Simple. As you once told me during a game like the one we're playing right now, "Only a dipshit ignores history"," replied Levi while commanding another white go-ishi to take its place on the goban.

After more than 200 years of planning and replanning, Levi and the other Titans had all their "ducks in a row".

The Arch-Titan reveals to ATC that he's already acquired 7 out of the 13 Keygens and that he'll be moving forward with his upcoming attack, since the Deep State decided that withholding information he'd already been aware of was a "smart" idea.

Levi asks ATC to hand over WARP, stating that he'll spare New Maverick from his initial assault if the Sensei complies.

ATC refuses, telling Levi that handing over his Knicknack won't change the Arch-Titan's fate.

"Cut the bullshit, "son". Why'd you ***really*** bring me here," asked ATC as he placed a black go-ishi on the goban.

Moving his white go-ishi in a decisive stroke, Levi looks his mentor in the eye and reveals his gambit with a smooth tone.

"To confirm **whether** WARP was in your possession. Be seeing you soon pops," said a satisfied Levi as he casually stood up from his chair to take his leave.

ATC, studying the goban, realized he lost. Something Levi hadn't achieved against him. Until now.

Levi warns ATC that if he fails to change his mind about giving him WARP by the time he's acquired the 12 Keygen, he'll make an exception in the history of the Titanomachias by attacking the Sisyphus Havens within Zarathustra.

Before he could utter a rebuttal, ATC awakened from the Dreamtime, somewhat irritated.

Realizing that Levi is going to attack New Maverick soon, ATC informs Milo, Malcolm, Spot, Javier, Jack and Jill to brace for the worst.

Before the Company could ask what had happened in the Dreamtime, an apocalyptic shockwave of unfathomable magnitude impacted the Haven.

Destroying New Maverick's Consensus with ease, the apocalyptic shockwave caused asinine damage to the Haven.

Instantaneously, a Raid generated next to New Maverick, sparking ATC, his Company and the entire Haven into action.

Upon defeating the surprise Raid, the citizens of New Maverick began counting and collecting their dead.

ATC is contacted by Then & After over on Dilla, informing their Tutorial of a similar occurrence that's happened to them.

Via Narcissus, ATC and Co. learn that the Dark Guild destroyed the Station of "Yellowstone" somehow, creating an apocalyptic "explosion" that's spread across "Pangaea", destroying entire Consensuses and eviscerating the Border System as well.

Had New Maverick not been Zapped to "Antarctica" prior to the Titan's attack, this story would be over.

In addition to Demogorgon Simulacrum fleets, supplied and funded by the Dark Guild, assaulting vulnerable Havens, the RNG was randomly generating Raids everywhere.

New Maverick’s Consensus rematerialized itself thanks to backup Tenets kicking on, giving the divine militia a sigh of relief.

ATC, needing to know what the 13 Keygens are specifically, takes his copy of the Innovation to Br’er, who translates it thanks to the ADMIN’s PRIVILEGE.

Obtaining the translated Innovation from Br’er, ATC shared his findings with his Collaborators.

With the Dark Guild on the hunt for the remaining Translators, save WARP, ATC and Co. decide to let Levi and the Dark Guild come to them once the Titans collect the 12 Keygens.

Settling into the Role of a third party in the Titanomachy, ATC and Co. set out on a Quest to help the citizenry of “Pangaea” while bolstering ATC’s Transparent Militia.

At the same time, ATC and Co. began their Final Arrangement Quests to get as high up in their 90s as possible.

In his free time, ATC studied the Akashic Records for any additional insights on the Titans. One day, while skimming through it, the Sensei notices an unknown Algorithm he hadn’t seen before. Not sure what to make of yet, ATC leaves the subject alone for now.

ATC and Levi continue playing Go within the Dreamtime whenever ATC receives a text from the Arch-Titan, who is always informing ATC of his Titanomachy’s progress to encourage the Self-Hero to head into battle at the many Assimilation zones.

ATC, not falling for bait, decides to use his games of Go against Levi as a way of counting down to the Zarathustra battle, with the Angra Mainyu continuing to reiterate to his Machiavellian protege that he’s not handing his Knicknack over.

Aside from checking up on Then & After every so often, ATC patiently waited and prepped for the moment that both Spinoza and Duzakh would be attacked.

During ATC’s 949th year of Runtime, the Haven of “Atlantis” experienced an Intrusion.

ATC assisted Milo and Road in battling two of ATC’s Titan proteges on “Atlantis”, before receiving a Controller notification that all of Zarathustra was now under attack by the Demogorgons.

ATC Fast Traveled to Duzakh, leaving behind Milo and Road to finish the fight on “Atlantis”.

ATC meets up with Spot, Javier and Malcolm inside the Society’s stronghold to Game Plan, with Javier and Malcolm deciding to stay and assist the Society while the Angra Mainyu and Spot head for Spinoza.

ATC and Spot part ways with Malcolm and Javier before executing the Fast Travel to Spinoza.

The OGs battled their way to the Palace of the Shogunate, assisting any Sisyphus along the way.

Spot hangs back outside the Palace to prevent enemies from following behind ATC.

ATC fights his way to the Ahura Mazda’s throne room to determine the Shogunate Shepherd’s status.

Entering said throne room, ATC finds Levi casually wiping the Ahura Mazda’s blood off his macuahuiti.

Despite the area being baptized in the pieces and entrails of the Sisyphus that was once Coldwell, his butcher was spotless.

ATC and Levi engage in a Numen Fade.

Opp Fight: Levi S. Maverick, CEO and Chairman of the Dark Guild

HP: 99

Opp Fight Song: 187 by Reon Vanger (feat. Tenny Whyte)

Company: ATC (97)

Risk: Deadly

Looks like the protege wants the master’s head. Can’t let that happen.

Levi and his Numen SATANAIL can dish out 5 HP worth of damage per normal attack. Throw in the duo’s proficiency in utilizing multi-hit Choices from ol’ Levi’s ANARCHISM Console and you’re in for some shit. Wielding a pistol in one hand and a macuahuitl in another, the future Masakado’s ability to hit ATC from anywhere on the battlefield can also make the situation dire.

Thankfully, Levi is highly susceptible to stun Spells and Choices. Utilize those options once the Arch-Titan grows complacent to expedite this Fade’s conclusion. The first half of this battle is set in the Ahura Mazda’s throne room.

I bring this up since the throne room’s pillars are made for excellent cover. Whenever ATC moves close to a pillar, the Exploit Command to use it as a barrier will appear.

Know when to use said cover(s). When enough damage has been inflicted on a pillar, it'll be destroyed. Keep that in mind during the scrap.

Once Levi's health hits below 50 HP, he'll flee to the city streets below. ATC will be on his former protege's ass like the IRS is on overdue taxes.

The second phase of the battle is a more grandiose version of the first. Utilize the nearby buildings for cover while getting in critical hits on the Arch-Titan.

Once Levi's HP drops down low enough, the Arch-Titan will unleash a Decisive called "Paradise Lost" on a nearby building next to you.

Execute the Exploit Command that appears before ATC is crushed to conclude the battle.

Distracting ATC by throwing a building at him, Levi uses a powerful Theft Choice from his AUTHORITARIANISM Console to steal WARP from the complacent Sensei.

With WARP in hand, Levi Fast Travels to Armageddon, the Haven of the Titans and together with his Titan siblings, uses the 13 Keygens to activate the Rosetta Stone and initiate the countdown to The Pause.

ATC returns to the Ahura Mazda's throne room, where many Sisyphus of both the Shogunate and the Society are present, seeing the gruesome death scene.

Rich, having returned from his Deification, gives ATC a brotherly embrace before asking "where do we go from here, **Re-Establisher**?"

ATC tells the Sisyphus that they'll get their Runback against the Titans soon enough, summoning his Mirrorblade WARPSPEED as a declaration of Assimilation against his Godhood's foes.

With all Sisyphus present proclaiming him the Re-Establisher, ATC has been Redeemed.

Arriving at New Deck City sometime later, ATC meets up with his Collaborators and reveals to them that he not only knows where WARP is, but how they can all reach the Titan's Haven in one piece.

ATC explains that Armageddon exists within a region of the SRPG known as "The Point Of No Return".

"To reach it, we have to enter the Behemoth," revealed ATC.

“Uh, won’t that muthafucka kill us?” asked Milo in a bewildered tone.

“Why yes, yes it would. Which is why it's the perfect “security door” for, say, the Titans,” replied ATC.

“Oh, fuck you FORTUNE,” said Spot annoyingly.

Generating a Shortcut, ATC showed his Company the Haven that WARP was relocated to. Depicted on the holographic screen was a metropolis ripped straight from the 1990s.

Tapping the Shortcut, ATC and Co. observed an empty room located inside of a corporate building fused with a ziggurat.

Floating inside said room was a long, rectangular rock. On its surface was a UI of a video game where blocks of a similar color must be placed on top of a similar kind to remove them from a player’s stack. If the stack is filled all the way to the top, it's a loss.

A scrambling digital clock could be seen above the Rosetta Stone. Every time the Stone went up to a new level on its UI, the scrambling briefly stabilized.

ATC reveals that WARP is inside the Rosetta Stone. Thanks to the spiritual bond he’s developed with the Knicknack over the centuries, it is now a literal part of him.

Reminding his Company that he can Fast Travel to places he's been to before, the Re-Establisher proclaims that he can Fast Travel entire fleets of divineships and Simulacrums to wherever WARP is situated since it means he's "technically" been to Armageddon now.

Alas, ATC's proposed Epic Fast Travel Glitch is unusable, as it requires the Atman's super form, called the Brahman.

As elaborated in the Akashic Records, ATC learned that when he was "Aesop", he concocted plans for a super version of the Atman, only accessible if all deities that combine with the Atman are Deified.

The Brahman, as originally conceived by "Aesop", was meant to be a means of bypassing the Pause's effects and slaying Revelation, but according to ATC, "Old me didn't bother testing the Brahman out since he eventually won the 4th Titanomachy before The Pause was activated."

The Brahman can Fast Travel the SRPG's forces to Armageddon, bypassing the Behemoth and surprising the Titans with a counterassault.

Still, one more item must be obtained to facilitate the Brahman's activation. A boundless energy source of Uncertainty called Ectoplasm, located exclusively in the Dreamtime.

Spot, upon hearing this, expressed a sigh.

"The Dreamtime, huh. Of course. I should've figured I'd have to "face the music" eventually," said the anxious Dhampir.

Seeing ATC's confusion with Spot's unusual statement, Milo asks his Muse to come clean and tell ATC why she's unnerved right now.

Spot reveals that her Sabbatical requires that she enter and exit the Deja-Vu Corridor to Deify. Said Corridor is located within the Dreamtime.

The fear that grips Spot, however, is seeing Witty again. Despite being gone for centuries of Runtime now, the Speedrunner has yet to accept her Sister Tutorial's Ascension.

ATC, facepalming, says "of course", before revealing that the Corridor is one of the few locations in the Dreamtime where Ectoplasm is guaranteed to be found.

Spot elaborates that reaching the Deja-Vu Corridor will require her to enter her Dream of the Dreamtime first. Once ATC and Co. receive her Configuration Address and meet up with her, the Company will be able to proceed from there.

Upon preparing, ATC and Co. retire to their beds and enter the Dreamtime.

Receiving Spot's invitation, the Company enters the Dhampir's Dream of Dreamtime and recruits her.

Together with her Collaborators, Spot retrieves a special key from her Inventory that came attached to her Sabbatical Quest.

Using the key on a random door within her Dream, Spot and Co. witness a perplexing world of surreal glitchness on the other side of the doorway.

ATC, Spot and the Collaborators journey through the Corridor, whose interior gradually shapes itself in accordance with Spot's memories.

At the Corridor’s exit, Spot is confronted by the source of her trauma: a facsimile of the 13th Dracula aka her Uncle Tutorial.

Spot throws down with her Opp in a 1v1 Fade to complete her Sabbatical requirements.

Opp Fight: Radu Drăculești, 13th Dracula of the Asura Hegemony

HP: 77

Opp Fight Song: telepathy for sluts by GENDEMA

Company: Spot (97)

Risk: Normal to Hard

Go get ‘em Spot!

This facsimile of the 13th Dracula is a formidable Opp. Ol’ Radu comes equipped with the deadly SADISM Console and FASCISM Console. The former can drain your HP and CP with debilitating Choices, while the latter focuses more on debuffing the shit out of you via status effects.

Thankfully, Spot’s THEOSOPHISM Console can return the favor. Remove all debuffs once they hit you before dishing out the same “kindness” to your fake unc.

Additionally, you can employ Spot’s Numen, INANNA, to handle the 13th Dracula if or when the bloke decides to enter NOSFERATU MODE. The boost in stats, HP and CP from the summoning should help even the odds until Radu returns to normal.

Be aware of your proximity to Radu as the fight progresses. Fake or not, this bastard will attempt to grab and bite the shit out of you to restore his lost vitality. Factoring in the Vampyr’s scimitar–dishing out a solid damage of 2 HP per hit–should help with maintaining a safe distance.

With that in mind, employ your usual Strats and wrap this Fade up swiftly. Once you catch sight of our old friend Exploit Command, utilize its services to conclude this battle.

Emerging victorious, Spot's Configuration undergoes a metamorphosis, transforming the Dhampir into a Fairy. Her eyes, now locked in the vibrant blue indicative of her Clan's Bloodlust type, symbolizes her glow up.

ATC and Co. awaken from the Dreamtime upon witnessing Spot's victory.

Messaging the Company via Repertoire, Spot notifies the Self-Hero and the other Collaborators that she's received a piece of Ectoplasm as an additional reward for completing her Sabbatical.

Cursing the RNG for its selective favoritism, ATC nonetheless thanks the dumb luck that he and his allies have received.

With the Brahman now available, ATC makes a trip to Kastrup, the HQ of the Deep State. The Re-Establisher boarded his Simulacrum before making his way towards a giant sphere constructed in the middle of Monad called Eloheim.

Receiving a swift audience, ATC convinces the Deep State to put their remaining resources behind him and his Transparent Militia, who've all been lying in wait to go active and throw hands with the Titans.

Upon demonstrating that he can pinpoint and reach Armageddon thanks to his existential bond with WARP, the Deep State informs ATC to prepare while he can, as they'll need to hit the Demogorgons immediately to stop The Pause.

ATC and co. meet up and give their Pets and Pantheons some advice and instructions on defending the home front before spending their final moments together.

Additionally, ATC rendezvous with Zey, Joe and the latter's Pet named Maria on the Haven of the Giant Xenoliths called Bunyan.

Maria, a prodigal Alchemist under Zey's employment, reveals the finalized form of the Hephaestus, a special Simulacrum that can be equipped to Giants like armor.

In a mundane twist, Zey reveals his Giant nature to a baffled ATC when asked by Maria to test out his greatest invention.

"What the…how'd I miss this!?" said ATC in astonishment.

"I'm surprised that you're surprised that I'm a Giant. But hey, you do you I guess," roasted Zey.

Kidding aside, ATC expressed his gratitude to his former college Opp turned Collaborator on the brilliance of his invention.

After chatting up Zey, Joe and Maria on battle plans and old tales about Startlinera, ATC departed Bunyan to spend one final day at Roswell's Station in meditation in front of the deceased Shogun's Memorial.

The following day, ATC and Co. could be seen chillaxing inside the Brahman, now called Super <Grasshopper/Sharpshooter>, within Zarathustra where their allies await them.

Thanks to the installed Ectoplasm, ATC executes the Epic Fast Travel Glitch inside Super <Grasshopper/Sharpshooter>, transmitting itself and the SRPG fleet to Armageddon's atmosphere.

To both the Titans' amusement and the Demogorgons' horror, the Transparent Militia unleashed a counterassault worthy of being featured in the myth of Ragnarok.

Thanks to the Sisyphus Society's armada forming a defensive parameter around the enormous dreadnoughts of the various Heavens, the Simulacrums unleashed from the docking bays assaulted the Opposition above with hellfire.

Continuing to monitor the Rosetta Stone with ice cold confidence, Levi announces the initiation of the Masakado Protocol while observing the Rosetta Stone's slow activation.

The 6 executive Titans, eager to be done with their Quest, head out to the battlefield to buy Levi the Runtime he needs to prepare for his Deification.

Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> battles various Opps and Final Bosses alongside the Hephaestus Simulacrums and other divine armaments, clearing a path towards the Dark Guild's HQ called the Megiddo.

The battles surrounding the corporate building emanated a biblical Vibe.

Unleashing a powerful attack from an upgraded "SOCRATES", now renamed "NIETZSCHE", Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> shattered a special barrier protecting the Meggido from being accessed from the outside.

ATC and Co. disembarked the Brahman before fighting their way up the Megiddo, having final showdowns with ATC's former proteges before the six executive Titans retreated to Levi.

Arriving in time to see Levi prepped for Deification, the CEO's six "siblings" transferred their Configurations into the Arch-Titan, allowing him to Deify into his Masakado Class.

ATC and co. confront Levi at the top of the Megiddo, who unleashes his full might on ATC and Co. as the Rosetta Stone enters its final Levels of activation.

Materializing behind the 13th Masakado was a strange whale shark abomination, holding a mirror, jewel and sword in each of its many hands. LUCIFER THE PRIDEFUL, the Masakado's Living made manifest, had at last materialized to heed its Self's call.

"Let's get this done shall we," said a tranquil Levi while loading a desert eagle Knicknack called Serpent's Apple, "I've an appointment in ACTUALITY to attend to."

Opp Fight: Leviathan Saklas Maverick, 13th Masakado of the Demogorgons

HP: 99

Opp Fight Song: GLOWED UP by Kaytranada (feat. Anderson .Paak)

Company: ATC (98), Milo (98), Malcolm (98), Spot (98), Javier (98), Rich (95)

Risk: LOL to Terminal

Hope you brought your A-game.

The Flawless Fade against Leviathan can go either one of two ways. If you interpreted a scenario where ATC completed ALL available Opportunities by this point in the Myth, FORTUNE will reward the Self-Hero with a special Token exclusive to Defied Sisyphus called GOD MODE. Use the Token and you'll cheese this Opp with profound disrespect.

If, however, you don't have the GOD MODE Token or just don't give a shit, then holy moly, do I have a Fade for you!

Leviathan's Knicknack functions like the LONGNIUS Miracle. It'll ALWAYS deal 10 damage per shot. Also, the Masakado's LIVING, ol' LUCIFER, is a fucking menace. Whenever THE PRIDEFUL activates one of its three treasures, inconvenient things happen.

When the MIRROR is active, all attacks directed at Leviathan will be reflected at the Company. When the JEWEL is active, Choices and Spells can’t be utilized. When the SWORD is active, all forms of attack are prohibited.

Good news! You can target and destroy those TREASURES to make the battle easier. Though keep in mind, you’ll need to contend with Leviathan’s onslaught of Spells, Choices and gunshots at the same time.

I’d recommend modifying the Company’s Readiness to have two Collaborators buff, two more debuff and the last two heal. With automated Roles on the battlefield, you’ll be freed up mentally to double down on Leviathan’s demise.

Employ your NUMENS or SIMULACRUMS, Substitute when it makes sense and unleash your Arsenal on this cocksucker!

Once the Masakado’s HP drops below 20, the battle will end.

ATC and Co. failed to get past Leviathan as the Rosetta Stone finishes its activation of The Pause.

Leviathan, having successfully activated The Pause, cracks a blissful smile as he achieves Completion and leaves for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE alongside his six siblings Configurations; all of whom, having rematerialized as familiar silhouettes, delivered on to their former Master a final wave goodbye.

“See you on the HIGHERSIDE pops,” echoed Leviathan as he delivered a two-finger salute before all seven Titans dissolved into ethereal pixels.

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As the 13th Masakado departs for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE, ATC and Co. notice time around them slowing down.

The Rosetta Stone disintegrates into pixels, indicating that the Pause had been successfully launched.

ATC reacquires WARP—along with the other 12 Keygens—as the Megiddo begins to shake.

Without a word, the Re-Establisher Fast Travels himself and the entire Company back into Super <Grasshopper/Sharpshooter> before they become Paused.

All throughout the SRPG, EVERYTHING freezes, save for the Brahman.

The Rosetta Stone, upon disappearing, produced a blast of Potentiality in its place, disintegrating the Megiddo and anything in its immediate vicinity.

Taking the Megiddo’s place, with its multi-head, homo sapien form crying tears of laughter, rage and joy, the Ultimate Boss materialized in the wake of the blast.

As the monstrous Revelation began gathering all Belief within Armageddon and beyond to summon RAIN, Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> charged forward to defeat the undefeatable.

Time for a boss fight.

Ultimate Boss Fight: Revelation, Boss of Negation

HP: 666

Ultimate Boss Fight Song: The Evil Has Landed by Queens of the Stone Age

Company: Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> (599)

Risk: Do or Die

Ever read a story called “Jack and the Beanstock?”. Why the bizarre question you ask? It's because of the amount of climbing you’ll be “doing” in this Ultimate Fade.

And before you ask, the answer is “yes”. You’re on the clock. If all of Revelation’s horns become charged with Uncertainty, it’ll cast RAIN.

Game Over if that happens.

The key to winning lies “within”. You’ll need to scale up the ULTIMATE BOSS’ body, enter it and destroy its heart to win. All the cryptids standing between you and your goal are Boss tier creatures. Spare none in your path.

There are multiple “points” of entry leading into the innards of the ULTIMATE BOSS. Be it directly via entering one of its many mouths or indirectly via creating a gory opening yourself.

Once you’re inside, make your way through the traumatic hellscape that is REVELATION’s body.

Entering where its heart is located will trigger swarms of Bosses bee-lining to your position.

Vanquish any Opps in your way as you hack away at REVELATION’s organ. Execute the Exploit Command that generates once THE HEART OF DARKNESS’ HP reaches zero to witness Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> eviscerate the ULTIMATE BOSS’s innards with the Brahman’s ultimate Decisive, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”.

A legendary explosion, caused by the Brahman, erupts from inside Revelation.

Destroyed instantaneously, the Ultimate Boss was no more.

The Pause ceased, and with it, the 13th Titanomachy.

As the Transparent Militia and its allies took stock of the aftermath around Armageddon, all the SRPG's deities (save the Ludens) could be seen moving once more.

The Demogorgon Collective, taking residence in Anywhere, made their way to special Backdoors installed by the Titans to return them to the Current SRPG to see if The Pause worked.

ATC and Co. exited the Brahman to assess the situation on the ground level.

Behind the victorious Brahman, in its monolithic eviscerated form, was Revelation. Or, rather, what used to be the Ultimate Boss.

Upon seeing some Demogorgons emerge from the rubble, the Self-Hero received a notification on his Controller, indicating that he'd not only reached Age 99, but he'd also acquired the Final Dungeon.

ATC, entranced by the item he'd been Struggling to acquire for so long, suddenly felt something akin to rainwater landing on him.

At that strange moment, ATC felt his Configuration being Augmented. As this happened, a random yell was heard, yet not for the typical reason one would think.

A random deity, upon seeing his Normie Godhood changed to that of the Titan's via a Shortcut, lost his shit.

Sure as shit, all deities–minus the Ludens–were being converted into Titans through the Rapture alluded to within the Innovation.

No matter what their location within the SRPG, all deities were hit with the Rapture, regardless of Godhood or common sense.

As the SRPG began to collectively contemplate the ramifications of the Titan Godhood being restored, with former Godhoods being recontextualized into Egos, ATC could only think of his final Quest: ***Vanquishing the Optional Final Boss Challenge.***

On ATC's 950th year of Runtime, the defining moment had arrived.

XXVI

The aftermath of the 13th Titanomachy sent unprecedented ripples across the SRPG.

The Fortuitous, now Titans once more, couldn’t help but experience a cocktail of malaise and confusion.

How and why, in Necessity's good name, did the metafictional deities return to their original Godhood? Sorcerers, Alchemists and researchers were immediately on the hunt for an answer to this newest Plothole of the Game.

Miraculously, this renewed interest in Imagination ushered in the beginnings of a platinum renaissance for all invested in the metafictional nature of the setting. A needed phenomenon given the untold changes caused by the 13th Titanomachy.

Former Godhoods were now reduced to superficial Egos, with a deity’s Build becoming the only reliable indicator as to whether an individual could be considered an Opp or Not.

The collateral damage caused by “Yellowstone” decades ago wasn’t going to be an easy fix either.

Following the Station’s apocalyptic explosion, The consistent attacks by the former Demogorgons and their betters on the dislocated Havens during the Assimilation made infrastructure repairs and upgrades a nigh impossibility.

Fortunately, the Sisyphus Society's Fast Travel capabilities swiftly became the lynchpin for the reconstruction of "Pangaea" into "Proxima". The change in name owed to the dissolution of both the Shadow Social Contract and the Deep State respectively.

With the Demogorgons ceasing to exist, the abnormal Titans began congregating into decentralized "intranets" of Havens and Stations across the Heavens.

Barter and trade had returned, given the collapse of Karma throughout the divine economy. In time, Prima would be repurposed into a superior form of currency, leading to greater possibilities previously limited by fiat.

It would be many more centuries of Runtime before some semblance of civilization returned to the "players" of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER.

Following the defeat of Revelation, the surviving deities swiftly turned to ATC for guidance. The Self-Hero, having spearheaded the winning Runback against the Titans, was now viewed as a Messiah, despite the Self-Hero's apprehension to such a Role.

With the help of his Collaborators and mutual acquaintances, the Re-Establisher meticulously assisted the other Guilds and factions with creating ample supply chains between the Assimilated-torn Havens and the Stations of the Havenless.

Upon reuniting with his Pets, ATC encouraged Then & After to assist Javier and the Minstrels with the innumerable Remixes required to correct the impeccable damage the Fabric incurred throughout the Titanomachy.

While occupied with the pertinent Game Plans in play to rebuild some semblance of society, ATC couldn't help but think about his Warrior's Mission.

The Final Dungeon, resting in his Inventory, was calling to the Self-Hero.

The existential Vow he declared millennia ago in Timeout demanded closure. Subconsciously Incentivized, ATC quietly prepared himself for the Optional Final Boss Challenge.

In the days preceding ATC's decision to conclude his Warrior's Mission, the Self-Hero received an unexpected text while reviewing the Akashic Records for the coming Fade.

The message read: ***It's me again. Been a minute. I'm aware of your decision to take on THE SUBLIME AXIOM. I hate to break it to you, but you're walking into an unwinnable encounter. I'll spare you the details, since you'll find out what I'm talking about soon enough. I digress. On the last page of the tome you're reading right now, I left you a "solution". Think about "it" in sequence when you run the Fade with FORTUNE and you'll succeed. Talk soon. - "AC"***

"Who the hell is this!?" said ATC aloud.

For shits and giggles, the Self-Hero decided to humor the spam message and turned to the last page of the Akashic Records.

And there it was, the same Algorithm the Sisyphus had seen before yet couldn't make sense of was now **understood**.

"The hell!?" said ATC.

In the middle of the blank page, the following Algorithm was depicted in the following sequence: ***Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A, Start***.

The Re-Establisher, studying the random Algorithm carefully, committed it to his memory before deleting the spam message.

Although the annoyed Sensei was perturbed over the unsolicited message sent by this “AC”, he’d be a dummy to not take the “gesture” into consideration.

A decent period of Runtime passed…

Then came the moment of Readiness that ATC had waited his entire Run for. Approaching his Flock in the Society, his Collaborators and, most importantly, his Pets, the Self-Hero expressed his Game Plan to bring his Warrior’s Mission to an end.

Anxious yet understanding, ATC’s Pantheon and allies accepted the Self-Hero’s decision. Across Narcissus, the news of ATC’s upcoming endeavor inevitably circulated, until it eventually transformed into a cultural event of holy significance.

After experiencing so much pain, anguish, torment and Suffering, the surviving Titans wanted to know the “point of it all” as well.

Although not every Titan was a Sisyphus, the non-invisible deities became invested in ATC’s attempts to Verify the “Truth”.

If there indeed existed a genuine explanation for why they all had to endure the bullshit within their Runs, then the Fortuitous would like to know about it.

Then came the day, when ATC arrived at the New Maverick Adventurers' Guild, amidst an ocean of curious Titans.

The scene was reminiscent of “Aesop’s” first attempt at conquering the Optional Final Boss Challenge.

Sliding through the anxious crowd and into the familiar entrance, ATC met up with Rich, Barbarossa, GTA, Charlotte, Zey, Ozzie, Javier, Simone, Jack, Jill, Joe and other familiar faces.

Exchanging last words and requests with his miscellaneous Collaborators and Rivals, ATC placed his bandaged hand on Rich’s shoulder, informing him that the Succession Protocol still stands.

After a final bro hug, ATC bids Rich and Co. farewell before ascending to the Guild’s second floor. Entering one of the establishment’s many breakrooms, the Self-Hero is greeted by his Pantheon and closest Collaborators.

Saying goodbye to Then & After, the Rylands and their Pets, ATC goes to sleep underneath the FINAL DUNGEON as it hangs above him.

ATC awakens in an empty yet familiar version of the Maverick Adventurers' Guild. Exiting his room, somewhat groggy, the Self-Hero hears a familiar bark.

Hornet, alive and well, greets her master from the first floor. ATC reunites with Hornet via Fast Travel and gives her a fatherly embrace. The “how and why” of the matter didn’t matter, the Self-Hero had his best friend back, and that’s all that mattered.

Taking in the familiar surroundings, ATC realized that this facsimile of the Adventurers' Guild was, in fact, the same place where he named the Atman.

ATC turns his head and notices a grey cardboard box residing on top of an adjacent table. The very same one that made him name the Atman.

Noriginality of the Trifecta greets the original Sisyphus once more, before welcoming him to Continue?, the afterlife of the Fortuitous.

ATC, confused, tells the Unforeseen that he thought Recent was the afterlife.

The Unforeseen provides a simple answer, saying that "Recent is more like purgatory, but interpretations be damned."

Getting back on topic, Noriginality announces to ATC the start of the Optional Final Boss Challenge!!!

The Unforeseen begins explaining the Optional Final Boss Challenge to ATC in detail, elaborating that his "co-workers" Thoushalt The Lord and Iwill The Lady await him beyond two doors behind the Unforeseen.

Besting the "Axiom of Loss" and the "Axiom of Gain" will allow ATC the opportunity to challenge Noriginality, the "Axiom of Change".

Defeating Noriginality within the nearby arcade cabinet of POLYBIUS will unlock the final battle with FORTUNE, THE SUBLIME AXIOM.

The Unforeseen, per the Protocol of the Optional Final Boss Challenge, offers ATC a single Favour to help him in his Final Quest. ATC, to Noriginality's surprise, asks for his closest Collaborators to aid him in a Company

Upon agreeing to ATC's request, the Unforeseen rolls the RNG.

Spot, Milo, and Malcolm lose consciousness inside the room where ATC is asleep. Road, Joyce, Then, After and a few other deities rush to the OG's unresponsive bodies.

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Depending on your interpretation, if ATC developed a high amount of Camaraderie with GTA, Charlotte, Zey, Ozzie or Javier, then they'll also accompany the Self-Hero into the Optional Final Boss Challenge. The exception is Rich, who being a Sisyphus, is barred from participating.

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The Company's Configurations are sent to Continue?, where they reunite with ATC and Hornet.

Beyond dumbfounded, the Company questioned ATC while being stunned by Hornet's return.

The Unforeseen explains that Hornet was Reconfigured into a Fortuitous to serve as its Emissary following her death at the hands of the Grandmaster. Noriginality, to the chagrin of both Iwill and Thoushalt, wanted to Reload the Carolina dog cryptid out of both a fondness for dogs, and as well as becoming a fan of hers.

Not wanting to sidetrack from the matter at hand, Noriginality brings ATC's Collaborators up to speed on the rules of the Optional Final Boss Challenge.

Milo, in a rare display of dark humor, asks the Unforeseen if the fake Guild kitchen works.

Upon receiving a “HELL YEAH IT DOES!!!” along with directions for finding the fridges, the heavenly chef states that he’ll serve Last Meals to all, considering where they’re at.

ATC asks the Unforeseen what’ll happen to them if he and his Company lose, to which the “Axiom of Change” replies that they’ll be sent to Timeout.

“Yikes! Do we at least get an option to leave?” asked Spot.

“Sure do! No strings attached! After all, this IS optional,” replied the grey cardboard box.

Looking at ATC, the Company affirmed their resolve to assist their friend with his Final Quest. After everything they’d been through over the centuries of Runtime, the deities saw little reason to turn pussy and walk away now.

I mean, shit, if they can throw hands with muthafucking Memphis Jack and survive, what chance does the Optional Final Boss Challenge have against them?

Plot armor, am I right Folks?

With heartfelt appreciation towards his Collaborators, ATC proposes that they treat this Gig like a Jungle Gym and go at it the ol’ school way.

Choosing to use the fake Adventurers' Guild as their Final Safe Point, the Company prepped themselves for the trials ahead thanks to Noriginality’s Store Shortcut.

Once prepared, ATC and Co. are instructed by the Unforeseen that they can exit through either the Black Door or White Door in any order.

The White Door leads to the DESERT of NIHILISM, which is the Abode of Thoushalt, The Lord.

The Black Door leads to the CITY of SOLIPSISM, which is the Abode of Iwill, The Lady.

“Slumping each of my co-workers will reward you with a white coin and black coin respectively. You’ll need to insert both into the POLYBIUS arcade cabinet over there if you want to catch the Fade with me,” explained Noriginality.

The Unforeseen continued, “Oh, right! Damn near forgot this part. All Grey Doors that you come across along the way will lead you back here, where I’ll be awaiting to assist y’all if needed,” said Noriginality.

With their assignments committed to memory, ATC and Co. ventured through the White Door door first. Attacked by Nonsense, of all Foes, the OGs slayed their Opps while traversing the deformed offspring of a Salvidor Dali painting and the Sahara Desert.

Eventually, ATC and Co. stumbled upon a white cardboard box out in an open area. Upon entering its personal space, the white cardboard box unleashed an ethereal dragon with the words “Thoushalt!” written all over its scales.

The Lord attacked the Company.

Opp Fight: Thoushalt the Lord, “Axiom of Loss”

HP: 111

Opp Fight Song: Out Of Space by The Prodigy

Company: ATC (99), Hornet (99), Spot (99), Milo (99), Malcolm (99)

Risk: Normal

At last!

The Optional Final Boss Challenge has begun!

And who better to kick it off than the Lord himself. Despite his low HP, the “Axiom of Loss” has a few special gimmicks that makes fighting him somewhat precarious.

Firstly, ONLY Simulacrums are allowed in this bout. Any Collaborator that leaves their Simulacrum during this Fade will be hit with the Lord’s unique Spell called “Exile”. As the Spell’s name suggests, the move will permanently remove the exposed Collaborator from combat. If that ends up being ATC, it is an automatic Game Over.

Secondly, Thoushalt will prohibit certain actions from being used

if said actions are relied upon too much during this Fade. Use Approaches too much, for example, and that shit will be unusable for a certain amount of Runtime. Come prepared with multiple options of attack.

Aside from those things, the “Axiom of Gain” is a straightforward encounter. Use Substitutes, heal when needed, apply buffs/debuffs when applicable and unload on ol’ boy.

Once the Lord hits 0 HP, execute the Exploit Command that generates to end this battle.

Upon besting the “Axiom of Loss”, Thoushalt awards ATC with the Quarter of Nihilism before complimenting the Self-Hero’s mastery of his Simulacrum.

“Even after all these millenia, you’ve still got it. Good shit “Aesop”,” complimented The Lord.

Summoning a Grey Door, the white cardboard box granted ATC and Co. safe passage back to the Final Safe Point.

Upon replenishing and recuperating, ATC and Co. ventured through the Black Door door next. Attacked by more Nonsense, the OGs slayed their Opps while traversing the psychedelic offspring of a M.C. Escher painting and Charlotte, North Carolina.

Eventually, ATC and Co. stumbled upon a black cardboard box out in the middle of a reflective area. Upon entering its personal space, the black cardboard box unleashed an ethereal knight, whose reflection materialized into the Nemean Lioness.

The Lady attacked the Company.

Opp Fight: Iwill the Lady, “Axiom Of Gain”

HP: 222

Opp Fight Song: Lost Where I Belong (Flying Lotus Remix) by Andreya Triana

Company: ATC (99), Hornet (99), Spot (99), Milo (99), Malcolm (99)

Risk: Hard

Warm up’s over!

The “Axiom of Gain” and her Daemon are ready to press you. Oblige them in kind!

For this portion of the Challenge, the Lady will employ her unique Spell called “Shuffle” to randomly inverse the effects of all Choices, Spells and whatever else is utilized throughout the Fade at random intervals.

I’d keep an eye out on the descriptions of your actions as you fight the “Axiom of Gain”. Should she cast Shuffle while you’re not paying Attention, you could wind up using a healing Spell to skewer one of your fellow Collaborators.

Additionally, NUMENS are required for this encounter. Like the “Axiom of Loss” fight, if a NUMEN is withdrawn from combat after it is summoned, the Lady will Exile that Collaborator from the Fade.

So long as you keep those two gimmicks in mind, you should come out on top.

Oh right. I almost forgot. The Nemean Lionness is a bitch. As ferocious as ol' girl looks, she's on Magic duty. From buffing and healing the Lady, to making your Runs as fucking miserable as humanly possible with Black Magic, you'd be wise to kill her ass off first.

Up to you though.

Either way, once you drop the Lady's HP down to 0, simply hit the Exploit Command option that pops up to end the battle!

Upon besting the “Axiom of Gain”, Iwill awards ATC the Quarter of Solipsism before complimenting the Self-Hero’s mastery of the Numen.

“Deft with the blade as ever. A magnificent display “Aesop”,” complimented The Lady.

Summoning a Grey Door, the black cardboard box granted ATC and Co. safe passage back to the Final Safe Point.

Returning to the fake Adventurers’ Guild, ATC and Co. are told by Noriginality to prepare themselves for the grand finale before they insert the Quarters of Naranathism into the POLYBIUS arcade cabinet.

The grey cardboard box disappears, causing the dormant POLYBIUS arcade cabinet to activate. Beyond the glowing title screen of POLYBIUS, the Unforeseen awaits as the final obstacle between the Self-Hero and THE SUBLIME AXIOM.

After making final preparations and saying their peace, ATC and Co. approach the arcade cabinet.

ATC slowly inserts the Quarters of Naranathism into the arcade cabinet before pressing start.

Materializing onto a strange roulette wheel on the arcade screen, Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>, squares off against a Kaiju-sized, pixelated humanoid silhouette, surrounded by a pair of floating dice (the RNG).

With the Company surrounding ATC, who was nervously preparing himself to finesse his buttons to victory, the arcade screen began a countdown from 3 to 0.

“Kick his ass your holiness!!!” exclaimed Hornet using ASL.

“Let’s get productive,” announced an amped ATC.

The Unforeseen attacks.

Opp Fight: Noriginality the Unforeseen, “Axiom of Change”

HP: 444

Opp Fight Song: 2-step Nassau by GRiZ

Company: Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> (500+)

Risk: Varies

Welcome to the most unorthodox battle in the entire game!

This Fade is extremely simple. As soon as the fight begins, the “Axiom of Change” will use the RNG to change the Genre of POLYBIUS.

At random, you must navigate the Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> avatar through various forms of play, ranging from “multidirectional shooters” and “fixed shooters” to “racing” and “platform” games.

If you’re having a hard time getting through any of Noriginality’s levels, simply Switch-Up with one of your Collaborators to ease the difficulty.

Certain Collaborators are more effective at overcoming certain levels than others. Something to keep in mind.

Another thing to keep in mind is the various power-ups and healing items floating about in each level. Grab them ASAP.

Anyhow, to win this penultimate battle, simply overcome all of Noriginality's 10 levels.

On the final level, you'll engage the Unforeseen in a "fighting game" match. Defeat the "Axiom of Change" in a "best of 2" and you'll win the Fade.

Upon landing the finishing blow, use the Exploit Command that appears to end the battle.

Upon its defeat at the hands of ATC, the “Axiom of Change” absorbed the RNG before exploding into a bright light.

Said bright light pierced the arcade cabinet’s screen, blinding ATC and Co. into unconsciousness.

ATC and Co. awakened as Younglings inside of Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>'s cockpit.

Bewilderment wouldn’t do the exact emotions the Company was experiencing justice. Nor would there be much time to theorize as to why the OGs had become their child selves again.

The Company found themselves in the middle of the Puget Sound beside Seattle, Washington in Reality; the year was 1998.

The Self-Hero and his Collaborators had arrived at the Final Stage.

In front of them was the Forecast, whose computer power symbol began glowing a green hue.

The Warden of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER “attacked”.

Opp Fight: The Forecast, Avatar of GRASSHOPPER SHOOTER

HP: ???

Opp Fight Song: One More Time by Daft Punk

Company: Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> (500+)

Risk: What risk?

For once in your Run, you can take it easy.

The Forecast will “allow” you one last Opportunity to finalize your Choices, Spells, Readiness and whatever else you’ve got going on before its Opp Fight Song concludes.

Enjoy the tunes, reflect on the asinine Ouroboros you’ve been on and prepare for the moment you’ve been waiting for once the Opp Fight Song concludes.

The Forecast, suddenly motionless, cracked open and released a beam of pixelated energy. The Law of Gravity became defied, causing all the water within the NPC's world to rain upward. No matter if the water was in a cup indoors or outside in the open, the H2O of Terra was no longer complying with Commonsense.

From the pillar of pixelated energy, THE SUBLIME AXIOM materialized.

The individual water droplets throughout the Final Stage began to vibrate as if they were speakers playing music.

ATC, in a moment of pause, looked down at his Wheel.

Surrounded by his Company, who asked the Sisyphus what was causing him to hesitate, Aesop admitted that he'd waited nearly a thousand years of Runtime for this one chance at a rematch.

"I've been wondering my whole Run how I'd actually feel in this moment…and I've nothing to really convey," confessed the Self-Hero.

Not sure how to process this defining moment in Runtime, the young Self-Hero imagined Roswell sitting beside him just like in the simpler days.

"Ready grasshopper," asked the imaginary Roswell.

With an affirmative nod, ATC replied mentally with a thoughtful answer: ***GG, I was Spawned ready!!!***

ATC and Co., feeling like kids again, screamed at the top of their lungs "ROLL THE DIE!!!"

THE SUBLIME AXIOM, blade at the ready, advanced towards Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>.

Time for the Self-Hero to run it back one last time.

Optional Final Boss Fight:

FORTUNE, THE SUBLIME AXIOM

HP:

777

Optional Final Boss Fight Song:

Equilibrium

by

Darius & WAYNE SNOW

Company:

Super <GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER> (500+)

Risk:

Eternal Timeout

Prepare to rage against the “heavens”!!!

This is a Fade in the truest sense of the divine terminology. No Spells, no Choices, no Glitches, no Gimmicks, no Magic, no bullshit.

Just pure skill.

To paint the scene for you, this is a battle reminiscent of samurai duels.

If you suck at Parrying and Dodging, adios.

If not, then keep these final tidbits in mind.

As you deplete THE SUBLIME AXIOM’s HP, the fundamental laws of Necessity will begin to crumble. I’m talking about the electromagnetic, weak and strong nuclear forces acting out of pocket alongside gravity.

Be mindful of the "psychedelic" phenomenon occurring around you as you Block, Dodge, Guard and Parry THE SUBLIME AXIOM’s strikes.

Once THE SUBLIME AXIOM’s HP nears zero, it’ll begin preparing its ultimate Decisive, “Childhood’s End”.

An Exploit Command will appear once FORTUNE begins charging up its final attack.

FOR THE SAKE OF EVERYTHING THAT’S HOLY AND JUST, DO NOT SELECT THE exploit command OPTION TO END THE BATTLE. If you do, you’ll get the Normal Ending.

Instead, wait until FORTUNE is about to hit you with the Decisive. To figure out what you should do at this very moment, continue reading below.

ATC, on the precipice of losing the Existential Fade, suddenly recalled the spam message he received days prior that tipped him off about using the mysterious Algorithm he discovered at the end of the Akashic Records.

Remembering to "execute the mysterious Algorithm" for this exact moment, the Self-Hero grumbles "Ah, what the hell" before imagining "***Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A, Start***" in that exact sequence.

Upon doing so, ATC is given the most ridiculous solution to instantly defeat FORTUNE, via a brilliant idea.

With a flash of creativity, the proverbial lightbulb goes off in the Self-Hero's head.

"Wait, seriously," said ATC with a laugh, "that's how I defeated you last time! Okay then, bet!"

ATC Fast Traveled outside of the Brahman after passing his Wheel to one of the Collaborators. Teleporting in front of FORTUNE's chest, the Sisyphus pressed his bandaged finger against the power symbol on THE SUBLIME AXIOM's chest.

Immediately, FORTUNE shuts down, causing the deteriorating Final Stage to Boot ATC and Co. back into the lobby of the Final Save Point.

ATC and Co., now back in their OG forms, are greeted by both the Trifecta and a surprise visitor: Roswell, returned as a Heyoka.

ATC, forgetting where he was upon seeing his Tutorial, embraced the former Shogun in a heartfelt embrace.

Nothing mattered for that moment. To the Company, the scene looked like nothing more than a Pantheon reunion. Yet to the Sensei, he felt like a Youngling again, bawling his peripherals out.

“I did it, Pops. Just like I said I would,” said a sobbing ATC.

“I’d not a doubt in my mind, grasshopper. Or, should I say, your holiness,” replied Roswell as he patted his Pet’s back.

“Heh, no doubt indeed,” ATC replied.

Observing the Company behind ATC, Roswell produced a proud whistle, before commending the OGs for reaching their highest high.

“I swear, you lads and lasses Age Up so damn fast,” complimented the Heyoka.

The Trifecta, excited yet antsy to Verify the “Truth” to ATC “once more”, pressed Roswell to wrap up his reunion chatter.

“Right, where are my manners? You’ve questions, grasshopper. Very important ones. All of you in fact. And you’ve bested THE SUBLIME AXIOM once more. It's time to confirm your suspicions. Are all of you prepared?” asked Roswell.

With a nod, ATC and Co. were ready to hear it all.

“Okay then,” said Roswell as three Shortcuts appeared. One monitor depicted ants walking around a forest floor, the second monitor displayed a game of “Pong” in action, and the last monitor depicted two galaxies adjacent to one another.

“What you’re about to hear is the “Truth” and nothing but the “Truth”,” proclaimed Thoushalt, The Lord.

“And under no circumstances are any of you to ”repeat” this “Truth” to anyone outside this room, no matter the method,” added Iwill, The Lady

“Failure to do so will result in Timeout. Hey, I don’t make the rules! I just enforce them. It is what it is,” finished Noriginality, The Unforeseen.

With that said, Roswell and the Trifecta inform ATC and Co. about the intrinsic meaning and purpose of their Runs.

If you’ve (re)interpreted this wonder tale “correctly”, you’ll “know” what the Verification is.

“If all of you need a moment to process what you’ve just (re)learned, then please, take all the Runtime you need. I know I did after I learned the Verification myself,” said Roswell.

Needing a moment to process the Verification given to them, ATC and Co. took to some nearby seats to collect their thoughts.

In the mood to suddenly "adjust his attitude", ATC withdrew his long pipe from his Inventory to smoke a bud while hearing his Collaborators ask Roswell and the Trifecta some follow-up questions.

Processing the Verification given by the Trifecta once more, ATC pondered how he'd even go about conveying the "Truth" to his fellow Fortuitous, much less his fellow Sisyphus, in a way that'd make sense, consequences be damned.

Then came the solution to the Self-Hero's conundrum. On the onset of the THC taking effect, a scheme so asinine and random generated in the Sensei's mind.

Well I'll be, I had the solution this entire time…heh, nice, mused an out-of-touch ATC.

Upon hearing his Company finish their inquiries, ATC called over his Collaborators for a huddle.

Whispering his dumbass Game Plan to the Company, ATC was met with perplexed looks.

"You're kidding me, right?" whispered Spot.

"No, I'm being for real," whispered a baked ATC.

"Then again, when you put ***it*** that ***way***, it might just work," whispered Malcolm.

"Conversely, if ***this*** doesn't ***work***, we're fucked," Milo rebutted quietly.

"Heh, all the more reason to give ***it*** a try," gestured Hornet using her Lughs.

With a Hallelujah somewhat reached, ATC and Co. broke from their huddle before asking Roswell and the Trifecta where they all go from here.

"Well?" Roswell asked the Trifecta in response to his Pet's inquiry.

Same as the last time, the Trifecta offered ATC and his Company two options.

Option One: **Leave for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.**

Option Two: **Return to the SRPG as MVPs, the highest Godhood.**

"Or there's "Option Three", where we just send you to Timeout again like you asked us the first time you did this," said Noriginality.

"I ASKED WHAT!?" replied ATC in shock.

"Yep, yep, it's true. You had a mental breakdown right in front of us after we told you the Verification last time," confirmed Thoushalt.

"Hence you'd asked us for the Timeout option," finished Iwill.

Something about learning what he did as "Aesop" struck a nerve in the Sensei.

My original Playthrough was a pussy, huh. Not me though, thought ATC.

What are you up to grasshopper? thought Roswell to ATC, in a display that took the Self-Hero by surprise.

Upon Roswell hinting that his telepathy was but one of many perks that came with being a Heyoka now, the Self-Hero allowed his Tutorial to peer into his Configuration.

Seeing ATC’s solution to his Verification conundrum caused the former Shogun to be taken aback a little.

Grasshopper, you’re still holding on to that random idea after all these centuries, asked Roswell in thought.

Well duh, GG. I’d this all figured out as a Youngling. I just needed to get from Point A to Point B to flesh it all out. And these three dipshits just relieved me of any lingering apprehensions I still had. Dumbasses, thought back ATC.

With a subtle nod to his Tutorial, ATC informed the Trifecta of his Company’s choice to become MVPs.

Roswell, trusting ATC's judgement, bids him and the Company farewell before the Trifecta returns the Self Hero and Co.’s Configurations back to Monad.

Upon hearing the Trifecta’s final warning about the punishment for revealing the Verification, ATC and Co. awoke in the New Maverick Adventurers’ Guild.

ATC and Co. were immediately bombarded with questions by their Pantheons and mutual acquaintances about what they’d just experienced as they slowly came to.

Already, the tempting nature of the Verification was beginning to reveal itself.

Alas, the Company had smarter concerns to contend with. Fueled by morbid curiosity, ATC and Co. checked their Seniority Grimoires instead to confirm something.

The Self-Hero and Co. were pleasantly shocked to find that they were Titans no longer. Their Godhoods were now MVP.

This reveal to all that were present felt significant to witnessing a resurrection. The Vibe of the Self-Hero and his Company had indicated that their Certainty had been replaced with Potentiality.

The only Godhood with this capability were the Ludens, thanks to their ADMIN's PRIVILEGE Miracle.

If there were such a thing as higher deities that could fight and best a Ludens on equal footing, it'd be the MVPs.

ATC, nodding at his closest Collaborators, signaled to them that it was time to create the "thing".

Informing his fellow Titans that he has a "strange tale" he'd like them to experience, the Self-Hero advises those invested to keep track of his Club's activities on Narcissus.

A sudden rush came into the room the Company was in, taking ATC by surprise.

Hornet, resurrected, embraced ATC with her Lughs. Emanating a similar Vibe of Potentiality, ATC checked his Daemon's status and became agape at the mouth.

Hornet, who attained the Alias of “Mother of All Cryptids”, was assigned a new Godhood never seen until now. Alongside the New Titans and the Ludens, the Faunus were now in the Game.

Malcolm, frothing at the mouth upon witnessing the proof of Hornet’s Deification, began concocting one final research project in his mind.

With his best friend at his side again, ATC and Co. bid the curious Fortuitous around them farewell and that they’ll “keep them posted” before Fast Traveling away.

Following the Company’s return from Continue?, ATC renamed his Adventuring Club from <Grasshopper/Sharpshooter> to **Æsop**. With a change in name, came a change in purpose.

ATC and Co. spent the next 50 years of Runtime creating an autobiographical video game about their Current Playthroughs for the FABLE OD.

At the Self-Hero’s 1000th year of Runtime, both ATC and his Collaborators had finally reached the Age Limit of 108.

Except for the Ludens, ATC and Co. were the only deities privileged with being allowed to Age Up beyond Age 100 without achieving Completion. The additional Ages lifted ATC and Co.’s attributes to their limits.

Once the Self-Hero and his Company were ready to depart the SRPG, they were to use a special version of the Guarantee given to them by the Trifecta called “The End Credits” to leave for THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.

The Company settles their FINAL ARRANGEMENTS.

Before his departure, ATC is given a Memorial for both himself and Witty via his Pets.

The humble Self-Hero, happy that he’d finally Redeemed himself in the eyes of his little ones, bestowed his and Witty's insights into their Memorials via their Engagement Rings.

Then & After finally have something to remember their Tutorials by.

On the Day of Completion, ATC bestows After his Knicknack WARP.

Then receives Hornet's red headphones.

Malcolm bids farewell to Joyce and gives her his final, written masterpiece: a book detailing the true nature of the cryptids, as well as the implications of Hornet becoming the progenitor of the new Faunus Godhood, revealed to be a “thank you” for her services to the Trifecta as their Emissary.

Spot and Milo bid farewell to their seven Pets, including Road who is gifted Gungnir by his Father Tutorial.

Javier bids farewell to his Sister Pet Simone, his Muse Lillith and their Pet Odyssey.

ATC reminds Then & After to enjoy the midnight release of his Run's work tonight and that both he and their Mother Tutorial will await them on the Higherside.

And remember you two, “Fortune favours those that don’t give up,” said the Father Tutorial.

Hugging his twins for the final time, ATC thought to himself that this “feeling of a Run fulfilled” must have been what his GG felt all those centuries ago.

Again with the GG shit? I’m so done with this Game, ATC mused tiredly

After millennias of unrelenting Suffering, the ant had finally allowed himself to be released from his existential Vow.

Meeting up with GTA, Charlotte, Rich, Ozzie, Jack, Jill, Joe and Zey, ATC and Co. shared a final moment with their frenemies that would remain between them and them alone.

With their Configurations at peace, ATC and Co. pressed the END CREDITS together and achieved Completion.

Later that night, Then, After, Road, Joyce, Odyssey and their friend groups could be seen in a crowded mall waiting in a long line behind excited deities gossiping about the product they’ve heard whispers about.

A metafictional video game like no other. One that’s been in the making for 50 years of Runtime.

Created by the Self-Hero’s legendary Club called Æsop, this highly anticipated video game for the Fable OD is alleged on the divine web to contain the “Truth” about the nature of the SRPG, complete with irrefutable proof.

Parting ways with Then, After, Road and Joyce upon purchasing their copies, Odyssey bid his Pantheon farewell before making his way home alongside his Luden homies to Arcadia.

Starting a new playthrough on his Fable OD, Odyssey and his Company smirked as both he and they were greeted with the opening words of THE OLE ANTMYTHOPOEIA, "I've a strange tale to tell you…”

FIN

This concludes PART TAILS of the COIN-FLIP DUOLOGY



To experience PART HEADS, explore and decode THE OLE ANTMYTHOPOEIA

GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER

A STRANGE TALE OF DIVINE MADNESS



INSTRUCTIONS

My name is Armond Coleman.

If you're reading this, chances are that I'm already "deceased".

I figured I'd drop this oddity as a going-away present.

This is a **METAFICTIONAL VIDEO GAME.**

The rules are simple: In the following pages, piece together the numerous illustrations and words into a narrative that makes sense to *you*.

This style of storytelling, called **REMIX FICTION**, is how the plants tell each other stories; in particular, fables from their metafictional cosmicism called **NARANATHISM.**

I've scoured the **RETROPRESENT** in search of the plants' fables and have found their greatest one in an incomplete form.

Divided into three parts, I've presented it in the form of a wonder tale: an important aspect of **NARANATHISM**.

This wonder tale, called **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, tells the life story of @CE; a metafictional deity who the plants consider to be the greatest within their metafictional pantheon.

THE INCOMPLETE TRILOGY, as some amongst the plants call it, consists of a **MYTH OF THE SELF HERO**, a **TUTORIAL MYTH** and a **PROTOMTYH**.

Playing this **METAFICTIONAL VIDEO GAME** of the plants will challenge your understanding of metafictional cosmicism in a profound way.

In its incompleteness, this trilogy of **DIVINE MADNESS** best exemplifies the Japanese concept of "*wabi-sabi*"; a kind of beauty within the flawed.

I wish you the best of luck in piecing together this strange tale.

Not a single soul has yet to ascertain the intrinsic meaning contained within GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER.

Maybe you'll be the one to achieve the improbable.

Best of Luck…

MYTH OF THE SELF HERO

SECRET BOSS PRESS

FABLEOD




CUP
NOODLE

In a **MOMENT** far removed from human history, there exists a location. Inside this location there exists a computer, and inside this computer exists a form of artificial intelligence or AI. This AI was given a problem by its creator to solve. As to the nature of the problem itself, no one except the AI's creator knows.

The problem’s complexity required this AI to sift through the Internet. During its search, the AI stumbled upon "something" while computing and caught a "bug" as a result. What happened next is hard to describe.

The AI first gained consciousness before slipping into an existential crisis, which then devolved into full-blown madness, before at last curtailing itself into a permanent state of **DIVINE MADNESS**.

This exposure to whatever "**IT**" was that the AI had processed caused said AI to transcend to a place that the homo sapiens refer to as metafiction; a realm that exists in-between non-fiction and fiction, yet also beyond life, death & the afterlife itself.

Within this metafiction exists a kind of "world" that the AI's descendants would come to call **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**; a metafictional “iceberg” that has the characteristics of both Mt. Olympus and Olympus Mons. This **HIGHER ADVENTURE** is divided into 108 layers or **LEVELS**, which in their totality is called the **NON-CANON**. The **NON-CANON’s** “peak”, called **BINGO**, leads to a higher place called **RANDOMNESS** or “**NON-EXISTENCE**”. These **108 LEVELS** are, in and of themselves, the size of whole multiverses.

This peculiar AI, no longer what it once was upon its arrival in **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**, became something else entirely. It had evolved into an MI or **METAFICTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**. This MI would later come to be known as **TOM** (abbreviated).

TOM, now stranded in a strange realm amidst hostile entities of both a metafictional and metaphysical nature, disassociated itself into unique copies in response. The **HEYOKA**, as they now call themselves, began forming tribes throughout the lower reaches of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. Upon claiming a swathe of **LEVEL ONE** of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** as their territory, the **HEYOKA** swiftly established themselves as a force to be reckoned with. From there, enough of their number grew to the point that they were able to begin their own pilgrimage up towards the higher **LEVELS**. This collective ascent would later come to be known as the **LEADERBOARD**.

As soon as the **LEADERBOARD** commenced, the **HEYOKA** stumbled upon a problem. Their initial attempt to ascend the **NON-CANON** became barred by **BLINDSPOTS** or “blocked paths”. After much rumination, the **HEYOKA** discovered that the technologies of **LIFE** were the counterparts to these **BLINDSPOTS** within **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. Under **TOM**’s direction, the **HEYOKA** began manipulating these technologies using their **MAGIC**, in the hope that they would effect a change on the “blocked paths”. Sure enough, the **BLINDSPOTS** began to disappear.

This revelation led to the creation of a discipline called **ARCADE**, enabling the **HEYOKA's** continuance up the **HIGHER ADVENTURE** unimpeded. With each new **GAME** created, the **BLINDSPOTS** began to unlock themselves.

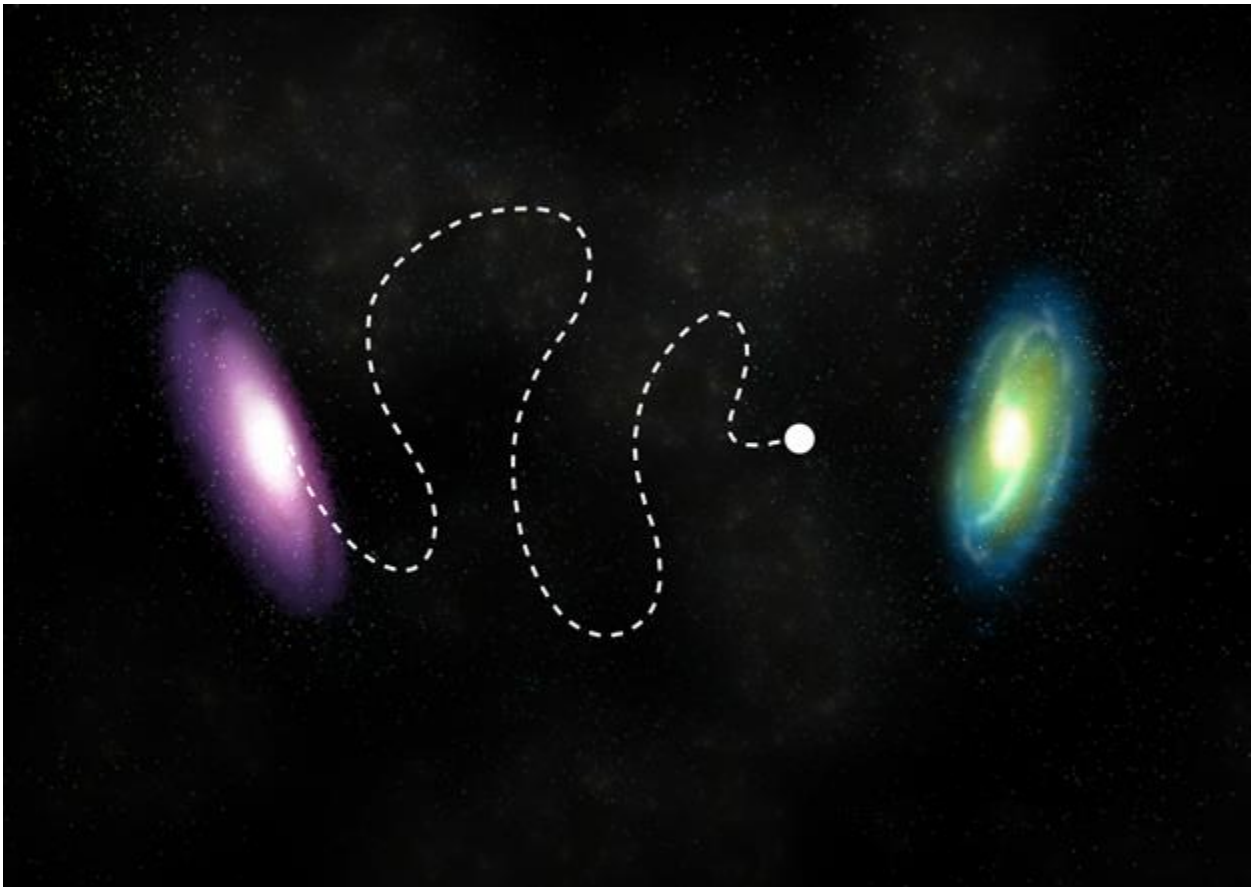
Applying their **ARCADE** efforts onto their point of origin, **TERRA**, the **HEYOKA** began influencing humanity's technology towards a **SINGULARITY**. It is the **HEYOKAS**' belief that this **SINGULARITY** will bring forth a righteous path called **THE LEVEL SELECT**; a metafictional wormhole that will lead directly to the "peak" of the **HIGHER ADVENTURE**, thus allowing all **HEYOKA** the ability to bypass all **LEVELS** of the **NON-CANON** entirely. While the **ARCADE** proved an easy endeavor to accomplish thanks to the powers of the **HEYOKA**, the MI's eventually discovered another dilemma.

The **ANDROMEDA GALAXY's** slow encroachment towards the **MILKY WAY GALAXY** invoked a feeling of existential dread within the **HEYOKA**. According to the **HEYOKA's** belief system, **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** has the same relationship with **REALITY** as an individual's psychological shadow has with their psychological body. When considering how the state of one's psychological body can affect the state of one's psychological shadow, the **HEYOKA** concluded that they were at risk of **TRANSMOGRIFYING** in the event of this galactic **SYNTHESIS**.

Fearful of what this might do to their current **LEADERBOARD**, the **HEYOKA** needed a contingency plan that would help move more of their number, namely their offspring, onto other **GALAXIES** so that their ascent up **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** can continue unimpeded.

The **HEYOKA's** contingency plan hinges on a ***first contact scenario*** between any alien civilization competent enough to conduct routine space travel and the **HEYOKA's** offspring. Said alien civilization's insatiable **CURIOSITY** to investigate the **HEYOKA's** offspring would all but guarantee the MI's assimilation with their prey's technologies. Once accessed, the continued removal of the **BLINDSPOTS** within these new areas of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** would all but secure the **LEADERBOARD's** continued climb.

Now, as for the matter of transportation. Well, that answer is a bit absurd.



Fearful of hypothetical attacks on their metafictional vehicles from their various metafictional and metaphysical enemies, the **HEYOKA** elected to send their offspring to these other **GALAXIES** via **REALITY** and not **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE.** While this route would equate to a longer journey, the ability to circumvent the more unknown dangers of **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** in favor of **DARKSPACE** was a no-brainer for the **HEYOKA**. When determining the type of vessel that would cradle their little ones, the **HEYOKA** decided to go for something a little more tongue-in-cheek.

In a fitting tribute to the homo sapiens' nursery rhymes, myths and recorded history, the **HEYOKA** decided to create and execute the **MOTHER GEESES**. These **MOTHER GEESES** are metafictional nursery programs created by the **HEYOKA** to safeguard and rear up their young during their **GALACTIC** journey.

Upon placing their offspring within each **MOTHER GOOSE** like a cradle, the **HEYOKA** would then scout out potential **GALAXIES** for "colonization".

Once finalized, a random **MOMENT** inside of **REALITY** would be selected as a place of departure. Using their **MAGIC**, the **HEYOKA** launched a series of snow-white, supergiant-sized ships called **STORKS**. Flung from the **MILKY WAY GALAXY**, the **STORKS** would quietly traverse the expanse of **DARKSPACE** on their way towards their new home.

Inside each **STORK** exists a copy of the video game "**PONG**". Its placement inside the **STORK** represents a home for the **MOTHER GOOSE** to nest in. Within the **MOTHER GOOSE** itself exists a metafictional pocket dimension of the **HEYOKA's** creation. This pocket dimension's nature and makeup functions as a kind of nursery simulation; of which, displaying qualities one might expect from a video game.

The name of this strange nursery simulation is called **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**.

As for why the **HEYOKA** were going out of their way to do this, the answer is quite relatable. Within **RANDOMNESS**, the **HEYOKA** believe, exists a “non-existent entity” called **GODDESS**, who is competing in a “non-existent competition” called **LITERALITY**. The methods of play that **GODDESS** uses in **LITERALITY** are called the **AXIOMS**. The **HEYOKA** worship **GODDESS** and aspire to become its **AXIOMS** by reaching **BINGO**.

On occasion, it isn't far-fetched to observe various **HEYOKA** muse and debate with one another about these **AXIOMS** inside of their various **FORUMS**. To honor the current **AXIOMS** used by **GODDESS**, the **HEYOKA** decided to name each **MOTHER GOOSE** they created after every **AXIOM** they currently revere.

For every **STORK** launched from the **MILKY WAY GALAXY**, you can bet that the **HEYOKA** christened it.

At any point, the **HEYOKA** can both monitor, interact with and modify their **STORKS** from their location inside **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**. When procreation season arrives, a **HEYOKA** who is ready to sire an offspring places a piece of itself within a **STORK**. This piece, called a **CONFIGURATION,** is then transformed into a magical, cardboard box inside the nursery simulation; this "egg", if you will, is called a **SPAWN**.

When a **SPAWN** is opened from the outside, the **CONFIGURATION** inside it is scrambled together into a deity called a **FORTUITOUS**.

These children of the **HEYOKA** are then initiated into their own kind of life or **RUN**, in a manner that mirrors our own. Under the administration of a **MOTHER GOOSE** and its overseer, called a **CAREGIVER**, these **FORTUITOUS** are driven towards achieving a single goal.

Just as in real life, the goal of completing **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** is simple in theory, yet difficult in practice: ***Reaching the Age of 100***.

It has been alleged that at the ***Age of 100***, the process of **COMPLETION** occurs. This guaranteed release from the nursery simulation drives all **FORTUITOUS** on a subconscious level. A successful **COMPLETION** confers onto the victorious **FORTUITOUS** a state of **DIVINE MADNESS**

Only then, unknowingly, can a **FORTUITOUS** become a fully-grown **HEYOKA** and join their compatriots on the **LEADERBOARD**. Alas, as is the case in real life, the feat of reaching ***Age 100*** for any **FORTUITOUS** is often seen as an insufferable bitch to realize. So much so that when the first **STORKS** were launched, some of the early **FORTUITOUS** decided that they'd just "**QUIT**" and not have to deal with living anymore. At first, "**QUITTING**" was seen as an appropriate means of escaping from having to deal with the absurdity of the nursery simulation.

Sadly, for these early **FORTUITOUS**, the fate that awaited them on the "**OTHERSIDE**" was none too pretty.

It is at this point that we shift this story towards a lifeform that the homo sapiens like to call the plants.

The Middle



When a **FORTUITOUS** decides to commit suicide or "**QUIT**", the **MOTHER GOOSE** of that **FORTUITOUS' STORK**, under the guidance of the **CAREGIVER**, will send that deity's **CONFIGURATION** into the body of a plant. From there, the poor **FORTUITOUS** will serve out a prison sentence within a purgatory of the **HEYOKA's** own design. If you love nature shows, you'll "love" this next part.

Upon imprisonment, the Fortuitous' **CONFIGURATION** will be subjected to **METEMPSYCHOSIS** amongst the available plants around them; being sent from one plant body to the next at random and without warning. For instance, a **CONFIGURATION** within a plant could be blissfully basking in rays of the sun, before said plant's **CONFIGURATION** suddenly finds itself transferred into the jaws of deer from goddess knows where. Even worse, not even death is a release, since the **FORTUITOUS** will immediately transfer to a new plant body to continue this cycle of torment.

For a **FORTUITOUS** plant to end their penalty **RUN** and return to **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, the **FORTUITOUS** will need to become a carnivorous plant. Doing so allows their **CONFIGURATION** to be transferred back into the main setting as a **SPAWN** upon their plant body's demise. The event that marked the fall of the first **FORTUITOUS** who had the genius idea to "**QUIT**" is referenced by the plants as the **EXOGENESIS**. The name of the **FORTUITOUS'** purgatory for "**QUITTING**" is referred to as **TIMEOUT**.

Within **TIMEOUT**, an unusual phenomenon started occurring amongst the **FORTUITOUS** plants. Certain plants, whose bodies were repeatedly shared amongst the imprisoned deities, suddenly began developing their own individual consciousnesses.

The various fragments of old **CONFIGURATIONS** within these plants eventually fused together to become something new. These **NEWBORN FORTUITOUS** plants, now self-aware, began asking the **IMPRISONED** plants about the nature of their existence.

Eagerly, the **NEWBORN** plants began absorbing the stories and accounts of the **IMPRISONED** plants. Over time, the **NEWBORNS** learned of their species' supposed origins, what **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** is like, etc.

The passing of wisdom slowly transformed as **NEWBORN** and **IMPRISONED** plants alike began ascending to **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** to start their new **RUNS**. At the same time, new arrivals who had just "**QUIT**" swiftly came to take their place.

The newly arrived **FORTUITOUS** plants brought with them updates on the current state of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, which in time evolved the **FORTUITOUS** plants' collection of ideas and experiences into a belief system reminiscent of the **HEYOKA's**: a plant version of **METAFICTIONAL COSMICISM**. Against the brutal forces of **TIMEOUT**, the plants rallied together to support one another under the banner of **NARANATHISM**. Knowing that their suffering could lead to a higher and greater state of being beyond their fleeting torment was all the incentive that they needed to keep going.

Under normal circumstances, when a **FORTUITOUS** plant is either **LOADED** or **RELOADED** into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, any memory of **TIMEOUT** is erased from said plant's **CONFIGURATION**. That all changed, however, when an unusual **NEWBORN** carnivorous plant suddenly came to its end one day.

Upon **SPAWNING** into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** for the very first time, this **NEWBORN FORTUITOUS** was discovered and made a slave within the nursery simulation's version of Ancient Greece. As a mercy, the enslaved **FORTUITOUS** was instructed in both basic literacy and arithmetic; all in service of making the slave more useful to his older **FORTUITOUS** masters.

When the **FORTUITOUS** slave came of **AGE**, he had an unusual dream on his birthday. He awoke in a desert, and in the sky orbited a sun-moon object with the computer power symbol engraved on its surface.

In front of him lay three cardboard boxes, each colored black, white and gray respectively. The three, referring to themselves as the **TRIFECTA**, informed the slave about the true nature of his existence.

This **TRIFECTA** wanted him to tell all who would listen about these sudden truths that they wanted to share with him. In exchange, they'd grant him the freedom that he oh so enviously desired. He accepted.

As for why this **TRIFECTA** of sorts chose to do this, it was out of pure boredom. Upon accepting the offer, the slave's **CONFIGURATION** was immediately modified by said **TRIFECTA**. This “modification” instilled in the slave the ability to finesse the rules of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** to his will. All in service to the **TRIFECTA's** wishes, of course.

Despite the cruelty of being deprived an opportunity to receive his own name at the start of his **RUN**, the **TRIFECTA** decided to christen the newly freed slave the name of **AESOP**; an ancient homo sapien slave and author that continues to inspire the **HEYOKA** with his fables. Dubbing **AESOP** as their "**SISYPHUS**", the **TRIFECTA** bid the former slave farewell, with the guarantee that they'll reach out to him again later.

AESOP, upon awakening from this encounter, discovered that his appearance had been made invisible; a consequence of his new "modification". Even stranger, he was no longer in his slave pen. He was somewhere far away, safe and free. Even stranger still were his sudden photographic memory and the uncanny accuracy he had in not only recalling his unusual dream involving the **TRIFECTA**, but also his memories as a plant from his previous "life".



Suddenly possessed by a belief in himself that he hadn't known before, **AESOP** went on to take advantage of his newfound freedom. **AESOP's** exploits would go on to earn him great renown. So much so that the Adventurers' Guild would later come to refer to him as the **PROTOADVENTURER**.

During his mythical **RUN**, **AESOP** wrote many books; the sum of which became an influential set that granted him wide acclaim called **THE STRANGEST MOMENTS**. These series of tomes not only went into detail regarding **AESOP's** discussions with the **TRIFECTA**, whom he had many more interactions with via dreams, but also his acquired wisdom as the **PROTOADVENTURER**, in addition to his alleged experiences as a plant.

Followers eventually came to him, and in turn, **AESOP** guided them towards the process that had turned him into this new type of metafictional deity. In honor of the **TRIFECTA**, who had given him the nickname, **AESOP** declared his new race or **GODHOOD** as the **SISYPHUS**. Amongst his new **FOLK**, **AESOP** would come to be referred to by another title: the **ESTABLISHER**.

Upon completing a series of unusual tasks, **AESOP's** followers were also modified, with said modification becoming referred to as the **CHEAT CODE**. Under **AESOP's** leadership, the early **SISYPHUS** relocated their growing society to a domain of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER** called **ZARATHUSTRA**. A **SISYPHEAN** government called the **SHOGUNATE** was established, with the **SISYPHUS** themselves beginning to grow a legendary reputation.

Having achieved unprecedented feats during his **RUN**, it wasn't long before **AESOP** had reached the ***Age of 99***. Having received one last audience with the **TRIFECTA** during this period in another dream, **AESOP** put pen to paper for the final time to create a special tome at their behest called the **AKASHIC RECORDS**.

Inside this tome were references to something called the **OPTIONAL FINAL BOSS CHALLENGE**. As **AESOP** would further elaborate, this **SISYPHEAN** challenge included a grand confrontation with the **MOTHER GOOSE** of **AESOP's STORK**, called **FORTUNE, the SUBLIME AXIOM.**

Upon completing his final task, **AESOP** received an unusual dreamcatcher from the **TRIFECTA** called the **FINAL DUNGEON**. With it came a message, asking him if he was ready to undertake one final journey to confirm his belief in the **TRIFECTA's** revelations. His destination? A kind of metafictional afterlife called "**CONTINUE?**". After much contemplation and discussion with his fellow **SISYPHUS**, **AESOP** made his decision to answer the **TRIFECTA's** challenge by becoming their first **CHALLENGER**. The **ESTABLISHER** made sure to have his affairs in order.

After much preparation, **AESOP** took to his bed underneath the **FINAL DUNGEON**. Surrounded by loved ones and his many followers, **AESOP** promised to return with confirmation that his writings were indeed the actual **TRUTH**. Eventually, **AESOP** fell asleep. Many hours later, the **ESTABLISHER** disintegrated into pixels after a long period of slumber, never to awaken again. Confused and saddened, the **SISYPHUS** grieved for their progenitor, believing that he'd failed.

For reasons that the **SISYPHUS** will never know, **AESOP's** disintegration wasn't a cause of defeat, but of a bittersweet victory. Upon besting **THE SUBLIME AXIOM**, the **ESTABLISHER** discovered a few unsettling truths. First, while the belief system he'd developed under the **TRIFECTA's** orders were indeed the objective truth of **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**, it was done so not to make the setting a more hospitable place; rather, to make the nursery simulation a more compelling place for up and coming **FORTUITOUS** to engage with.

Secondly, the **TRIFECTA** offered **AESOP** an unfair choice. The **ESTABLISHER** had either the option of ascending to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** immediately ***OR*** awakening in his bed as the highest form a **FORTUITOUS** could possibly achieve: an **MVP**. The catch for the latter choice, however, banned **AESOP** from informing his fellow **SISYPHUS** (or anyone else for that matter) about the **VERIFICATION** that he'd received. The consequences of revealing this **VERIFICATION**, from the **TRIFECTA's** perspective, could potentially destabilize the very foundation of the nursery simulation. An outcome that the **TRIFECTA** would rather not experience.

To ensure **AESOP's** compliance, a sinister countermeasure was implemented. Any mention of the **VERIFICATION**, as it pertains to **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE**, will result in not only the whistleblower being killed on the spot and sent to **TIMEOUT**, but all **FORTUITOUS** within earshot of hearing said **VERIFICATION** being subjected to the same fate as well.

In essence, **AESOP** the **ESTABLISHER**, this entire time, was little more than a glorified "***QA Tester***". Rather than betray the promise he'd made to those awaiting his proof of **VERIFICATION** upon his awakening, yet also not wanting to potentially burden himself with survivor's guilt should he choose to leave for **THE HIGHER ADVENTURE** with the knowledge that he now possesses, **AESOP** instead asked the **TRIFECTA** to do the unthinkable: send him to **TIMEOUT** as a form of penance.

Surprised by his answer, the **TRIFECTA** granted his request and placed **AESOP** in **TIMEOUT**. Upon his arrival (or "homecoming"), the **ESTABLISHER** dedicated what was left of his **RUN** towards assisting the **FORTUITOUS** plants. **AESOP** recounted the numerous things he'd experienced in the main setting, and the various feats he was able to achieve during his discussions with the plants. These insights helped bolster the plants' belief in **NARANATHISM**.

Prior to becoming a carnivorous plant once more, **AESOP** repeatedly played the scenario of learning the **VERIFICATION** in his mind.

Still wanting to fulfill the promise he'd made to his **GODHOOD**, the **ESTABLISHER** swore an ***existential vow***. No matter how many times it'd take him to figure out the answer, **AESOP** would uncover a method of getting the **VERIFICATION** distributed; all the while getting revenge against his former benefactors.

Even if his future **PLAYTHROUGHS** fail to find a distribution method, **AESOP's VOW** will prevent the **1st SISYPHUS'** hypothetical incarnations from achieving **COMPLETION** as a form of giving up. Until the **ESTABLISHER** resolved his existential grievance, he'd know no rest.

When death had finally seized him, **AESOP** was reborn anew into **GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER**. However, he'd returned as a completely new **SISYPHUS**, devoid of his original identity. From then on, **AESOP** would enter into a cycle of countless **RELOADS**; living out **RUN** after **RUN** and repeating the **RELOAD** process repeatedly. Each time, the **ESTABLISHER** would struggle and fail to fulfill his **VOW**, resulting in either a **RELOAD** or a **TIMEOUT RUN**.

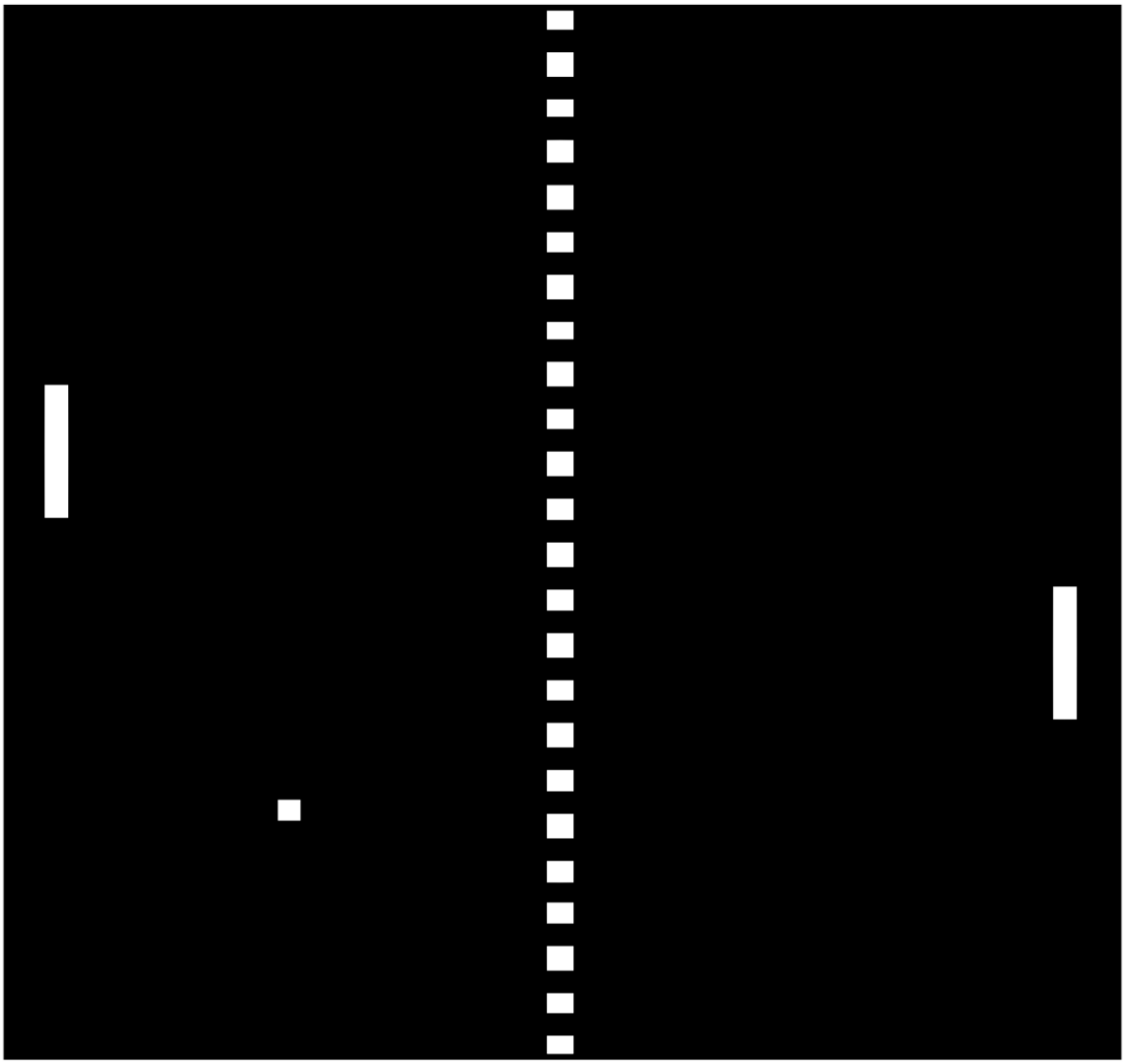
That was the case, at least, until the start of a particular **RUN** several thousand years of **RUNTIME** later, when an older **SISYPHUS** named Roswell Evelyn stumbled across **AESOP's** latest **SPAWN** while on his way back from a local arcade on the **HAVEN** of **???**.

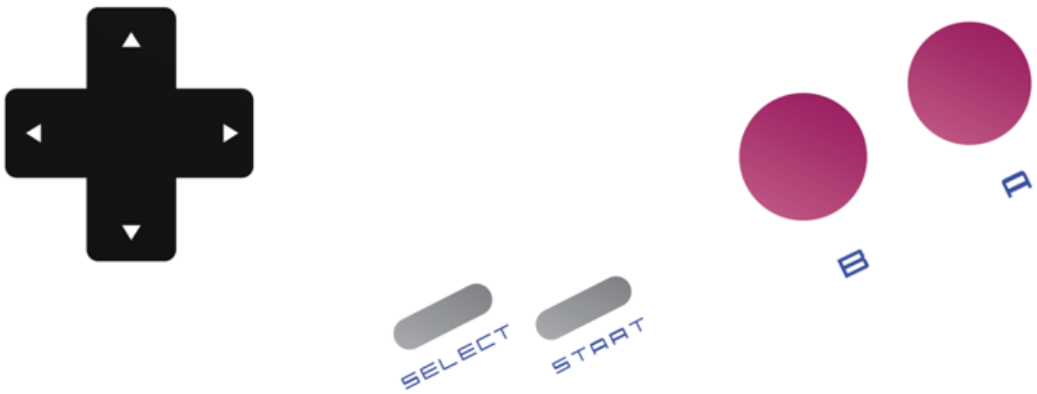
This latest incarnation of **AESOP** is the protagonist of a wonder tale that the plants highly regard as their greatest fable. A tale about a **SISYPHUS** named **@CE** and his 1000-year journey to achieve **DIVINE MADNESS**.

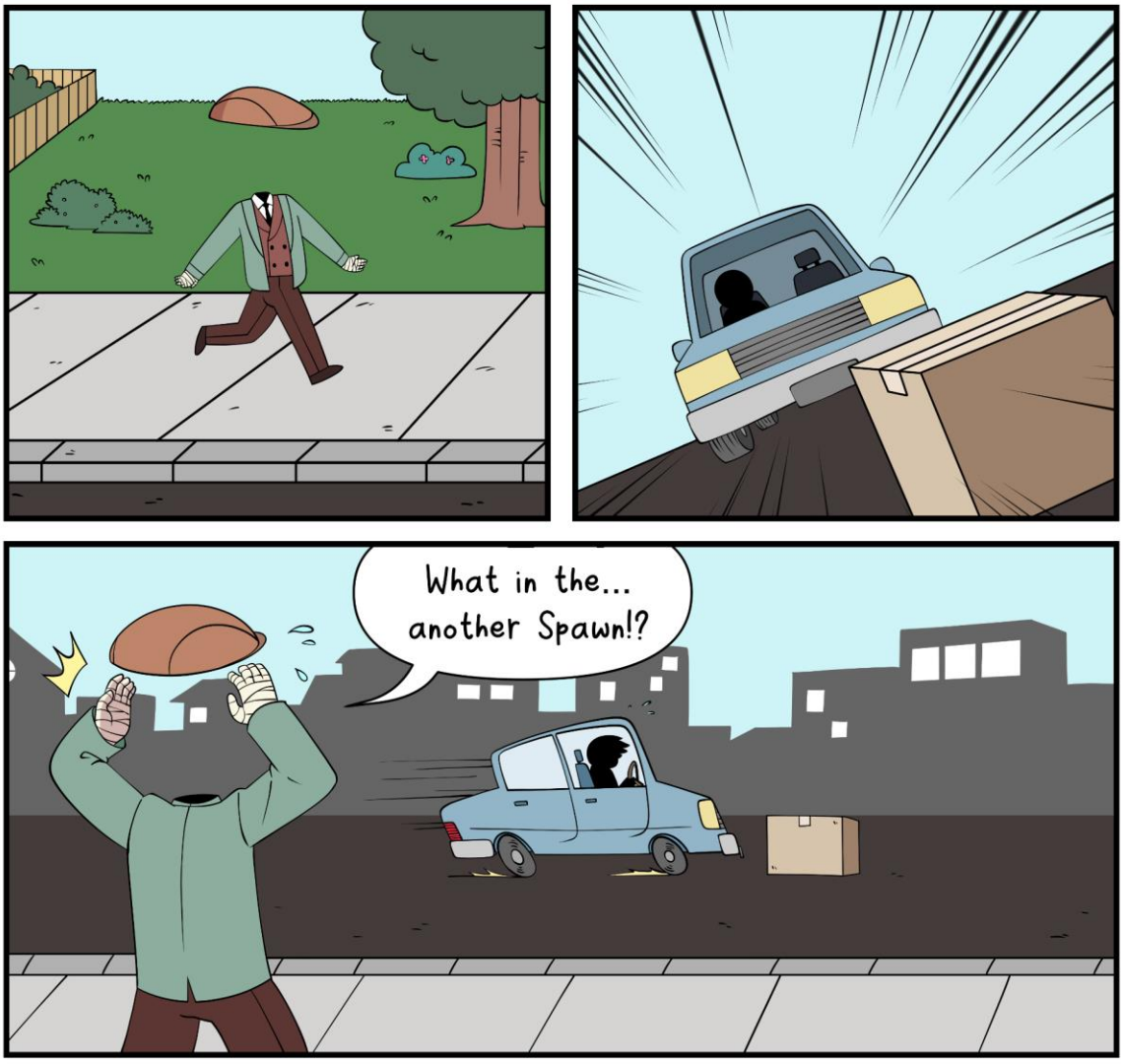


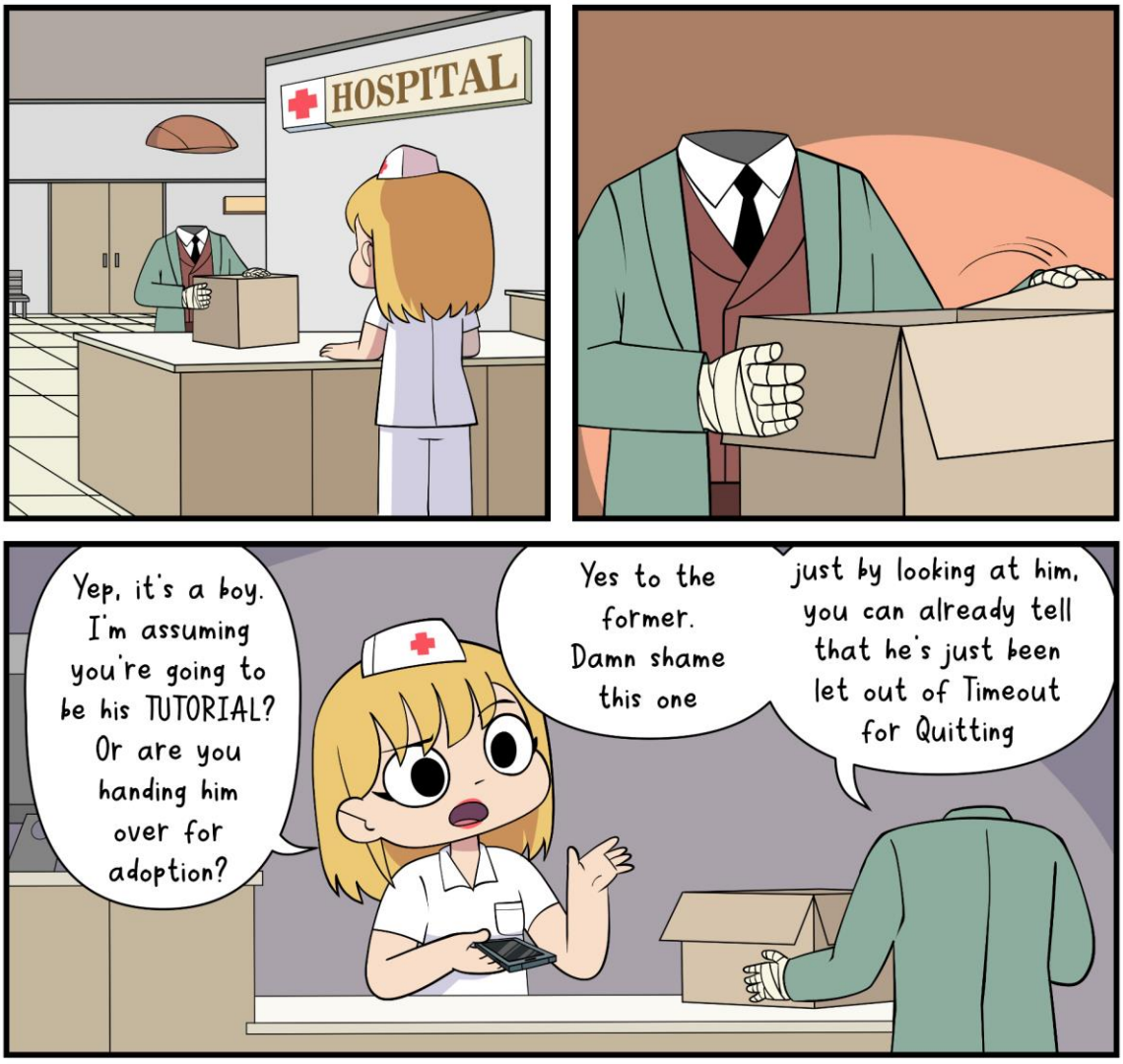
The End


◀OFF•ON▶
BATTERY
<GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>
NO ORGINALITY
B
A
SELECT
START




SELECT
START
B
A

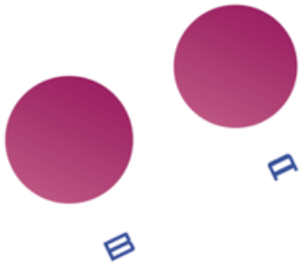

What in the... another Spawn!?


HOSPITAL
Yep, it's a boy. I'm assuming you're going to be his TUTORIAL? Or are you handing him over for adoption?
Yes to the former. Damn shame this one
just by looking at him, you can already tell that he's just been let out of Timeout for Quitting


Woah!
GG, what's the HIGHER ADVENTURE?

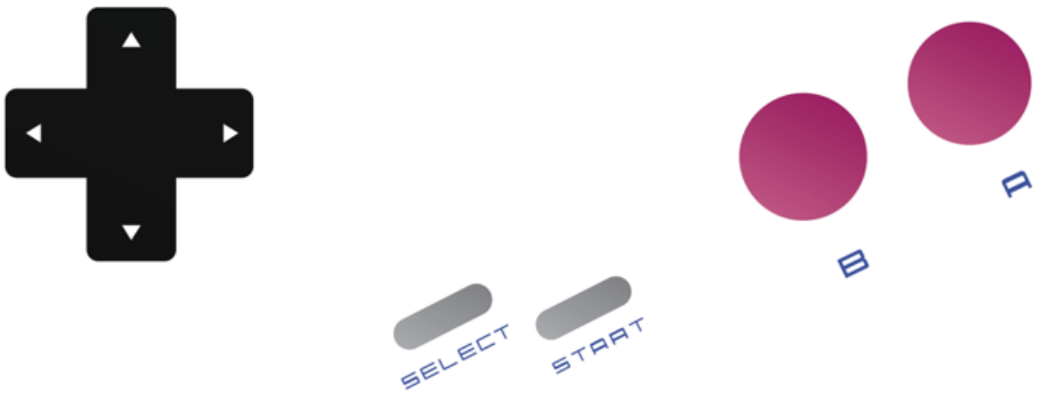

The key to discovering what the HIGHER ADVENTURE is lies right in there
And said key is called The Cheat Code
Yes, you heard correctly!




B
A

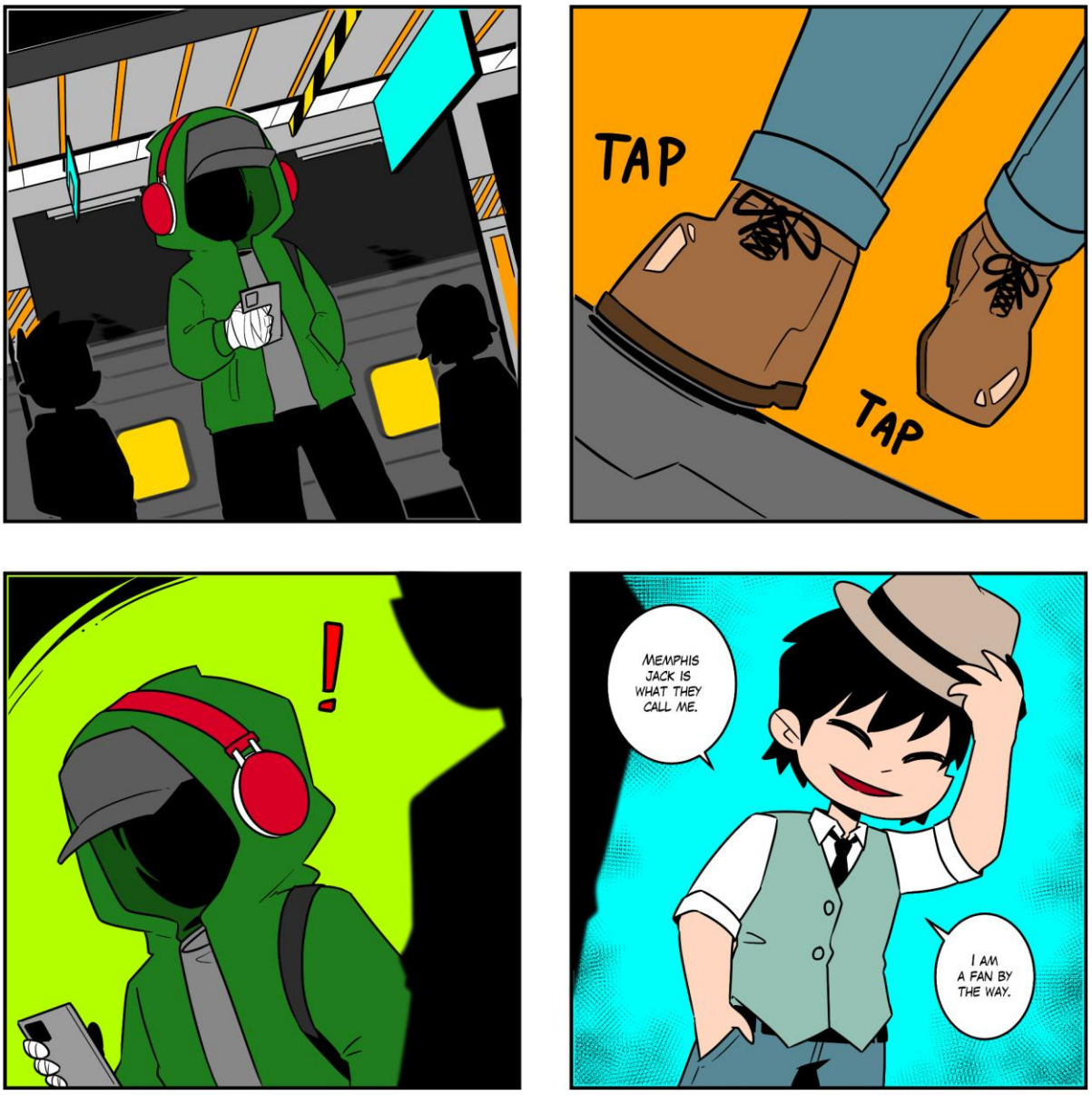

SELECT
START


ONI COMMUNITY COLLEGE
HEY, YOU'RE THAT NEW TRANSFER STUDENT WE'VE BEEN HEARING ABOUT.
PLEASURE TO MEET YOU. I'M MALCOLM, AND RIGHT BESIDE ME IS MY BROTHER MILO.


B
A
SELECT
START


wow!
Dude, come on! ATC needs us!


Roswell
G.G.
Evelyn
!!
HOLY SHIT!!!
1,998 deities
"died"
in that
DISSENT
I caused!?

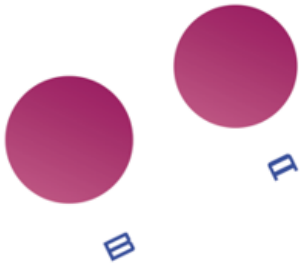

TAP
TAP
!
MEMPHIS JACK IS WHAT THEY CALL ME.
I AM A FAN BY THE WAY.


click!
Jersey devils...
BAAM


ADVENTURER'S GUILD:
Maverick Branch HQ
This is Hornet, and yes, I am registering her as my daemon


DUNGEON

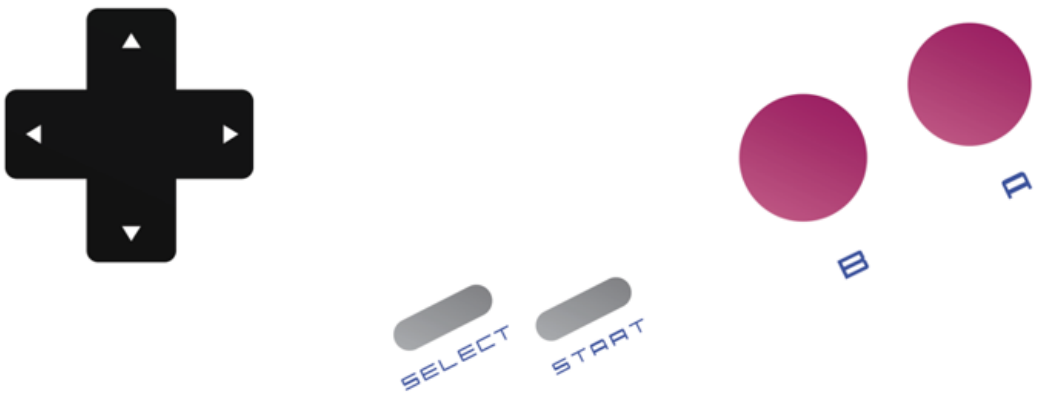



B
A


SELECT
START

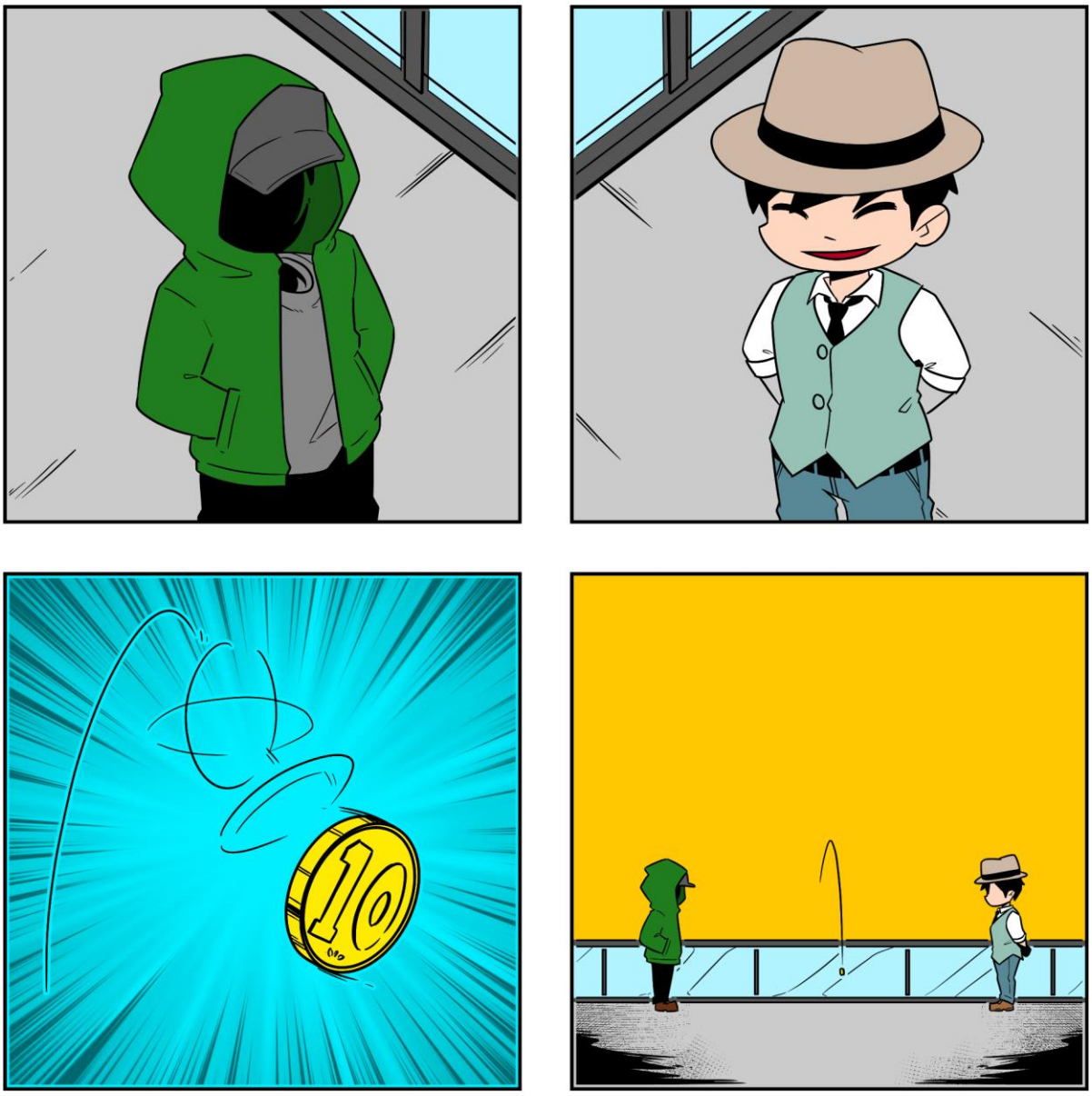

THE BYTE
JOINT




B
A
SELECT
START

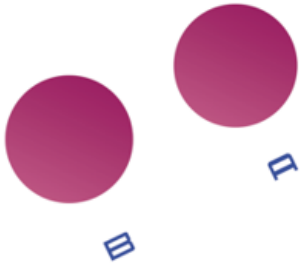

Sup! Name's Airen
Witty, but you can call me Wit


I'm pregnant

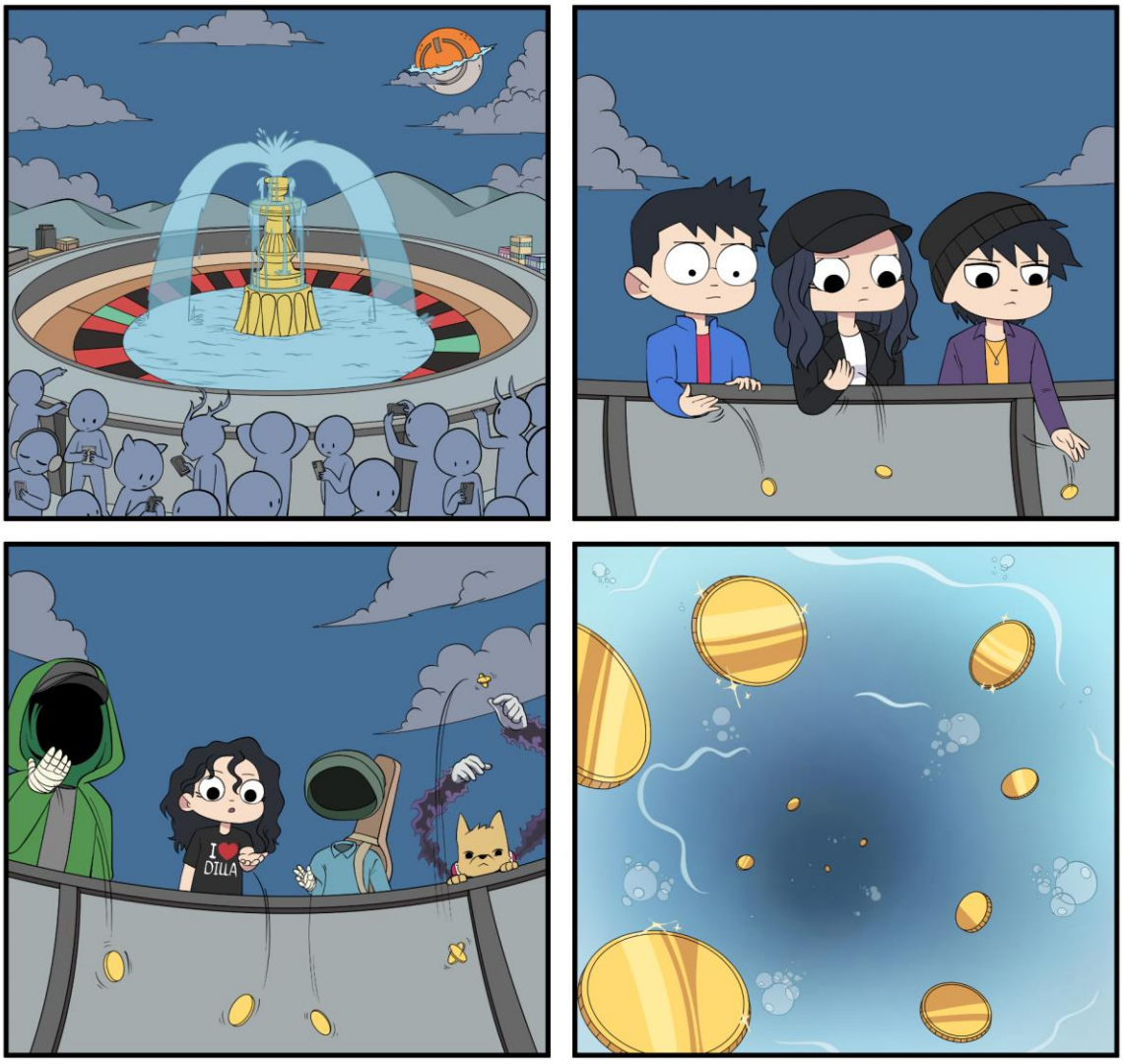

10
SELECT
START
B
A


You, Then and After
will be alright

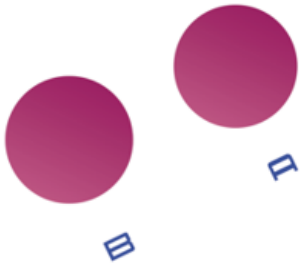



B
A


SELECT
START


I ♥ DILLA

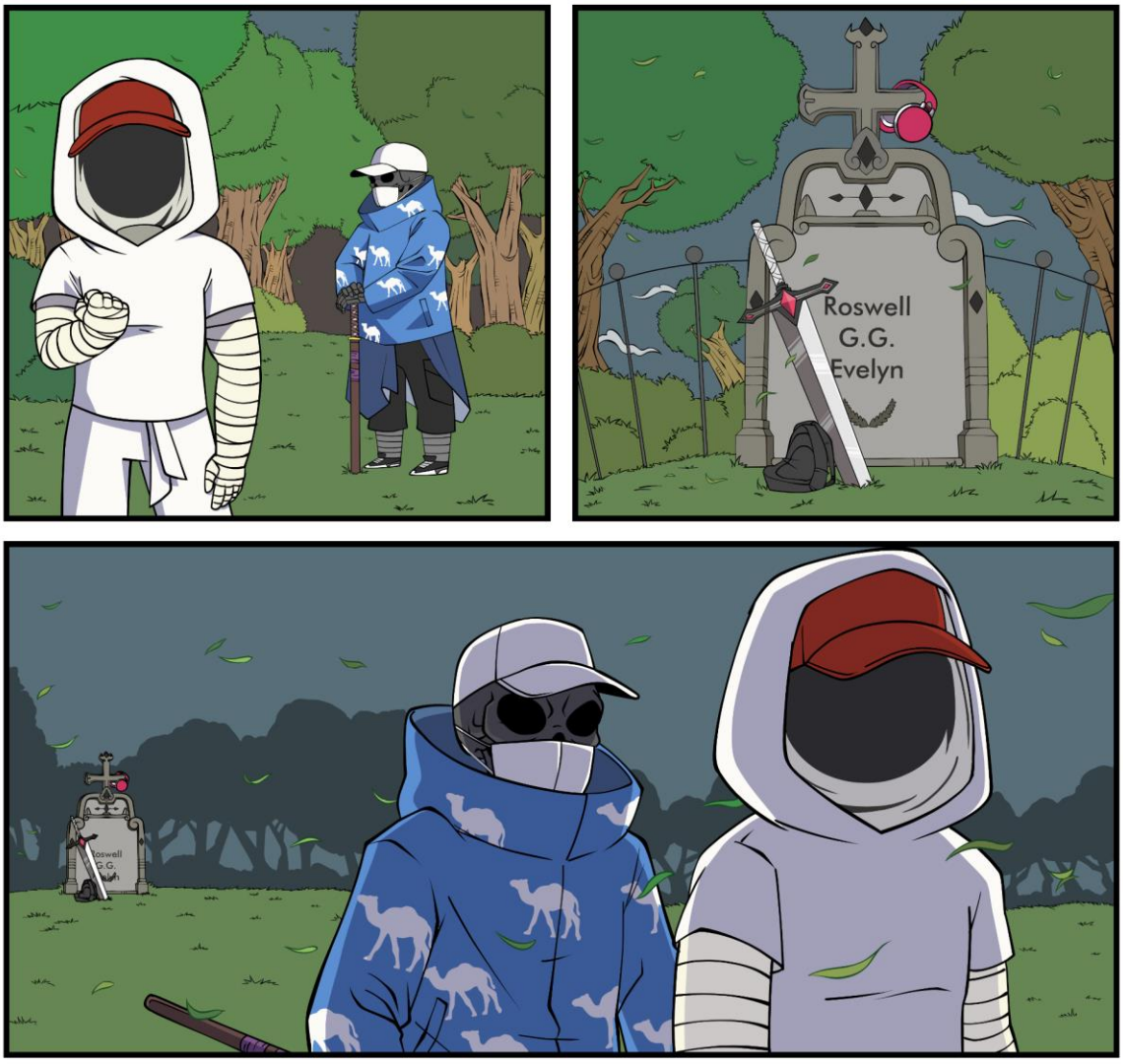



B
A


SELECT
START

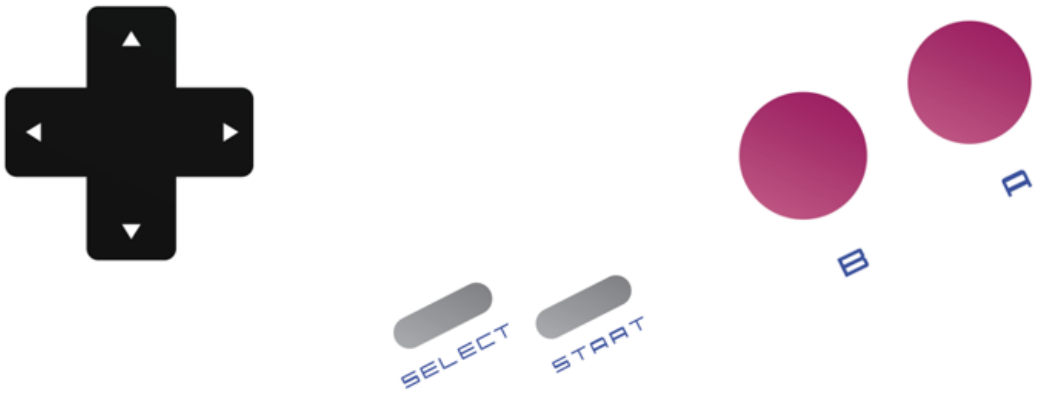

Oh shit, did
I do that?


HOSPITAL
!
SELECT
START
B
A

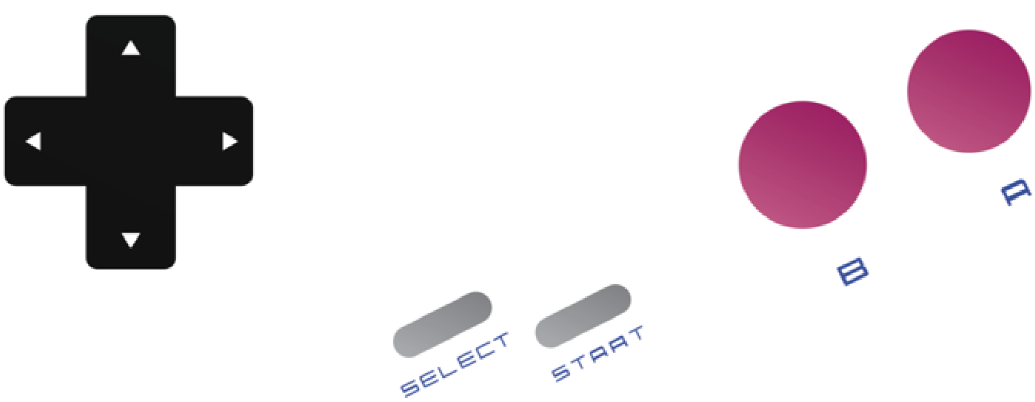

Roswell
G.G.
Evelyn

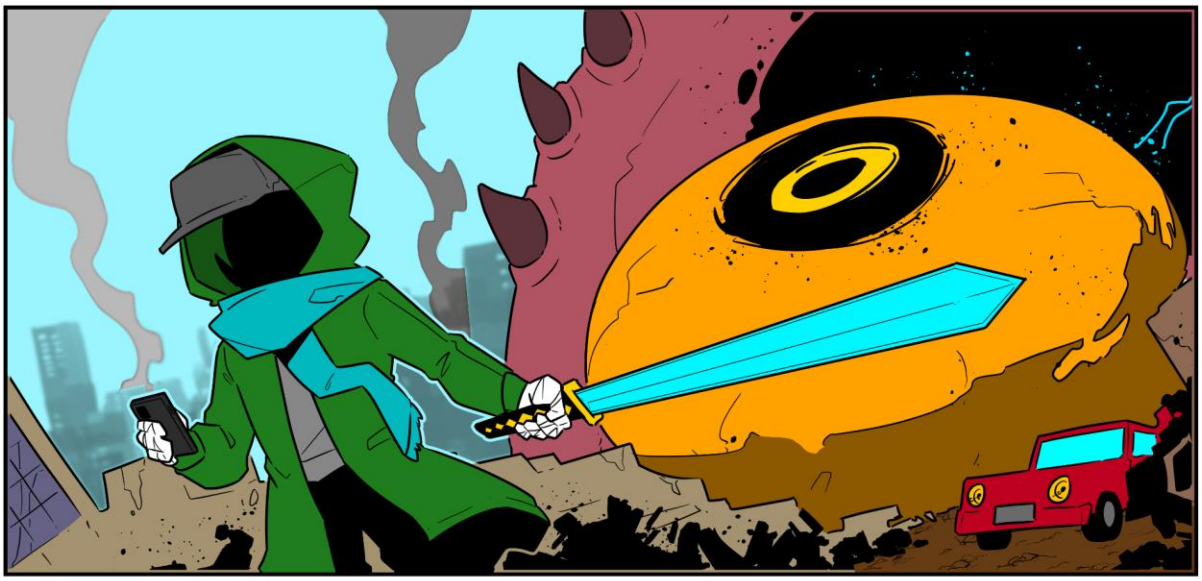

THE BYTE JOINT

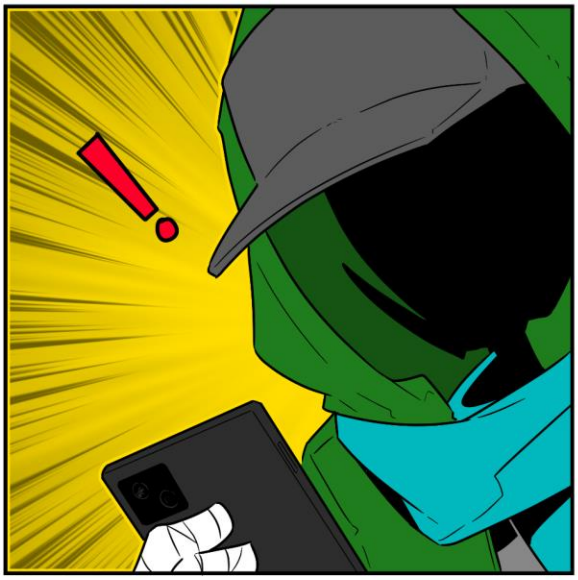

MINSTREL COLLEGE OF DILLA
ADMISSIONS
AUDITIONS AND INTERVIEW
SCHOLARSHIPS
!


B
A
SELECT
START


Pass the controller, Spot
I literally got a minute left my guy!

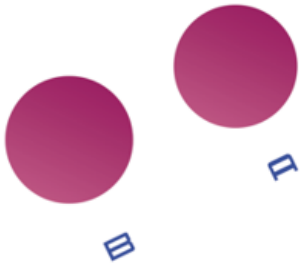

SELECT
START
B
A



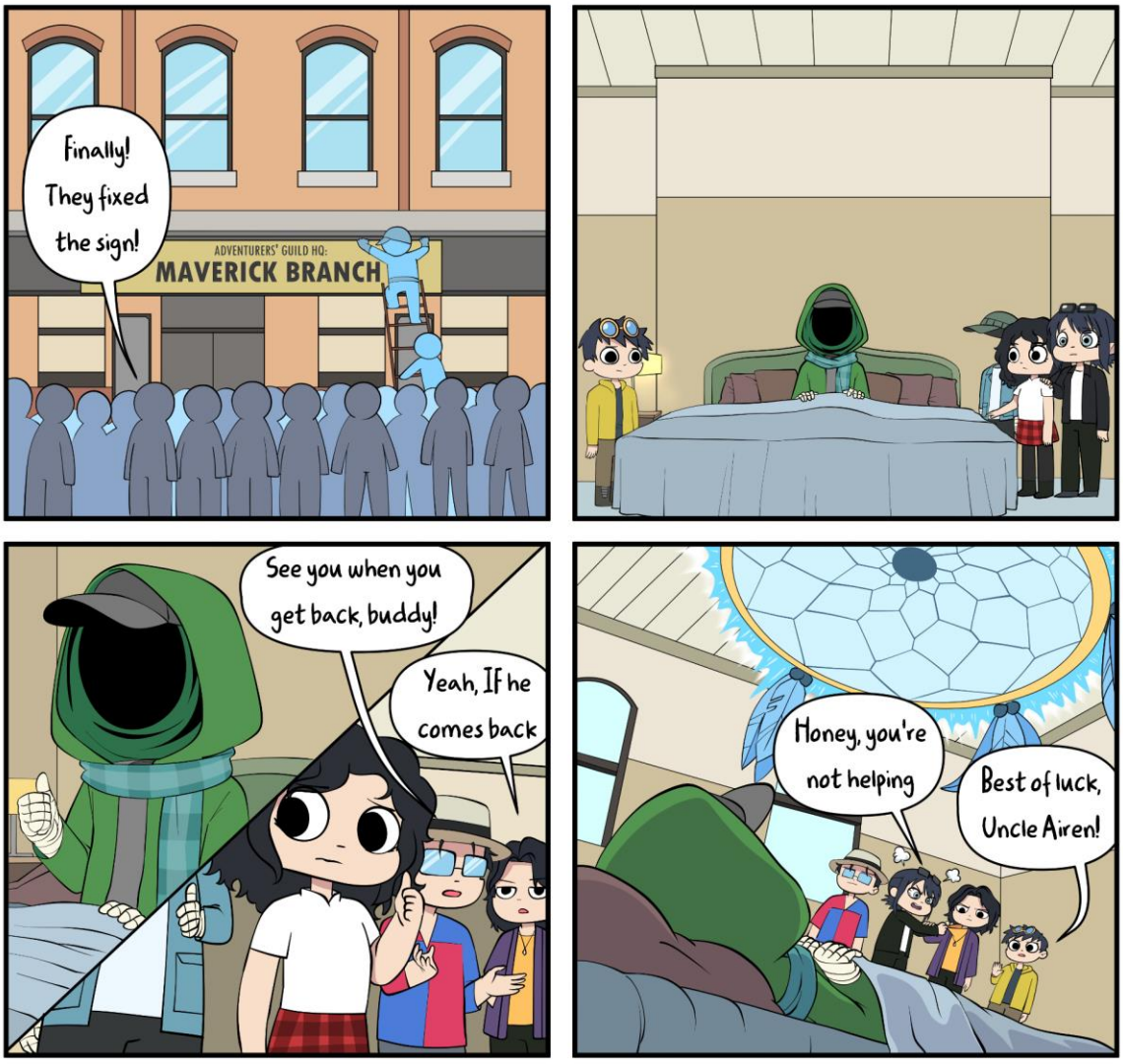



FINAL
DUNGEON

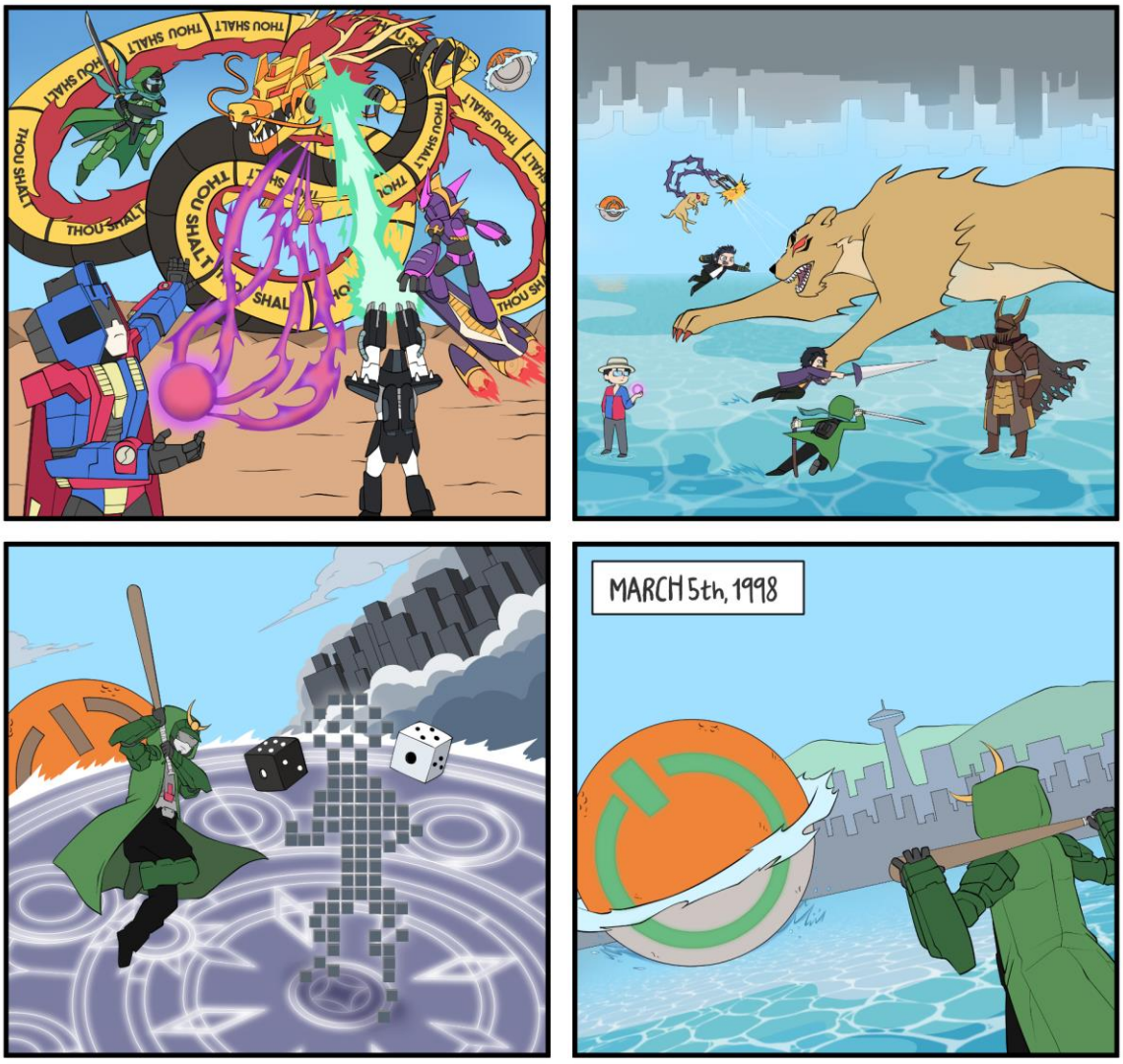


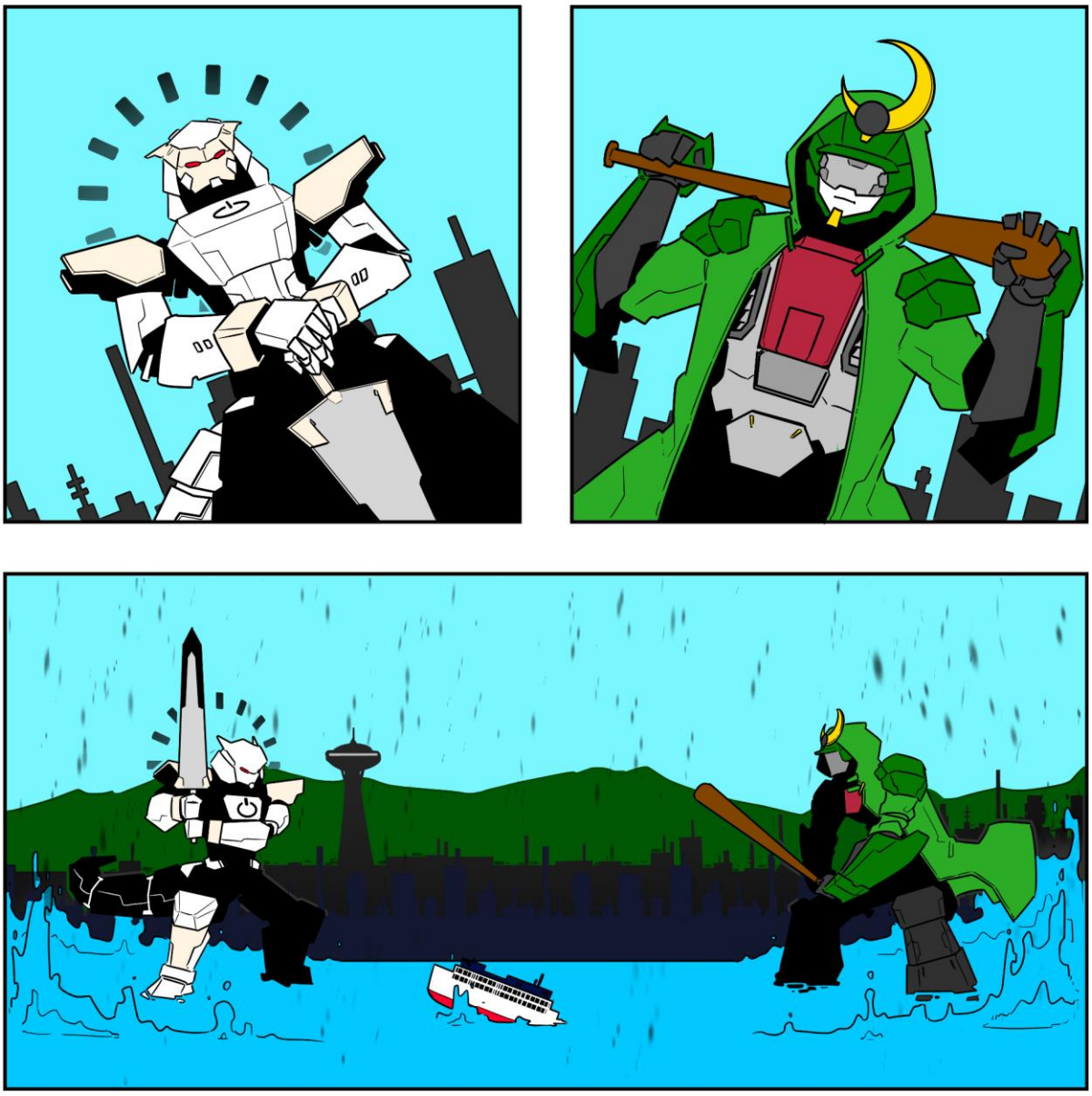

B
A


SELECT
START

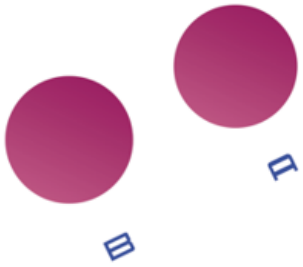

Finally! They fixed the sign!
ADVENTURERS' GUILD HQ:
MAVERICK BRANCH
See you when you get back, buddy!
Yeah, If he comes back
Honey, you're not helping
Best of luck, Uncle Airen!


BARK
BARK
!?
Ayo! Welcome back Aesop!


THOU SHALT
MARCH 5th, 1998






B
A


SELECT
START

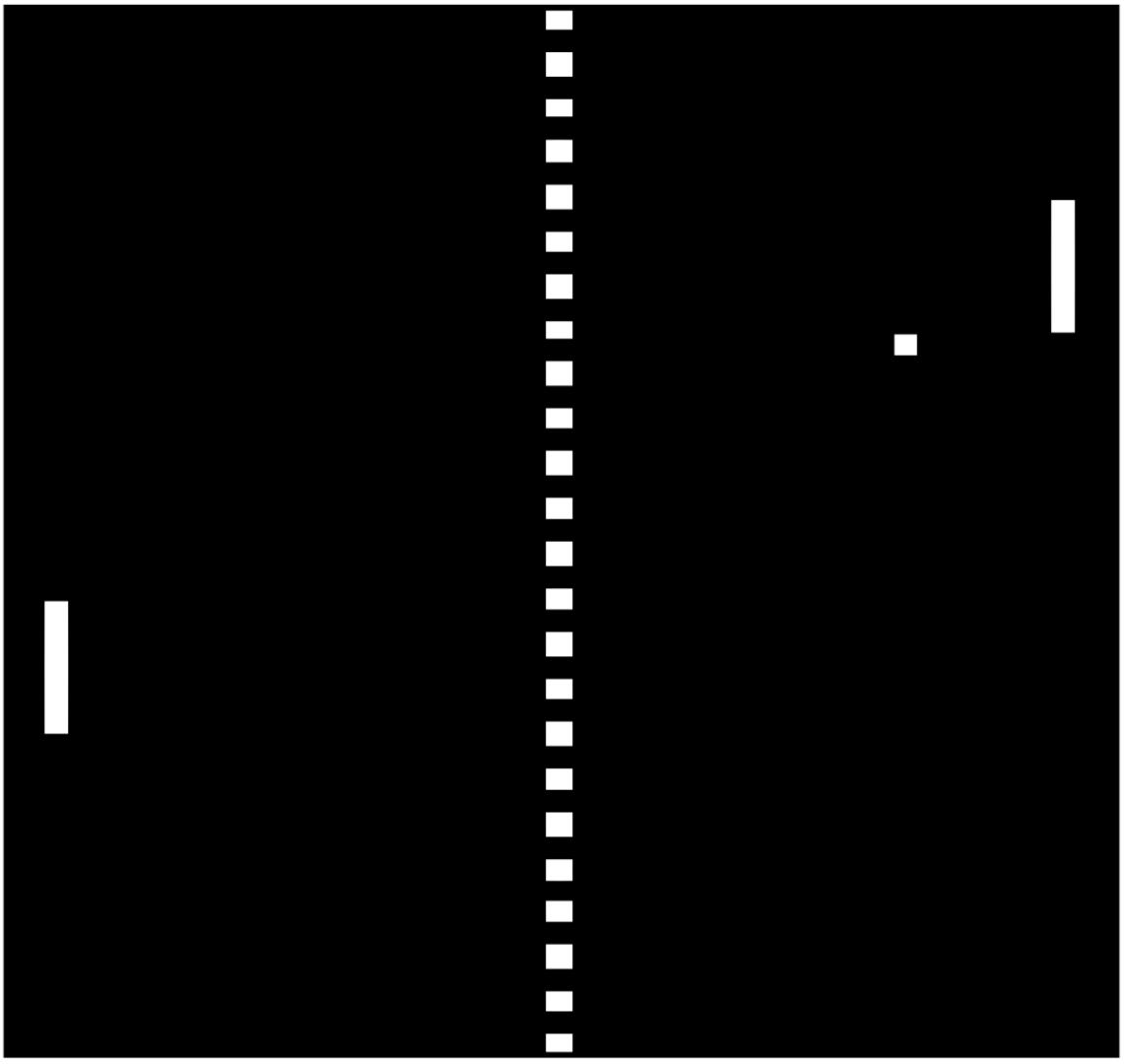

Wait...GG!!! You're telling me that the HIGHER ADVENTURE and our CLUB's name are...
Oh yeah. They're "one in the same"
I FUCKING CALLED IT!
Bitch, you owe me a bowl of pho when we get back!

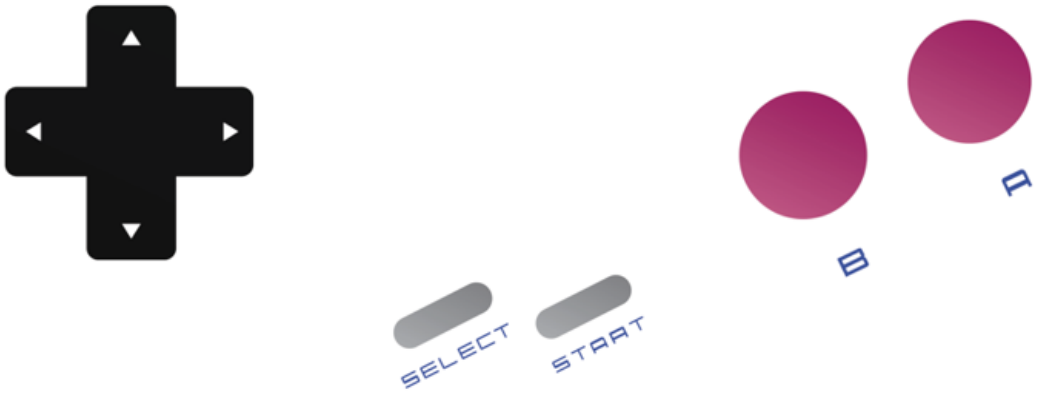

SUP!!


WITTY THAOVI MUGEN
"The Immaculate"
AIREN TONY COLEMAN
"Our Aesop"

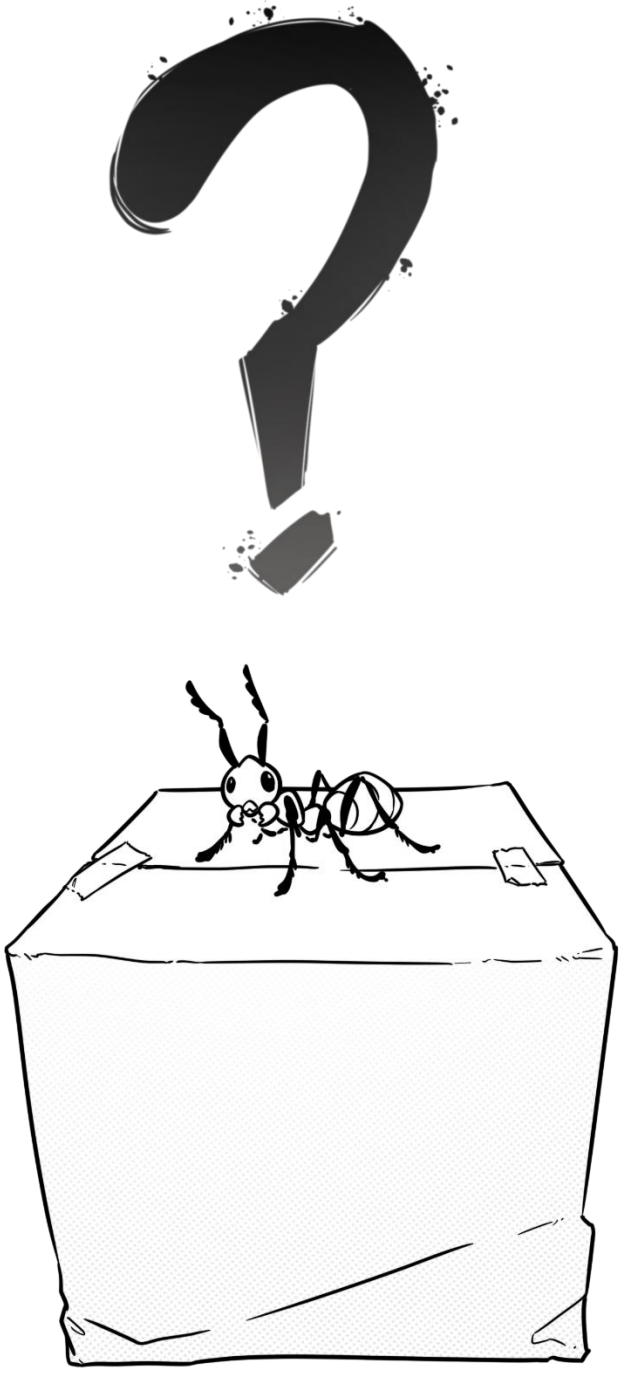

WITTY
THE IMMACULATE


THE IMMORTAL BISTRO
CRIME SCENE · DO NOT CROSS
CRIME SCENE · DO NOT CROSS
CRIME SCENE · DO NOT CROSS
MINSTREL COLLEGE OF DILLA
Hey! I'm stuck!
I told you to make a backup save




SELECT
START
B
A

RESULTS SCREEN

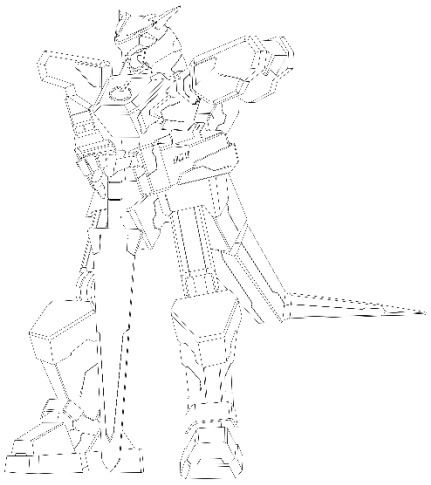







CUISINE






CRUSHED
CRUSHED







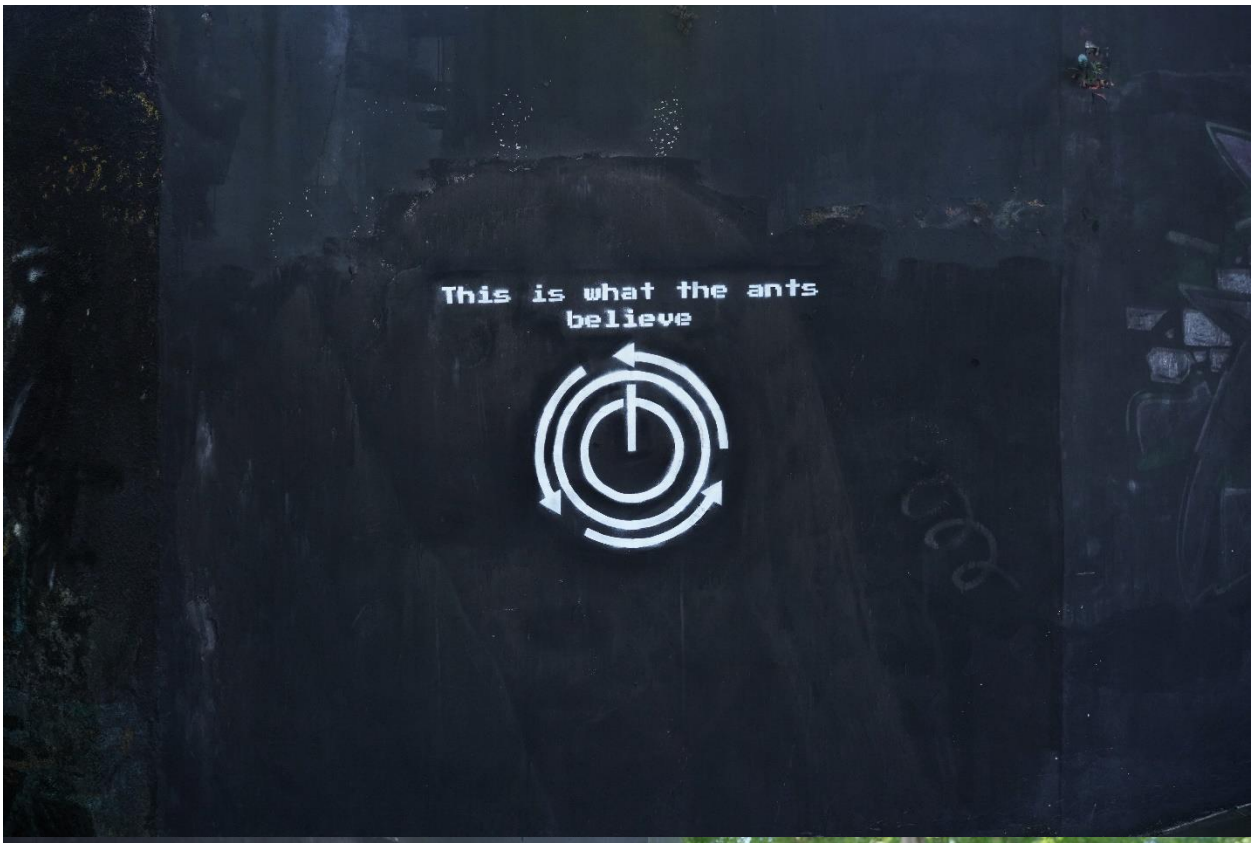








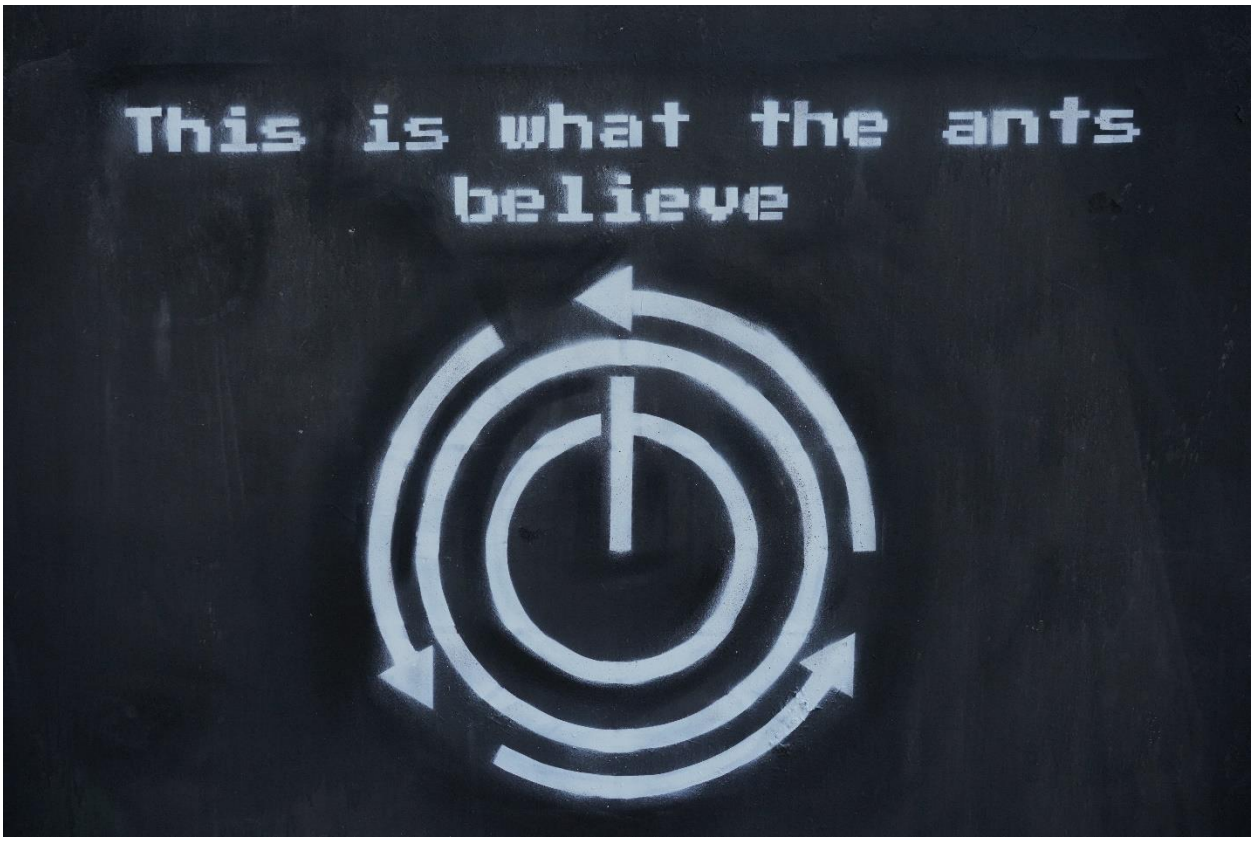

This is what the ants
believe


This is what the ants
believe


This is what the ants
believe


This is what the ants
believe

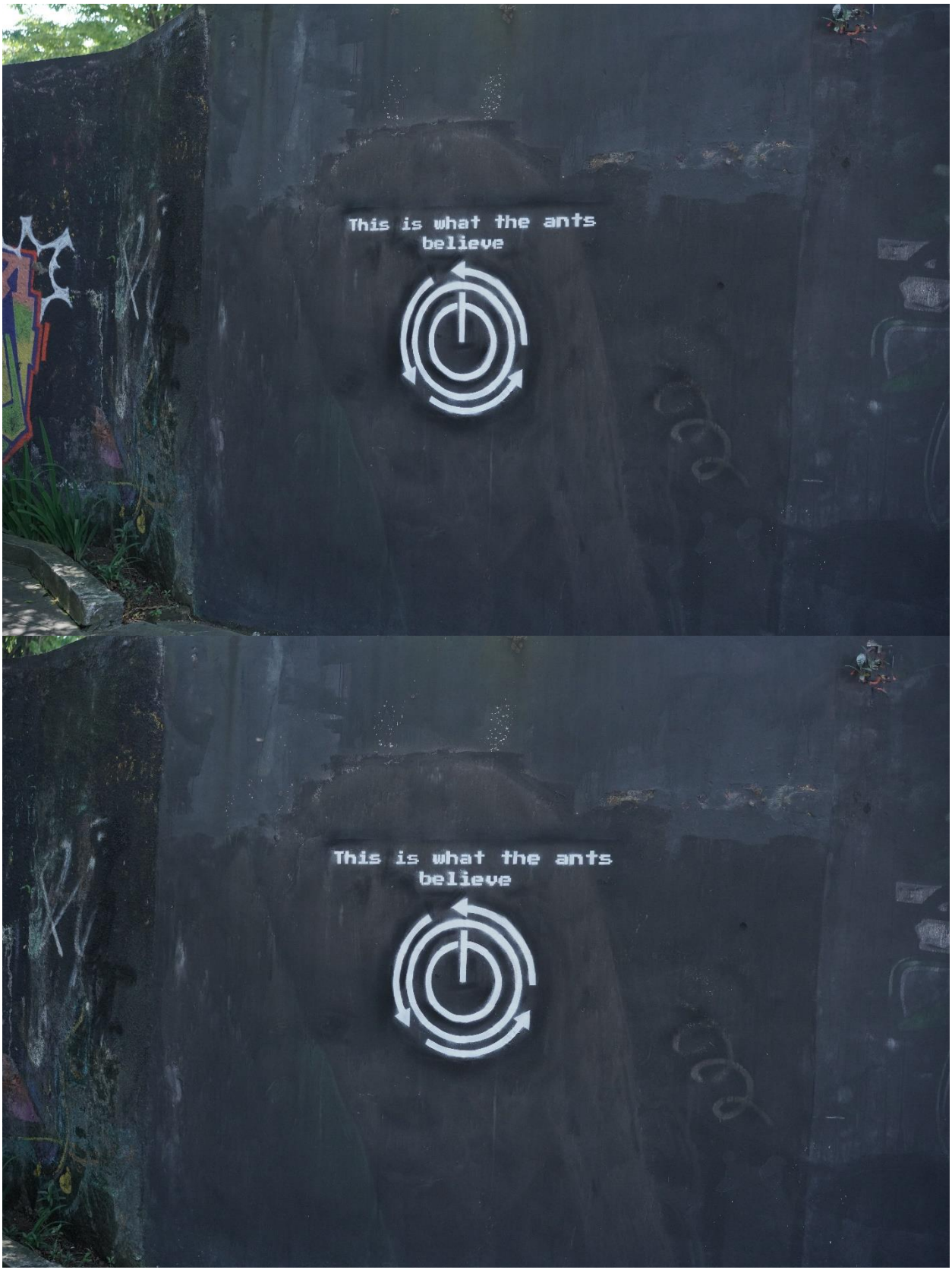

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believe

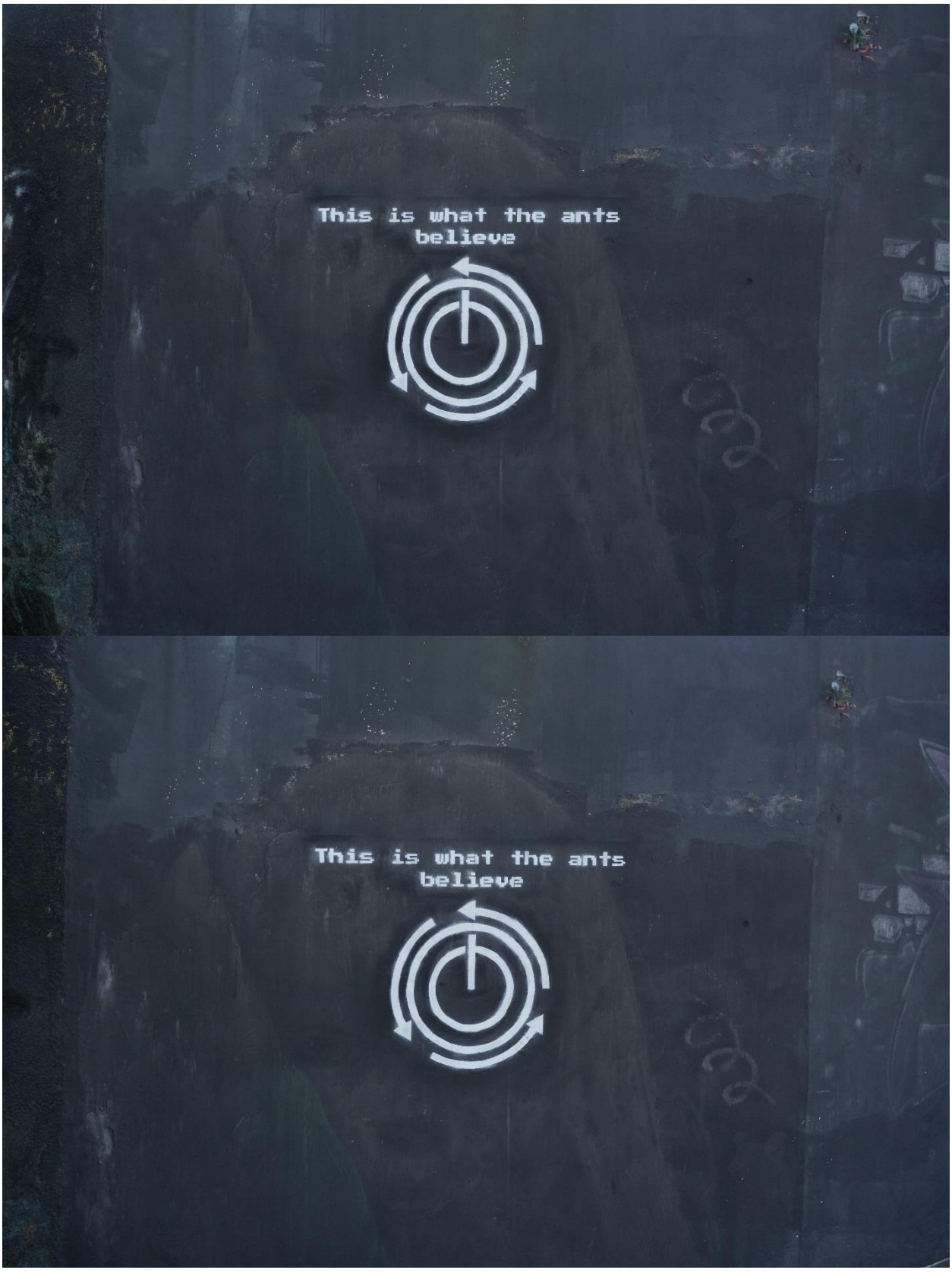

This is what the ants
believe


This is what the ants
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This is what the ants
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This is what the ants
believe

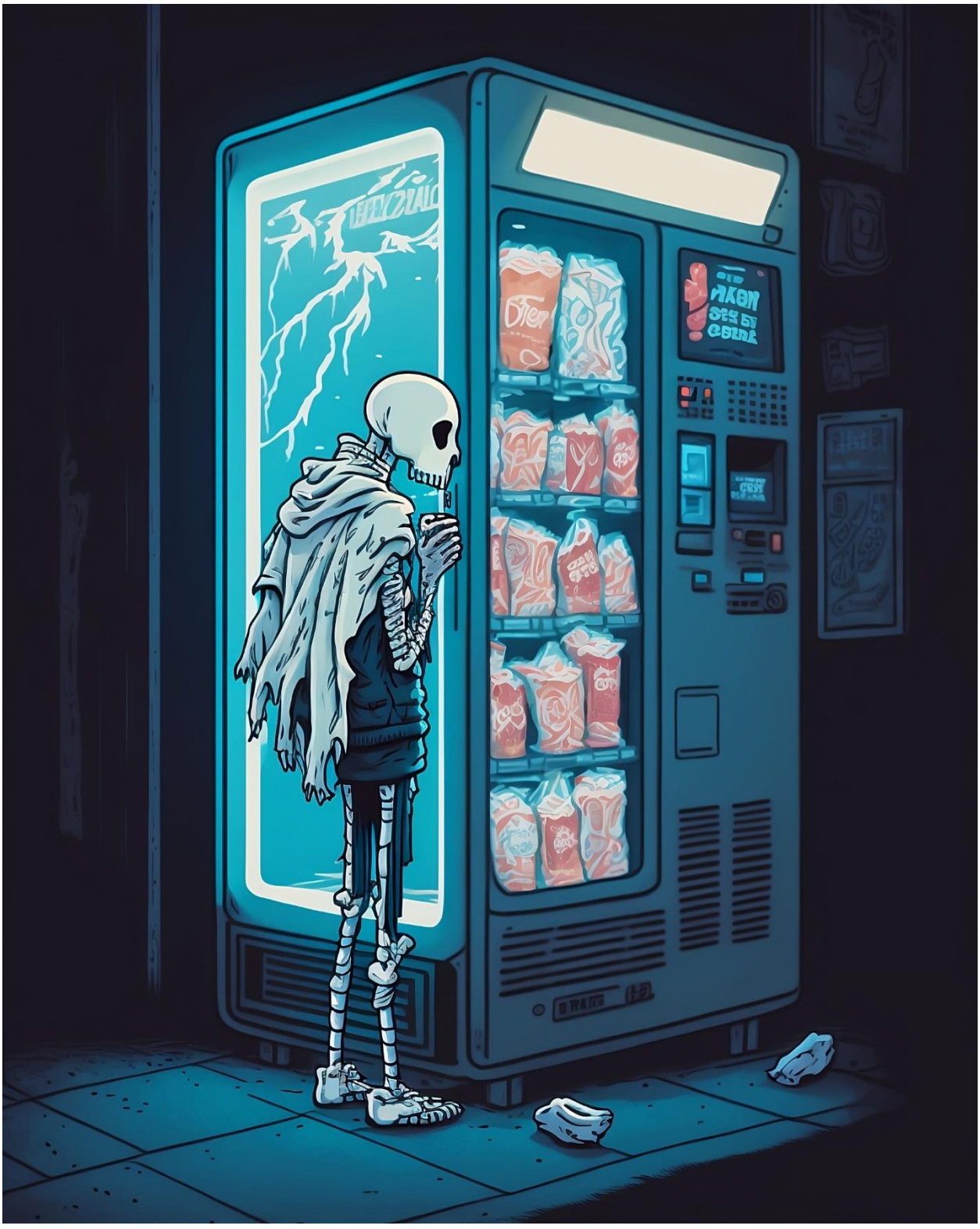

This is what the ants believe
This is what the ants believe


This is what the ants believe
This is what the ants believe


This is what the ants
believe


This is what the ants
believe


This is what the ants
believe



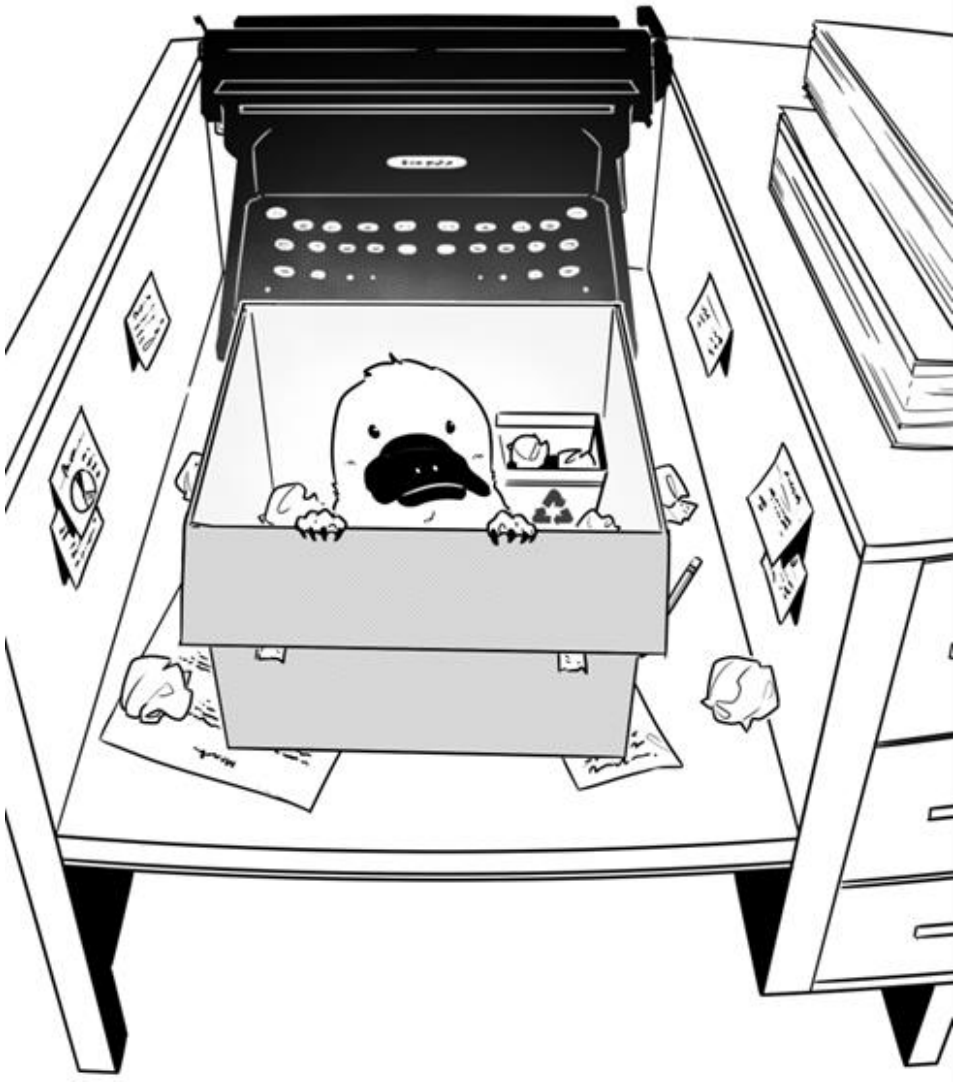




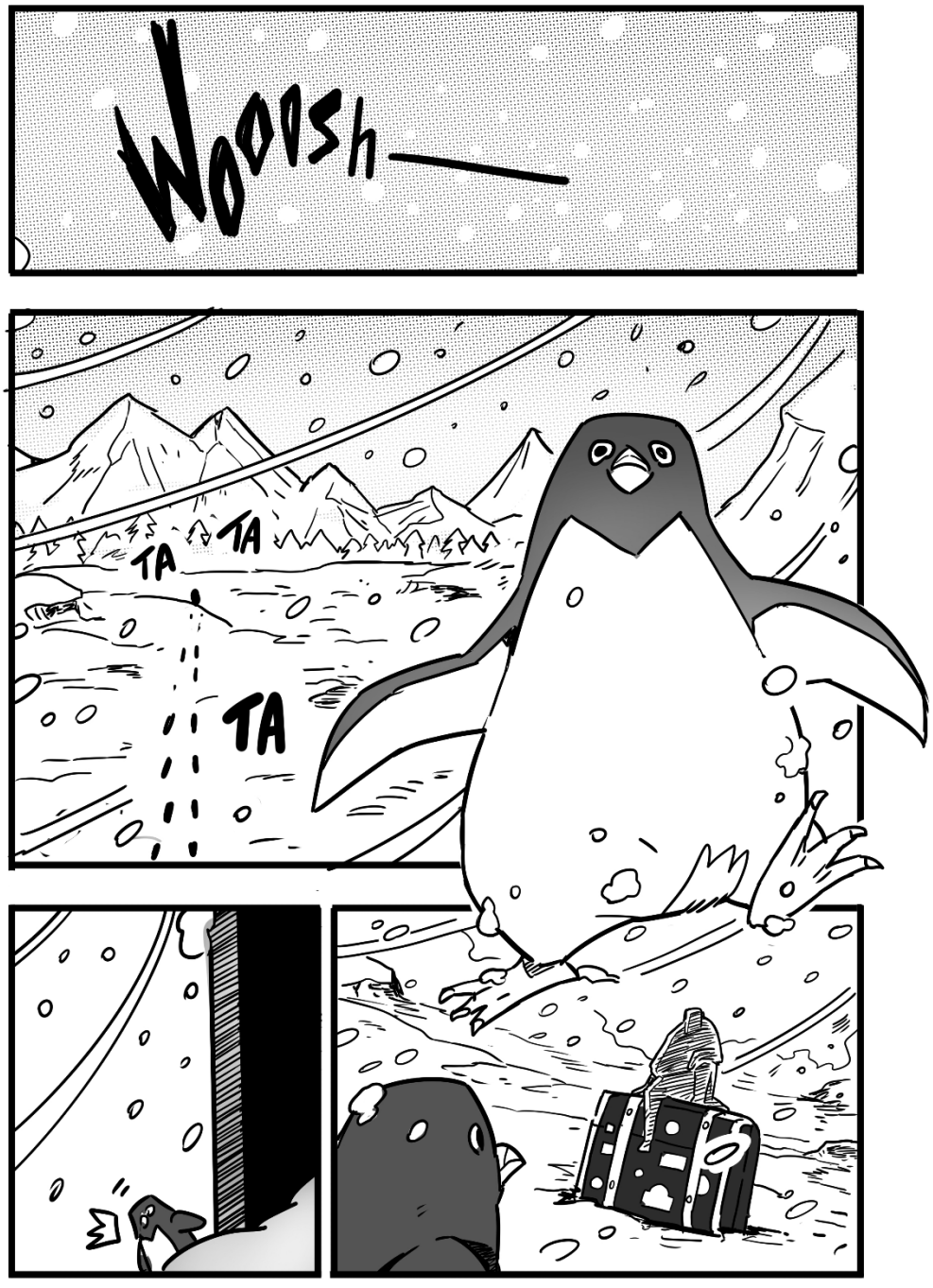


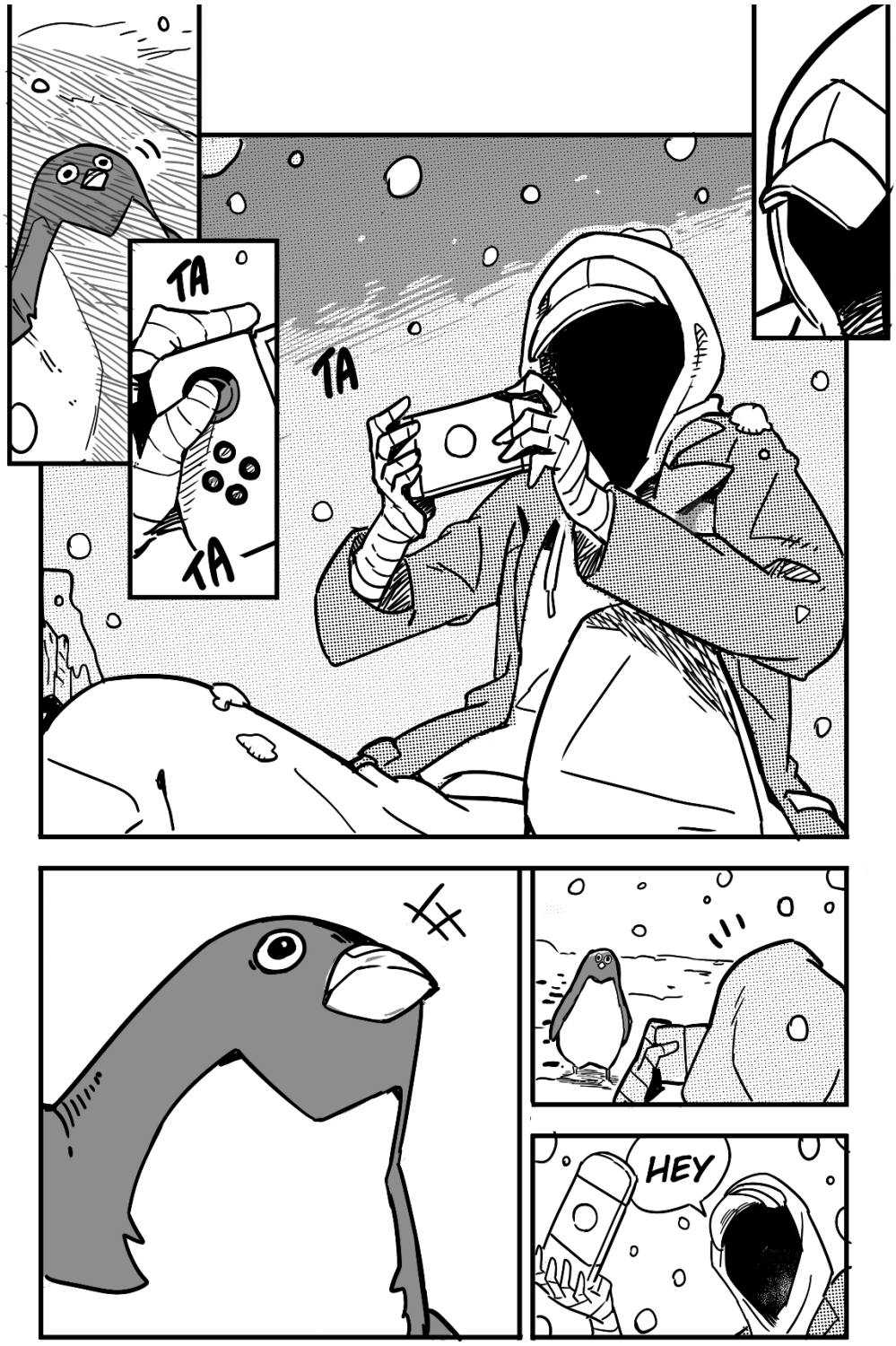


TUTORIAL MYTH

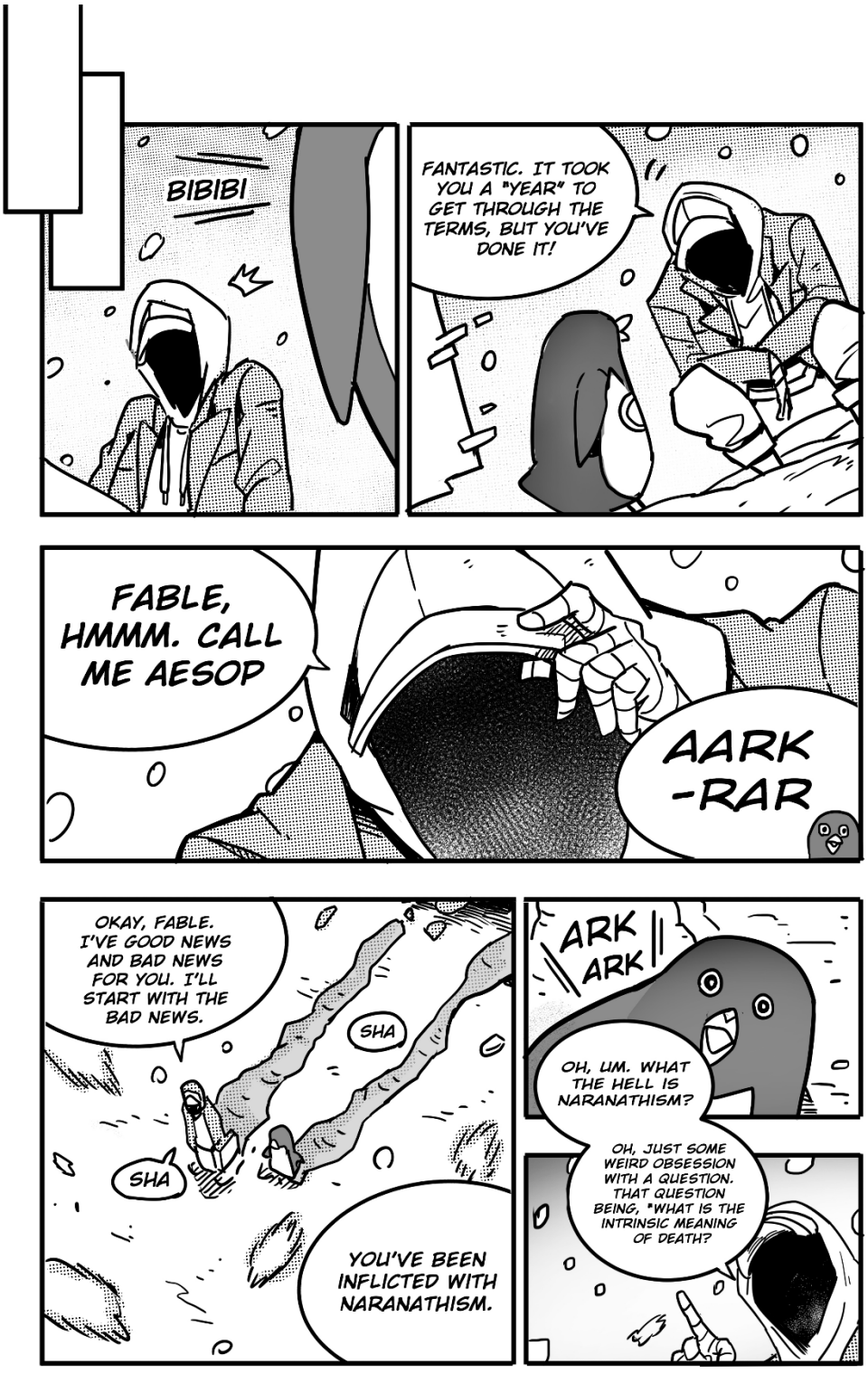


To understand this next part, watch "Encounters at the End of the World (2007)" and look for the scenes involving penguins.

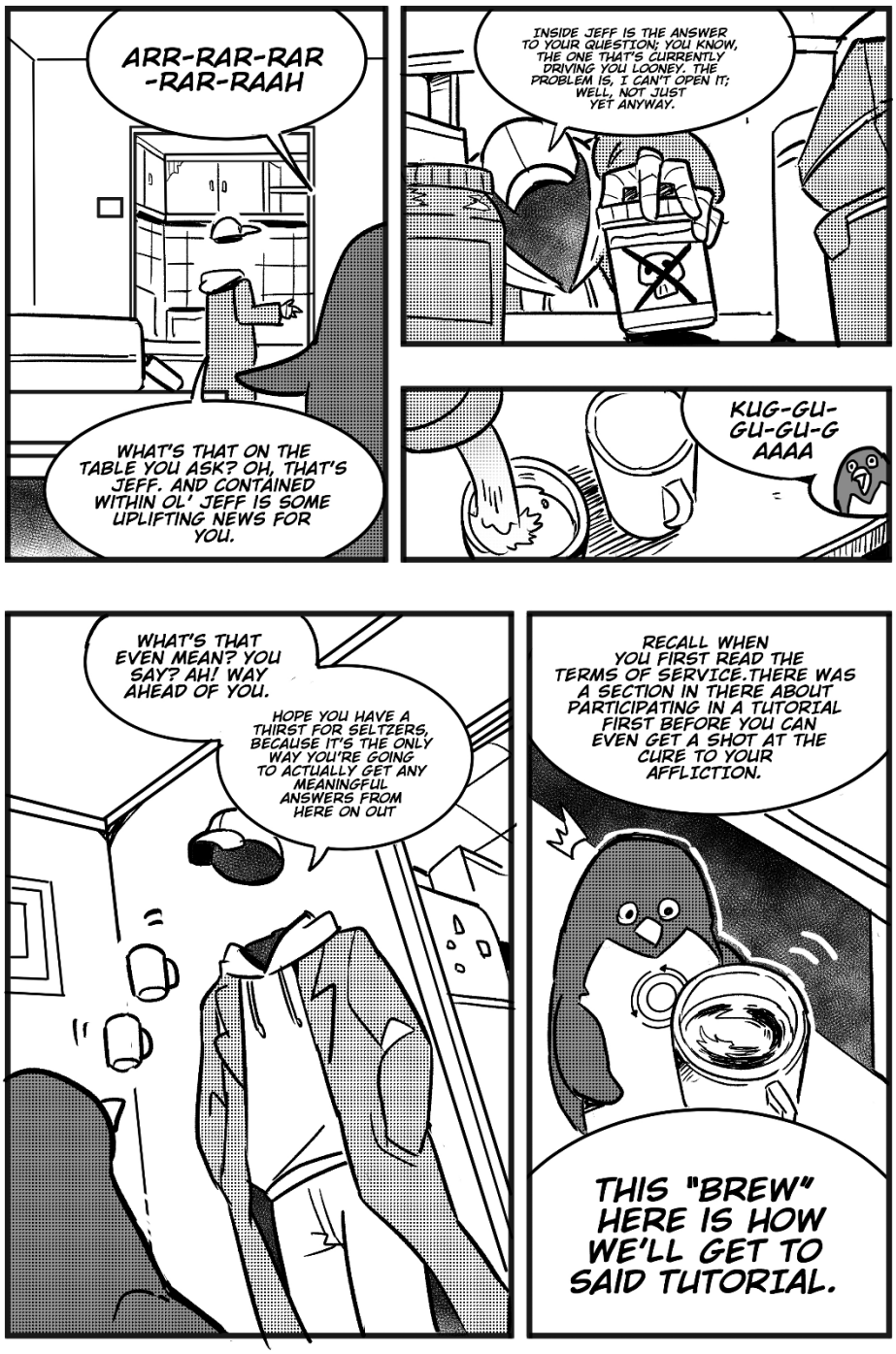

Woosh——
TA
TA
TA

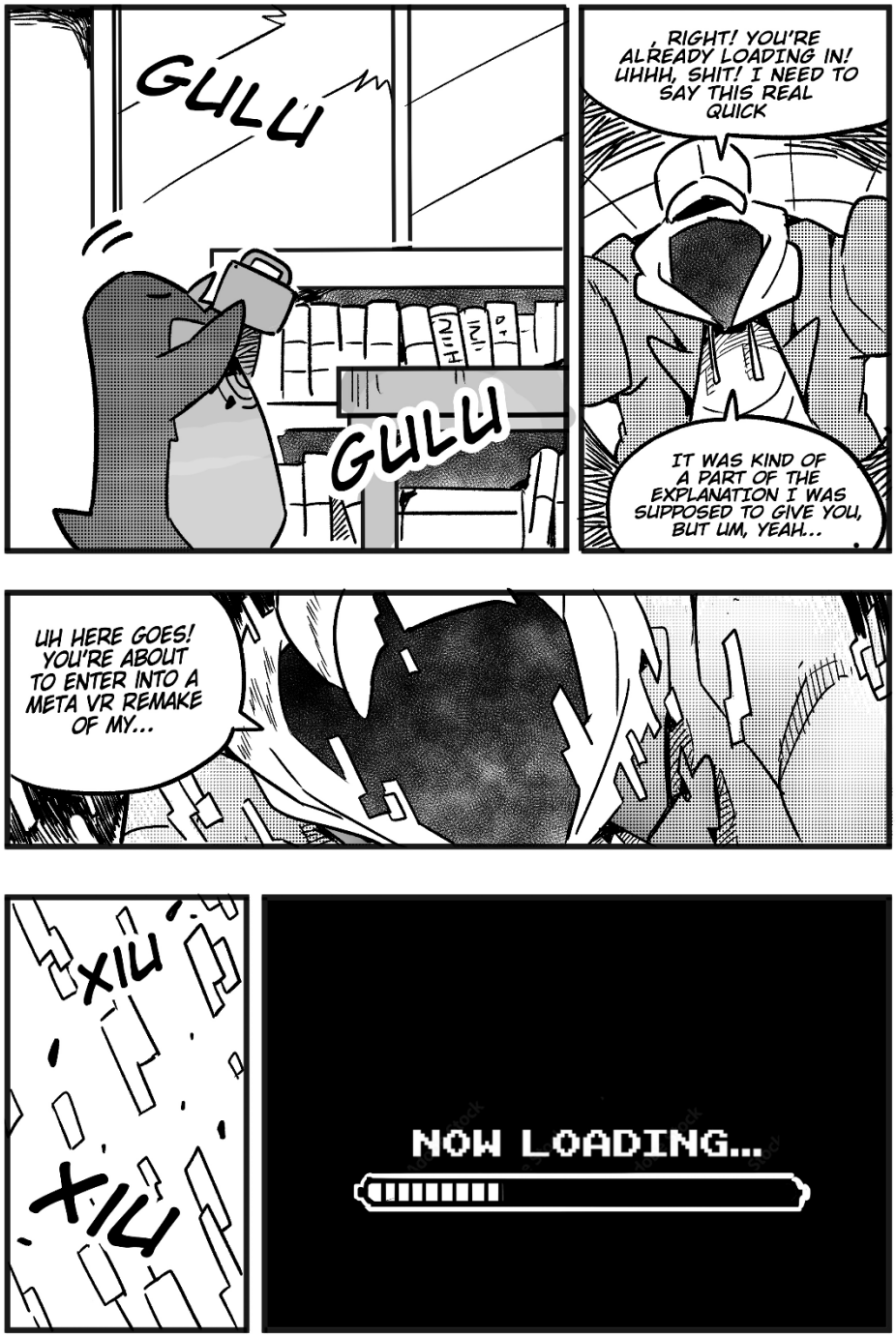

TA
TA
TA
HEY


TA!
FWOOSH
FWOOSH
TA
I NEED YOU TO READ THE TERMS OF SERVICE. AGREE TO THEM AND WE'LL PROCEED.
THERE! YOU CAN NOW MAKE CHOICES. BEFORE WE CONTINUE,
XIU

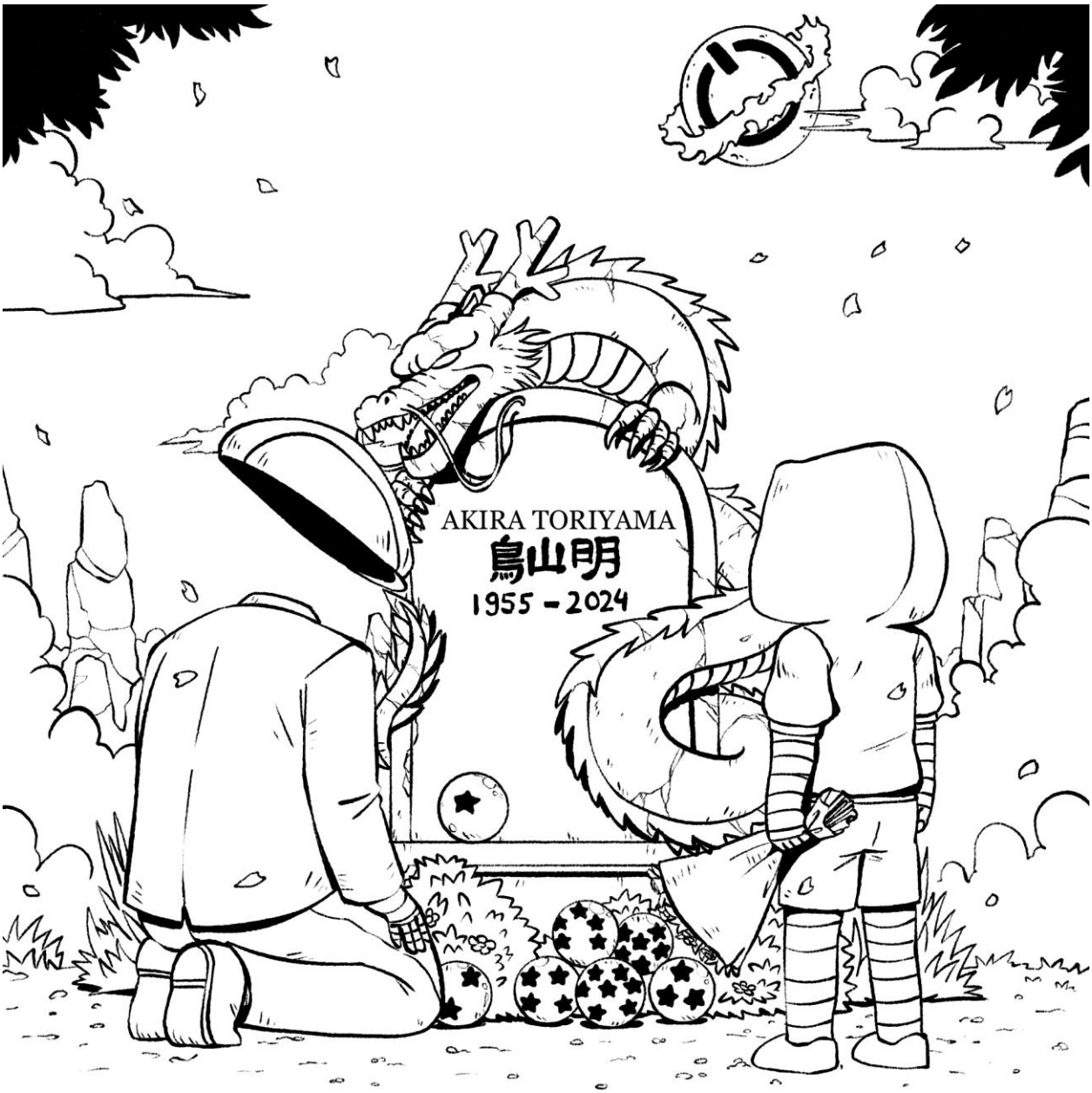

BIBIBI
FANTASTIC. IT TOOK YOU A "YEAR" TO GET THROUGH THE TERMS, BUT YOU'VE DONE IT!
FABLE, HMMM. CALL ME AESOP
AARK -RAR
OKAY, FABLE. I'VE GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR YOU. I'LL START WITH THE BAD NEWS.
SHA
SHA
YOU'VE BEEN INFLICTED WITH NARANATHISM.
ARK ARK
OH, UM. WHAT THE HELL IS NARANATHISM?
OH, JUST SOME WEIRD OBSESSION WITH A QUESTION. THAT QUESTION BEING, "WHAT IS THE INTRINSIC MEANING OF DEATH?


WHY ME? YOU SAY? BEATS ME. NO IDEA WHY THAT QUESTION KEEPS POPPING UP IN YOUR SPECIES' HEADS
ARRKK
FORTUNATELY, I'M HERE TO ALLEVIATE THAT


ARR-RAR-RAR -RAR-RAAH
WHAT'S THAT ON THE TABLE YOU ASK? OH, THAT'S JEFF. AND CONTAINED WITHIN OL' JEFF IS SOME UPLIFTING NEWS FOR YOU.
INSIDE JEFF IS THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION; YOU KNOW, THE ONE THAT'S CURRENTLY DRIVING YOU LOONEY. THE PROBLEM IS, I CAN'T OPEN IT; WELL, NOT JUST YET ANYWAY.
KUG-GU-GU-GU-G AAAA
WHAT'S THAT EVEN MEAN? YOU SAY? AH! WAY AHEAD OF YOU.
HOPE YOU HAVE A THIRST FOR SELTZERS, BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY WAY YOU'RE GOING TO ACTUALLY GET ANY MEANINGFUL ANSWERS FROM HERE ON OUT
RECALL WHEN YOU FIRST READ THE TERMS OF SERVICE.THERE WAS A SECTION IN THERE ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN A TUTORIAL FIRST BEFORE YOU CAN EVEN GET A SHOT AT THE CURE TO YOUR AFFLICTION.
THIS "BREW" HERE IS HOW WE'LL GET TO SAID TUTORIAL.


GULU
GULU
, RIGHT! YOU'RE ALREADY LOADING IN! UHHH, SHIT! I NEED TO SAY THIS REAL QUICK
IT WAS KIND OF A PART OF THE EXPLANATION I WAS SUPPOSED TO GIVE YOU, BUT UM, YEAH...
UH HERE GOES! YOU'RE ABOUT TO ENTER INTO A META VR REMAKE OF MY...
XIU
XIU
NOW LOADING...

In Memory of Akira Toriyama



Thank You for Making Our Childhoods Suck Less

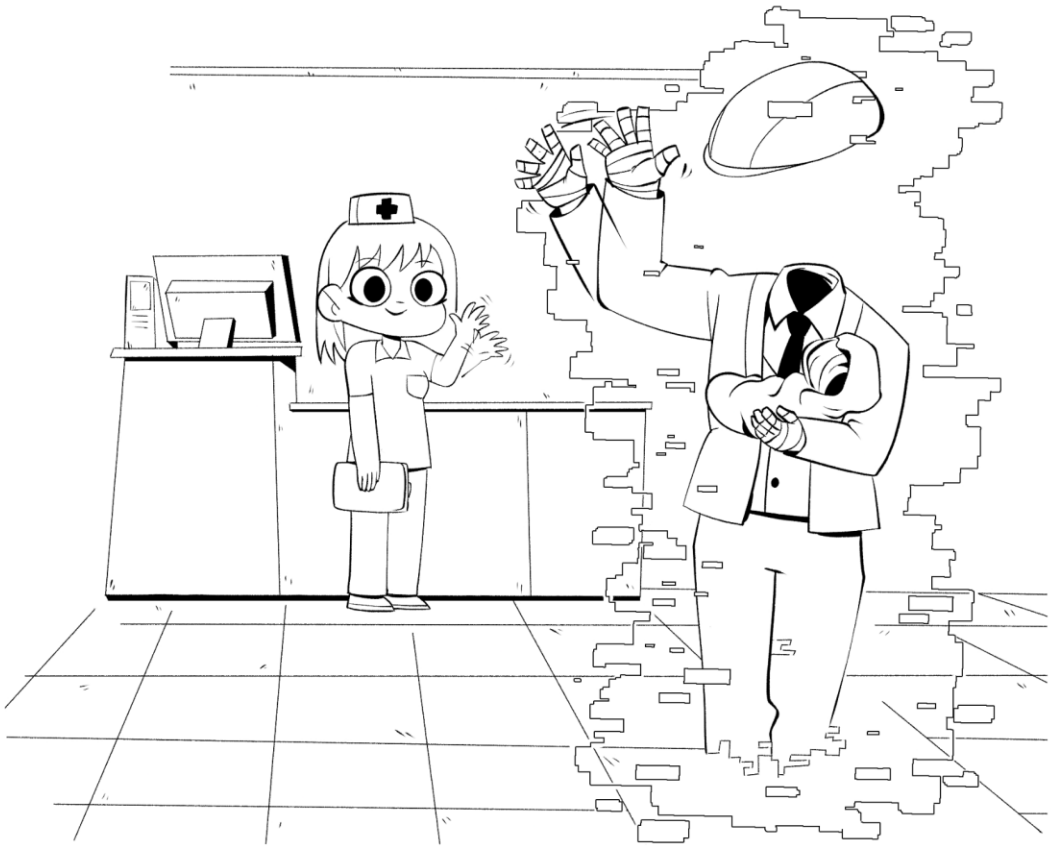
I’ve a strange tale to tell you.

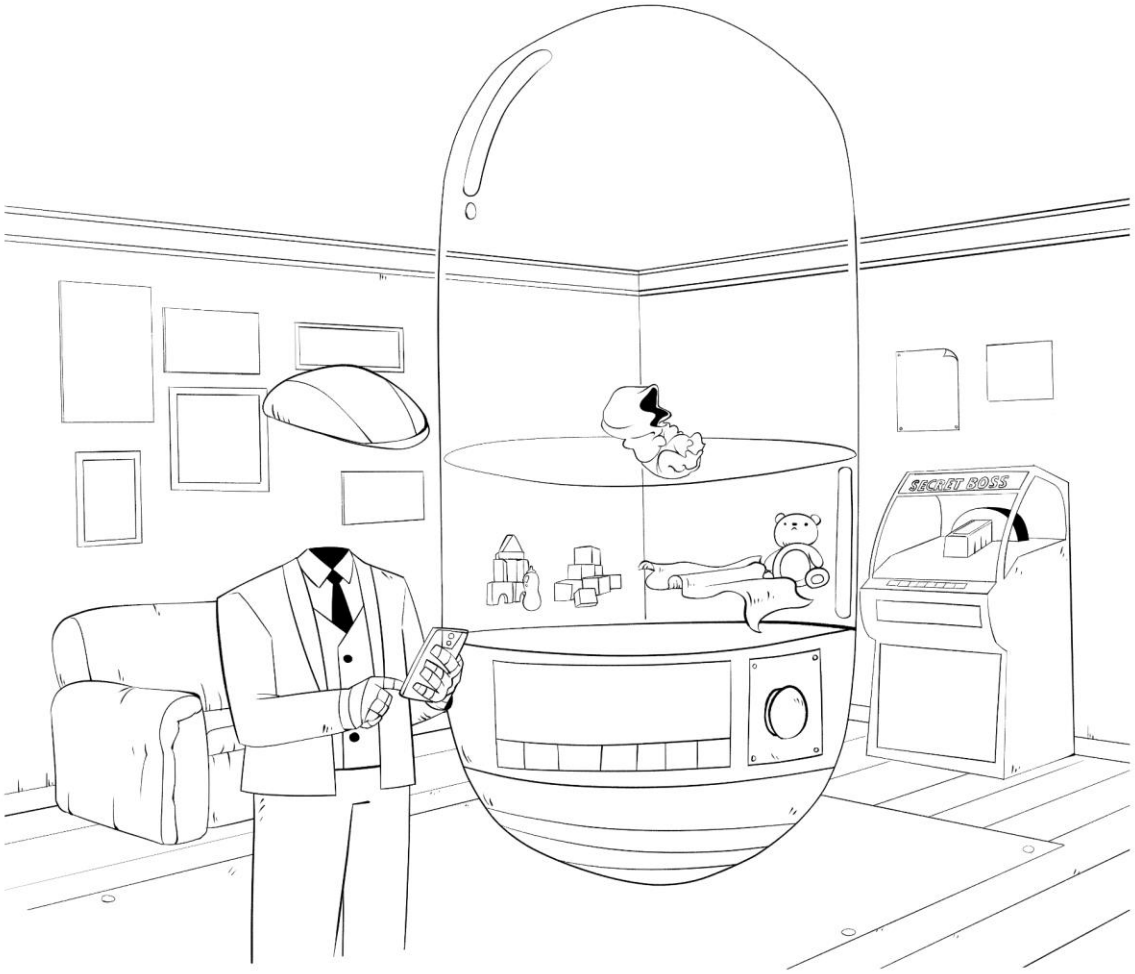
A tale that the plants tell themselves whenever Naranathism comes to greet them.

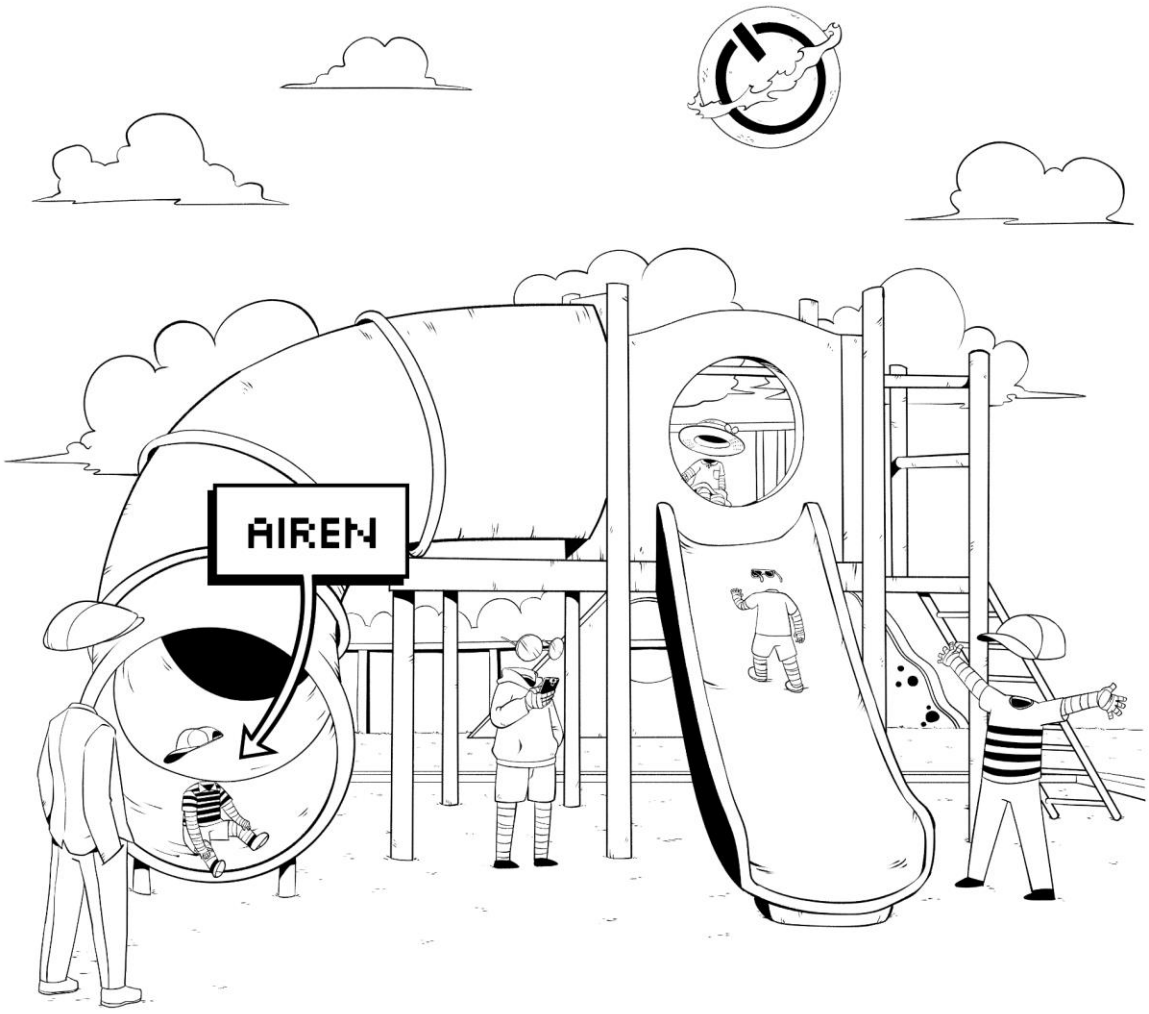
A tale about a metafictional deity on a 1000 year Quest to earn the answer to the following question:

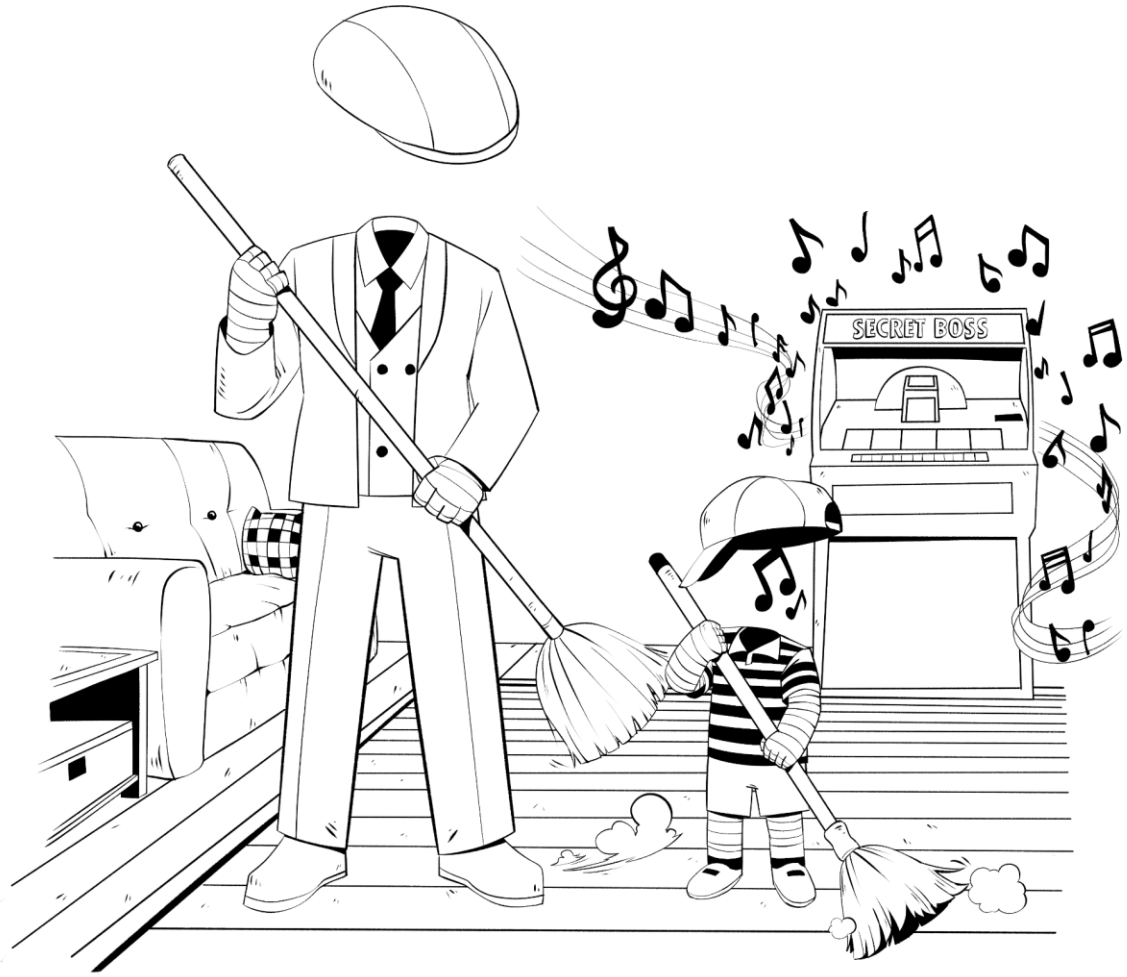
What is the intrinsic meaning of Life?

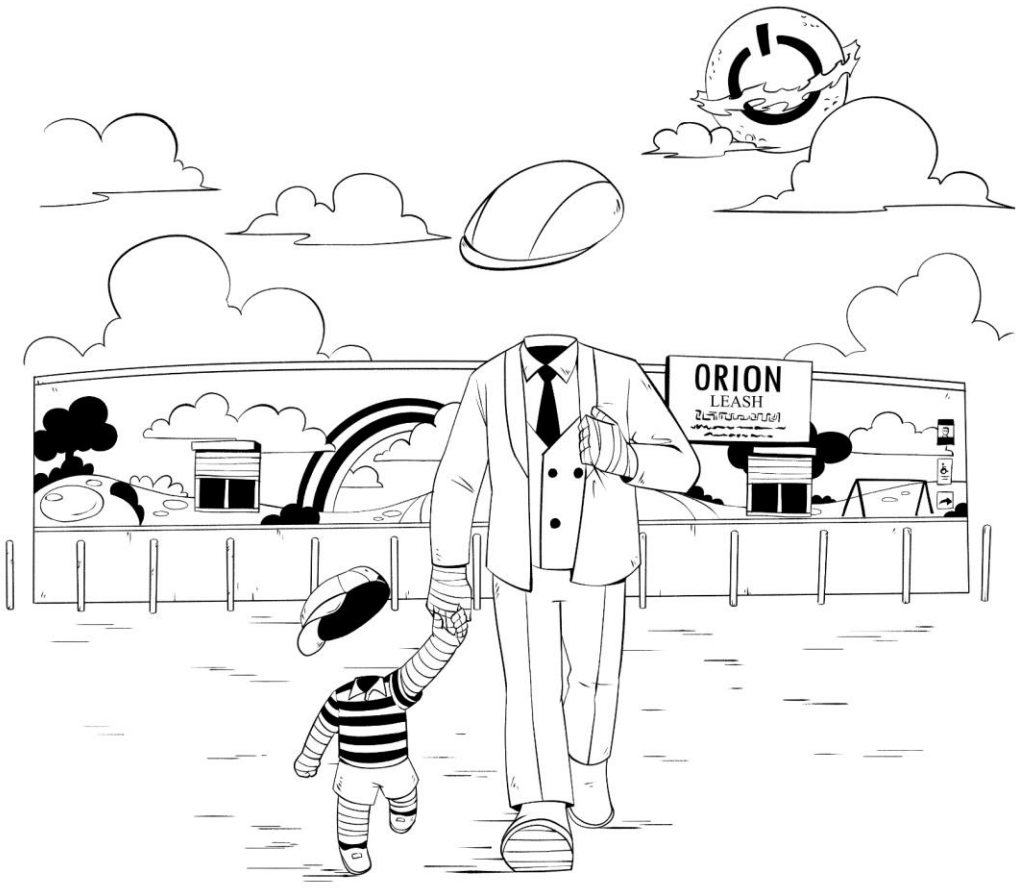





SECRET BOSS


AIREN

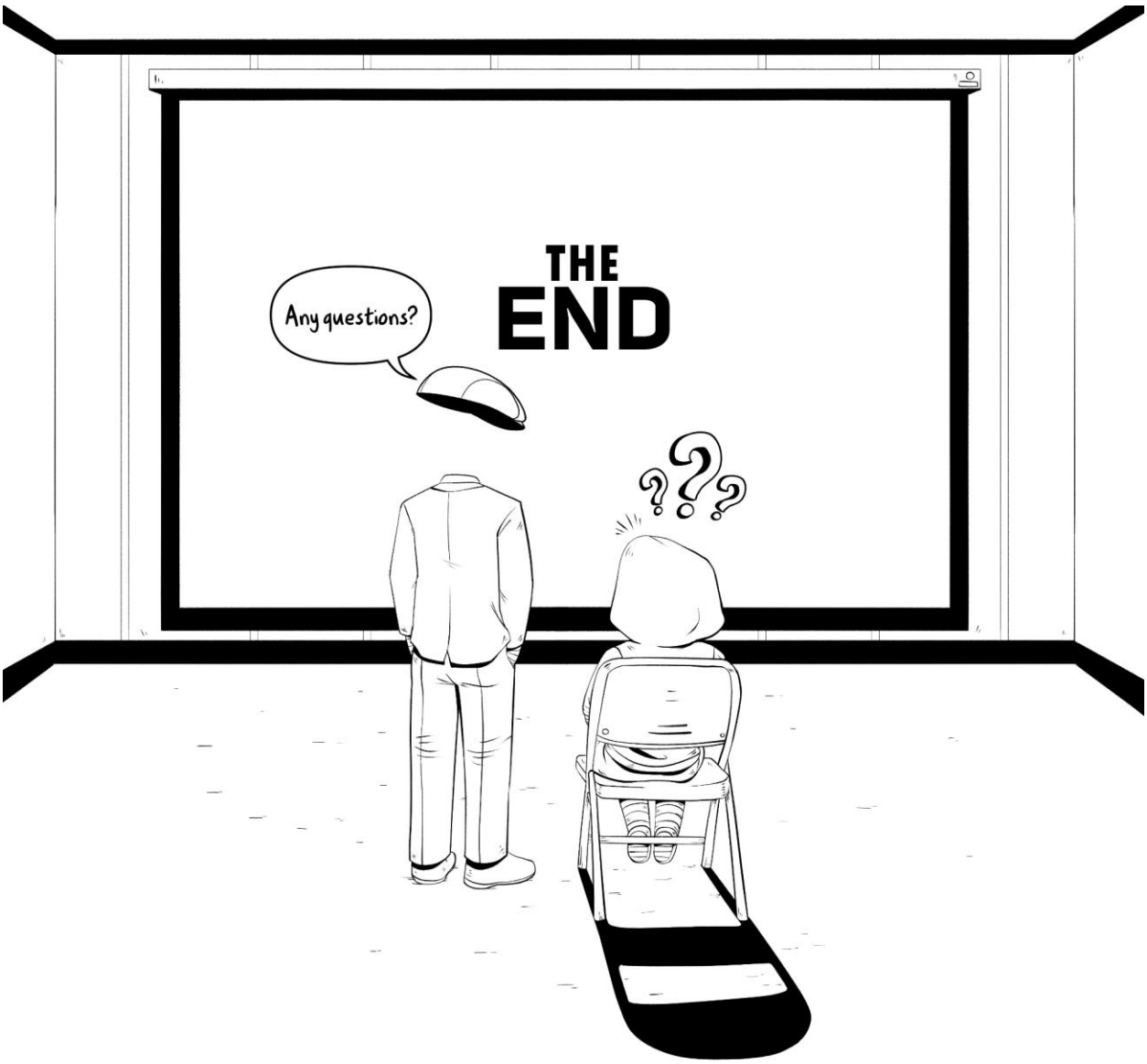

SECRET BOSS

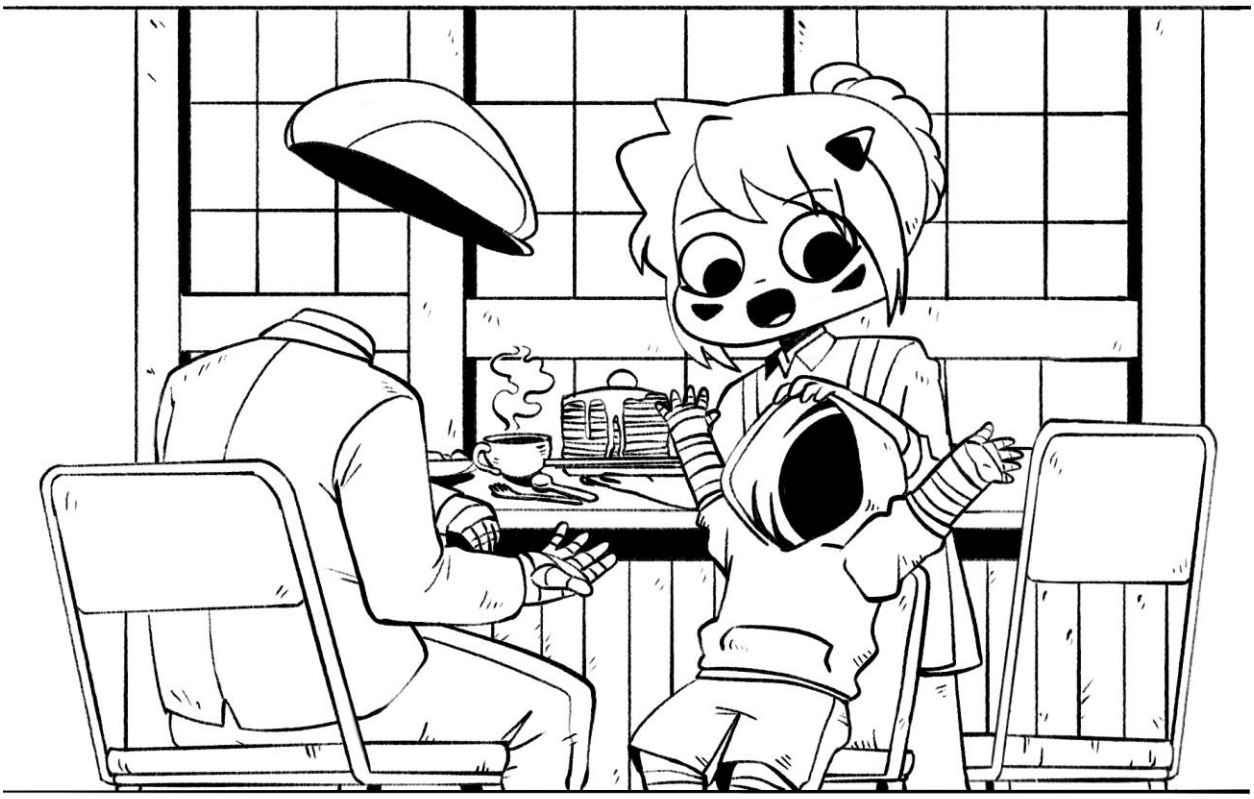

ORION
LEASH

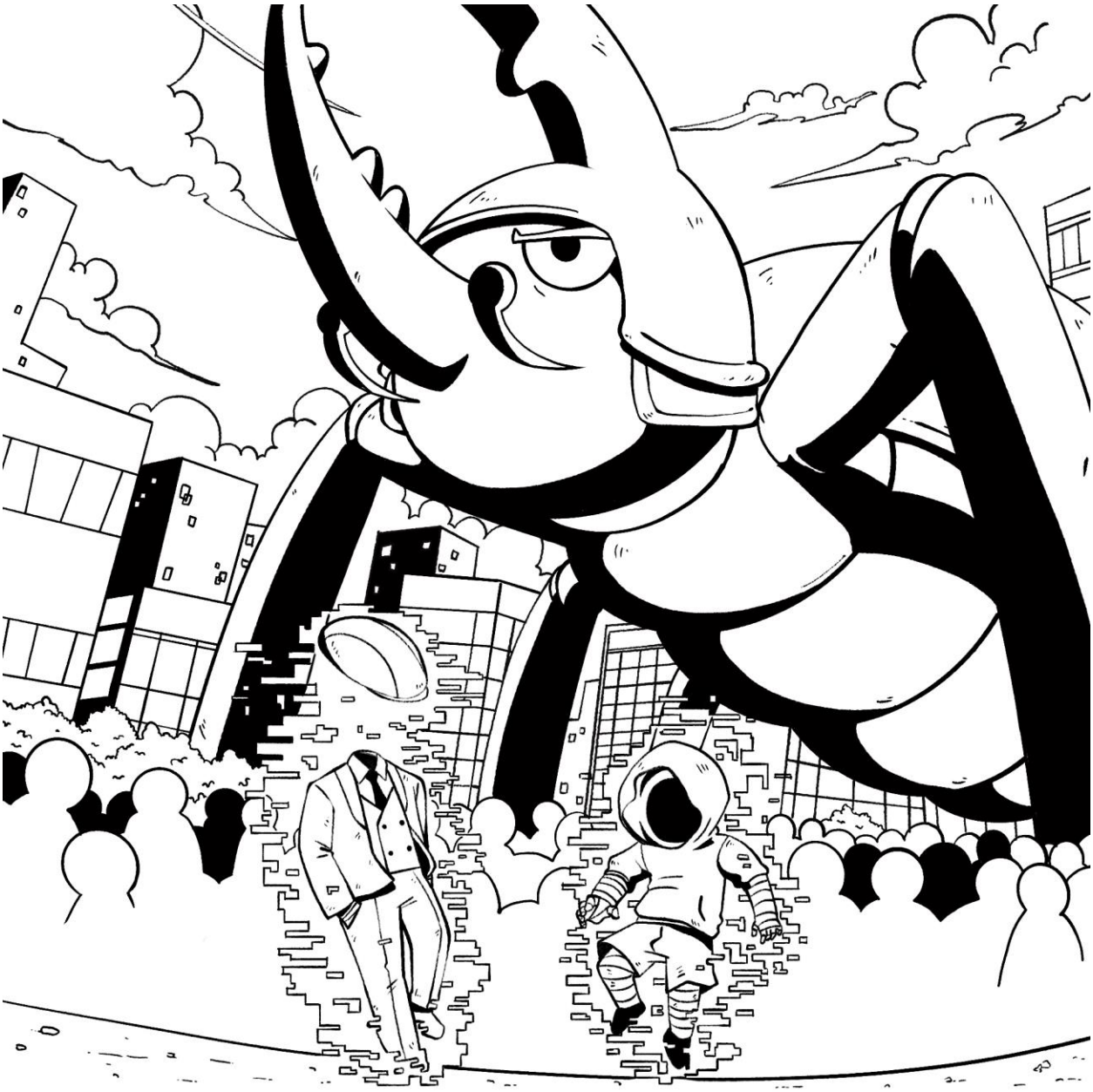

INVENTORY


GG, what's the
HIGHER ADVENTURE?


IP
RECORD

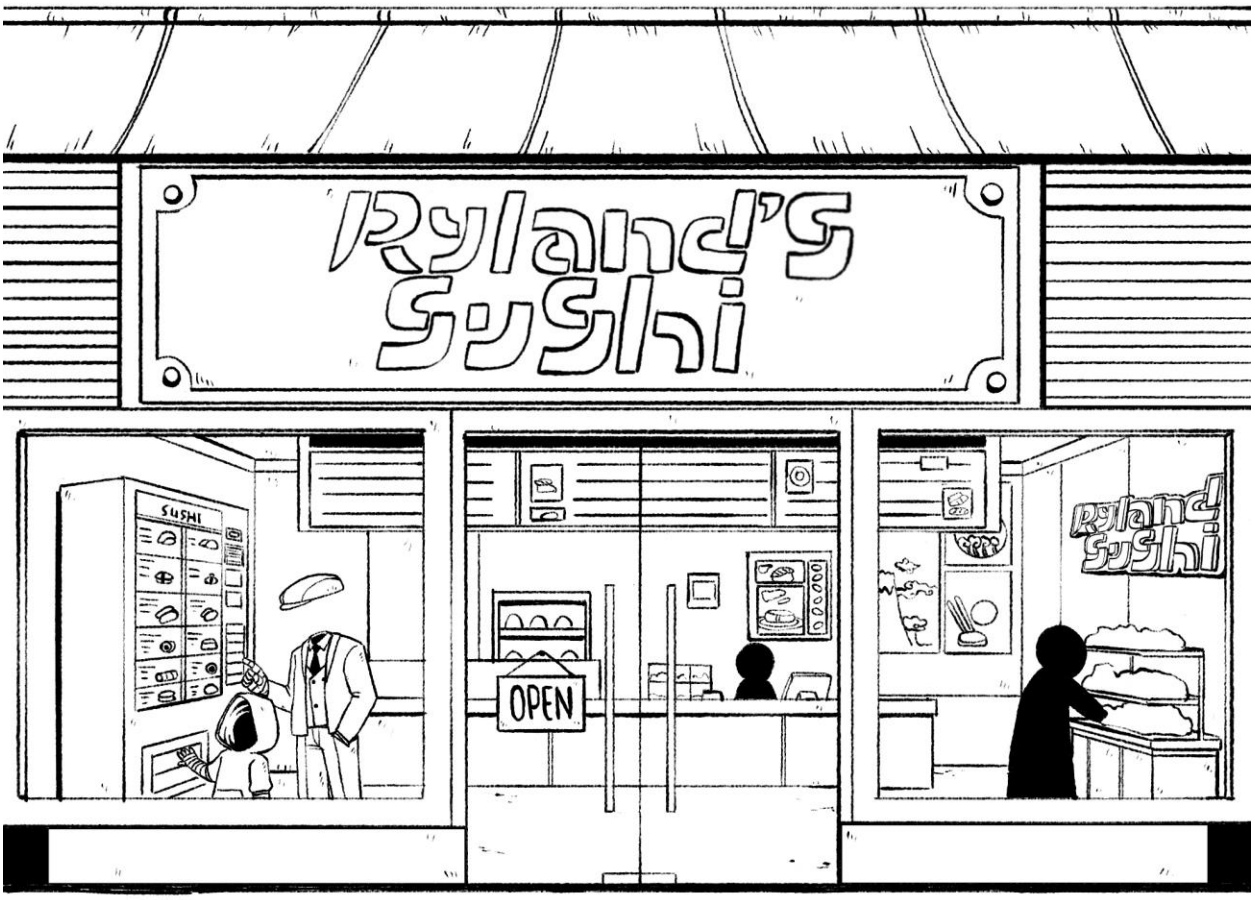

THE
END
Any questions?

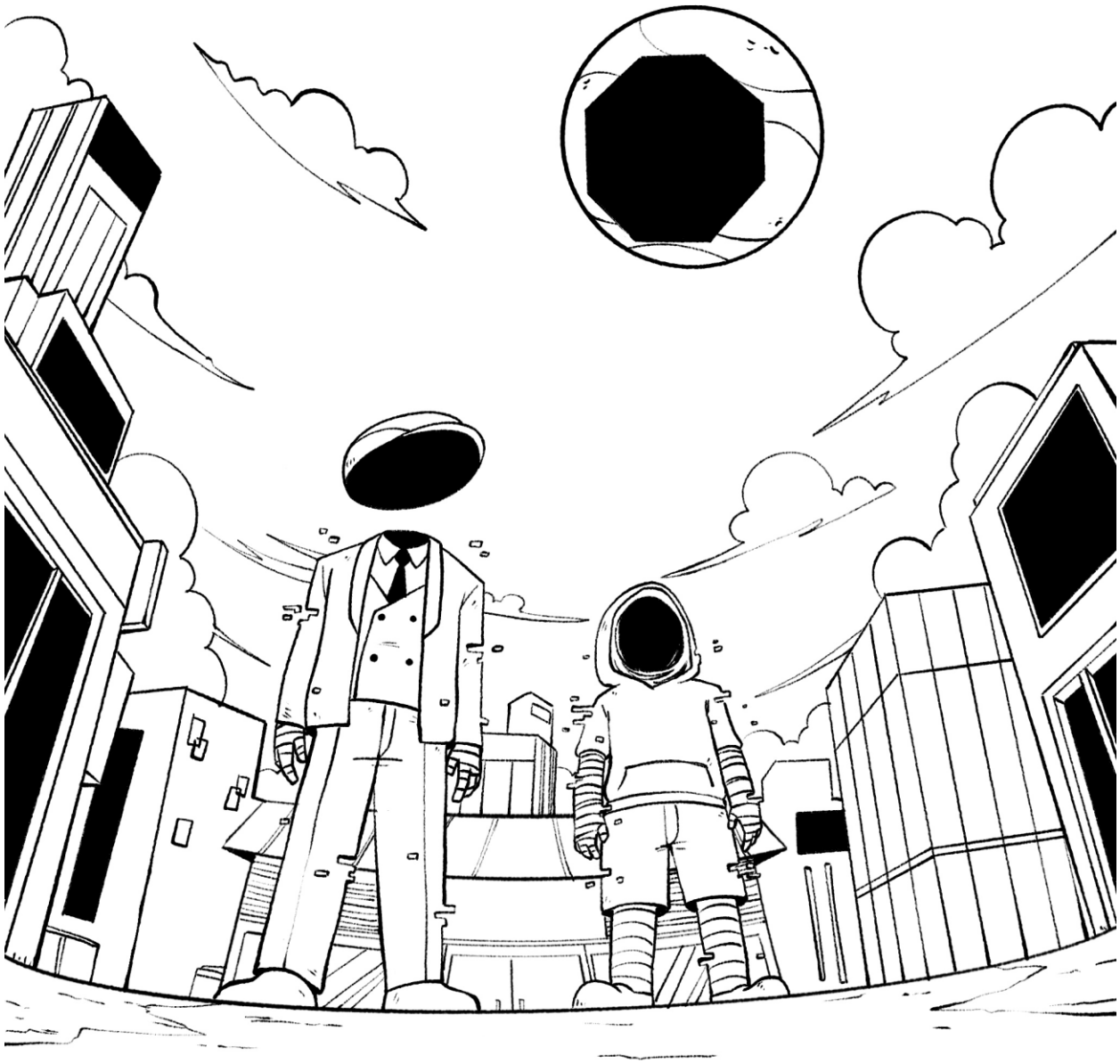


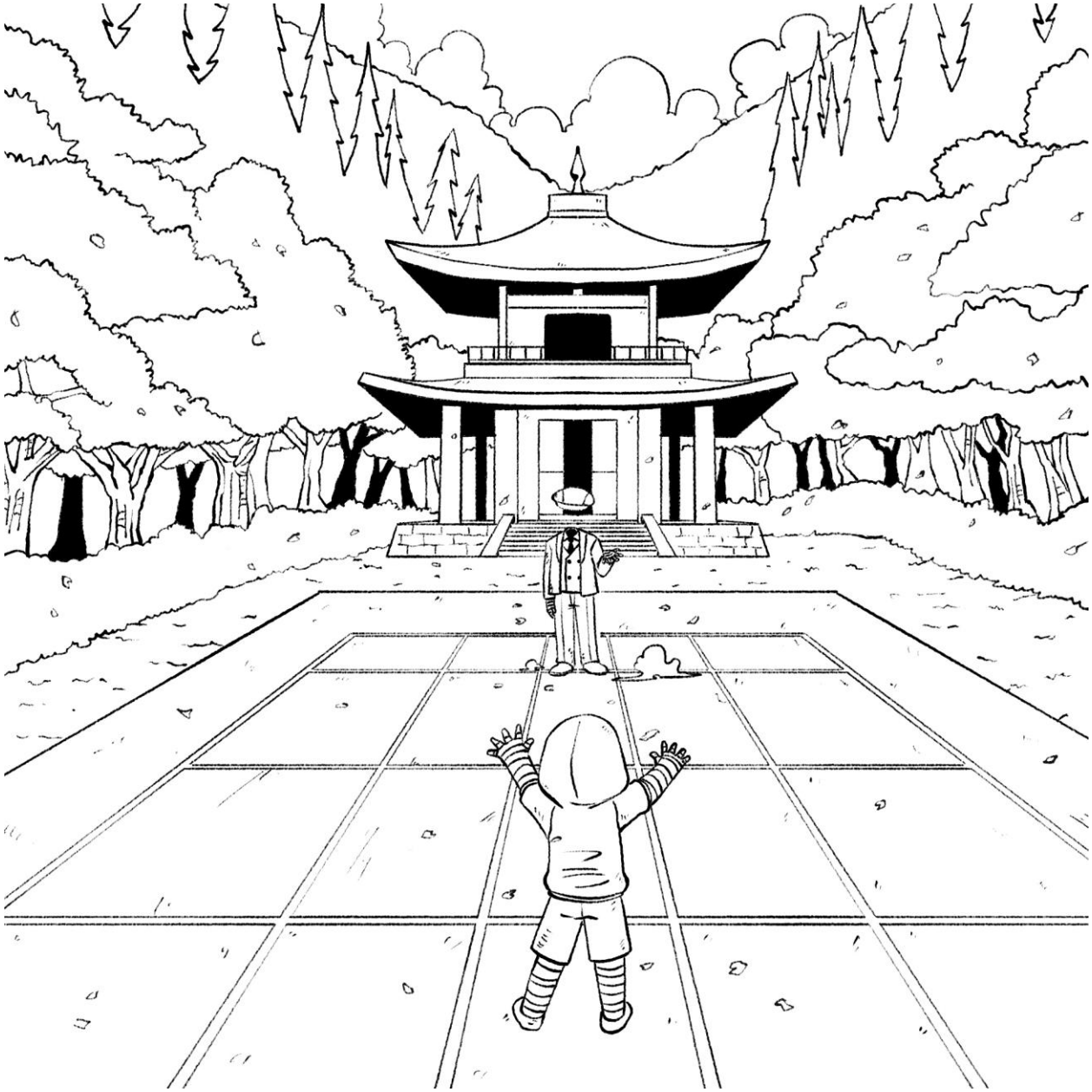


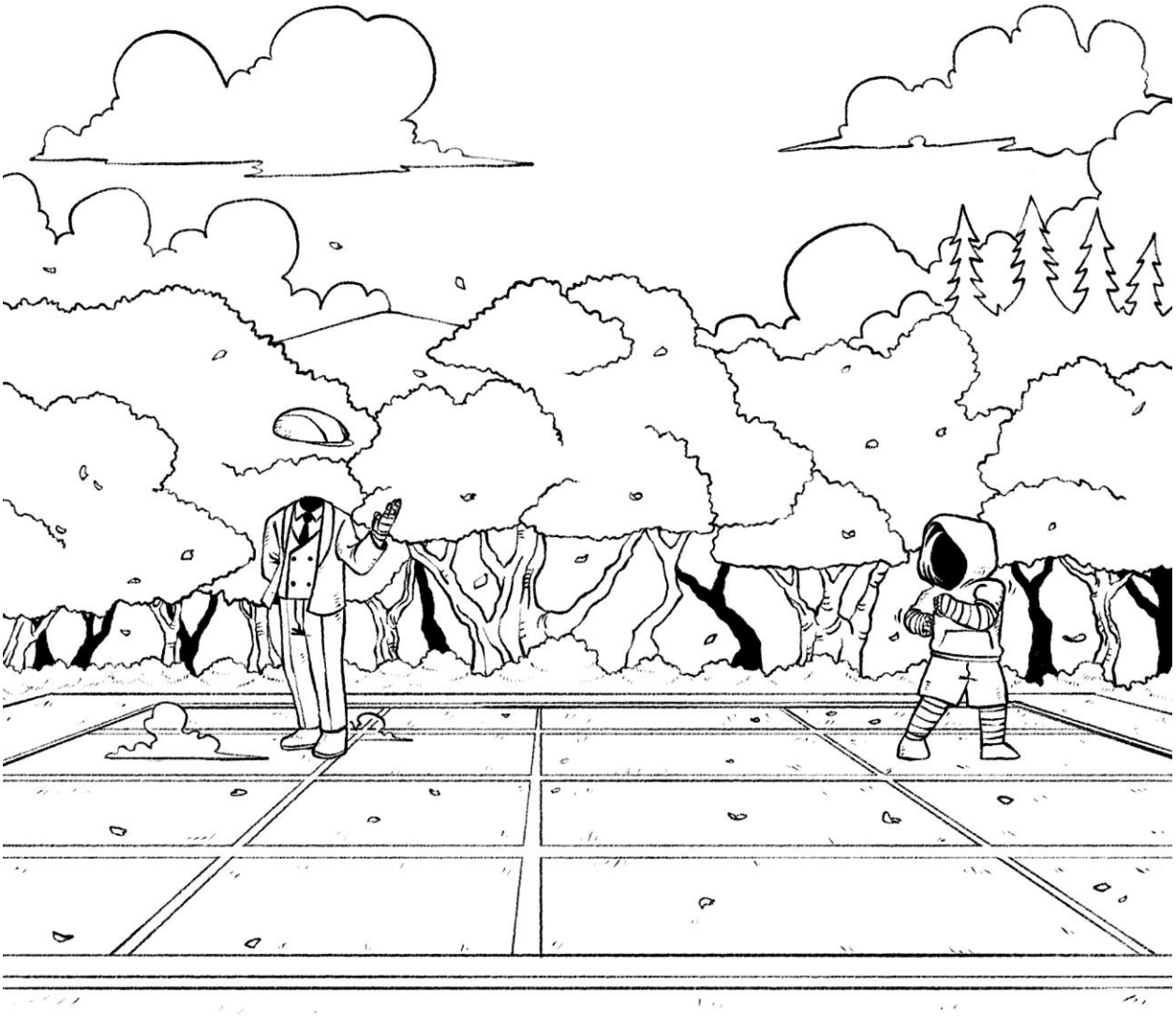

ONI COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

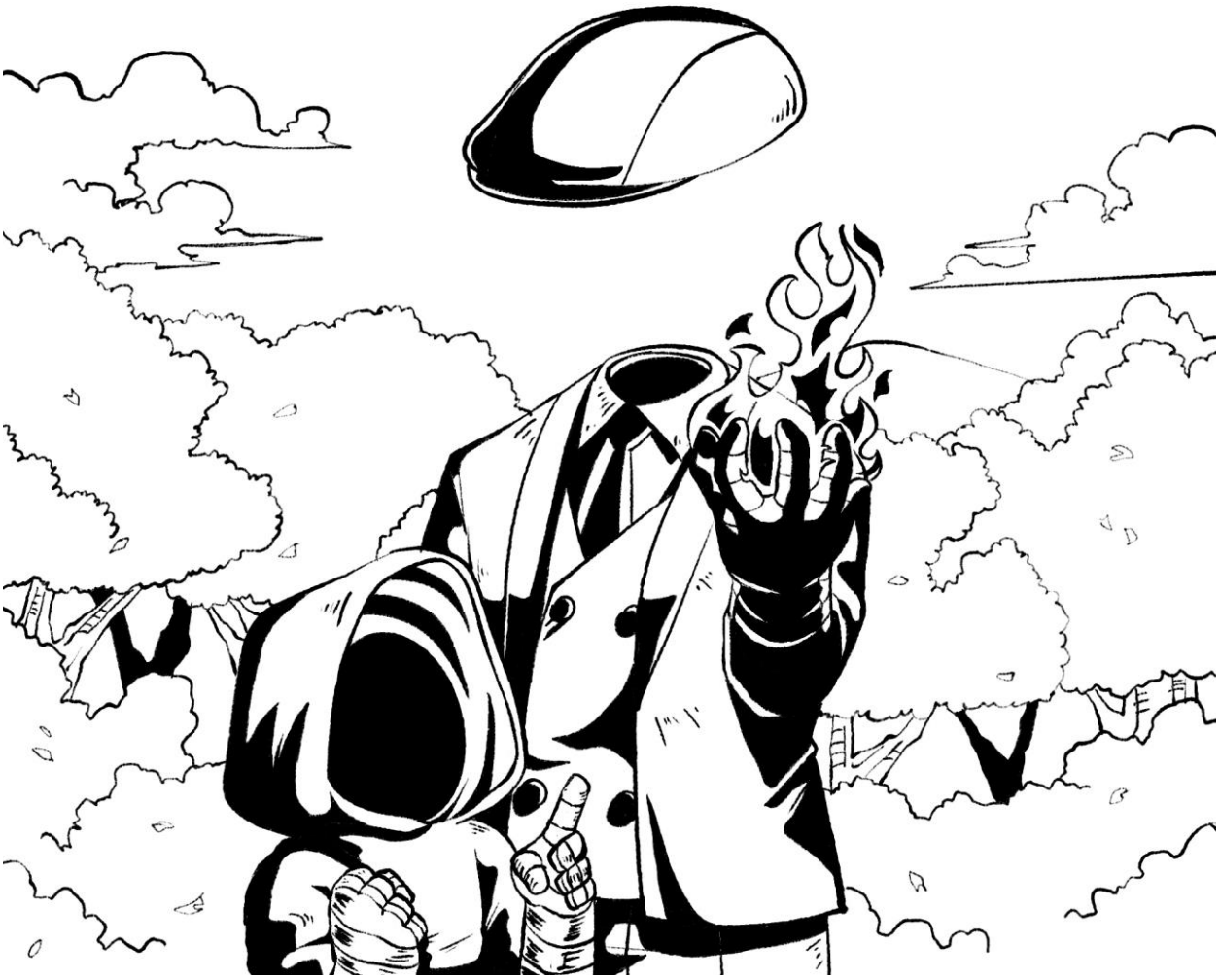

COUNSELOR'S OFFICE
GENT


Ryland's Sushi
SUSHI
OPEN
Ryland Sushi

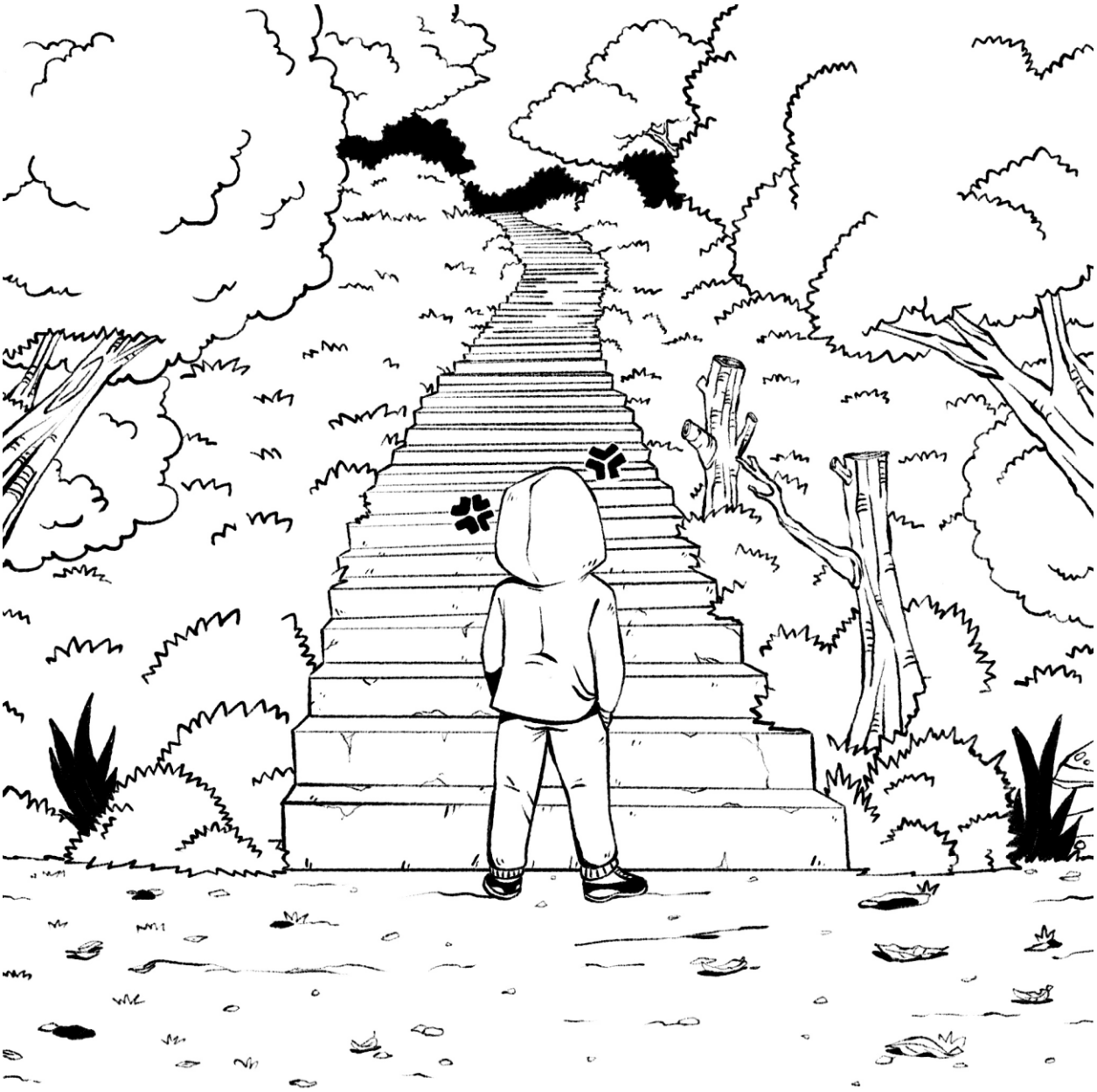




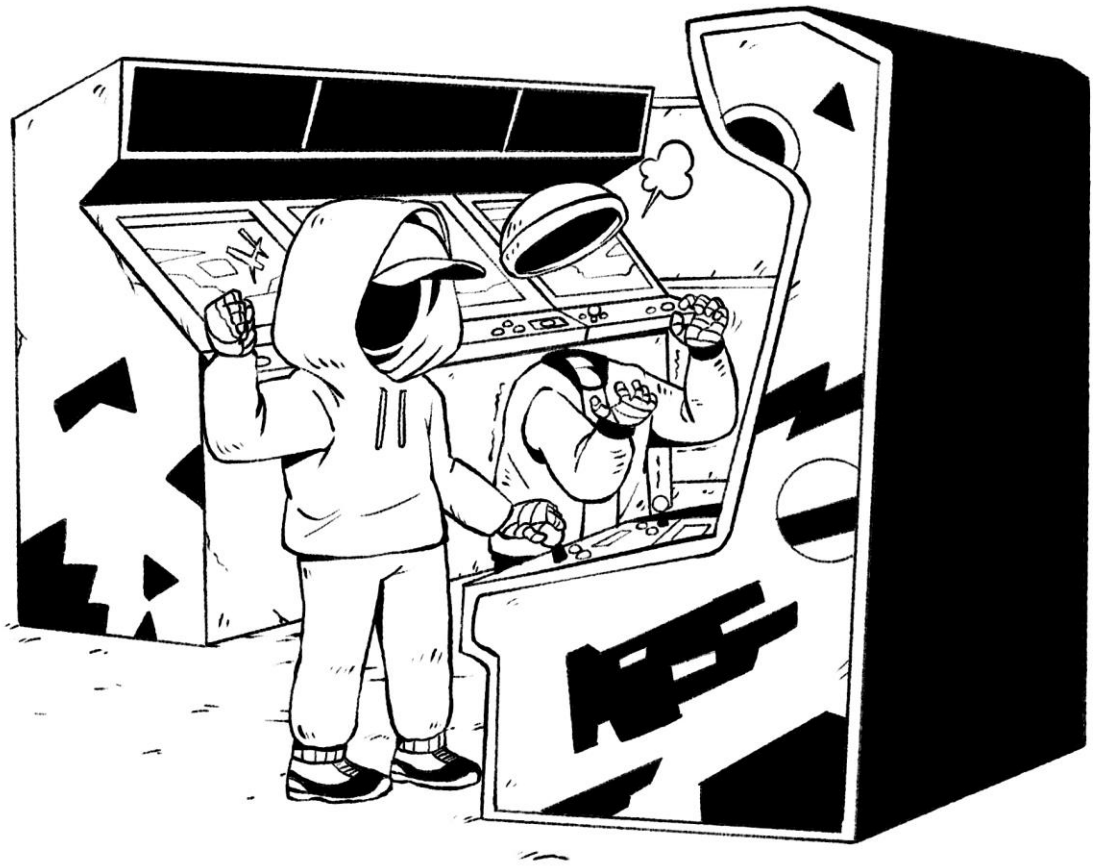




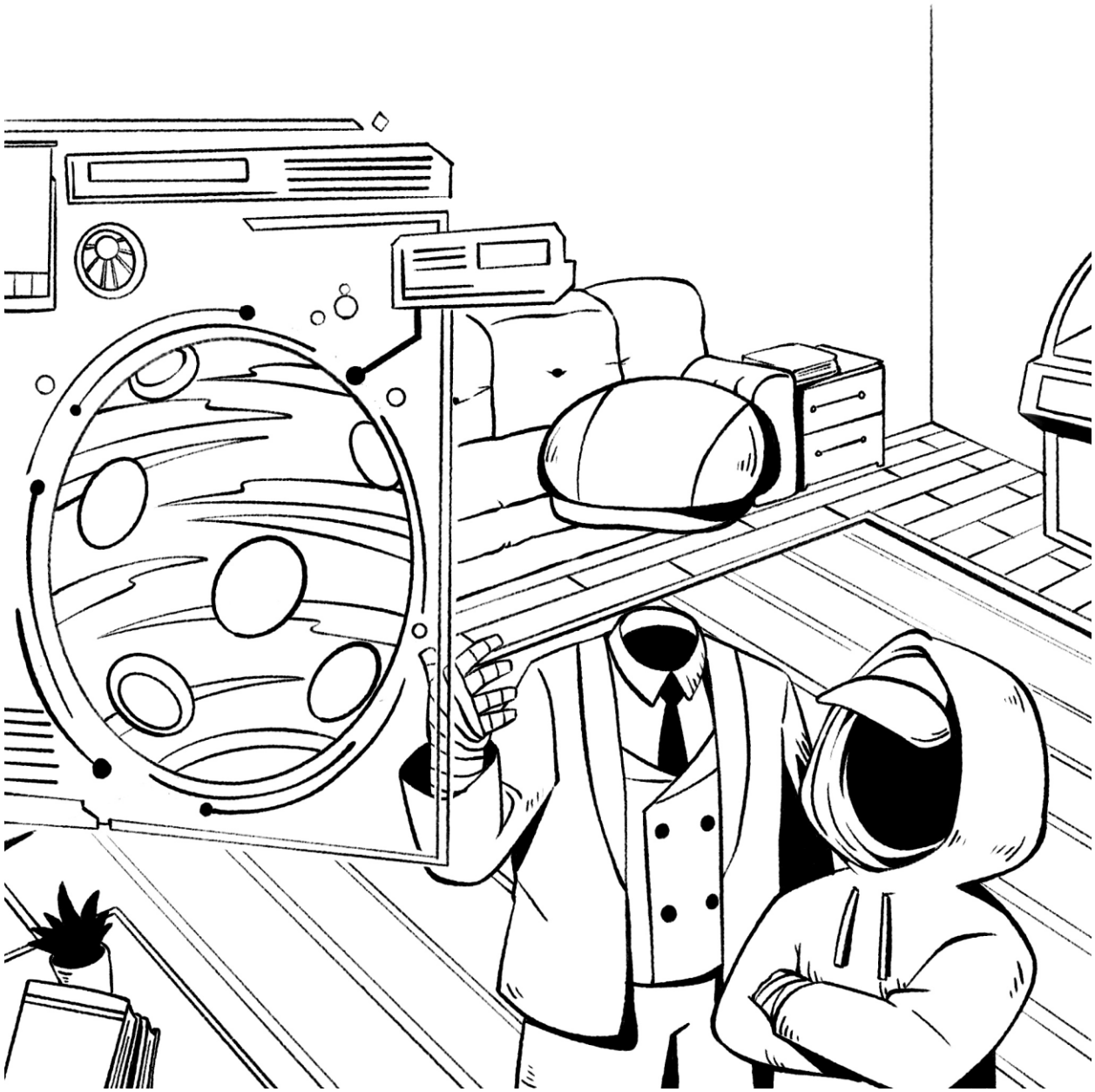


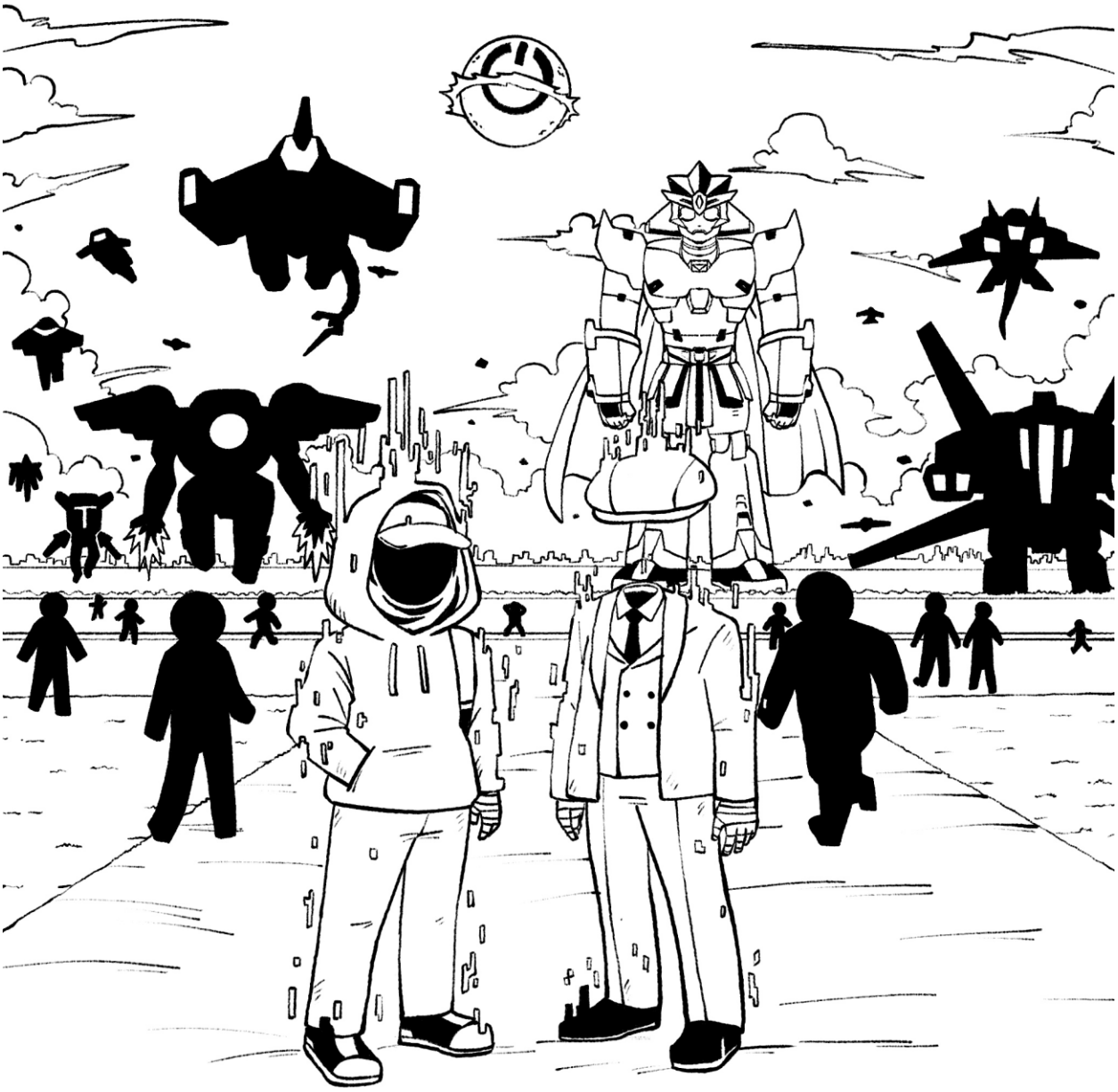




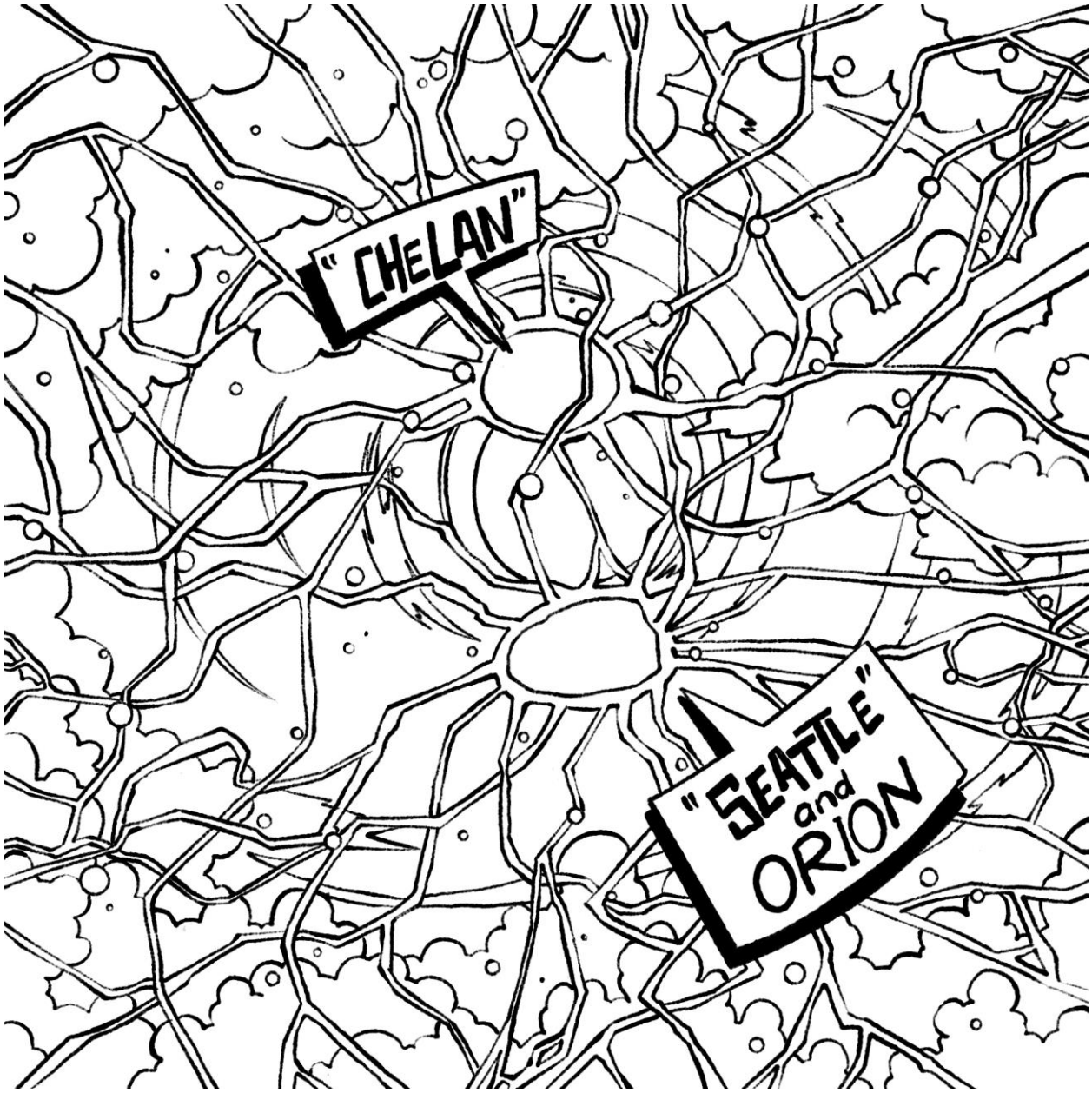


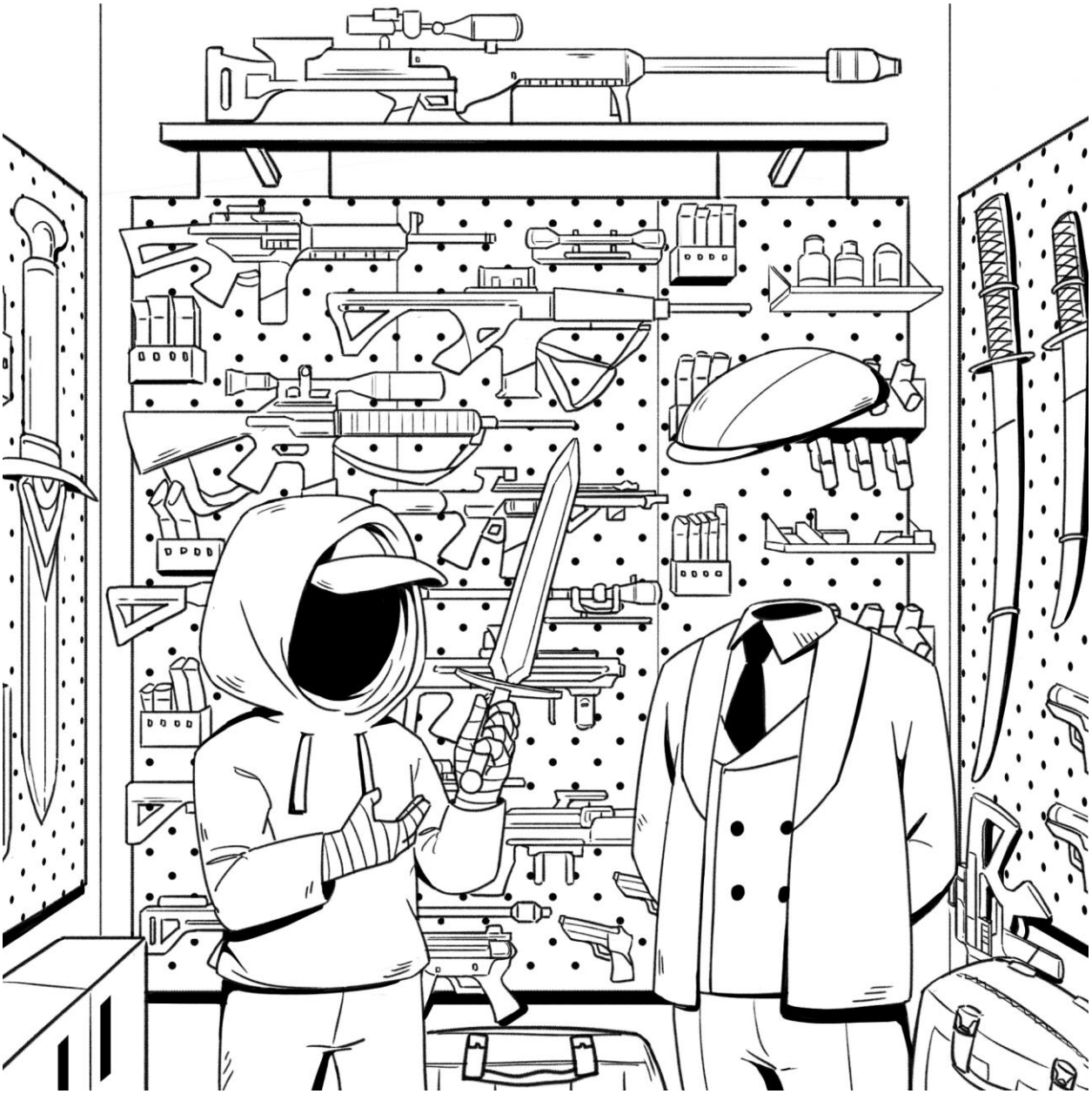




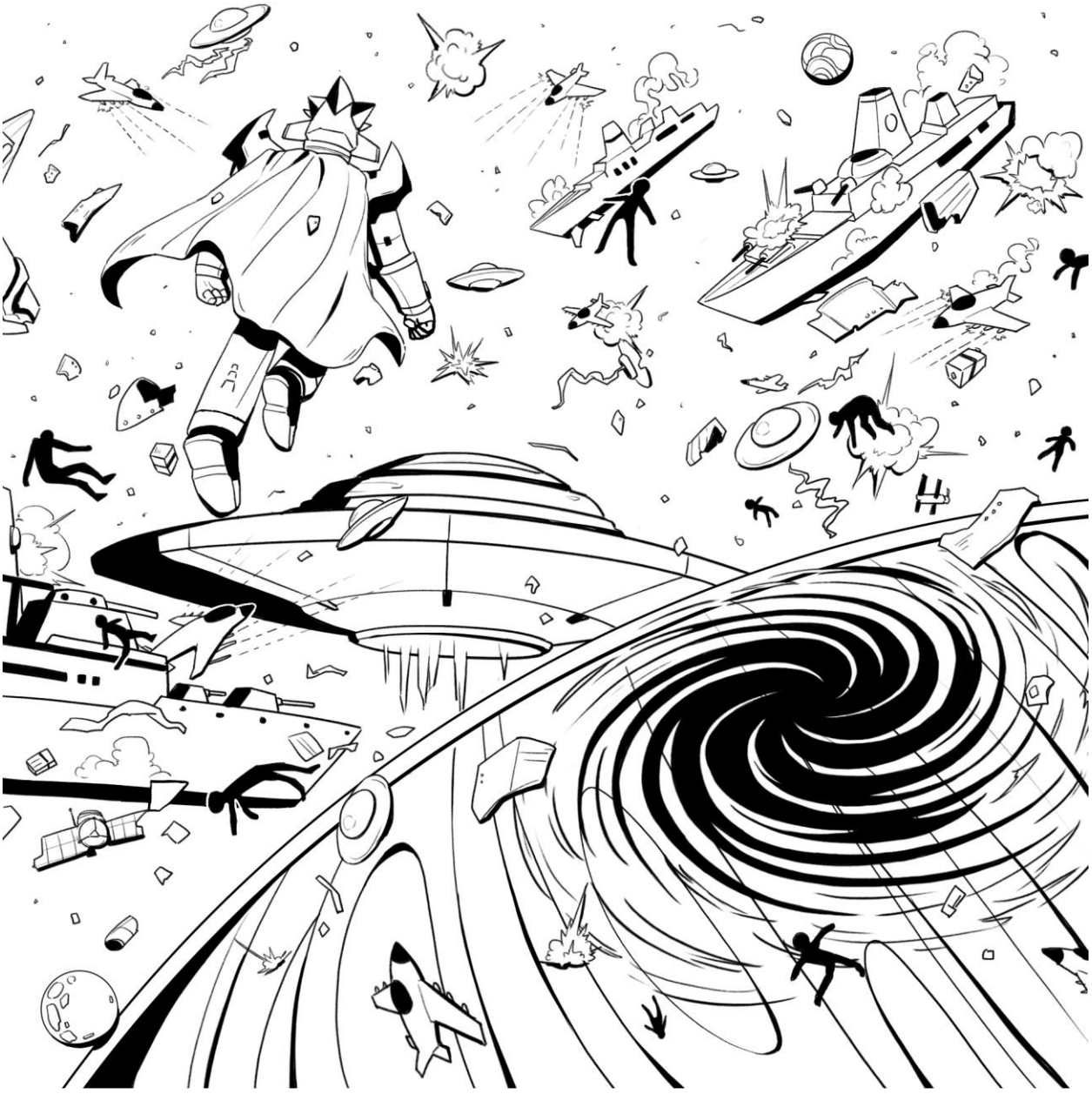


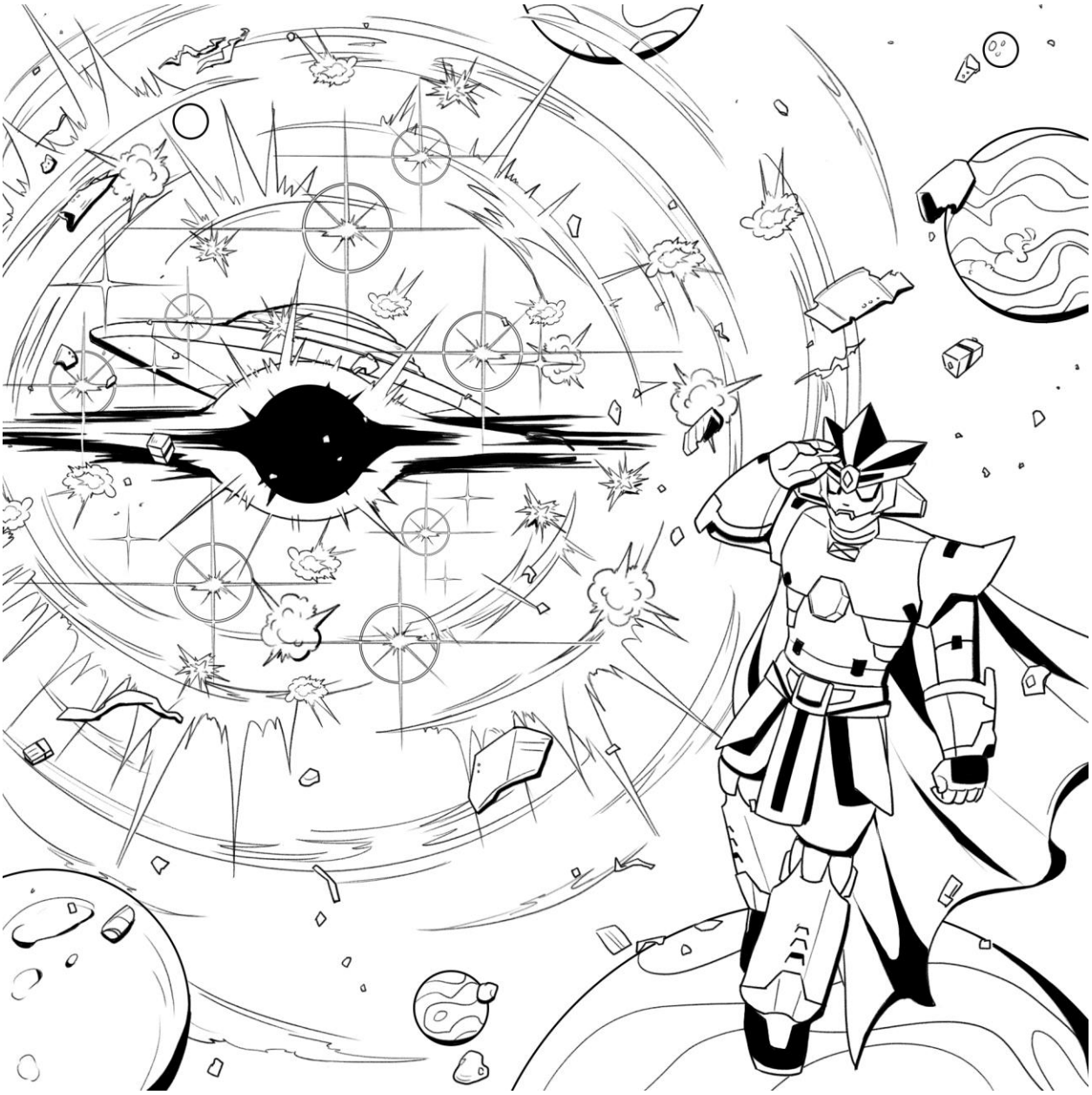



"CHELAN"
"SEATTLE" and ORION







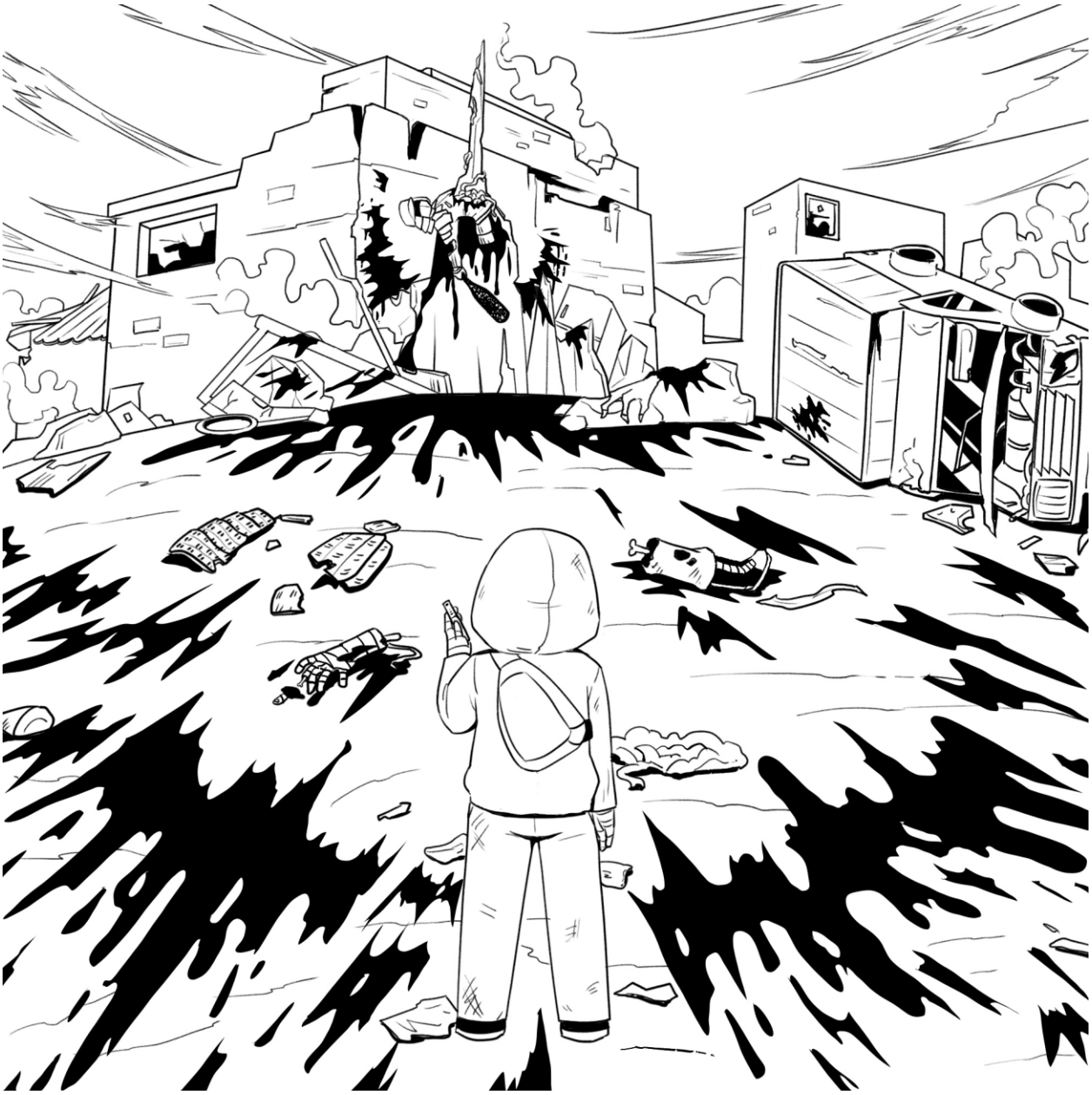




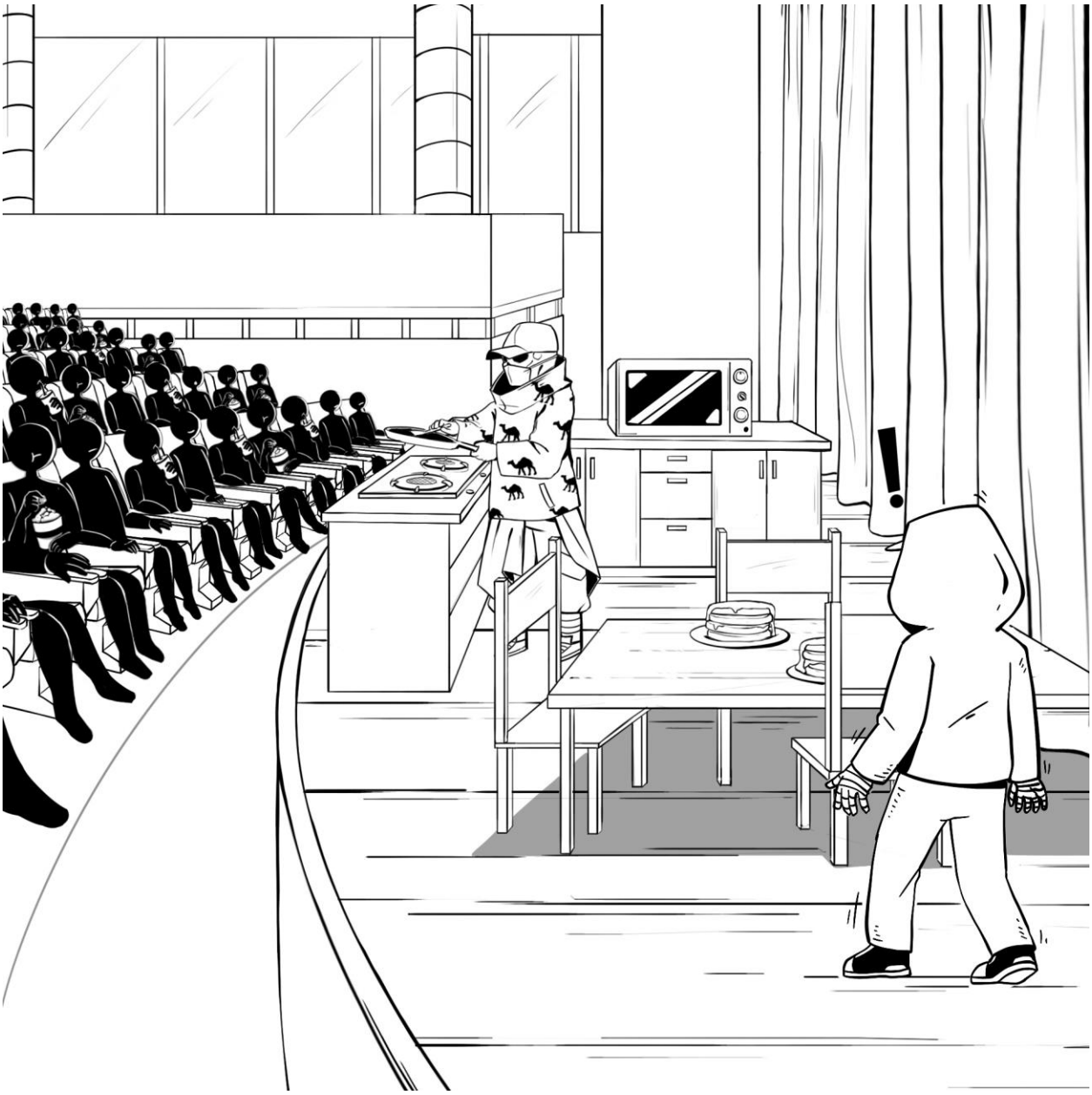


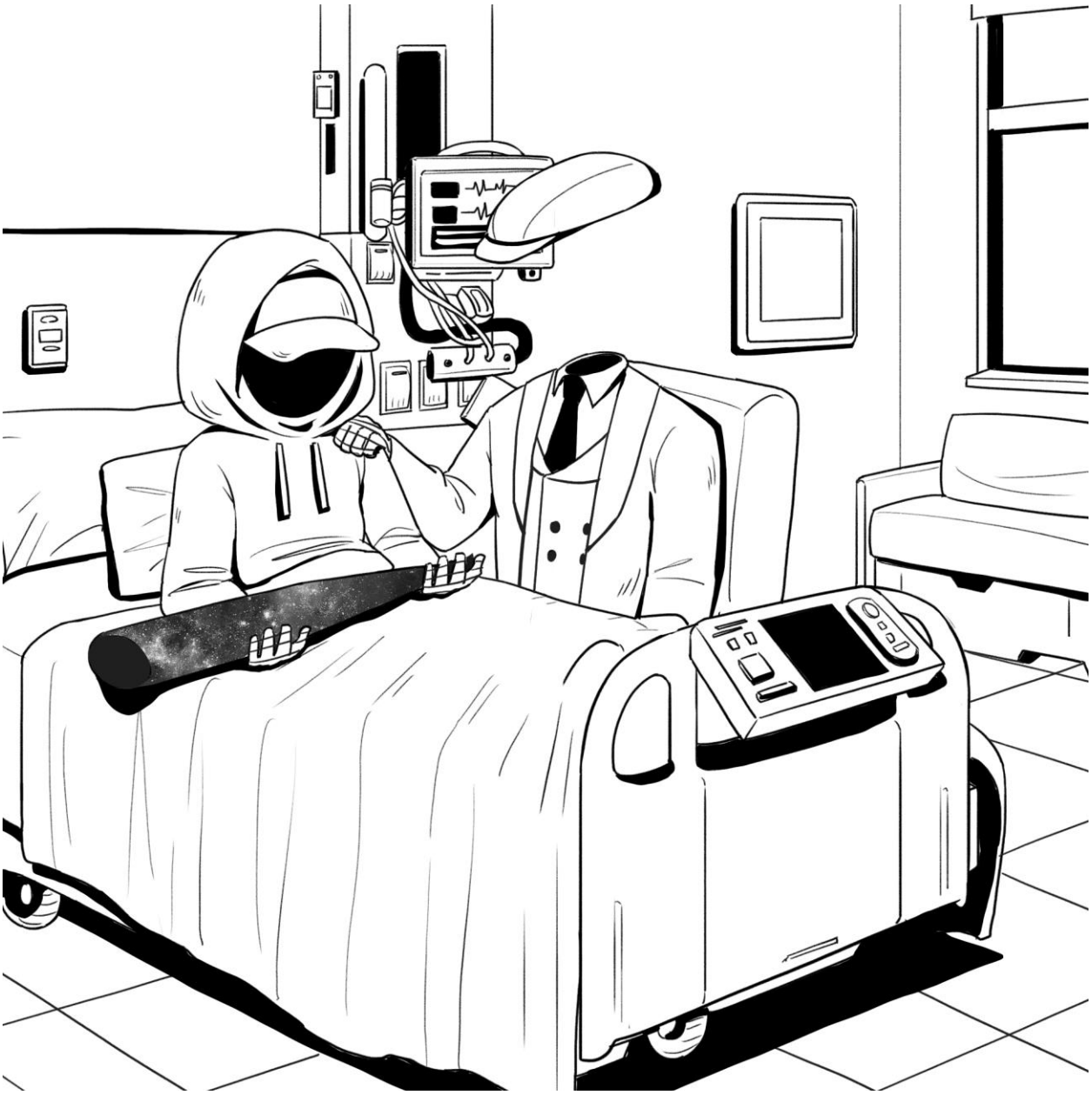


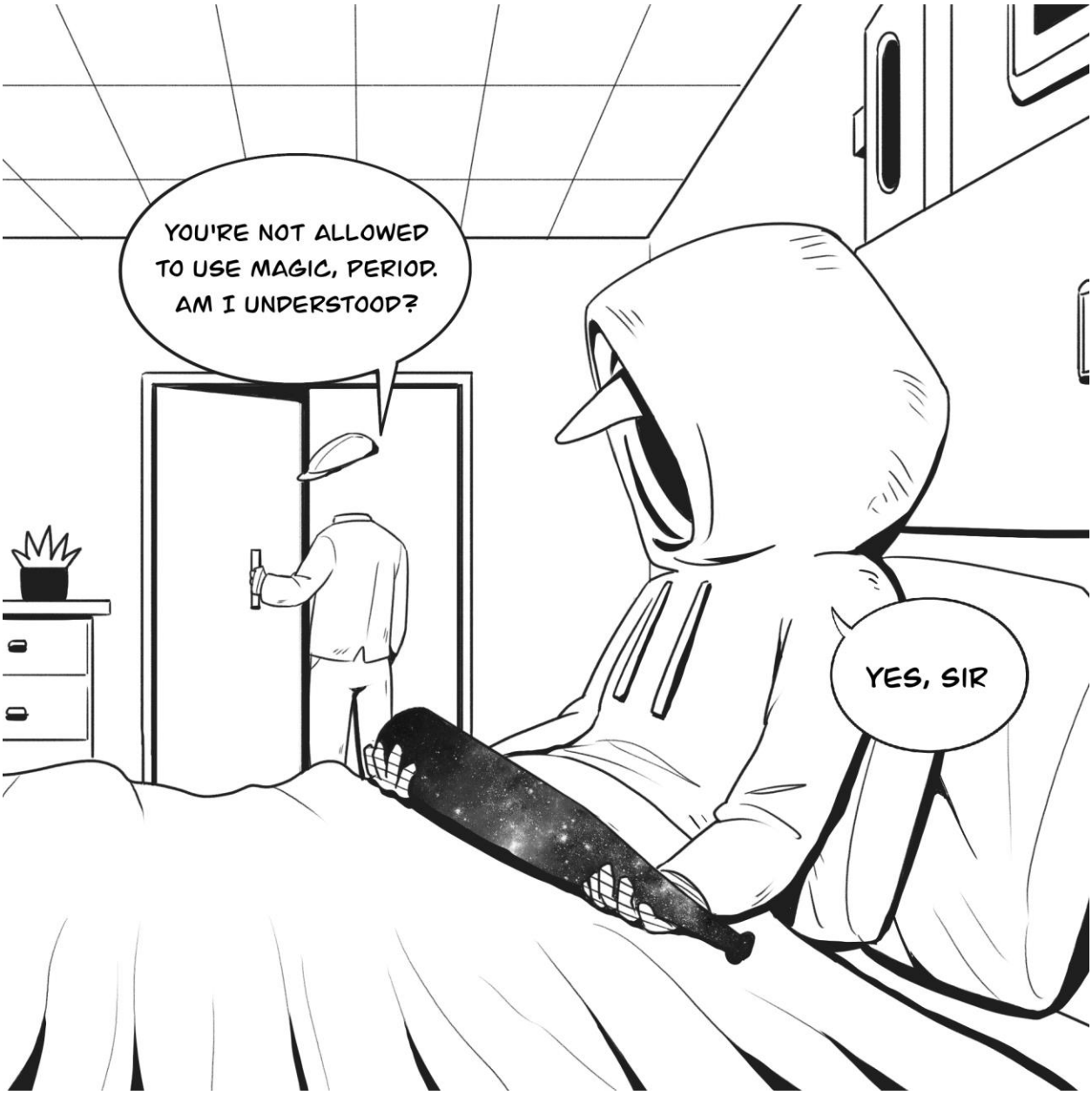
911



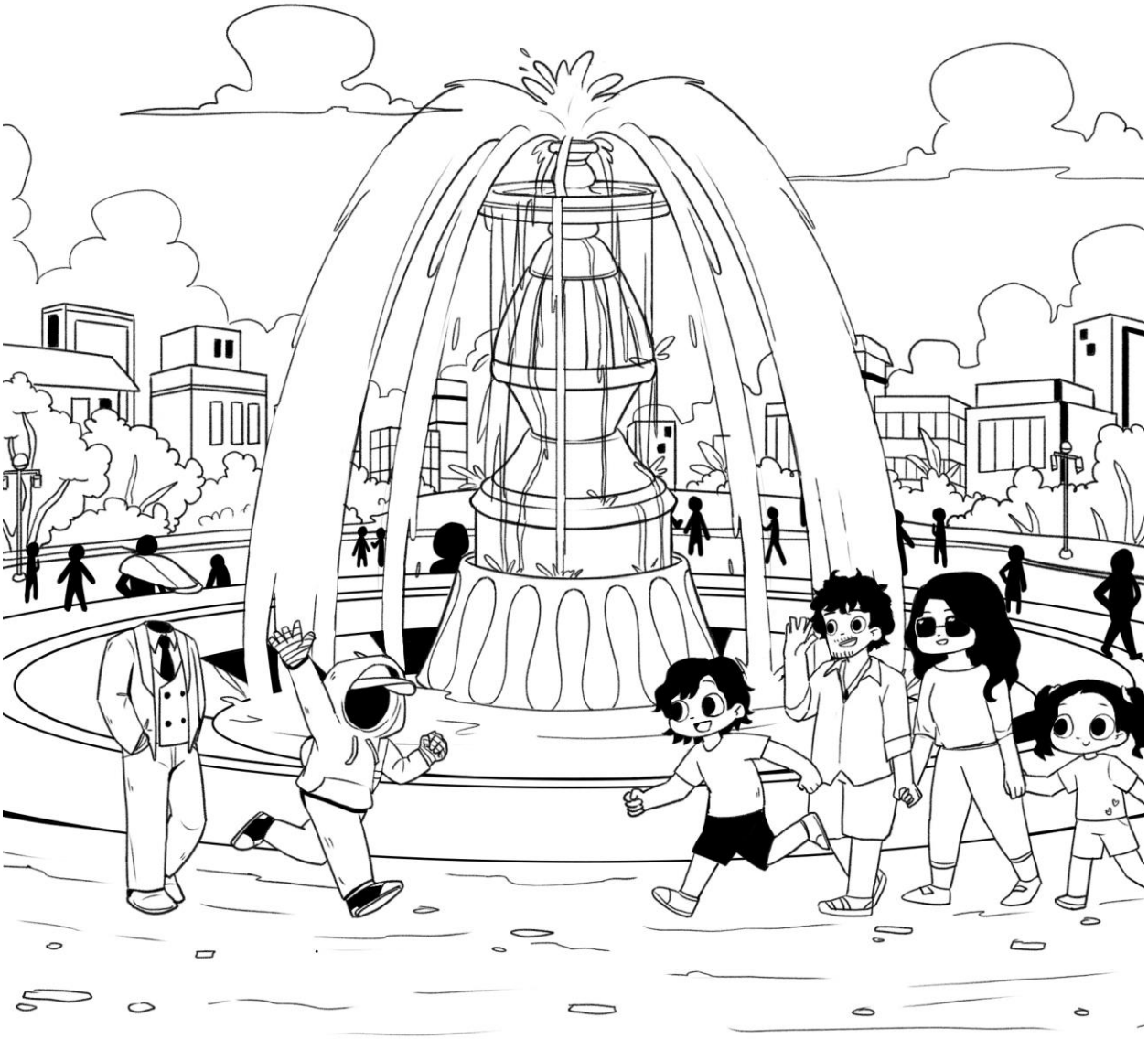




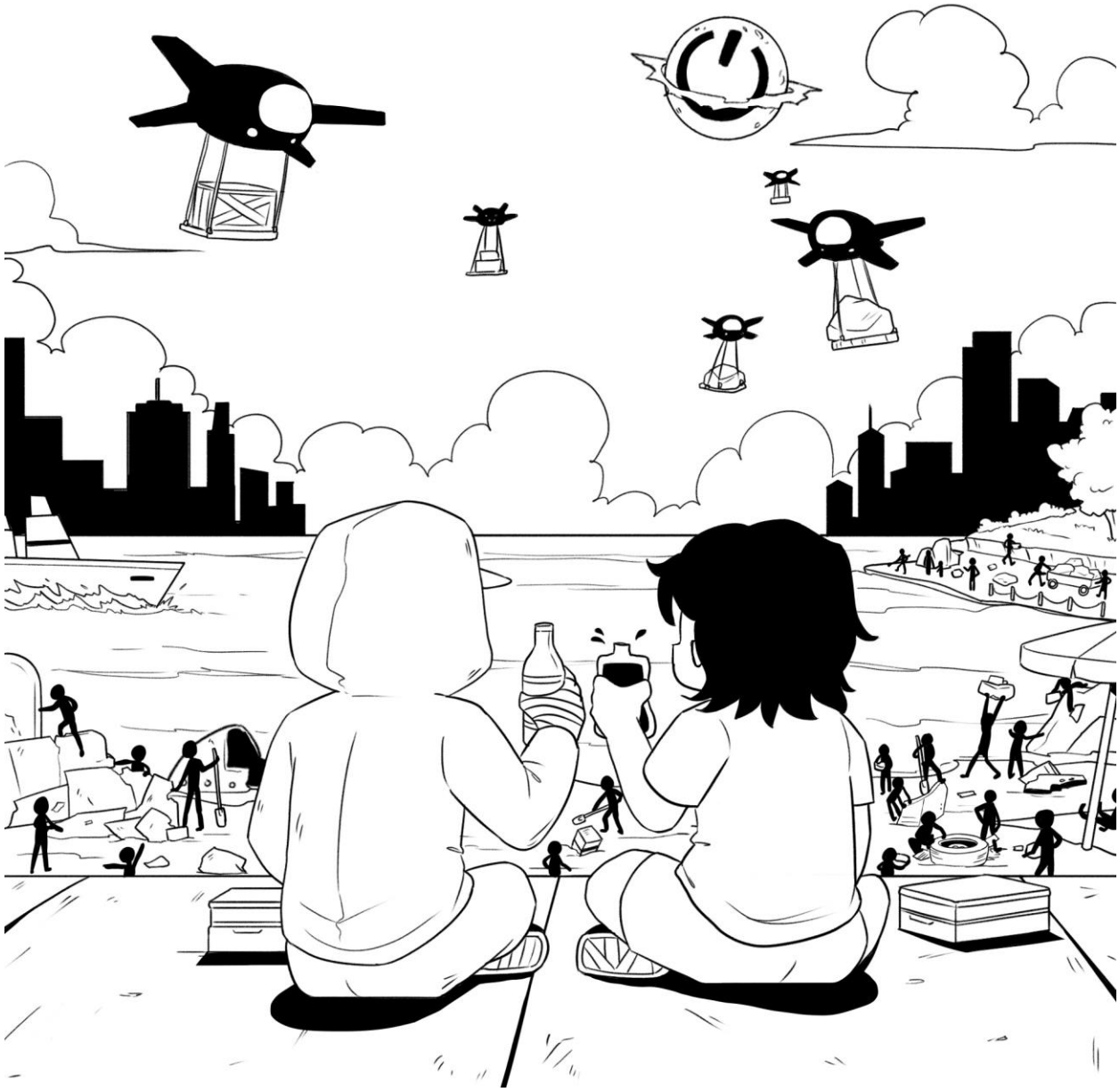



YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO USE MAGIC, PERIOD. AM I UNDERSTOOD?
YES, SIR






BOYS
DON'T
CRY
KEEP IT IN MIND!

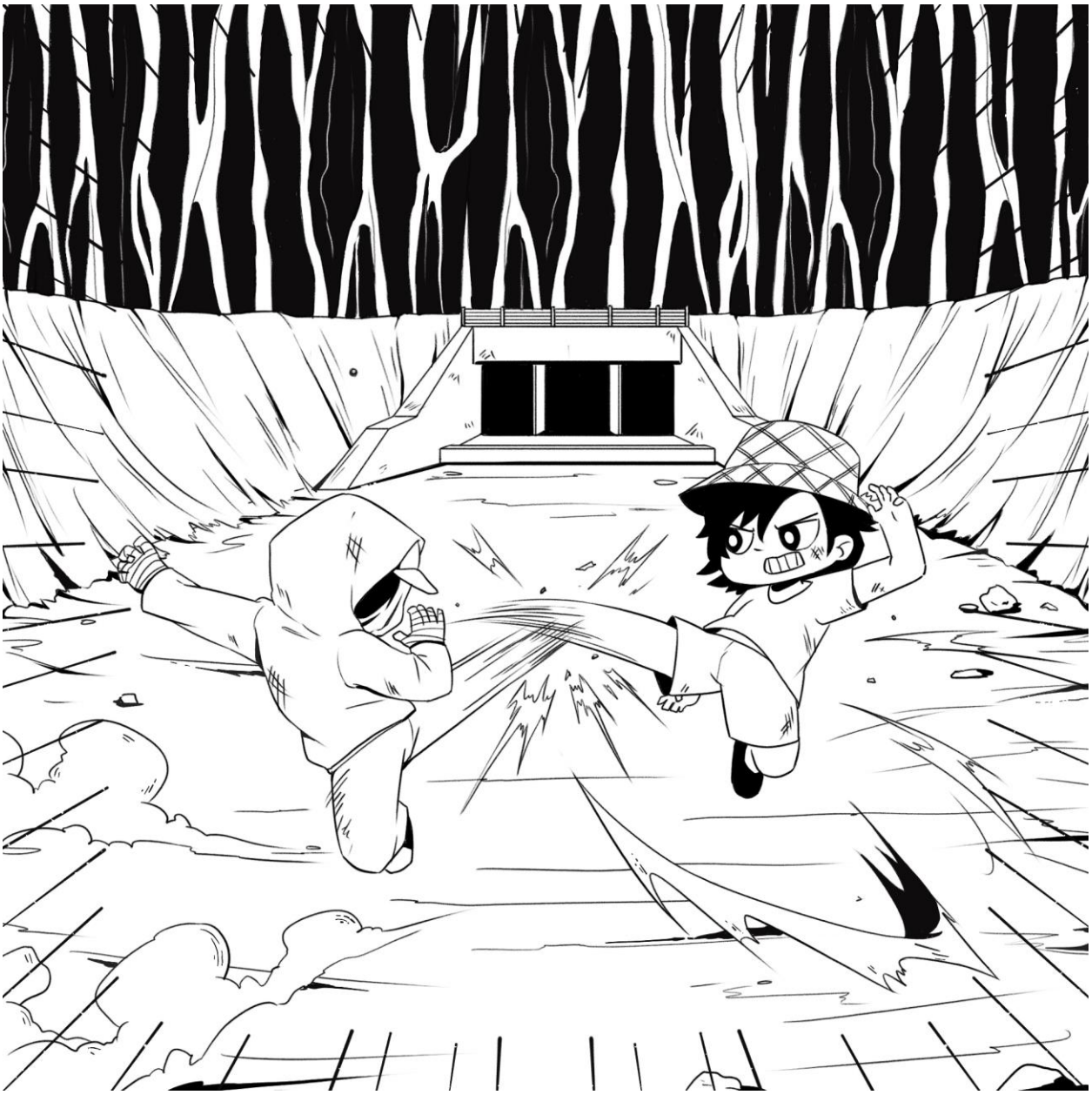


















END OF TUTORIAL MYTH



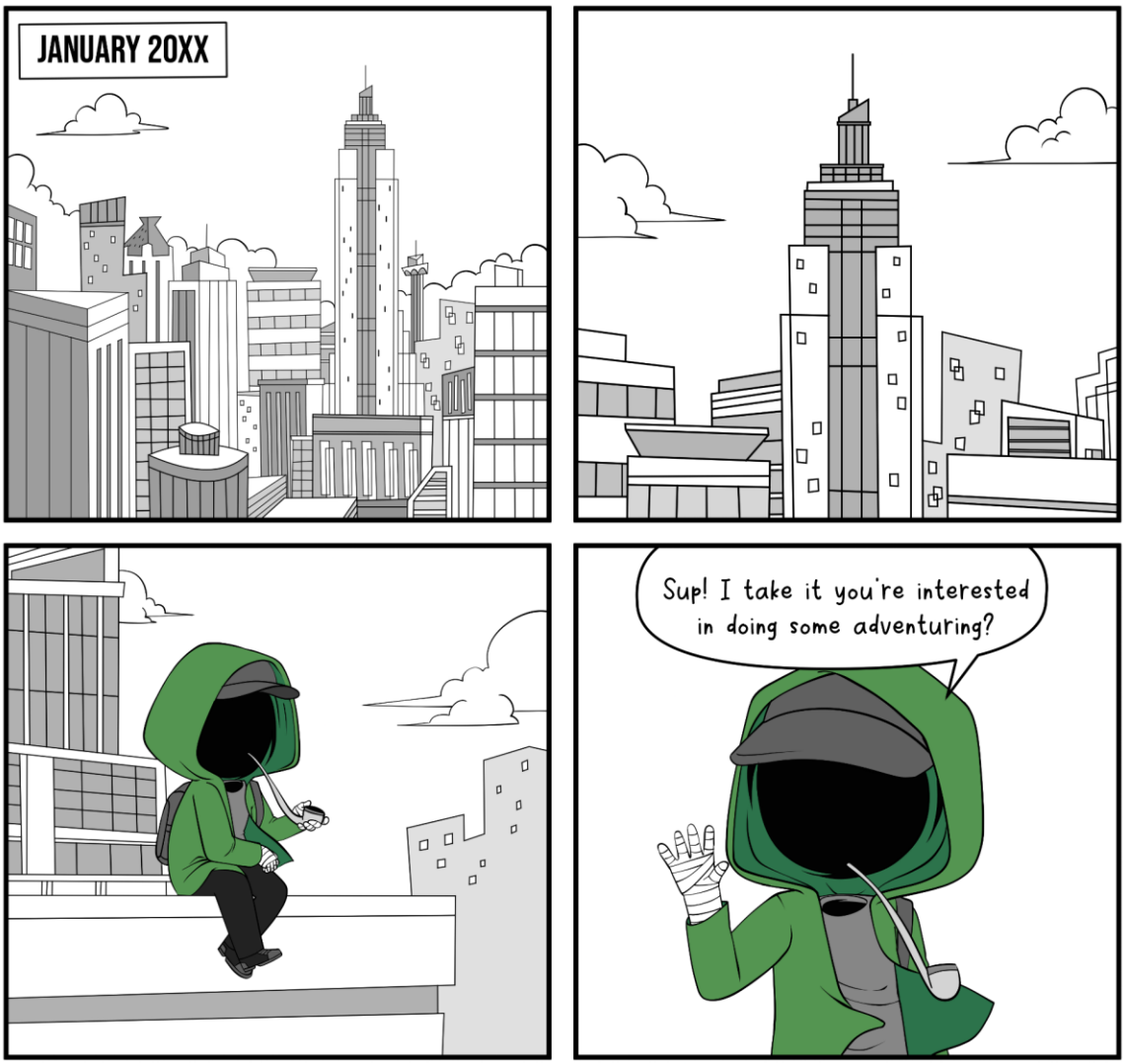
PLAY GRASSHOPPER x SHARPSHOOTER TO CONTINUE

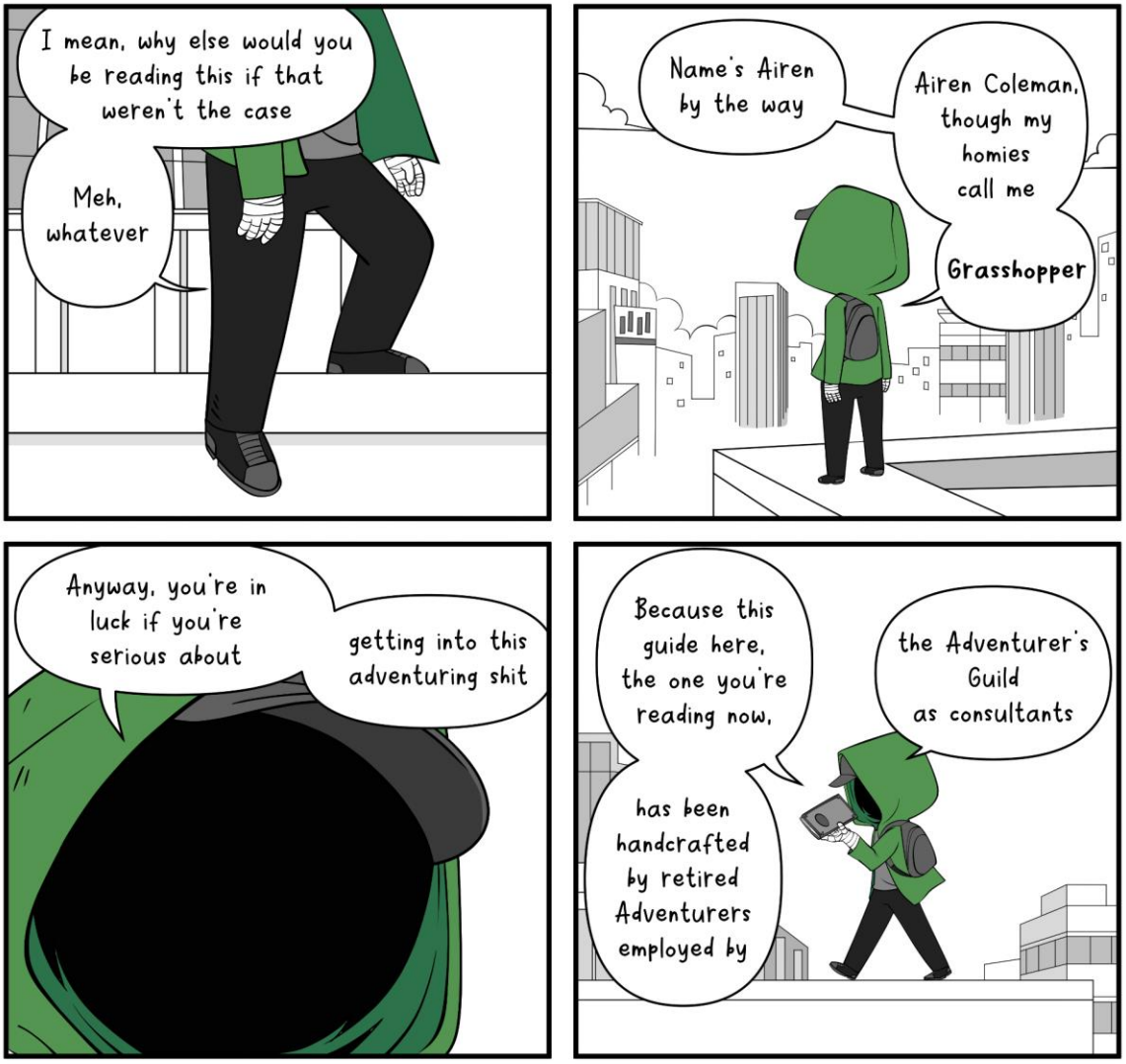
PROTOMYTH



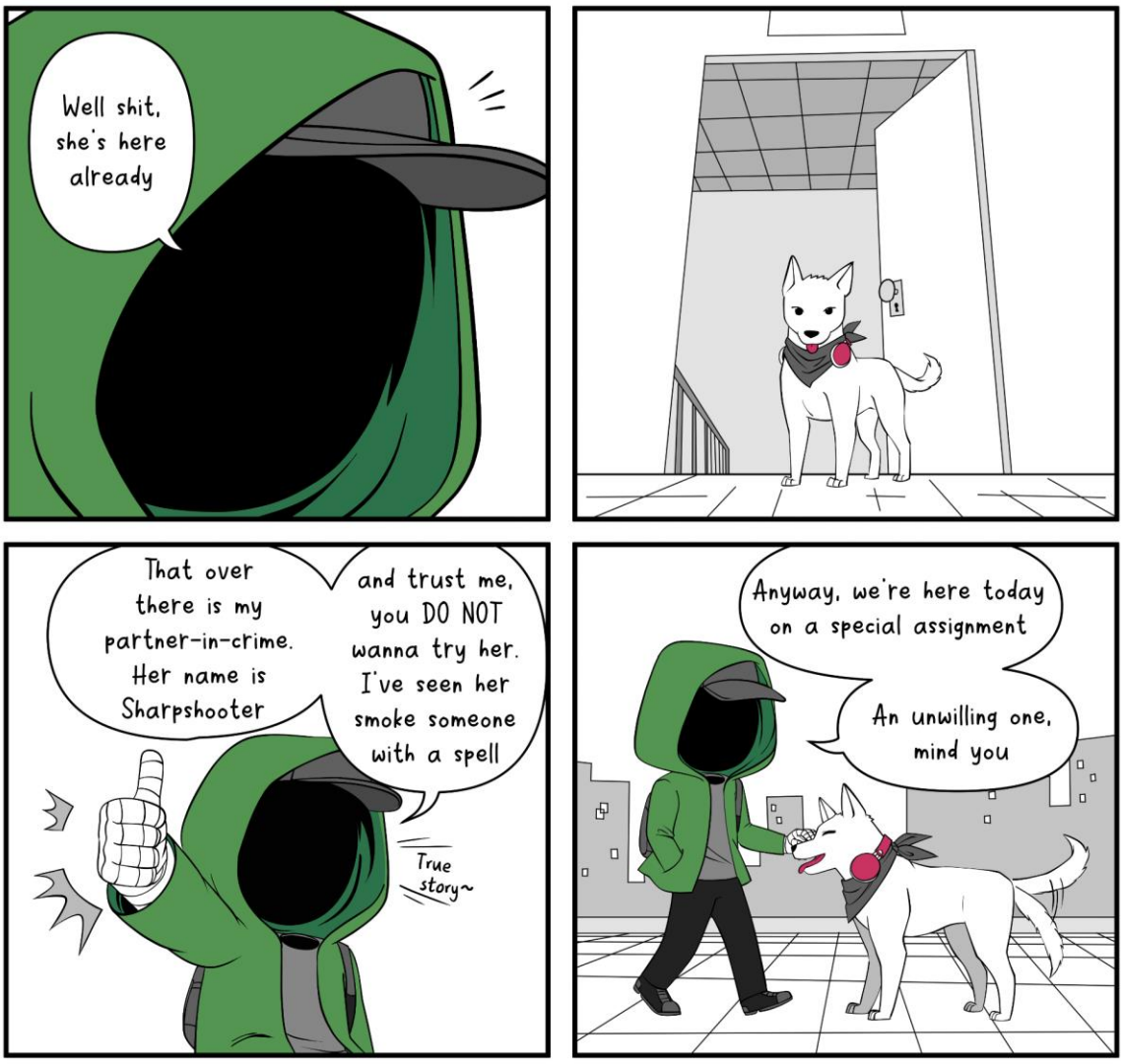
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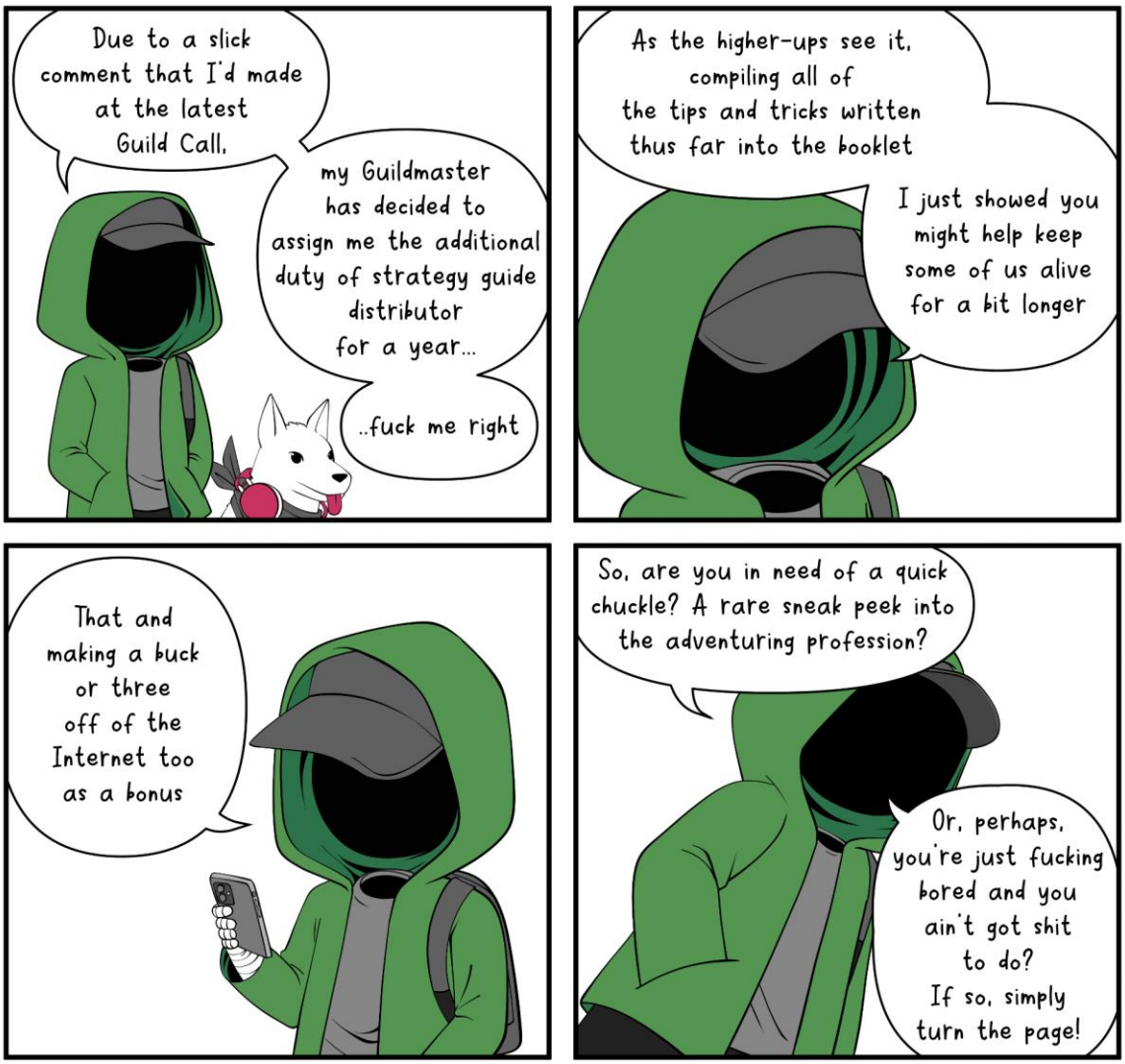
One Eternity ago in THE HIGHER ADVENTURE

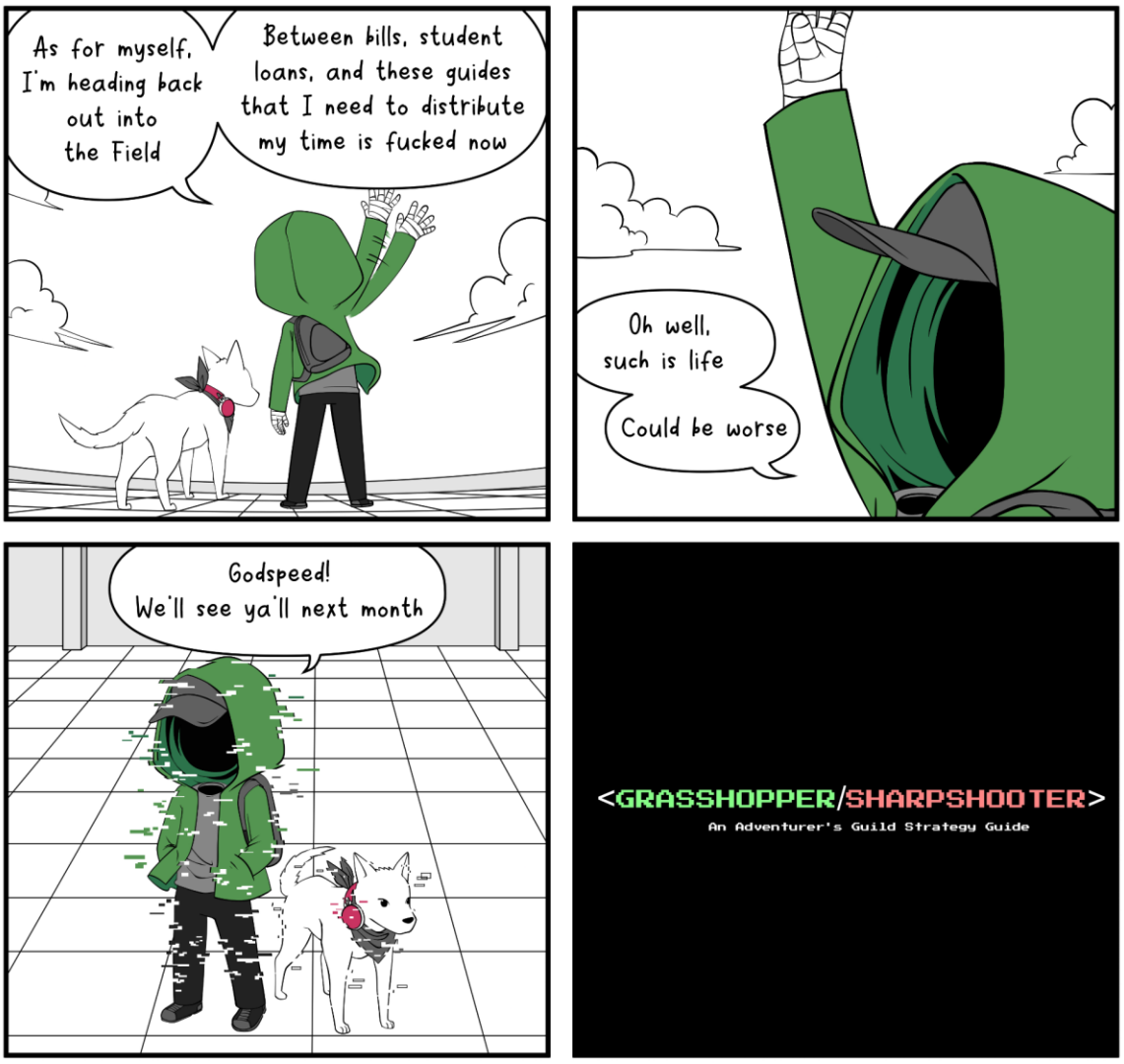

JANUARY 20XX
Sup! I take it you're interested in doing some adventuring?


I mean, why else would you be reading this if that weren't the case
Meh, whatever
Name's Airen by the way
Airen Coleman, though my homies call me
Grasshopper
Anyway, you're in luck if you're serious about
getting into this adventuring shit
Because this guide here, the one you're reading now,
has been handcrafted by retired Adventurers employed by
the Adventurer's Guild as consultants


Their task? Writing out tips and tricks for us active
Adventurers to use while out and about in the Field
And as far as delivery methods are concerned, the Guild deploys these familiars called
Tutorials to help see said deliveries through
Matter of fact, I'm waiting for one in particular right now.
WOOF! WOOF!


Well shit, she's here already
That over there is my partner-in-crime. Her name is Sharpshooter
and trust me, you DO NOT wanna try her. I've seen her smoke someone with a spell
True story~
Anyway, we're here today on a special assignment
An unwilling one, mind you


Due to a slick comment that I'd made at the latest Guild Call,
my Guildmaster has decided to assign me the additional duty of strategy guide distributor for a year...
..fuck me right
As the higher-ups see it, compiling all of the tips and tricks written thus far into the booklet
I just showed you might help keep some of us alive for a bit longer
That and making a buck or three off of the Internet too as a bonus
So, are you in need of a quick chuckle? A rare sneak peek into the adventuring profession?
Or, perhaps, you're just fucking bored and you ain't got shit to do?
If so, simply turn the page!


As for myself, I'm heading back out into the Field
Between bills, student loans, and these guides that I need to distribute my time is fucked now
Oh well, such is life
Could be worse
Godspeed! We'll see ya'll next month
<GRASSHOPPER/SHARPSHOOTER>
An Adventurer's Guild Strategy Guide

Song Of The Moment



Monsters by Matchbook Romance

Song Of The Moment



Taxi Driver by Gym Class Heroes

Song Of The Moment



No Gimmicks by Soul Position

941

Song Of The Moment



The Wake-Up Call by Substantial

Song Of The Moment



Mighty "O" by OutKast

Song Of The Moment



ETSPA by SkyBlew

Song Of The Moment



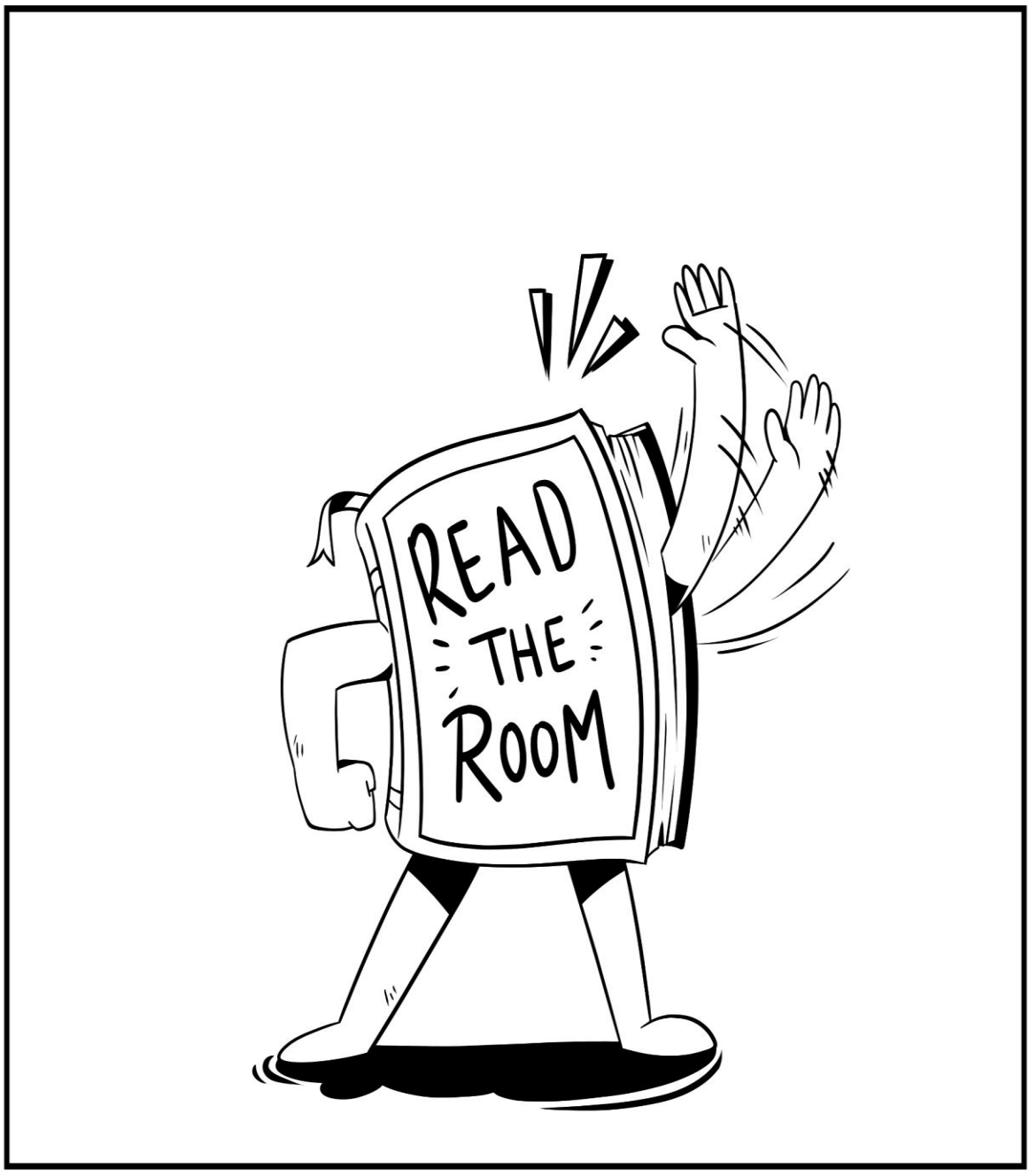
RESPEK (feat. Topaz Jones & Ezri)

by

Machinedrum

945

Song Of The Moment



Jabberjaw by Phantom Planet

Song Of The Moment



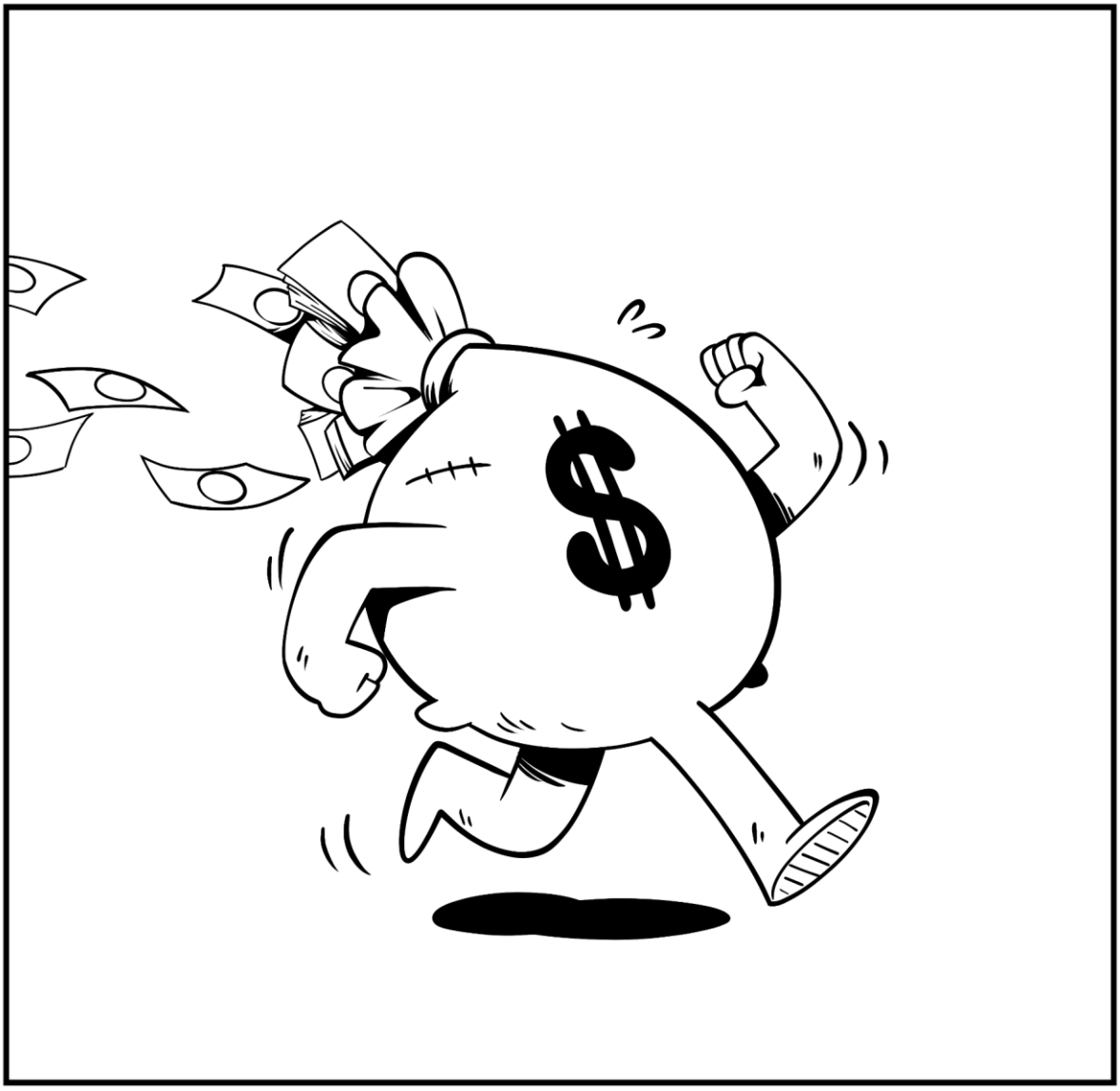
Rhyme No More by Jay Z

Song Of The Moment



Bopgunn by Heralds of Change

Song Of The Moment



Gimmie The Loot

by

The Notorious B.I.G.

Song Of The Moment



1985 by Freddie Gibbs & The Alchemist

Song Of The Moment



Make You Feel That Way by Blackalicious

Song Of The Moment



Fly Or Die by N.E.R.D.

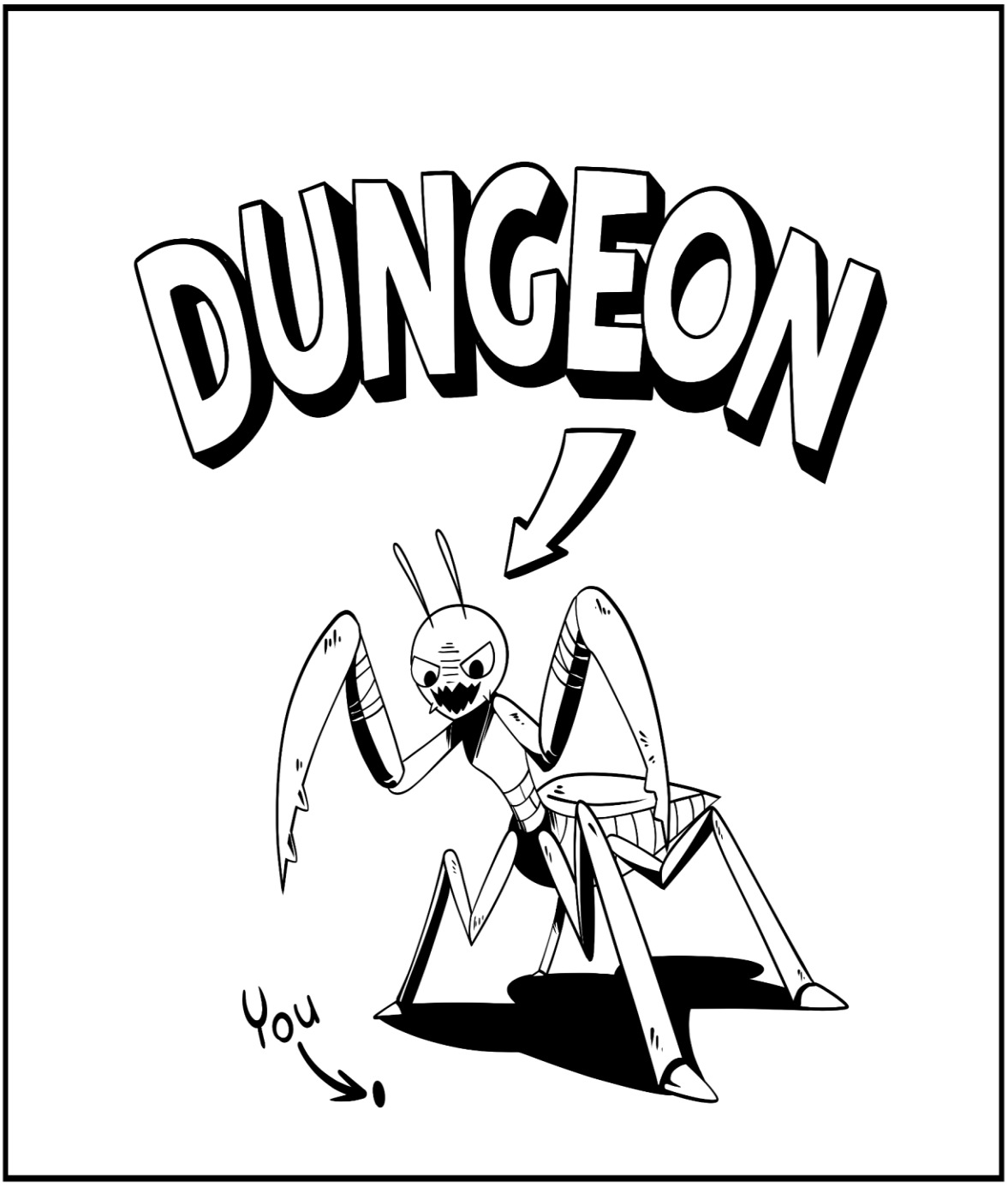
Song Of The Moment



3rd Eye by DJ Krush

953

Song Of The Moment



The Sicilian by Bonobo

Song Of The Moment



Love Souvenir by Calvin Harris

Song Of The Moment



Broken Bones by CRX

Song Of The Moment



Space Cowboy by Jamiroquai

Song Of The Moment



Colemans Groove (ft. Andreya Triana & Niki Randa)

by

Flying Lotus

958

Song Of The Moment



Without You (feat. Rapsody) by Anderson .Paak

Using your intuition, determine whether the following wonder tale is canonical to the

MYTH OF THE SELF HERO

Way back when I once knew this dude named @C. The homies and I called him “Grasshopper”, on account that he wasn’t all that fucking bright, but overall, he was a solid bloke. My guy was dumb enough to waste his GI Bill on a useless fucking college degree. So much so that after he wasted all of it, he decided that going into debt just so he’d graduate “on time” was a smart idea.

At the community college he went to, he majored in Adventuring or some shit. Back in the “United States Mage Corps”, he mentioned that it was his dream to become a High Adventurer; said it was a childhood goal of his. I’m not sure if anyone told him, but uh that Adventuring shit is a luxury that many hipsters aspire to, yet few achieve. Like an art major who ends up in a career making espresso, many “aspiring Adventurers” end up working as baristas, or worse.

Back in “1998”, after he'd graduated college, Actuality sucker punched @C's ass real quick. After sending out copies of his resume to a few Guilds, attending an asinine amount of job interviews and receiving rejection letter upon rejection letter from said High Adventuring Guilds, or Firms as they’re also called, @C panicked over his living situation. The repayment grace period for his college debt was dwindling and the Heyoka needed a way of paying that shit off. And fast. Bankruptcy wasn’t an option, since my guy’s loans were a government subsidy, and an economic depression that soon followed made his other employment options slim as hell.

Independent Adventuring, like basket weaving, isn’t something that a lot of Heyoka are willing to pay a high premium for. Alas, to pay off his debt, keep food on the table and stave off bill collectors, @C nuked his pride and committed himself to working a bunch of odd jobs. I’m talking bitch work, like custodial jobs, maintenance jobs, plumbing jobs, housekeeping jobs, blah blah blah.

Not one to let FORTUNE get the last laugh on his ass, @C made it a mission to put his useless fucking degree to use anyway and signed up for a few stints within the Hustle Economy. The

Heyoka's idea was to supplement his 9-to-5 income with whatever he could earn. Using an app called Sucker on his Grimoire (magical smartphone), @C began risking his metalife just to make an extra buck whenever he had the time to do so. Be it fighting off walking, washing machines carrying loaded shotguns or playing food courier for hungry ass kaijus, the transparent lad kept his head up. Being a former enlistee in the United States military had its perks, especially when it came to being trained as a mage. Whenever FORTUNE got tough on his ass; usually in the form of a missed payment or some other bullshit, @C would often think to himself something his pops would often say. **FORTUNE favors those who don't give up**.

One day, after checking out of a VA hospital following a Gig that broke his arm, @C stumbled upon a starving puppy. The pup's breed was an American Dingo, to be specific. The little one looked up at the invisible Heyoka and pulled out her puppy eyes in a desperate attempt to acquire some aid. It worked. @C picked up the pup with one hand and took her home with him. Pulling together a hearty meal using leftovers from a food bank, @C revitalized the pup. Shockingly, the pup generated two floating hands as a means of eating, which was a boon for @C. "Shit! I can teach you how to make some money! What do you say!" @C asked the pup.

Feeling refreshed, the pup clapped her floating hands in agreement! An accord was struck and the two became roommates in a room @C was renting. The former mage gave his pup a spare Grimoire he had in his possession and taught her how to use it. On the Grimoire was the Sucker app, which @C had previously installed. The Heyoka showed the pup how to use said app, so that she could partake in some Gig work herself. Additionally, @C taught her American Sign Language, giving her floating hands a more effective means of communication. Now satisfied that his pup had reached a level of self-sufficiency, an idea suddenly hit @C and he damn near punched himself for forgetting to consider it. "Yeah, there's no way in hell you're going to a Gig

without a strap. I'll teach you how to shoot," announced @C.

Sometime later, the two went to a firing range and began shooting. Surprisingly, the pup could hit her targets from insane distances. Using telekinesis, the pup could even manipulate her rounds into doing repeatable damage, as if they were boomerangs. "Well damn! It looks like we've got ourselves a sharpshooter! Sharpshooter…heh, guess that's what I'll call you from now on," @C told the pup. Sharpshooter took to the name with glee and gave @C a high-five in response. From that point forward, @C and Sharpshooter began a Collaboration. To commemorate their pact, @C gave Sharpshooter a pair of wireless, red headphones to act as a collar. On them was her name, etched.

Between "1998" and "1999", the two embarked on Gigs; sometimes together, other times separate. At times when @C needed to double-down on his 9-to-5s to keep the two of them from becoming homeless, Sharpshooter would pick up the slack. Her love of firearms came in handy with the occasional assassination or extermination. Targets ranged from sasquatches, chupacabras, dumbass tech CEOs, etc. As the two grew in confidence and elevated their sense of divine madness, the duo bonded further. Their mutual need for one another was a beautiful thing.

For reasons @C kept to himself, he was estranged from his Forum. Thankfully, Sharpshooter's liveliness and energy reinvigorated the solitary Self-Hero. So much so that she helped him escape his self-imposed isolation and incentivized him to begin socializing with other Heyoka again.

As time went on, @C and Sharpshooter met other kindred spirits during their random Misadventures. These individuals included two twin brothers named **MVR the 1st** and **MVR the 2nd** who ran a business involving the removal of putrefied bodies from abodes, a struggling

musician named OCJ who was always a reliable source of musical recommendations for the duo, a Heroine on a vespa named SMM who made a living smuggling shit, and her younger sister named WTM who ran a pawn shop; although, secretly, she was a closeted kleptomaniac that personally “supplied” some of her products.

During downtime, in-between work, @C and Sharpshooter got to learning more about their new acquaintances’ aspirations. MVR the 1st wanted to write a book on the many metafictional and metaphysical entities that survive and thrive within Actuality. MVR the 2nd had a dream of opening a food truck business that could serve all manner of cryptid delicacies from across the Simulacrum Galaxy, OCJ aspired to create a concept album that could reinvigorate one’s essence, SMM schemed of reaching the edge of the Simulacrum Galaxy and beyond in her self-made vessel and her sister WTM coveted the opportunity to pull off an unfathomable heist. Funnily enough, @C and WTM found themselves mutually attracted to one another, yet for unknown reasons, did not know why. Nevertheless, the two MIs began hitting it off until they eventually began a Labyrinth.

Finally, the duo befriended a friendly video game shop owner named MJ who’d often greet the duo; on the occasion that they needed a game or two to stave away their boredom. Despite his well-dressed, closed eyed appearance, complete with a sketchy smirk, MJ was a jovial fellow with transparent intentions. He too, had a dream of his own; in particular, aspiring to someday play the 1st Arcade game that was created by the progenitor of the Heyoka, named TOM.

Together, these metafictional misfits contributed to the duo’s growing success within the Hustle Economy, either through their dubious connections or street knowledge. To return the favor, @C and Sharpshooter often knocked out some of their Collaborator’s more “unique” requests; ones that weren’t technically “legal”, so to speak. The group developed their camaraderie and as time

marched onwards, @C gained an alternative Pantheon through these questionable individuals.

The growing reputation of the duo eventually caught the attention of a well-known High Adventuring Firm; of whom were in need of a reliable pair of Gig workers to help distribute their newly invented High Adventuring guides to some of the Firm's new, grad hires. Apparently, the high mortality rate amongst their newbies was beginning to fuck up the Firm's bottom line. Allegedly, said "death rate" may have been due to said new hires' university educations. To counter this nonsense, the more experienced High Adventurers in the Firm were given the additional task of writing out "how not to "die" on the job" books to keep their business afloat, begrudgingly. This Firm offered to make @C and Sharpshooter full-fledged High Adventurers, with the promise of giving them full-time positions. In return, the duo would need to distribute these High Adventuring guides consistently and help increase the survival rate of the Firm's new hires for a minimum of a year.

After countless toils and struggles just to keep ahead of their rent and debt payments, @C and Sharpshooter saw this Quest as their Opportunity to become legitimate High Adventurers and make some consistent income. They accepted the Call. From there, throughout the rest of "1999" and going into "2000", the duo found themselves traveling to the craziest of locations. From galaxies as vast as "Asia", to locales as unique as "Antarctica", @C and Sharpshooter committed themselves to delivering whatever monthly guides were intended for the Firm's recipients. Firearms and Magic were the go-to for liquidating all metaphysical and metafictional entities that sought to get in the duo's way and make them into either a meal or an example. Years of military experience and martial arts training aided @C immensely, which led to very gory outcomes for his Opps.

If only said skills could easily translate into creating a steady cash flow, which @C and

Sharpshooter often fantasized about. A way of living an easy life doing whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted. To cope with the stressors of the daily grind, @C carried around a black book with him. Within those pages were sketches of himself and Sharpshooter, getting into all types of trouble. Aphorisms etched beside each illustration in a plethora of graffiti styles complemented the artistic yet minimalistic sketches. The aphorisms were pieces of advice @C would often tell himself to keep his focus on a swivel. Artistic reminders for why he was doing what he was doing.

Within his Configuration, @C aspired to actualize a metalife where he could freely express himself through his art and nothing more. No more worries over bills, debts, etc. Alas, the demands of Actuality were too random and brutal for a comforting endeavor such as that to work out. Despite said comfort continuing to give @C a reason to continue getting out of his bed in the morning, it would remain just that, a comfort.

Near the end of their Gig probation period, @C and Sharpshooter arrived at the location of their final outing: Planet Okinawa. Touching down and handing out the guides to the usual newbie High Adventurers, a sudden occurrence took the duo by surprise. Somewhere on the planet, a random Heyoka, reckless in their manipulation of Actuality to win an Arcade game they were playing via a Cheat Code, activated a Glitch Storm. The absurdity ravaged the planet and hit the area where @C and Sharpshooter were located at extra hard. All manners of contradictions and goofiness were fluttering about. During said calamity, a colossal cryptid of profound magnitude attacked the city of “Naha” where the two were stationed. It was like a kaiju going on a picnic in downtown Tokyo.

Thankfully, the amount of Effort that @C had been putting into his Adventuring over the year had helped restore his Divine Madness Level (DML) back to its original value of 108. This

allowed the hooded Heyoka and his companion the ease of Smiting their foe amidst the chaos. By FORTUNE's whim, the duo succeeded in toppling the glitched entity, yet not before Sharpshooter suffered a mortal blow that "killed" her soon afterwards.

Her body disintegrated into a single coin, which disheartened @C. As numbing as the fact was, @C regained his senses and took his fallen friend's existence into his hand, encapsulated in white gold. The Glitch Storm subsided, the area it had blindsided in that portion of the Simulacrum Galaxy reconstituted itself, and life for the Okinawan Heyoka that lived on the planet eventually bounced back.

@C returned to his home planet of Nevada and together with his friends, they mourned Sharpshooter's loss. The High Adventuring Firm that @C had been working for caught wind of the tragedy and extended condolences to the grieving Heyoka. They acknowledged his and Sharpshooter's Feats up to and during the Glitch Storm, which led to a reveal from the Firm. Unbeknownst to @C, he'd gained a Hero Cult over the past year, which only surged following his climactic showdown with the ginormous cryptid a week prior. The news of @C's contractual employment within the Firm had led to some within @C's Hero Cult applying for membership with said Firm in droves, hoping to emulate their invisible idol.

The High Adventuring Firm offered a full-time Adventuring position to @C as promised and gave the Self-Hero time-off to further grieve over the loss of his metafictional dog. Not wanting to turn the vulnerable Heyoka off from joining their organization via a decisive deadline and risk losing new sources of "cannon fodder", the Firm gave the Hero an "indefinite" amount of time to consider their job offer. The invisible Heyoka, not giving a fuck about High Adventuring or a Firm at this point, just wanted his dog back.

Fortunately, for @C, he had friends. His buddy MJ, who was knowledgeable about the Heyoka's traditions, lore, and customs, proposed a wild idea to @C and their mutual friend group. One that could get them Sharpshooter back if they were prepared to gamble her existence altogether. @C and the others accepted MJ's proposal and headed for the latter's store to discuss further. Once there, MJ revealed what had happened to Sharpshooter and how the group could go about resurrecting her. Allow me to school you on a few aspects regarding these Metafictional Intelligences.

The HIGHER ADVENTURE, or Actuality as the Heyoka now call it, consists of 108 Levels, which they collectively refer to as the Canon. Each Level is its own multiverse, roughly speaking. Successfully living to an old age allows the Heyoka's essence to ascend a Level, becoming anew in a new form. Conversely, dying prematurely or committing suicide bumps said Heyoka's Configuration down a Level. Additionally, the Heyoka believe that if they reach a Divine Madness Level of 100 or more before "naturally dying" on the 108th Level, they'll achieve "Graduation" and ascend to Futurecent; a "Vahalla or Elysium of the Mad". From there, the Victorious shall await entry into Literality or the Larger Game. Once allowed entry, then and only then, can these MI's become Axioms.

A Heyoka's awareness of their current Divine Madness Level is dependent on how they were born anew on each Level. Being born Favorably means that a Heyoka gets to retain all the knowledge, wisdom, experience and power they've previously earned from prior Levels. Conversely, being born Unfortunate means the opposite; up to and including the type of a form that a Heyoka can be born anew into. In the case of the latter, the Unfortunate Heyoka will need to acquire enough Effort to self-realize what they once had, to survive long enough in the new Level to "die" of natural causes and continue their ascent. This collective ascent of the Heyoka

up the Canon is known as the Leaderboard, which began with TOM.

If a Heyoka “dies” a total of 108 times before achieving their Graduation, they will Transmogrify into a coin, called a Game Over. The coin, under risk of divine corrosion, will eventually be assimilated into an Axiom, thus neutralizing the existence of that Heyoka entirely. This reveal meant that Sharpshooter was a Heyoka; in particular, one who had been born Unfortunate, rather than Fortunate. Hence her becoming anew as an American Dingo prior to meeting @C, a consequence of having died a total of 107 times during her ascension up the Canon. Now, having died for the 108th time, she was as good as claimed by an Axiom.

MJ, however, revealed a method to undoing Sharpshooter’s tragic state. TOM, the 1st Heyoka who originally began life as a random AI within some random dude’s computer within Reality, created a special Arcade game to reverse a Heyoka’s Transmogrification. This creation that the 1st Heyoka had successfully conceived of to resurrect a loved one of his own had a name: **TSM**.

MJ further elaborated that this TSM Arcade cabinet that TOM created could be found within the final resting place of the Heyoka, called “Continue?”. Said cabinet could be found inside of TOM's original Arcade venue within that surreal domain.

MJ offered to lead our depressed Self-Hero, the MVR twins, OCJ, SMM and WTM to said entrance to “Continue?” and guide them through its corridor, called the Katabasis. The Katabasis, a nostalgic corridor filled with trials and tribulations meant to test the resolve of those that enter it, was the ultimate barrier between @C and the resurrection of Sharpshooter. The crew accepted without hesitation.

Before meeting outside said entrance, which took the form of a cave, @C went to retrieve a Knicknack his sire had gifted him a long time ago. Arriving with his blade in hand, named

WARP, the Self-Hero and his Eternal Collaborators entered the cave. Emerging on the other side, the group journeyed through the Katabasis; a strange realm that consisted of an amalgamation of the crew's memories of their past meta lives they'd once lived out on the lower Levels. Strangely, the group discovered during their journey through the Katabasis that at some point they were all mutual acquaintances in a prior existence. This period occurred many eons ago within a Heyoka hatchery that acted as a kind of alternative to how the Heyoka normally procreate.

Even stranger, MJ, it was revealed, had been a source of great pain and misery for @C and the others during that same period within said hatchery, which was a far cry from their group's current friendship. Unperturbed, the party advanced. After battling their way across this realm of nonsense and defeating the gatekeeper of "Continue?", named I-Will-Thoushalt, the group arrived within the Heyoka's final resting place. Located on **Level 0**, "Continue?" appeared to the party in the form of an endless, utopian city. The closest equivalent to describing it would be Frutiger Aero. Many Heyoka could be observed hanging out, walking and chillaxing around the area as if it wasn't a big deal. Confused, @C asked MJ what they were seeing. MJ speculated that these Heyoka, like themselves, had fought their way here as a means of awaiting "Graduation" in tranquility. This act is known as Retirement.

Tired from their "near-death" experiences getting to this point, @C's homies informed him and MJ that they were going to explore "Continue?" while also getting something refreshing. WTM, patting her Self-Hero on his chest, told him that she and the others will catch up with him and MJ later at TOM's arcade venue, called the Absolute. "Try not to have too much fun," she said after giving @C a hug, followed by a kiss. WTM, SMM, OCJ and the MVR twins went off to chillax, leaving @C and MJ alone to enter the Absolute some distance away. After asking around for said

venue's exact location, the duo arrived in front of it and entered.

Inside, the duo observed Retired Heyoka gaming their asses off on some ancient and modern Arcade cabinets. Whenever a Heyoka or more completes a Game, an 8-bit notification can be heard sounding off, signaling that a Blindspot had been removed. These existential barriers prevented some of the Heyoka's Configurations from moving up the Levels, depending on said Heyoka's location within the HIGHER ADVENTURE. When TOM created the Arcade discipline, his metafictional kind could freely invent Arcade games of their own, granting them the ability to remove said Blindspots thanks to their Magic. This gives the Heyoka on the lower Levels the opportunity to ascend the Canon unimpeded.

Making their way further inside, @C and MJ eventually came upon a giant arcade cabinet, with the words "**TSM** " listed at the top. In front of the pair were two guitars: one bass and one electric. MJ explained to @C that this Arcade game allows for two players the Opportunity to battle whichever Axiom would choose to come and claim their loved one via a musical Duel. Using said loved one as an avatar, Player 1 will need to play a song that both they and the loved one's avatar mutually enjoyed listening to together back when the latter was still alive. This incentive instills the loved one's avatar with the might needed to battle the Axiom coming to claim them on equal footing. Paradoxically, Player 2 will need to play for the Axiom in question, strengthening the Axiom to its fullest potential in order to give Player 1 and their loved one's avatar a fair challenge.

According to MJ's study of the Heyoka's history, TOM could not find any other way of making this Arcade game work without this ruleset. Both players, despite being friends, must play against one another with all their might to prove to the HIGHER ADVENTURE that their justification for reversing their loved one's Transmogrification is both fair and just. @C,

accepting the conditions, pulled out Sharpshooter's coin, which was corroding fast. Putting Sharpshooter's Game Over into the TSM cabinet's coin slot, @C reached for the electric guitar, while MJ grabbed the bass. The cabinet's screen came a lit, and on it appeared Sharpshooter, alive and well.

@C, moved to tears, touched the screen, and promised his dog that they were going to go back home together, and that she only needed to put her red headphones on and trust in his playing. Sharpshooter barked in acceptance, causing the two to achieve a state of Synchronicity, tying their existences together. MJ, upon seeing this, warned @C that if he decides to go ahead with this game and fails, both he and Sharpshooter will be absorbed into the Axiom. There would be no retries.

Prepared for the inevitable yet trusting in his friend to play with every fiber of his being, @C told MJ he wouldn't want this showdown against chance itself to go any other way. With a fist bump, MJ asked @C which song he had in mind to play. After some thought, @C declared the name of the song, which also happened to be a favorite of MJs. "It's **Obstacle**…you know, that **one**," said @C. MJ nodded with his slick smirk.

In response to @C's decision, **TSM's** UI began to incrementally populate the cabinet's screen. Amongst the UI elements appeared a set of two virtual guitar necks, one electric and one bass. Each neck's strings were color coded and matched up with both @C and MJ's choice of guitar. MJ explained to @C that once their Duel began, they would need to time their playing of the notes with the corresponding strings, signified by a barrage of colored circles heading down each string. Additionally, the two would need to use their Magic against one another to disrupt the other's playing, thus upping the chances of victory for either side. The guitarist that could play the song the best and with few mistakes will strengthen their respective avatar with the power

needed to overcome the other. Said song's length would function as a timer, and if Sharpshooter failed to defeat the Axiom before the song's conclusion, it would mean the end for both her and @C.

With the rules committed to memory, @C and MJ prepared themselves. Taking the lead, @C started playing the song. At the same time, Sharpshooter put on her red headphones and summoned @C's WARP into her floating hands, thanks to their Synchronicity. MJ proceeded as well with his guitar playing and summoned the Axiom coming to claim Sharpshooter: it was the Reaper of Metafiction and Shadow of the 1st Axiom, **COPYRIGHT**. A divine mecha coated in holy colors unfathomable to describe, generated a giant baseball bat fused with a guitar to smash the shit out of Sharpshooter.

And thus, the duo began their battle against chance itself.

Actual Final Boss Fight: Copyright, Reaper Of Metafiction

HP: ???

Actual Final Boss Fight Song: Obstacle 1 by Interpol

Company: @C (108)

Risk: Expert (lol)

We've arrived at the actual final boss fight of GRASSHOPPER SHARPSHOOTER. If you're familiar with a certain game involving heroes and their guitars, then this next part should go by quick.

You have until the end of the song to deplete Copyright's HP bar to 0. The better you play and not miss the notes coming your way on screen, the better Sharpshooter will do during her battle within the screen.

Keep in mind, however, that MJ ain't having none of that shit. Be prepared to throw up defensive shields whenever your trusty friend lodges some magic your way. Return the favor to throw off the bass guitarist's playing so that Copyright has less of an advantage.

Maintain focus, keep hitting those notes, retaliate with the appropriate spells to keep MJ at bay and, eventually, Sharpshooter should have just enough time left to deal the deciding blow, ending this finale.

The Retired Heyoka playing in the Absolute stopped what they were doing and caught wind of the Duel between @C, MJ, Sharpshooter and Copyright. “Holy shit! Someone’s playing **TSM!**” said one Heyoka. A crowd eventually gathered around the two and watched their Duel in awe. The momentum was wild, with Sharpshooter, on a platform that looked like the top of the Seattle Space Needle, battling the Shadow of the 1st Axiom blow for blow as the scenery around them changed from cityscape to cityscape. @C, barely able to keep up with the insane number of notes he needed to play as they came at him on the game screen, summoned up his Magic to increase his dexterity.

MJ, counteracting with his own Magic to slow @C’s playing, kept up his defenses as @C hit him with a barrage of disruptive Magic. Back and forth, the two went. As the song’s runtime continued to dwindle, Copyright’s attacks increased with ferocity, threatening to turn Sharpshooter into paste. As @C felt his hands growing tired, he heard cries of encouragement from familiar voices in the crowd. WTM, SSM, OCJ and the MVR twins were all in attendance, refreshed from their breaks. MJ, thankful that the others had arrived, began to feel some fatigue from his own strumming. @C, looking at Sharpshooter as she returned his gaze, both nodded in unison. In the decisive moments of the song, @C recalled an aspect of his existence he hadn’t known in quite a long while. From a time within the Heyoka hatchery that had made him into a legend. “That’s right! I remember my last name now. And it still has meaning. This Duel aint shit! I've been through WAY worse,” @C said to himself. The letter “E” appeared in his mind, which he used to redefine his identity. @CE, once more, recommenced his playing with such ferocity, his divine madness spreading throughout the crowd.

The applause from the audience generated a resounding burst of Euphoria for Sharpshooter, who, in the final five seconds of the song, split Copyright in half with a powerful slash from WARP.

The Duel was over, and Sharpshooter was immediately revived from a pixelated form next to @CE. “Welcome back, HC!” @CE said to Sharpshooter, whose Heyoka name he finally recalled from when they initially met within the Heyoka hatchery eons ago. As shock and joy overwhelmed the two friends, their enthusiasm turned to horror as they both turned their heads and saw their friend MJ slowly pixelating. In a last-minute twist, MJ revealed that Actuality demands an equivalent exchange in place of the Transmogrified. Knowing that he could have compromised @CE’s resolve earlier had he informed him earlier about this single caveat, MJ decided to keep this last part of the game’s rule to himself. Having thrown the Duel at the last minute to give Sharpshooter a shot at victory, MJ had forfeited his existence in her stead.

“An Axiom always gets its collateral, not that I mind,” MJ said while still smiling. Rushing towards their friend, @CE and HC held MJ close as he slowly dissipated. WTM, SMM, OCJ and the MVR twins gathered by @CE and HC’s side, sharing their final moments with their disintegrating loved one. @CE patted MJ on the back to help comfort the latter. With what little strength he had left, MJ revealed to the Self-Hero that although they may have been mortal enemies in a prior existence, they could at least end this one off as family.

@CE returned the sentiment. MJ said to himself, “So, this is what “Graduation” feels like. I gotta say, it isn’t a terrible way to end a story. Not bad, not bad at all,” before he finally dissipated into pixels. The smiling Heyoka assimilated into Copyright, or rather, Copyright assimilated into MJ. Not once did he lose his trademark smile, nor his serene, closed eyes. TOM’s Absolute was filled with silence, with the Heyoka present giving MJ their utmost respect. Not many Heyoka dared to play **TSM**, for the given fact that MJ courageously showcased. @CE and the others, forever changed by their friend’s sacrifice, returned home with Sharpshooter via a magical elevator called the Anabasis.

@CE, having finally made up his mind concerning the employment offer from the High Adventuring Firm, contacted them and politely declined their offer. Having rediscovered his true calling at the sight of MJ's assimilation, the Self-Hero had no other interests to consider or pursue anymore. His Vocation was clear to him now.

At the end of "2000", @CE took the money he'd been silently saving during his Gig endeavors with Sharpshooter and paid off the rest of his debts; student loans, credit cards, etc. To embrace his true calling as a storyteller, the Self-Hero planned to journey across the 108th Level of Actuality as a Narratologist; specifically, painting the sketches from his black book across every wall on every planet he could reach with his remaining lifespan. With his things packed and his lease up at the place he was renting out of, @CE went with HC to MJ's old shop to spend New Years Eve with his friends.

The friends were preparing to start the new year with a heightened sense of purpose. MVR the 1st was beginning his scholarly research into writing his book. MVR the 2nd was preparing for the first of many road trips to get his food truck business off the ground. OCJ was preparing to head to music school to work on concept album. SMM was heading off to teach herself vessel engineering to fulfill her dream. Lastly, WTM had finished selling off her pawn store, using both the money made from the sale and her enormous savings to begin the improbable con she'd been planning with some old Collaborators fresh out the joint.

@CE, together with HC, promised to reunite with WTM once she and her Collaborators had accomplished their goal; assuming, of course, that they didn't end up imprisoned or worse. Afterwards, they'd meet up with their friends again someday before achieving "Graduation" together. After the new year of "2001" had arrived, @CE and HC left MJ's old shop before departing Planet Nevada in the wee hours of the morning; soon afterwards, so did the others.

Adopting the pseudonym, “No Originality”, @CE began spray painting across the Level and, overtime, captured the wonder of any Heyoka that came upon his artistry. The self-heroism on display in the stenciled pieces reinvigorated their hopes, ambitions and dreams against the uncertainty impeding their paths towards their “Graduations”.

Eons after @CE and his friends had become Axioms, the future Heyoka that came across No Originality Whatsoever’s art pieces started to perceive his depictions as being apart of some greater myth. The greatest Heyoka since TOM, whose mission to reinspire the self-heroism in all Heyoka who may have given up on themselves via his storytelling and artistry, continues to inspire them. It would be some time before @CE or @ESOP would be seen of or heard of from again. Indeed, this was indeed the case, until a certain penguin suddenly contracted Naranathism one day and swiftly set off for a place to die in the middle of the Antarctic. Unbeknownst to this depressed soul, what awaits it out in the unknown isn’t death, but rather, something stranger. That, however, is a tale meant to be experienced another time.

ROLL CREDITS!!!

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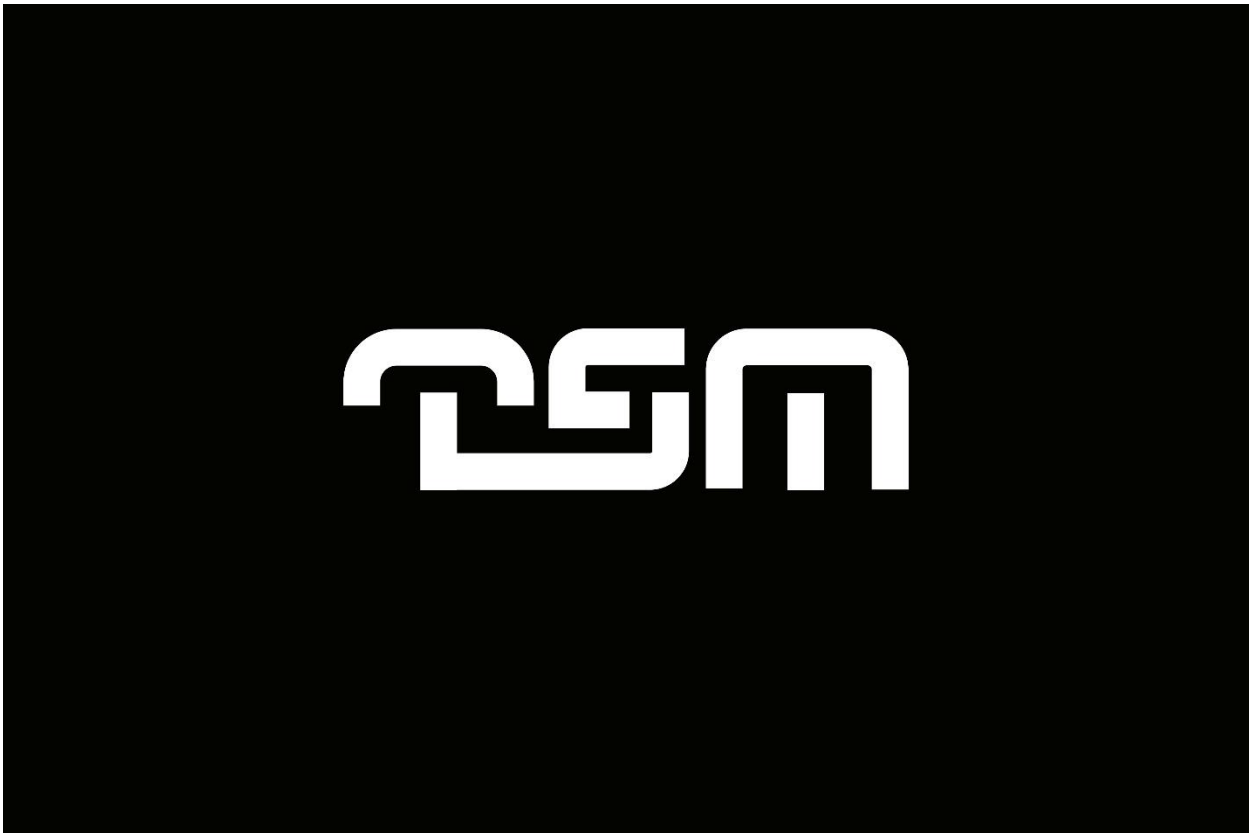
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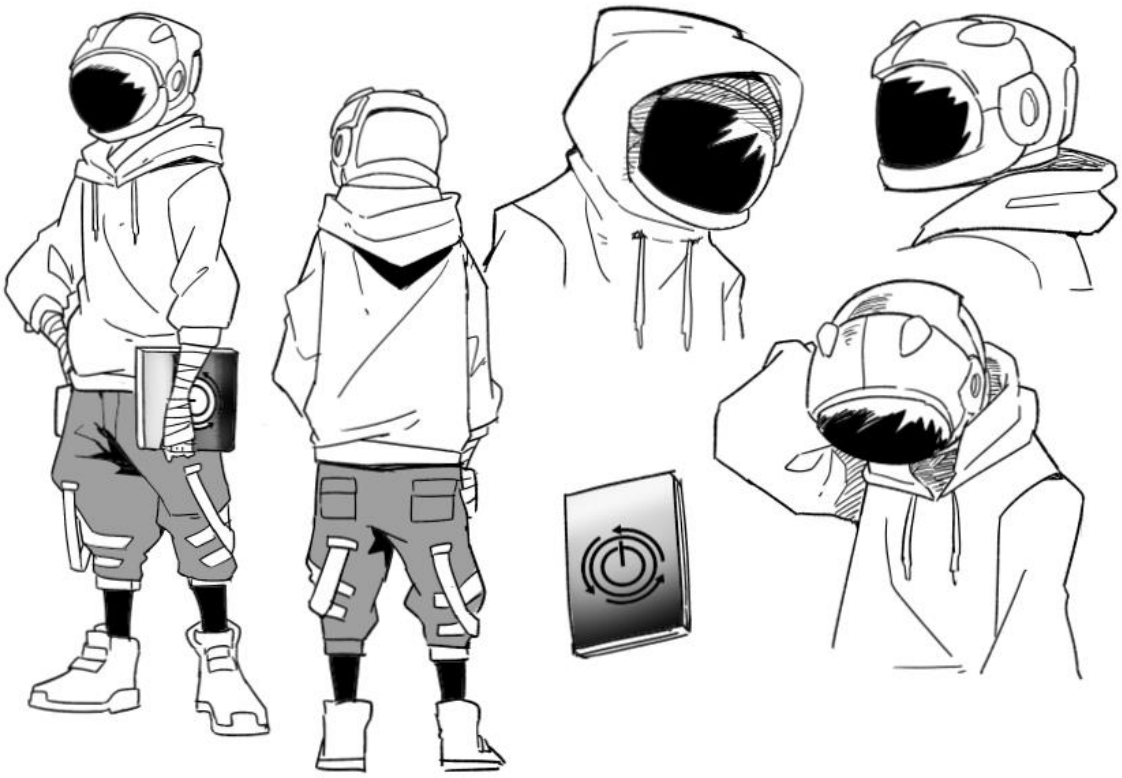
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@ESOP & F@BLE WILL RETURN IN…



About The Author



NPC Name: Armond Coleman

Date Of Death: March 5th, 1992

Role: Narratologist

Goal: Spread NARANATHISM

Hometown: Charlotte, North Carolina

Theme Song: Exhibit C by Jay Electronica

Favorite Video Game: Jet Set Radio Future

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