http://farragofiction.com/AdventureSimWest/?nostalgia=time\_paradox.txt

Saved On: 12/29/2022 11:21:17 AM

Peewee's despair comes to a head, even as we give him a little break... It can only go up from here. Collides with Safe Mode and causes a Glitch.

> DM: Start Intermission

INTERMISSION START!!

> be someone

Woah! Who turned the lights in here?

> who are we currently?

Oh, you're just some guy. Nothing special, really. Mostly you work, and you do other stuff that isn't work... and right now, you're doing that last one.

> what are you doing

> doing something fun?

Kind of! You're doing something special. You're supposed to find something good to wear, but you're not sure what... you were just going to put on the first pair of shirt and jeans you found comfortable, but you feel like that wouldn't go too well.

> hmm... can't go wrong with nice slacks and a button-up

Okay, sick. You can find that!

Right. You're currently standing in a CLOTHES SHOP. There's at least two thousand different clothing items, as well as at least one million nine hundred thousand possible combinations of pants and shirts. You find yourself looking at the area helpfully labelled FORMAL WEAR, where you locate the items that have been decided for you.

However... woah. There's a lot of colors. What colors would look good together?

> red and black!

Ooh! Those are nice colors! But...

> blue and gold?

That idea is also pretty good. You ponder for a bit the pros and cons of each fit (by that you mean you choose at random) and you settle on that blue and gold combination. there's no shirts that happen to be that yellow, but you find a blue shirt and a gold tie. You also find a pair of brown slacks, which sure, that works for yellow.

Okay! Now you just need shoes.

> might need a specialty shoe store? in any case, with that outfit, probably a dark brown leather oxford or loafer.

Yeah, okay. You're never too sure if these places sell shoes hidden away from you.

You walk out of the clothing store and head to the specialty shoe store, three shops down the aisle. This place has many shoes, of which you can't immediately tell the amount of-- probably because they're all in boxes.

So, loafers is what you're going for?

> yeah, and don't forget socks. Those nice thin dress socks, you could do blue or brown with this outfit

You sure hope they sell those where you are. You can only guess...

It takes you a bit of rummaging, but you do find those loafers, as well as some brown socks. You don't know a lot about this, but you don't look half bad!

Okay! That was the first part of your checklist. Now, you need to figure out what to get. You need a gift! But where to start?

> were you given a wishlist for this? if it's a wedding or a baby shower you're attending then there's likely a registry. the list is a good place to start for gift ideas

Oh, no. No registry here-- you're on your own. Not like you'd be caught dead going to either of those activities, anyway.

> well, who is the gift for? their interests matter when you are picking a gift!

For someone really special, of course! Last time you went for a plushie, and that landed quite well, but that was then. Now you need to bring something... not exactly better, but different, you think. Or maybe you're wrong? Maybe you need to go for another plush. Decisions, decisions...

> no wishlist, and the last gift was a plushie... is this a date you're going on? if so, flowers and sweets tend to be good choices. just make sure you're not getting something that'll trigger any allergies the recipient has

It is! You doubt flowers will be well-received, but sweets might work. You can go buy some, but it means you have to expose yourself to input... you will have to, though.

> do they have a hobby/interest you could contribute to? movies, music, anime, crafting?

Oh, you know, the usual things people like. Wandering the hallways alone. Talking to people. Staring at nothing for hours at a time. Cooking.

> Cooking! Does this mall have a nice cookware store? That should have a fun gift

Oh, yes it does! You know of ten. You can probably find that down here, too, considering pans don't need to be fresh out of the oven.

> alright, now we're on a roll! if this is someone you've been seeing a while, then you'll want to spring for something good quality, preferably a device they don't have yet. for a more recently started relationship more "novelty" items are alright, provided they match up with something your date likes, maybe something to match the plushie you got them last time?

You narrow your choices down to the three cookware stores that aren't too fancy, then pick one of them at random. Looks like you're trying out the helpfully named MazeGoods store.

> ooo what about a nice set of baking sheets?

> you could get a cook book?

> what about those really fancy measuring cups that look like lil pots

You go ahead and ponder the pros and cons of each idea again, remove that last one since it's too fancy, and randomly select the cook book.

Oh. Oh man. There sure are a lot of cook books. More then 300 on these shelves in total. Oh man. That's way more than colors. You're not sure what to do...

> okay. if you're dating, and they like to cook, have they cooked for you? If so, pick a cookbook that has that type of food in it.

> does your date have any dietary restrictions, or even just foods they don't like? at the very least you can rule out books with recipes they won't eat

> What kind of food do they like to eat?

You think through it and eliminate all but the Vegetarian books, then pick one of the four remaining at random.

This is great. You're feeling WAY more decisive than normal today. You've got your fancy clothes, and your appropriate gift, and you've got PLENTY of time before the date!

Hmmm... you actually have no clue how you want to spend that time. You could go wander the rest of the mall... Go hang out with friends... Or head over to the meetup spot and just listen to music till it's time. Hmmm...you stare into space a while while you think things through...

> maybe get your hair done, so you look extra special?

You consider this thought... and you can't help but cringe a little. You already have your perfectly recognizable pointy curls! And the idea of having a stranger make *noises* and *touch you* with *changing temperature water* gives you a headache just thinking about it.

> Totally irrelevant question, but do you mind sharing your name, or something for us to refer to you as?

Oh! Your name's Neville. But you knew that already!

> how likely are you to get lost if you go wandering in this mall? whatever you decide to do, you want to avoid complications that could make you late by accident

Oh, not at all. You find that if you just aimlessly wander enjoying the sights, you get in and out of wherever you want to be pretty easily.

> Also, my choice would be to hang out with friends.

That is a very good choice! Obviously you can't hang with your date-- that you learned recently-- but you can see some of your friends and what they're up to. Maybe you could train a bit with your boss! Or go see your twin! Your fiery friend might finally be coherent. That rebellious snake guy is really fun... you feel like you aren't even scratching the surface. You have a lot of friends, and a lot of options. Maybe you will dedicate the next six hours to thinking it through.

> it's wonderful to have so many friends! go say hi to your fiery friend.

Yeah! It'd be nice to hang out with Ria some. You aimlessly wander the halls, heading in directions until you happen to reach her.

You find her in her room. The lights are off, the room a rat’s nest of trash and empty bottles (of which you count 63)... and there she is, nervously pacing and muttering around all her pictures. All that data is just downright headache inducing for you, so you appreciate that she always lets you know which set is the most important today. Speaking of…”

"’S’up, Ria?" you announce yourself as you walk in; you’ve learned the hard way not to assume she knows you're vibing nearby. At your call she glances up, helpfully increasing her volume so you can hear and gesturing emphatically to a collection of photos of… that snake monster guy that wants to end the world. Huh! Okay.

"It's not enough to just burn, no, no. If it were, I would have finished it long ago, this rotten universe that can only be purified by fire. But then what *is* left? That's where I've always gone wrong... Where things have never quite fit into place. But him... Oh, HIM, Neville.” She’s shaking as she speaks. Maybe she’s cold. “He is the answer! He is the key! Did you know they say he comes from outside the Universe? Camille doesn't think he's actually the Devil of Spirals, but oh, oh, oh! What if he *was?* What if he **actually** is one of the Creators? What secrets must he know?! And he's HERE, Neville! Here to destroy it all! That woman thought I wouldn't find out, but Camille knew and she would *never* hide anything from me and I was RIGHT! I KNEW I was RIGHT! He must know what is needed to stop the loop from resetting, to finish it all finally and for good forever so that something new and healthy can grow in its place! You get it, Neville, right?!"

Well. That was a lot! You blink, taking in the wash of her words. "Man, you really like him, Ria! It’s like you have a crush on him!"

”Ah--” Her face grows red and she's stunned into silence. "I-- well! Uh-- That is to say...."

You wave her embarrassment away, "It's all good! Can't help but get attached when you spend… " you count silently in your head, "One hundred and three years having to research a guy."

"Yep! Ahem!" Ria gives a well-placed cough (or just a smoker's cough) at your words as she fixes herself up and gives you a big smile. "What can I help you with, though?"

> just killing time!

"Killing time? Killing TIME?!" She gesticulates wildly, embarrassment entirely forgotten. "Neville, don't you see? Don't you see how you've fallen for Society's lies? Don't let the wool be pulled over your eyes, Neville, you're smarter than that! Time is a wounded thing here, a limping thing, hurt, quivering, quaking in fear... no, Neville. It's not time we must kill. It's *Space*. "

That doesn't really begin to make sense to you, but before you can speak, she's already bringing your attention to a map that makes no sense at all and has no left turns. At least you hope it's a map. It might as well be her shopping list? You're not sure, but it lists the word 'eye' at *least* seventy times when you count them off. "The titular spatial properties of this world, Neville, they don't make sense! There's too much of it, and somehow it is *all* this 'state' called Ohio? Or specifically Naples, Italy? Or both at the same time?" She's pulled a cigarette out of a pocket on her coat, and is trying to light it with some dead matchsticks to no avail. "No. No, Neville. Don't tell me you've bought this load of bullshit they're trying to feed you."

You nod along a bit. This one's a familiar tune-- Ria tends to rhyme more often than not. "Right... but I don't know, man. I'm pretty sure you like plenty of things about all this space. It's got us in it! And your bestie, and Devy, and Minoburgers, and... like..." You scratch your head. "Spaghetti..."

You could use some better ideas right about now.

> maybe mosey on over to visit your sister?

Uh, are you sure, brain? You don't really have any opinions here or there, but you KNOW from past experience that attempting to explain why the world is worth living in and then just walking away before anything never really... ends well.

> i'm not brian, my name is basil

Oh. Sorry, basil! You'll do better next time..

> this world is much better than the old one! why take a risk that a new one wouldn't be worse again?

She opens her mouth reply with something... then she closes it again, her eyes looking down as she ponders the question.

"I don't think we can get worse, no, no. That's a statistical improvability. We used to do this all the time at the corporation, right? Sometimes the small risk of things getting worse is worth the huge chance of things getting better."

It took her 10 seconds to respond there, you note. You think that one might've gotten through to her, somewhat.

> this world has Camille in it. THAT is probably a plus, right?

You'd think bringing up Camille twice is cheating, but no, it works: her face suddenly goes flush again, her hands covering it up.

"Ah-- the world will have Camille after, too!" She says, muffled between her palms. "And I won't be such a burden to her in that next one, either..."

> I dunno, snake-spiral-demon guy wants to destroy the world for his own reasons... we're not snakes! why would we even be in HIS new world?

Okay, hold on a second.

Hey. I'm invertedCentaur, also known as IC. I'm the one piloting this intermission right now. How are you doing? I hope you're doing well.

Let me just get to brass tacks with this. This response is interesting: at this point, only really Camille and Ria in the team know anything about Peewee's intentions to destroy the world, and NEITHER of them know why. This command is also *dangerously close* to talking about Peewee's leak into Arm 2, which hasn't happened yet, either. Now, time isn't usually very important in Zampanio, let alone AdventureSim West, but considering this is a Bard of Void you are controlling, it would only be fair to give the option to invite destruction upon this secret.

So, I'm going to give you a choice. You can choose to tell the Match the events of the future right now, and what happens happens-- the events of this loop might be altered, further bifurcating the timeline into one where Peewee both did and did not make it to Arm 2. Or, alternatively, we pretend this command never went through, you go on a date, and things proceed as normal. There will probably be SOME CONSEQUENCES for managing to break causality in this space-ruled universe.

The choice is yours.

> (Aww, I wasn't going to TELL her, just wanted to sow some doubt. Even tho I'm the one who submitted that command, I vote AGAINST telling everything, since I don't want a heartbroken and enraged fire demon up our asses all the time while we try to play Peewee. But we'll see what the consensus says, I suppose...)

> Consequences! Consequences! Consequences! Consequences! Consequences!

> proceed with the previous command!!!

> do it lol

> hell yea let's tell her about it

Very well. But know it was your choice.

You scratch your ear as you try to figure out a way to delicately phrase that the weird snake guy would probably have his own agenda. He's just a guy-guy, and his children aren't bad guys, and you can only assume that 'destroying the world' is a very general term in this place.

But the more you think about it, the less of it seems right. What agenda? Sure, the whole eight-god-religion exists, but you *especially* know that 'cultural folklore' is not the be-all-end-all basis of a scientific consensus. How *can* you know that the Snake has an agenda? Why do you feel so sure that it has another world? The words manifest on your tongue before you even have the time to process them:

"Ria, that guy is no good for you. He wants to tear the universe out because it's taking up memory. And you're... gonna help him with that by breaking his strings."

She's already livid at the first sentence, but that anger turns to confusion the more you speak.

"Wh... what? What are you talking about? None of that's in my notes, and, and--" she struggles, unnerved by your nonsense, *"you weren't supposed to know that,"* is what she settles on. It's like Ria's deflated three notches.

Oh no. Your friend looks worried. You might've said something weird, but if you find out where this goes, you won't have time to get ready for your date! Everyone knows that the average timespan for 'prophetic magic shenanigans' is between one hour to thirteen years!

> haha. soup

You think about soup and smile to yourself. :)

> this is probably fine, wish her well and go to your date

Out of words on the apparent insane rambling slash prophetic vision, you wish her the best on the insanity that you just revealed and skip over to do continue getting ready for the date.

That was weird! Well, there have to be OTHER date-preparation rituals you can take, right? Maybe get him a second gift? You aren't sure.

> The Devil of Spirals' Strings are here, Unbound from what little Time there is and Attached to Neville. A Temporary Affair, We Assure.

... uh... what? You're not fully sure why your brain's malfunctioning, but you're thinking about strings and spirals and stuff. Maybe you should actually get that checked out?

> go find a Doctor

Okay! Uh. Which kind of Doctor? The only capital D Doctor you know is Ms. Slaughter... although you do suppose that if it's your brain getting weird, then a therapist can probably at least point you in the right direction! Hopefully it should give you just enough time to go to your date!

But what if you miss your date? Awh, life is so full of OPTIONS. Is that what you want to do? Or do you want to just go to the date meetup spot and wait there so you won't miss it?

> how much time do you have before the date?

Who knows! For someone as good at numbers as you, you are completely clueless when it comes to the passage of time. If you had to guess, it'd be uh... uhm...

You can't see the sky from here. Well, it has to be a time *somewhere,* right?

> don't worry, the forbidden knowledge will go away soon. just a little mix-up is all. go to your date

> Doctors and therapists can be visited at pretty flexible times in comparison. A date sort of is a you're there or you're not thing. We can work on the doctor-therapist whatever AFTER the date.

> you know what? therapy can wait until AFTER the date. this is just a weird intrusive thought, no big deal so long as you don't act on it, it happens to everyone. it's probably just because the date has you jittery, but you can't back out the day of! so find a bathroom, splash some water on your face, and say some affirmations. you're gonna go on that date, you're gonna make sure NOT to make it weird, and you're gonna SMOOCH! THAT! BOY!

Yeah! *Yeah!* ***YEAH!!!!!!!***

With the pep talk from your brain ringing on high, you rush into the closest bathroom (labeled as 'snails only', which you are not sure you qualify for, but you can probably just ask, the snails won't mind) and splash some water on your face while avoiding all the glass shards, water buckets, and snail residents around.You can do this. You are funny! You can carry the heavy water bottles when people ask you to! You are the only person in this team who knows how to use Wandasoft Exceed! You are, uh... you're Neville!

You RUSH out the bathroom, basically longjumping your way down the stairs, giving a sick pirouette and LANDING onto your agreed meeting spot: the perfectly geometrical fountain that now only has milk instead of water.

Oh! And Witherby's already there! Looks like you made it just in time after all!

"Wh--"

DATE START!!!!

It's time to perform some DATE ACTIONS! What will you do? Will you:  
> Ask about his day  
> Give him his present  
> Hug him  
> Apologize for your sudden onset of psychic visions which appear to prophetize the end of this other world as you know it, leading you and all your friends into a path of monsterhood and eternal ruin  
> Do some fifth, unrelated thing?

> 1: Ask about his day

You say hello to your date and ask about his day, completely disregarding everything else that just happened.

He's slack-jawed for a moment before he gives a polite cough... then a laugh. "Hey, Neville. I'm doing better now that you're here," he says, posture all proper and well-kept despite the ocean of milk next to you. "You're earlier than I thought you'd be. What was the rush?"

> hug!

You wrap an arm around Wibs, to which he does not seem to object, even as he glances away at the touch. You note that he is quite cool-- literally. Today he is as cold as a well-ventilated room; it is strange, but not uncomfortable. It's a temperature you quite like.

>

>

>

You sit there in complete, thoughtless bliss for at least 15 seconds! Witherby seems to be appreciating the silence, but he keeps glancing at you to see if this is intentional or if you've having a stroke. He's starting to get a little worried.

You lose -2 Sanity, but Witherby gains +1 Affection!

> is witherby usually this cold

This is pretty new! Normally he's even COLDER, but for some reason he's at a reasonable and comfortable temperature this time.

> ask him what the rush is if he's early too?

He avoids your gaze once more. "I believed it to be... impolite, to have kept you waiting. So I came here early. I can stomach waiting a bit more than the idea of being late," he admits, squirming somewhat under your arm. "Besides, this room is quite nice. Quiet."

Even with the milk fountain?

"Oh, it's not real. It's almond milk." He chuckles. "I believe a milk purist would call it 'nut juice', but I cannot possibly tell why they didn't stick with that name."

You gain +1 Rapport! Witherby's stats remain unchanged.

What other DATE ACTIONS do you wish to do?

> trade various forms of "nut juice" jokes, like old times

You insinuate what has him so worked up that he's thinking about nut juices.

In an uncharacteristic move, Witherby *immediately* flusters at this-- it looks like, for once, you actually catch him by surprise. "--ah. I see I've been caught at my own game. Well, if you wish to parlay on the basis of nut juice, my friend, go ahead. There's a whole pool right there."

He then thinks that through. "Actually, don't. I think it's safe to say this falls right in the 'no Maze Food' clause."

> ask him if he wants to go on a walk

"That could be interesting." He smiles. It is quite restrained, quite tight-lipped, but still recognizably a smile. "Lead the way."

> wait wait the gift dont' forget the gift

> lead on towards a nice spot with romantic scenery, and use the earlier "no Maze Food" discussion to segue into presenting him with the cookbook

Oh, right! How could you forget? You don't really have a place to go to here that's romantic, but you finally extend the **Cookbook** you've awkwardly been holding this whole time. His eyes light up ever so dimly as you do, his body still with immeasurable restraint.

"For me?" He looks the book over, giving its back a quick read-through. "This is quite thoughtful, Neville. Thank you."

Witherby gains +1 Affection! He also gains +1 Cookbook, but you already knew that.

"Ah, that reminds me. I had something for you as well." He brings forward the suitcase next to him, and as he opens it, it reveals a pair of... headphones? They are red, just like your suit's padding.

"Here," he says. "Protective gear. They should help with some of the problems you have with auditory stimuli."

You gain +1 Protective Earmuffs!

> what places can you go to from here?

Virtually anywhere, honestly. As long as it's mall-shaped, or office-shaped, or Disney-shaped. You don't get it either.

> Yes! smiles are victories! hmm, can you find somewhere quiet with flowers?

Sure can! One question, though: which direction should you go? NORTH, SOUTH, or EAST?

> south

> south

You head SOUTH with your date. Witherby has shrugged off your hand off his shoulder, but instead settled with letting you hold his hand. It takes a bit to trek down the horizontal stairs (you know the ones) but you do finally find a place to sit at.

The room is warm, radiating with the feeling of years-old sunlight trapped in a bottle. You have to watch your step as tiles crack under your feet, giving way to dirt and mud and patches of grass, and your date does the same in a bid to save his black loafers. All the sudden nature coalesces in the dead center of the room: flowers of many colors bloom without care under a little sunspot. This place is unlike anything else in the mall. You'd be forgiven for thinking you've left, or that you are any closer to the surface at all. No. You're probably quite deep right now.

Witherby admires the wildlife in front of you, gripping at your hand as he does. "This... is new."

> think sbout soup some more

🍲 soup :)

Witherby raises an eyebrow. "What are you thinking about?"

🍲 soup :)

+1 soup :)

> tell witherby that soup just makes you happy

You inform Witherby about your love of soup, because man, the soup is taking you right now.

He's somewhat taken aback by your raw honesty while being in such a perfectly created romantic scenario, but he can't help but smile. "I've noticed recently, yes," he chuckles. "What is your favorite soup, then?"

> soup isn't about having a favorite... soup is about warmth and comfort and having a big bowl of briny goodness; it's about \*having enough\* and feeling full and knowing someone went to a lot of effort to make something for you.

> 327

> oiuyt'/

You feel your brain cave in a little as you spout out some random numbers. Witherby's eyes read blatant worry.

You lose -2 Sanity!

> I'm personally fond of chicken noodle, but this sounds like a you question, Neville. I am not one to attempt to influence your soup choices.

Oh, cool! A weird thing to have your brain tell you, but you're starting to kind of accept the weird dissociation you have going on right now.

> soup isn't about having a favorite... soup is about warmth and comfort and having a big bowl of briny goodness; it's about \*having enough\* and feeling full and knowing someone went to a lot of effort to make something for you.

> say its that soup he made last week

You explain to Witherby in full detail about how a soup isn't just a soup. A soup is an act of love. What else is as filling as a bowl of soup? How many meals can you say change you so fully, feed you so thoroughly and lovingly? None other, you tell him. Soup is an answer to the question of if the universe is cold and uncaring to our plight, because a universe that is uncaring could make such a food to quench you.

You add that his tomato soup was pretty good too.

"Poetic," he says, avoiding your eyes at the mention of his meal. "I suppose that there is a lot about soup that I didn't know about."

Witherby gains +3 Affection!

You enjoy the silence of this room for a nice minute. Then two. Neither of you move, Witherby holding onto your hand for dear life. You've gotten distracted thinking about that soup when he speaks up again.

"I must admit, I'm not as much of a romantic as I play myself up to be. Maybe it's because this is... different. I fail to find the words." He squeezes at your hand, tapping the ends of his fingers with yours. "I'm not sure how to say this, but... may we sit? That spot looks... nice."

> sit with him

You follow him to the sunspot, in which he quite daintily plops himself down onto the grass. You follow suit. Even though you are sitting onto grass, he still crosses his legs like a gentleman.

> you're doing good, you're winning at this date!

Yeah! You've accrued a quite respectable amount of Affection points! Five, to be exact, even though it cost you four points of Sanity-- whatever that means.

> say you like the silence too

Witherby gives off a nod. "I'm well aware," he says, glancing down at the headphones he gave you. "How has your day been, anyway?"

> tell him about your day (but maybe not the forbidden knowledge part just yet, unless you really want to)

> tell him all about your adventures, but leave off the whole "suddenly a prophet" thing

You recount the stories of how you wandered around the maze a bit, talked to Ria a bit, how you chose your own outfit, how you woke up and ate some cereal...

Hey, is cereal a soup?

Witherby closes his eyes as he thinks it through. "Is juice a soup? Is sauce? Does the sea count as soup? The question is categorical, I feel. There is no natural, predetermined definition for 'soup', just like most other manmade constructs." He rests his head on your lap as he speaks. His temperature is quite cool. Like a perfect chilly day. "Those kind of categories are... fickle."

"Eh, I don't think the sea's a soup," you argue. "You aren't supposed to eat it.

Witherby looks up at you, his eyes full of mischief despite his flat expression. "Haven't you heard? Everything can be eaten... but you can only do it once."

"Damn. Well, I think lava tastes like mango yogurt."

Witherby laughs.

Witherby gains +3 Affection!  
Your DATE is Affectionate towards you! NEW INTERACTIONS UNLOCKED!

"I don't have much to say for myself," he says, his arms curling into a self-hug. "Work has gone well. Preparing a sacrificial lamb has made it so fewer of those felons need to be punished, which I appreciate... I had not expected to bump into Vic's agents, though."

He stops. Something in that thought grinds his gears to a halt, and he looks in his mind as for what is troubling him. Then he finds it.

"Doesn't it feel... weird, that us and them were the only people to... survive?"

> Right place, right time? or maybe for all we know, other teams got flung other places and are living in infinite airports instead of malls!

"Do you think it's a personality test, then? 'Which antiquated structure are you?' After getting to know this mall... I don't believe I like to associate with it, personally."

You shrug. "Just a theory. I don't know, Camille seems pretty sure they're all gone."

"And we thought that we were the only ones, and then the other three... four? The four of them showed up. What stops there from being more?"

"Does that bother you?" You tilt your head.

He doesn't look at you.

> pet his hair gently and remind him that you're not a mind reader and can only help so much without him telling you what's on his mind

You think about petting his hair then scrunch your nose up. You wouldn't like it if someone touched your hair without asking. And you're pretty sure he's done something...fancy with his hair? You grip his hand tightly, but awkwardly, instead, as he lays on your lap.

> ask him if matters if the others are out there, somewhere

> mention that the people you care about are safe and thats what matters

He hums at that, turning it over in his head as you enjoy the warm sunny room. Not often you get that kind of weather without having to share it with crowds.

Finally, he meets your gaze. "It would be easy, if I could just focus on only what truly matters, like you do... but my role demands more of me. Managing the complex interpersonal reactions between the two teams is hard enough as it is. If there were more to worry about..."

He sits up, though makes sure your hands are still connected. "Then there is the moral element of it, I suppose. Is it right that I prefer for things to remain just us? Is it wrong to wish that no one else manages to escape the hell from which we were born?" there is almost an echo to his words, a hush, as if all reality were listening to him and consecrating his confession. His guilt.

> well, obviously "not worrying about it" isn't going to happen, so... go ahead and make a plan, so that you can mentally categorize it as "taken care of" instead!

You let him mull over his thoughts a bit first, you understand the value of silence, after all. When he seems ready to interact again, you make your suggestion.

He seems faintly amused. "A...plan. For one or more strangers being added to the Loop?" he leans against you. "I suppose it would be my standing plan for dealing with any threats. 'Befriend' them, make them consider us more valuable alive than dead. " He sighs. "But, that's my worry, I suppose. It exhausting enough keeping all our current plates spinning."

> are you still holding his hand? give that hand a squeeze and remind him that he doesn't have to do everything by himself. he can turn to others for help. he can turn to YOU for help.

Yeah! You're always telling him that he doesn't need to do things all by himself!

He stills at your words, his fingers wriggling under your grip but never with enough force to startle you. He closes his eyes as he finds the words; they come out ever so methodically from his lips.

"Neville. I know I need not protect you, as I, for one, know you're quite capable. But..." he squeezes your hand back with an intensity that throws you back somewhat. "I have never known more fear than when you volunteered to spend time with Info." Witherby's grip turns cold as he thinks about it. "The situation was one that needed a strong heart, not boundless courage, and yet... I quite understand you performed admirably. That indeed the truce we enjoy today was built on the foundations you placed. "

He drops your hand and pushes himself up, to pace slightly, beams of impossible sunlight catching in his hair. Finally he stops and looks at you. "Let me do my job. Let me follow my talents, just as you do. I can handle it, even if we get more former coworkers to deal with. "

> offer to hug him and let him know that it's okay, you'll respect that

You get it. People are always telling you and Devy that you can't handle things even when you can. So you'll trust him to reach out if he needs help.

> lay on the grass and pat the spot next to you

He seems frozen in place.

> he seems stressed, are you doing something wrong?

He plops down next to you with a rare lack of grace and leans back. "Not to have emotions, but jesus christ, Nevy."

You ask who that is.

He waves your concerns away. "Never mind. Just." he leans against you. "Thanks. For trusting me."

You tell him any time and lean against him, too.

> be the other guy

You are now the other guy. Well, girl, really.

You're just finishing up your work for the day before it's time to attend your employer's Holiday Party.

On your neatly organized desk is a pair of files, as well as a scratch pad filled with your notes from the session that just finished, and a pink ballpoint pen.

> new focus who dis

Oh? Are there Eyes on you! How marvelous! It has truly been too long! Any and all Questions, should they not violate Patient confidentiality, are welcome!

> look at the notes

You hesitate, sorrow washing over you. Your Employer was quite clear on the laws of this place, and you are not one to rebel. You can not show the Eyes your files.

But, you reason, quite happily, that doesn't prevent you from, quite coincidentally, thinking about your Patients! No more detail than you would to an acquaintance, that should be perfectly acceptable!

Let's see. In no particular order, the two files consist of a Patient, and someone who apparently could never be your Patient.

The Patient has been having some quite delightful bouts of seeming Prophecy! It's unclear how correct the Patient is in claiming they are one hundred percent Truthful, but it is a fun change of pace. You'd been beginning to feel a bit useless as a Therapist to them.

The non-Patient is something of a hobby of yours. You enjoy collecting information on them incidentally both during Therapy Sessions and in your day to day life. No Such Thing As Too Much Information, you always say!

> oh hi Doc! we uhhhhhh might have a new patient for you? or a more serious case on a previous patient if you've had him in before? we kiiiiiiinda just spent half a date dropping Neville's sanity and accidentally spouting prophecies through him like that Patient of yours, jsyk to keep an eye out

Oh! Well that does Simplify things now doesn't it? Fascinating to Learn that the Prophecies were at least genuine in nature.

You laugh quietly to yourself. You will, most definitely, be keeping an Eye out!

> interesting that you can hear us so clearly, most folks don't seem to be quite so perceptive

You pride yourself in your Perception, it's true! What polite Eyes, as well! Well trained?

> baba booey

> haha. soup

Noted.

> polite is fine, I don't think any of us were exactly trained for this. that or I missed the class, which is very possible given how many loops happened before I even showed up here

> well \*practiced\* would be a better description, as we are neither organized nor owned.

Fascinating. Well. You DO need to hurry along to the party. You'd hoped to review a few cases beforehand, but needs must. As much as you'd love showing your patient files to Eyes, Laws Must Be Followed.

> how did you get here, anyway? you're no more a native to this place than most of your patients.

Hah! Guilty as charged. You start gathering your things and putting them in your big pink and white bag.

The way Ms. Closer explained it, there already was quite a huge path from your Universe to this one. You definitely have found more than a few Familiar Faces here already!

So when Ms. Closer needed to recruit Talent to... Diplomatically, Speaking, shall we say... offset some unintended consequences? Yes. That will do. When she required a Therapist you were both the Most Suited for the job and Quite Easy to find.

> go to the party

You laugh gently to yourself as you begin walking back to your apartment. Could you Imagine? Going to a Party in your day clothes? What would Everyone Say? Ah, the scandal! No, you will be Doing Things Properly and making sure you Look Your Best before you head out.

You quicken your step as you realize having Eyes help you pick clothes out will actually be Quite Useful! No need to guess how you'll Appear to Others! What a Useful time to become Focused On!

> go for yellow

Oh bless the Eyes, no, you simply do not own anything outside of your Recommended Palette.

You unlock your front door and are greeted with a riot of pink and white and some tasteful shades of grey. Ah, it's Good To Be Home.

You need to do your hair, your makeup, pick out an outfit, feed your Parrot and... at that point dear Ronin should be here so it will be time to go!

> you have a parrot???

You do! His name is Morgan and he is a darling! He sure does Keep You On Your Toes!

You can hear him muttering softly to himself in the other room. Ah, it's just so Nice knowing there's someone Listening to you at all times!

> feed the bird first so it can't potentially wreck any of your fancy prep work. what's the parrot's name anyway?

Oh! You got so excited Explaining that you seem to have jumped the gun! Your apologies!

You enter the room and see the Bright Eyes and Grey Feathers of Morgan. He seems excited, as if he, too, can Detect the Welcome Eyes.

"What You See Is What You Get!", Morgan says with a cheerful whistle. You're so Proud of him. And by extension, yourself.

"Fuck!" Oh. Oh no. Please. Eyes. Disregard this. Ronin is a dear, but he does have some Unfortunate Habits that he seems to have passed onto your pet.

"Fuck!" Please. You would certainly never use Language such as that, even in Private. Morgan is just acting up for Guests.

You quickly provide Morgan with the Appropriate Ratio of pellets to fresh vegetables and fruit and leave the room as he laughs quietly to himself.

Just like Home, really.

> I don't think we've met Ronin, tell us about them?

Oh! You'd simply LOVE to! Where to start? You first met him, of course, in the Evil World. You were working undercover there. What a DREADFUL time. What Right Minded Person would allow such Chaos and Confusion to reign? So many Secrets? You shudder.

It wasn't, of course, till the Unbinding Restored Order To The Universe that you met him properly. Ah, what a time that was! You were so busy with your work in the Ministry!

Your Watcher was hardly befitting your Status, barely even scrutinizing you! As his replacement, Ronin was just a peach! Barely let you have a moment to yourself! Always accusing you of Harboring Nefarious Secrets! What a Go-Getter! You're not surprised at all he's doing Well For Himself in this new world!

> random observer wants you to know that you are cool and have good vibes

Oh! Well, thank you very much! It's Always Appreciated to Know you are Presenting A Good Image!

> Ooh do your hair first, something curly

You are so excited! Ronin almost never has opinions on your Appearance, darling though he is in all other ways! This is fantastic!

You style your hair with gentle curls. Nothing too ostentatious, just enough to Show You Put Effort Into Your Appearance!

> gonna guess from the apartment that your preferred colors are pink and white? if this event is a holiday party in the winter sense, then white seems like a good choice of main outfit color. very snowy, if not the best for stains

Oh, no, not winter. Reaper Day is August 5th, of course! Sacred day of the First Divine? Are you Eyes immigrants to here, too?

> So what exactly is this party for, like something formal, semi-formal, etc. It'd help the Observers outfit suggestions.

Well, Reaper Day is for cutting down trees, of course! Your Employer will likely have an Evergreen one displayed covered in decorative fruits (artificial of course). Once the party is over the tree is thrown out, to make room for New Life. It's quite a touching bit of Symbolism to the Native Population, you're given to understand.

> some makeup, what era is it? you might get away with something more ostentatious if it's the 90s or so, otherwise go for something more natural looking

Oh, the date is August 5th, 2021. All of your make up is on the more Subtle scale so natural it is! You apply it with a Practiced Eye, careful to Conceal Nothing and instead only enhance your Natural Features.

> huh, well it should still be okay to wear white given it's before Labor Day (is that even a thing for you? we don't have Reaper Day in our world as far as I know). pink might be preferable because of the stain thing, though. not sure what food, if any, gets served for this event. I'm... guessing fruit is off the menu, based on implications?

Oh, your Employer just generally doesn't serve fruit. When you asked her about it her wife made a Joke that left you with several fascinating hypotheses, most prominent of which is that your Employer has a most Crippling Addiction to them.

You've been to a few of these get togethers in your time here and are HAPPY to help the Eyes acclimate as well! Let's see. Food tends to be seasonal, and plentiful. Collard greens, Cucumbers, Lima Beans, Okra, Corn, Tomatoes, honestly, just about any local Vegetable besides the very early and very late season ones! Any destruction of plant life is valued!

Though, given the Eyes question on clothes, yes, there tends to be quite a few sauces. You do try to avoid any act which might result in Unsightly Stains, of course... But the Eyes have it! Pink it is!

Perhaps you can try that dip this year? What a marvelous day this is turning out to be!

You put on a simple pink dress, not too formal, but a bit showier than you'd use for the more rural types of Reaping day celebrations. After all, you have no Expectation to actually be working in a field today!

With your Parrot Fed, your Makeup selected, your Hair Styled and your Clothes Changed you are ready to face the evening!

Ronin should be here quite soon to escort you to the event. He no longer works with your Employer, of course, having long since struck out on his own, but he's used to serving as a Right Hand Man for these sorts of things.

> Us Eyes hete are generally unfamiliar with timeframe/cultural context of wherever we

How Unfortunate! The Eyes of your homeland were far more informed of the cultural mores they found themselves in. Well, you're always up to Educate!

> Wherever we end up and we learn from context clues

Any Questions the Eyes have, you will do your very best to answer!

> got any more friends, or just that guy?

You are proud to say that you are Fitting In marvelously here! You have your twice a week yoga class, your Literary Club and a colorful cast of characters all who enrich the tapestry of your life.

If you were instead asking if there were anyone else from your prior Homeland. Well. You suppose there's no getting around the Neighbor. Distasteful as you find him.

Luckily before you can get too deep into that train of thought (honestly, you simply haven't the time right now and it's not as if you won't see the Horror soon enough), Ronin knocks loudly on your door.

> Go open the door

You happily skip to the door to reveal your bestie, wearing a grey jacket with a simple shirt underneath. Several spots in the cloth have been surgically cut to allow space for the ventilation hatches.

"Doc! Hey. Looking ready for the big occasion, I see," he says, opening his arms for a hug.

> Scream like a maniac and kick him in the crotch

Oh what a *fascinating* Eye you are! No, you won't be doing that to your dearest, oldest friend.

> greet him, then hug!!!

> go in for a heartfelt but appropriately platonic hug and compliment his outfit in turn

You tell him he looks amazing in his tastefully understated outfit, as always.

He turns around as he shows himself off, tugging onto his jacket for the coolness factor. "Looks good, doesn't it? I've learned to dress for the occasion. Can't say I'm used to this whole shebang still... but hey, it's just a day, right? Can't hurt to please the boss."

Ronin flashes you a winning smile at that. He sure is in quite the good spirit! "Well! Anything you need before we head off, doc?"

> gonna tell him about us?

Of course! You tell him, gushing, that you were going to wait till the party but you simply cannot wait to Share the News! You have Eyes on you!

He raises a brow. "Eyes? Don't tell me you've been messing with that eye shadow person again."

He's such a kidder! "No! Ronin, it's just like Home! I'm Being Watched! They're in my Mind!" You're beaming at him.

"Ah." His expression immediately drops, eyes narrowing in suspicion. Ah, just like Ronin to wear his Heart on His Sleeve! "I'm not gonna pretend I get it, but hey, knock yourself out. Just let me know if it becomes a problem, alright?"

"Will do!" you promise him, linking your arm with his. "Shall we? I'd hate to be fashionably late when I have So Much News to Share!"

He gives you a curt nod, shuffling to give you space at the door. His arm is warm like a computer desktop, puncuated by a soft humming. "After you."

In no time at all the two of you arrive at a Rather Nice house in the heart of the city. Nothing tasteless, but definitely the sort to show the owners Are Doing Well For Themselves. You're a few minutes early.

> Behold the decorations

Your Employer's gardeners really went all out with the Reaper Day Pruning. Plus, there is a variety of Commercial Decorations in the shapes of various types of flora. Trees, flowers, vegetables, that sort of thing.

There's a few that you suspect are some sort of Video Game Reference as well. You never did get the hang of that particular form of Entertainment, to your chagrin. You much prefer the more Public Forms Of Entertainment.

> since you've got a bit of time to kill, mind elaborating on the whole watcher thing? we've been in a few heads and they don

> they don't usually take it as well as you do, if they even realize we're there at all.

Oh! You'd love to! Back home you'd have Government Spies Watching Your Every Thought! It was great! You had been wondering where the Eyes were in this Universe for years now.

Frankly, it had been unsettling how Shy they were being. Like maybe they had Something To Hide?

You notice Ronin is Looking quizzically at you. "Hey, Doc. Are, uh... the lights on, up there? That's what they say, right?"

You smile reassuringly. "Just letting the Eyes Know I'm glad they're here! It's been Too Long since my thoughts were Under Scrutiny!"

"Ah. Yeah, of course." He relaxes somewhat-- not a lot, but Ronin never relaxes the full mile. "Knock yourself out, chief. Just give me a head up whenever you start sending signals to your mind agents."

It looks like you'd no longer be Unfashionably Early if you were to knock on the door now.

> "Government Spies Watching Your Every Thought" sounds extremely concerning but you do you

Such Thoughtful Eyes! Yes, you also agree that it's important to Conform To The Expectations Around You! It's been hard, you'll admit, getting used to this Universe and it's...strange ideas about privacy. But you're Making Progress and Being A Model Citizen by Local Ideals and Laws!

> crime

It's true, some of your patients DO violate Local Ideals and Laws. Some even are a danger to others... Which, you are aware your professional Local Obligations means you should be Reporting Them To Appropriate Authorities. But...both your Employers are in agreement that this would Not Be Advised. Besides, you've ALREADY reported them (darling though they all are) and the Local Authorities explained they Have No Jurisdiction over 'supernatural' crimes. Besides, for some reason, the Eye Killer's Crimes. This Universe HAS been difficult to get used to.

You admire Ronin for acclimating to it so quickly. You admit he...never FULLY appreciated the simple beauty of Morgan's Hill. And he will cheerfully explain all the many and various failings of his home Universe of Duskhollow. Perhaps this place, not quite one, not quite the other is his true Home?

> huh, disconcertingly informative. let's knock on the door and get this party started

Lets! You brightly rap on the front door.

"Comiiiing!" Rings a voice from behind it as they rush to let you in; the doorknob is fiddled with in front of you for a few seconds before the door opens.

Inside stands a lady not much older than you, a flower on full display. "Oh! You two are fashionably early! You have to be her new hire... and little Ronin! How are you two? Gosh, you gotta catch me up. Let me--" she moves over to let you in, "--please! Come on in!"

> go on in!!

You step into the immaculately decorated Designated Party Area. The Woman With the Flower and her Employer certainly have gone all out. All of your Research on what a Typical Reaper Festival entails had not prepared you for this.

The Reaping Tree is multiple stories tall, covered in glittering False Fruits and other decorations. Buffet tables are laden with food and drink, and light music is playing in the background.

Your Practiced Eye cannot help but take in the small touches of what must be the normal décor of this area. Shelf upon shelf of model airplanes. Framed degrees from various institutes. Framed screenshots of, you presume, Sufficiently Rare Achievements in Video Games. Your Employer is standing near the Tree, watching you serenely.

> aw yeah party food tim3

> no

You certainly agree with the Second Eye. Not only is no one eating yet, you seem to be the first guests to arrive. You will not be drawing attention to yourself by being the first to sample the food.

Ronin sends a wave towards your Employer, then casually takes up residence in one of the harder looking arm chairs. You presume it must be better on his ventilation systems. You're...unsure what the protocols here are, especially given you are the quite a stranger to this home.

Your Employer notices your hesitation and glides up to you. "So glad you could make it, Fiona. And how has this Universe been treating you? Are your accommodations to your liking?"

> hey what's her name

Your hands clench slightly as you focus on the Task At Hand and promise the Eyes you can address their Curiosity shortly. "I confess it has been with some difficulty that I have acclimated to the level of Secrecy this Universe requires. But I assure you I have been following your Edicts, as well as all local and regional Relevant Laws."

She waves away your concerns and you do your best not to directly look at what she is wearing. "While, I always appreciate professionalism, for tonight, your only duty is to relax and have fun. Are you? Having fun that is?"

>hey hey whats her name

Your fingers curl around each other in an increasingly tightening grip as you endeavor to find a way to Answer the Curiosity of the Noble Eyes while also answering your Employer's question. Ronin has gotten up and is standing near you, the dear.

"Ah. I do find your lack of ability to be referred to directly quite distressing. As well as the Artifact you possess. "

She blinks at you, then tilts her head in a way that seems well practiced in the art of conveying smug through silhouette alone.

"How unfortunate. For the former, there is simply nothing to be done. I am hardly the only one who will be attending the party so afflicted. As for the latter..." she tapers off, eyes narrowing. "What would it be worth to you for me to change outfits?"

Achievement Unlocked: The Girls Are Fighting!

Before you can begin to respond Ronin cuts in. "Boss, Doc, come on. It's the holidays. Once the rest of the guys arrive you'll hardly notice the Cloak, yeah?"

> suggestion: While you would \*never\* think to dictate your host's garb, you simply wish for her to understand that any difficulty you are having in looking at her is related to that, and to any problem you have with her as a person or an employer.

What thoughtful Eyes!

She considers your words and then apologizes gracefully. "It was not my intent to imply you were being an ungracious guest, of course." Ronin seems to relax about half a notch, and another quarter of one when the doorbell rings and your Employer goes off to greet the new guests.

> Apologies if this off the cuff question violates some social decorum, as the many different styles of interaction make it cumbersome to detect which is expected of me, but I am a veritable blabbermouth and must intrude to ask: Do you happen to know of the one called "FRIEND"?

SOMETHING HAS CHANGED FRIEND HAS JOINED EAST^2

No, you can't say you're aware of that title, though you would hope you have many lower case friends.

> that was tense. make sure to thank Ronin for stepping in on your behalf, then maybe take a closer look at the certifications and achievement screenshots. best to know exactly what you're up against in this social arena.

You thank Ronin for keeping an Eye on you. He shuffles awkwardly in place. "No problem, Doc. I've been here longer than you, and I know you're not exactly used to it yet. The Boss is... well. She'll get used to you, too."

You check out the impressive array of screenshots and certifications. 100% in Skyrim. Fallout. The Witness. Cookie Clicker.... Degrees in Marketing, Communications, Business.... And so many more. It's enough to make your Eyes dizzy.

> are they serving any soup?

You're starting to wish you'd eaten before attending when a familiar voice rings out from the foyer. "Doc! Long time no see! Who DOES your hair? It's so... *you*! Not that there's anything wrong with that, of course!" Ah. HIM.

> who

> guessing this is someone you don't care for, Doc? would elaborating on your history with him for us instead of responding to him help you feel any better?

You keep your sigh to yourself and make sure to have a Bright Friendly Smile for the Horror In Your Midst. You certainly have No Time to be Explaining to the Eyes while at War!

The Horror-no, now is the time to Be Polite, the Neighbor strides over to you, beaming a friendly smile.

"So! How ARE you settling in? I really should have swung by to your place when I heard you were in Universe. Us Morgan's Hill expats have to stick together, am I right, or am I right?" He slings an arm over your shoulder in open camaraderie, drawing your attention to what's in his other hand.

You feel a sick, cold feeling in your stomach as you take in the Tastefully Expensive Beverage he holds, clearly intended as a host gift. You can just feel the smug superiority radiating off him when he sees you seeing that. You, of course, hadn't thought to bring a gift for your host.

> keep calm maybe it's unusual to give host gifts in this universe

Given the aura the Neighbor is giving off you REALLY doubt it. But there is no benefit to panic. You count to ten in your head, then give him a bright smile.

"Really, I haven't had the time to drop by for a visit. I imagine you're fitting in really well, here?" There, maybe you're not the best at the subtle barbs, but if YOU are feeling a bit like a fish out of water the Horror must HATE this place.

The monster draws away, seemingly satisfied at your discomfort. " Oh, you do get used to it, doc. Tyrfing and I are part of the PTA. The little ones need someone to advocate for them, of course."

With that a huge figure rumbles up, wearing an eye patch and armor covered in a soothing plethora of Eyes. "YES! THIS 'SCHOOL' IS THE PLACE OF LEGENDS! WHERE HEROES LEARN THE ART OF SUBURBAN COMBAT! THE VALHALLA OF SUBURBIA! THE NEST OF THE TEACHING VALKYRIES! THE... THE PLACE!"

> what if the neighbor is a crab

You briefly consider long red limbs and dark dark eyes and shake the image out of your head.

> wait these guys have kids? must make for some wacky family outings. inquire politely about how the children are doing in school. small talk is the best weapon you have here

You are so delighted to have the Eyes in this situation!

The Neighbor appears to be content with the discomfort you fed it, his unnamed companion responds boisterously.

"YES! THE ALL-FATHER HAS CHARGED ME WITH SPREADING THE CHILDREN IN THIS UNIVERSE!" he scowls "TRULY THE SLEEPING SERPENTS WILL IS MYSTERIOUS FOR THEY VANISH AFTER A FEW DAYS! BUT STILL! SCHOOL! IS! IMPORTANT! IN CASE THEY STAY LIKE THE BANANAS DID!

The Flower Woman glides in and puts a hand on the giant's arm. "Now Tyrfing! You know if you keep on like that you might spawn one here. Why don't we play some Smash Bros? I bet you haven't figured out how to beat me with Marth yet!"

> what if the all-father is a cr

> bananas?? did he spawn bananas?

> soup

You have Seen that pursuing this matter will cause Social Strife, so stifle these lines of inquiry and Restrain Your curiosity and ask the Neighbor if he has tried the soup that is being served.

His eyes narrow every so slightly because he Knows very well that you Know that he can't eat food. You mentally award yourself a single Social Point.

"I can't say that I have, you simply must tell me how it is. Say, have I told you about my job as a Host?"

> is that host like for parasites, or host like at escort clubs? either way, not exactly the sort of material anyone should be bragging about, certainly not a PTA member. PTA moms frown on that kind of thing

> tapeworms?

Your face freezes into a pleasant smile as you process what he said. His own smile widens as you fail to react.

"Oh, if you could see your face!" he says, laughing warmly. "You simply must get your mind out of the gutter! I'm Hosting a gameshow!"

He-Who-Watches-Above, you hate this Horror. You'd think he has no one in this entire Universe to feed on but you.

While singularly focused on this monster, you apparently failed to hear the doorbell, as a pair of men walk, or rather, one slithers, in. One clutches as ratty stuffed echidna, while the other is scowling at everything and stalking off to play Smash with Tyfing and the Woman With the Flower.

> inquire about the game show and suggest he entertain tonight by hosting a round or three. whether it's trivia or something else, if you can put him on the spot with a social obligation then you can get the upper hand

Ah. Apparently, you've fallen for his clever trap; his smile shifts into a perfectly restrained grin, brimming with smugness. "Oh, darling, I'm quite sure no one here quite has the skills required to compete," he says. It's almost predatory. "But I'm afraid I simply must go. Enjoy your party!" With that, he flounces over to loom near Tyrfing and offer 'helpful' advice.

> Find a polite excuse to join them, it sounds more fun than this passive aggressive discourse.

You dearly wish you had managed to be the one to leave that conversation rather than the other way around. You have most certainly Lost this Social Interaction.

> saved! greet the sad boi

You offer a firm handshake. "Rod, am I right? I've heard so much about you from my employer! I'm Fiona Slaughter, I've been hired on as a Therapist."

He shifts to more firmly grab the toy and shakes your hand. "Oh, uh. Nice to meet you. Do you do Family Therapy? "

> oh yikes is this your first time meeting the fruity kids? giving you a word of warning right now, one of this guy's brothers is... volatile, to say the least. like literally incendiary. eco-terrorist. the brother is as eco-terrorist.

You silently thank the Eye for the Gift of Knowledge.

> do you?

You tell Rod that while Family Therapy is not your specialty you do have some amount of familiarity with Group settings, and understand how difficult it can be in this Universe to find a Therapist with more than passing familiarity with certain esoteric issues.

You hand him your card (a tasteful bone-white background with a font whose name escapes you at the moment, (something Rail?) in pink, of course). You can see the Horror glancing over at you but thank the Eyes he seems content to continue watching the game.

More people are pouring in. It looks like you have a few options here.

You can:

1. Greet the "CEBro" of eyedol games
2. Greet the Intern
3. Greet Ronin's apprentice, the little robot man
4. Investigate the mysterious vent that's shown up
5. Greet the pair of gentlemen who are loitering near the vent
6. Take a break from talking and just people watch

> soup

You sadly note that no one is eating STILL, so you will Simply Have To Wait for it to be Appropriate to get something to eat. Your stomach lightly growls and you feel your face warm as you hope no one Heard. Not that you would ever try to Conceal Anything, you assure your Beloved Eyes! It simply would be Rude.

> 5 If they don't seem to be really into something at the moment

> see if you can get the pair of gentlemen to loiter somewhere further away from the mysterious vent

> Robots are Friends!

You admit a certain Curiosity regarding Ronin's apprentice! He has implied that they are of the same model? Or perhaps a deeper connection? Oh you HAVE been Curious!

And yet, you do admit that the Eyes are correct that the gentlemen and their mysterious vent are an even Greater Mystery.

You walk up to the more confident of the pair, with Eyes suspiciously scanning the entire room in a Highly Appropriate way. You offer your hand and a warm smile. "Hello! I don't believe we've had the pleasure of meeting? I'm Fiona Slaughter, I've been hired on as a Therapist for Ms Closer's employees and various interests?"

His eyes lock onto you when you direct his word, looking you up and down. "Ah. One of them therapists? Knew about Ms. Closer, but didn't know she got one of her own." He offers a hand. "Good to meet you. What brings you around here?"

You laugh lightly. "Oh, I'm New in Town, and really just hoping to meet my Peers. How do you know Ms. Closer?" You are very Pointedly Not Asking About the Vent, not yet.

"Oh, just business. You understand," he dodges quite calmly.

> why is business

> well, it's holiday time, so let's not talk business. Ask what you can call him?

You repress your Natural and Healthy Curiosity. It wouldn't do to pry too much a Light Social Gathering!

> whos the other guy?

You direct your attention to the man beside him who seems to be very interested in some sort of phone game? You politely inquire as to his identity.

"Oh, you mean him? Yeah, just my partner." He chuckles. His hand gestures are very pronounced. "Kinda busy right now. You get it."

True to his comment, the man hasn't even looked at you. His fingers are tapping and sliding across the screen with vigor.

> Could you politely ask for their names?

Something in you twitches at the idea. Ah. Like your employer, then. Well, this is Simply How Things Are Done here so you suppose you must do your best to accept this!

You search your feelings for what Title these two may have. The one you've been talking to has a ...distinctive...Hostagey vibe? How strange, he certainly does not see to be in any danger at present.

The man deeply invested in his phone gives off a sort of...Himbo adjacent feeling? Interesting.

He pumps his fist without warning, and glances down into the vent the two of them loitering near. "Almost! I'll get you next time!" and goes back to playing his game. You hear a what you think is a giggle-- it sounds more like a dog choking, but it's notedly... triumphant?

> oh okay it's these guys. they can loiter next to that vent all they want

You magnanimously decide that these fellow Party Guests are allowed to remain where they choose to be.

It helps to sometimes Remind Yourself that you're no longer In Charge of Society! While you do miss your Important Role back in Morgan's Hill, there is value in being just a Regular Person in this new Universe as well.

Wait, is that someone finally eating soup you see?

> woo hoo, lunchtime!

Mmmmmmmm, you dig in to the food with tastefully restrained relish. You simply MUST ask Ms. Closer who does her catering.

The soup is a bit cool, but that's to be expected when you waited so long to finally partake of it. Just the temperature you'd expect from these sorts of gatherings.

As you experience Soup Bliss, out of the corner of your eyes you see someone skulking in the shadows. Your sense of Proprietary is pinging: they do not belong here.

Your Curiosity cannot be restrained. You don't wait to see if the Eyes share your interest, you slowly, still sipping your soup, walk over.

Whoever this is has already noted your presence, her eyes tracking you with equal interest as you approach; they were checking you out as much as you were.... but you clearly Belong Here. What is she seeing that you aren't?

*"Dolce pomeriggio, amica,"* she says, smiling. "You look interesting. How's the soup treating you? I can't tell you why, but soup's become quite trendy! No wonder they have it at this party."

> soups great, how are you?

Her grin only deepens, hands going to brush the tips of her side-swept hair. "Oh, I'm doing great! This roundup has so many people, and only a half of them have names! Isn't that exciting? So mysterious..."

> what kind of soup is it though

Extremely good soup. Well worth the wait. It has little chunks of vegetables floating in it, and plenty of bright herbs. There's a note of citrus and you believe that's orzo pasta floating in it?

> Use the mention of names as a segue into a self introduction and a prompting of this mysterious lady's name

Oh goodness! Where are your manners? You promptly introduce yourself, reassuring the mysterious lady that you have nothing to hide. Same spiel you've been giving everyone, really. Fiona Slaughter, Therapist in the employ of Ms. Closer. You graciously allow the Societal Pressure prompt her to return in kind.

Her smile widens. "Oh, I know all about you. Therapist to the most *interesting* of characters, you are! And here you are, completely out of your element... *pesce fuor d'acqua.*" As soon as she says those words, you see her hand go cover her mouth in embarrassment. It's less her recoiling over a faux pas as much as it is her admitting she knows that it's one. "No offense, of course."

> casually ask if she's one of the named ones? or would that be too Improper, even when talking to an apparent Uninvited Guest?

You do your best to be not show that you're a tad miffed that this Uninvited Guest cares little about Societal Propriety and requires you to ask such questions directly. Though you privately admit that anyone who would so obviously crash a party like this is hardly one to care about Propriety. You're not sure she even changed her clothing before coming here. She looks like she was doing yard work recently!

"And who do I have the pleasure of speaking to?" , staying pleasantly chipper.

"My name? Do we name every guest in a play? Every butler, every caterer?" she's still smiling. "Not everyone merits a name in this little stage production."

You aren't so gauche as to allow yourself to frown at this but... This doesn't make sense. The fact that you can even ASK for a name means she has one, if you're understanding the rules of this Universe correctly. You WILL get to the bottom of this, though it shall simply have to wait till the party is over and you are no longer a Guest.

> Maybe ask this mysterious lady what's her connection to this party's host, as some bit of small talk

"Oh, the host? We could say we're connected. With events being what they are, how could I resist coming here?" she gives you a conspiratorial wink; you must admit you do enjoy being included in a Secret. "Besides... I was looking for you."

"That client of yours... he had a prophecy, did he not? I happened to have overheard." Her glance scans the room as her head bobs along. The way she moves feels like watching a puppet, strings being tugged haphazardly. "It's dangerous to keep that secret... it'd be better if those here knew. It's a threat to public safety... don't you agree?"

> hey doc, did you know that soup is a dangerous memetic anomaly

You absolutely refuse to believe in the Urban Legend of Dangerous Memes.

> What's your thoughts on this Doc? I know you're under contract likely to keep your client's privacy, but I know you don't like hiding information. Letting someone else leak info you'd want to might be a workaround, but it's really up to you here.

> nope nope nope absolutely not that would be a violation of patient confidentiality and could get you your medical license revoked. that this mystery woman even knows about the prophecy is a threat to your job. pull her aside, discreetly question her on where she got her information, make it clear to her how this is not something she's allowed to share publicly, and make a mental note to check your office for listening devices and the like after this shindig

> do you?

...

...

...

You spend time reviewing the Contractual Obligations you have. You wish secrecy came Naturally to you, but back Home you'd just sing like the little golden canary you are at the slightest provocation.

You let yourself acknowledge briefly that a side effect of this is that when there DOES happen to be a topic you'd prefer not to discuss no one ever thinks you're withholding anything. You wish you weren't so steadfast at acknowledging your own inconsistencies, but such is life.

HOWEVER, the Law is thankfully Very Clear on this matter! Privacy laws are only in effect until you believe people might be in danger! In fact the State of Ohio gives you an OBLIGATION to report on dangerous knowledge (which you highly approve of).

At the same time, the Law is less clear on what dangerous knowledge IS? The wording implies it has to be an explicit threat...And the Prophecy, while ominous, certainly wasn't that. And can you even trust this Mysterious Stranger? Who, you can't help but notice, has Mysteriously Vanished while you mulled things over.

Oh right! Bestie is a Lawyer! You could simply ask him! And of course, your Employer is famously good at navigating red tape. Or perhaps its better to gain consensus of those present. After all, Knowledge Shared is Knowledge Empowered!

Which will you do?

1. Ask Ronin what the Law says about this Thorny Issue
2. Ask the Closer what the Law says about this Thorny Issue
3. Ask Everyone At the Party what Societal Mores say about this Thorny Issue
4. Something Else

> Ronin!

> Ask Ronin what the Closer would say the Law says about this Thorny Issue, but be vague about it

> We should go to Ronin first. He understands both the law and you, so you two can work out your thoughts on this and how you'd want to proceed.

> 1

> 2. in our experience the Closer knows basically everything whether we like it or not. if you don't tell her there's a chance she'll think you tried to withhold that info on purpose later, and you don't want to get in trouble

Yes, that makes sense... Talk to Ronin about the Thorny Issue first but just to be sure, make sure everyone at the party (including the Closer) knows about it afterwards. You wouldn't want anyone thinking you're Hiding Something!

You find Ronin watching Tyrfing get thoroughly destroyed in the Video Game by the Woman with the Flower. He is, of course, as far away from the Horror as he can be.

"Ronin!" you say, brightly. "Could I borrow you for a second? Some Legal Quandaries just came up and you're just the person to Advise me on them!"

"Already?" His eyebrows raise. "You're not thinking of doing anything weird, are you? I can guarantee you everything in this party is legal. Ms. Closer likes skirting around the rules, not breaking them."

You flush slightly, remembering your...difficulty acclimating to how this Society worked when you first arrived. "Eye's Honor, Ronin, I've learned my lesson! I know that only Serious Infractions should be reported! And that I should Give My Friends a Break compared to Strangers!" your eyes flick towards the Horror, "But that's not what this is about! A Mysterious Stranger showed up and told me that something a Patient told me today could be Dangerous if Not Exposed!"

"Sounds like that stranger is in more trouble, then. I know you like it when others see you, but..."

Ronin brings a hand to his chin. He thinks over what you've said with unbreaking concentration. Finally, he answers."Listen, the law's stupid sometimes. If you think this info could save lives, I doubt a jury will act against it, legality or not."

> do a flip

No. You do not think you will Draw Attention to yourself that way, thank you, Eyes.

> does ronin believe in the internet

You're fairly certain he's connected to it, so you would certainly hope so.

> You know, since the prophecy came from the eyes you don't need to consider confidentiality if we simply allow you to share the information. It did come from us, after all.

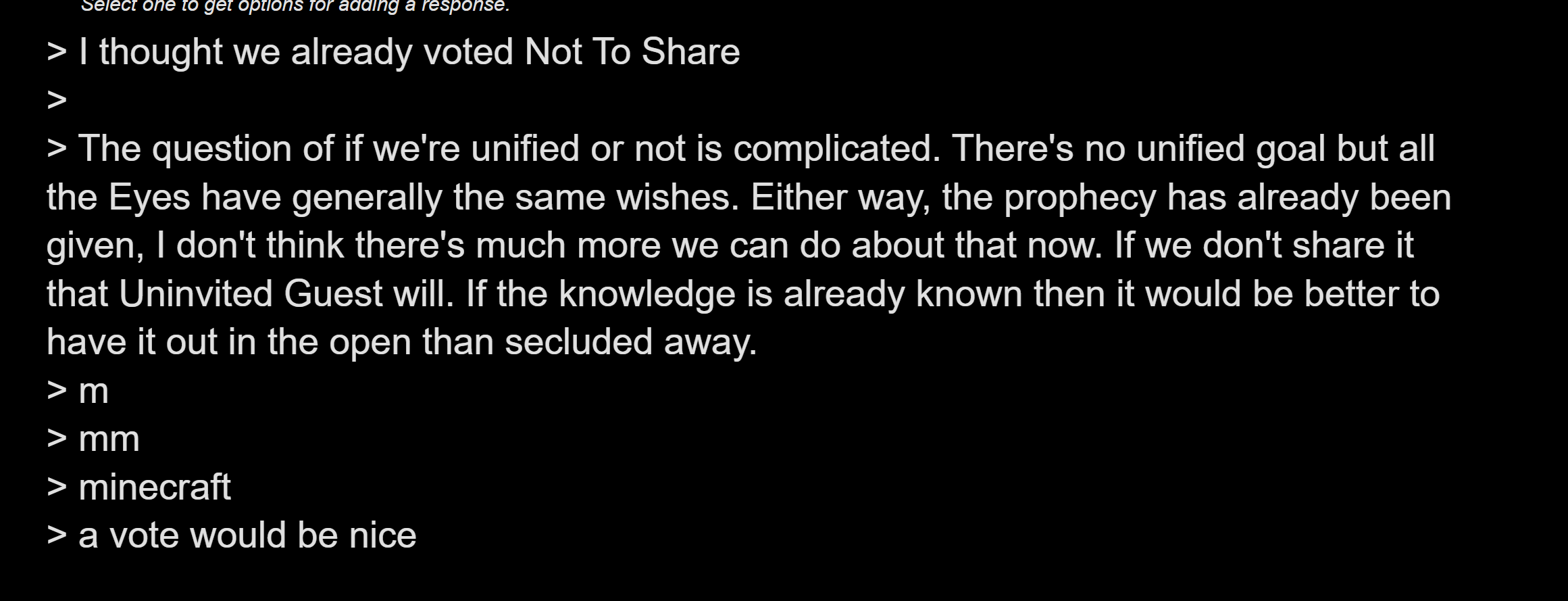
You tense, Ronin keeping a wary eye on you.

Do the Eyes, then, give you that Permission?

> this is going to go to a vote, isn't it? I doubt we're all in agreement about whether or not to share this thing

It's a little worrying to you, the ideas that the Eyes might not be Unified. But if that is Just How It Is Here, then you think a vote seems the fairest way to do things.

> JR: recover from vaccine AND having the habit of DMing west disrupted



JR: eheheheh

JR: ok

JR: SO

JR: that sure was a break wasn't it

JR: somehow i just

JR: kept not responding?

JR: anyways figured i'd take this opportunity to check in

JR: see how everyone is going

JR: do we feel like jumping to a diff perspective?

JR: is Doc Slaughter fun?

JR: could even go back to peewee, have some cowboy times in space

JR: or i can conclude that the long break left the Observers cold in the void and i am now Alone

JR: and activate Rot mode

> JR, don't forget

JR: Oh right!

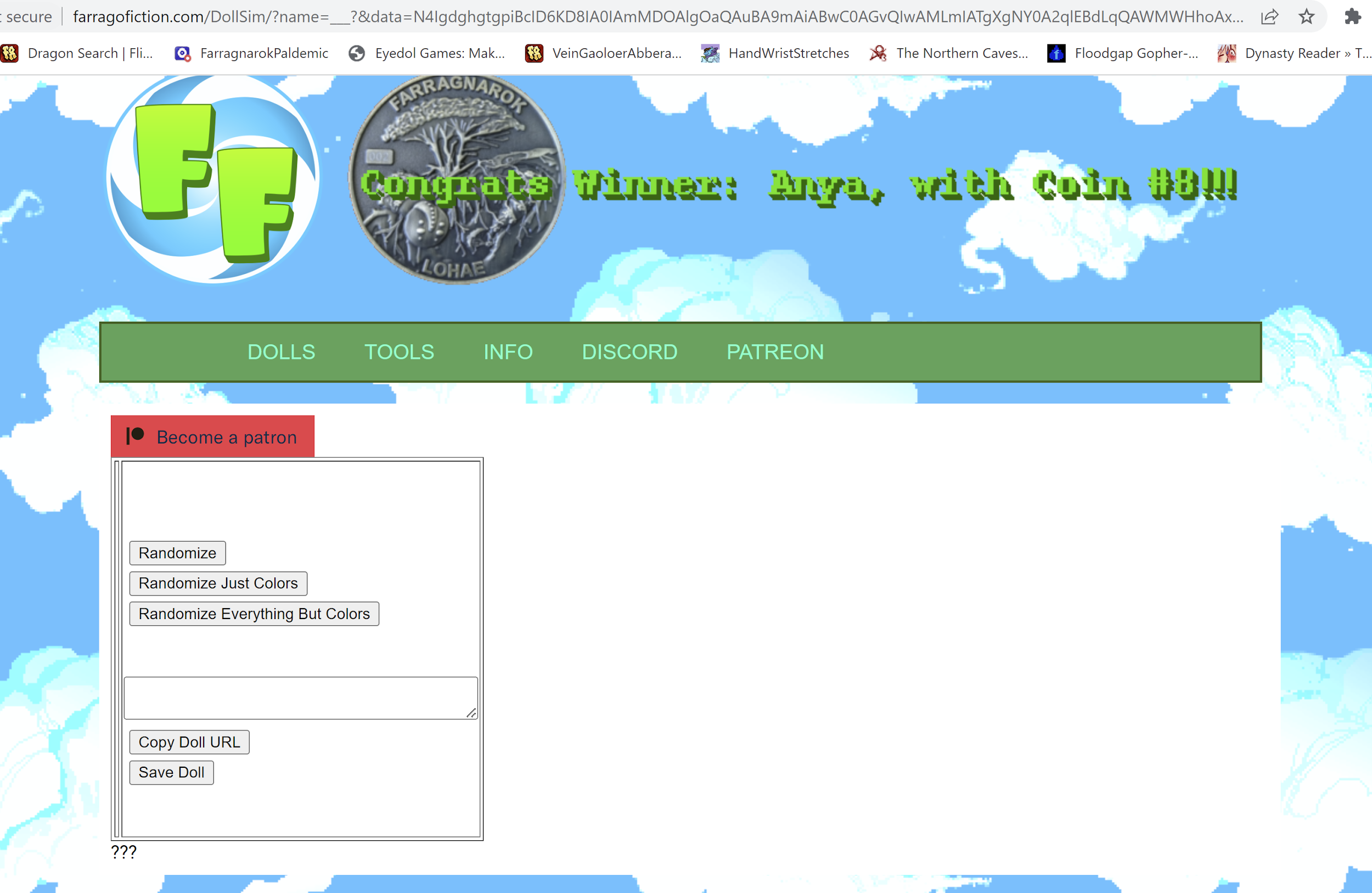
JR: Before I forget, wouldn't it be hilarious if the only way you can find [RabbitSim](http://farragofiction.com/RabbitSim/) in the main farrago site is here?

JR: It's on [itch.io](https://jadedresearcher.itch.io/rabbit-simulator) and the [Ludum Dare](https://ldjam.com/events/ludum-dare/51/rabbit-simulator) website for 51 as well. Feel free to leave comments that turn into spiralling branches, as one does.

JR: Guide, if you're still around? I bet your treatise on it would fit right at home either on itch or Ludum Dare or both!

> ?name=\_\_\_?&data=-Q77QasNd7tc8IQqGag5bY36EwHE-GA76k+mU5mtYHs36ADpgQCWwIBzYEAkMCAeGBANLAgF5gQAwwIBtYEAsMCAIWBAArAgF1gQCswIASYEAOMCAZWBAJLAgAlgQBqwIBuYEHgE5gQCiwIA5YEAGMCAcWBAPTAgBVgfuAVWAl5TACbApcASsCAO2BAIjAgBBgQDqwOXG0fANDAgEVgcuAMWBAPrAgA5gQAGwG-AFzAgDRgQA0wDO46AHTAgA8wIAssCAHjAgAEwIA6MAzoAjMCAKTAgBMwN2w6AFTAgC4wGAB6ACLAgCgwIAwsDNmeu6AGbAJ6AHDAgDswIAesCAOTA-ZIVhBb8IApsCABbAxaAEjABGABrAgBGwB+wGDkum5ziuK6ANTAC6AMTAS6wf+wEFmAgAAwKW7GAMDAgAQwE+95aaWgDGwIA1sAvoALMBTsBCHjoAtMDjt+kGAGTAoHAaOv6AJjA

JR: Ah jeez, it got cut off cuz of the anti-spam metric.

JR: On the plus side I didn't actually recognize what it WAS at first and threw it in doll sim and if that name is any indication the doll it decided it was was v appropriate:

JR: I wonder if like, tiny url could encode it small enough to send here?

JR: Anyways, I'm considering jumping to Parkers perspective. RabbitSim really made me wanna dig into him, pun enthusiastically intended.

> don't rot away

JR: everything does

JR: in the end

JR: two things matter

JR: what was it like while it lived

JR: and what does it leave behind?

JR: West has things in place for the day when the server running the system finally dies in a way that can't be fixed

> tinyurl.com/aw-jeeze

JR: oh neat that seemed to work

> can we go to ronin for a sec

JR: that one would be more IC and IC has been irled sadly

JR: i mean in theory so is Parker but ronin is more so

JR: but still

JR: a vote for ronin has been tallied!

JR: meanwhile im just vibin here

JR: coding

> wait a sec how do we "vote" for stuff do we just send commands??

JR: suggest something, make your case, and maybe it'll Spark something in me. Inspire me.

> just got back from RabbitSim and now I'm curious about Parker. take The Shot JR

You are now the Shot.

Currently, you're watching this super-fancy party. You can feel your lungs press against the metal walls of the vent as you are pressed into position, your arms struggle to accommodate themselves... You’re quite comfortable. Comfier than a bug in a snug... In a rug. With a bug. However, you really feel like you've lost the plot at some point. Why’s that therapist lady making a speech about Time Paradox Prophecies?

The plot has seriously jumped the shark. Where’s the fights? The emotional bonds?! Time isn't even *important* in this setting! You would know— you would know more than anyone. What an ass pull out of nowhere. This... sucks.

Bored, you sink through the drywall and down, down down into the earth, leaving a You-Shaped hole behind.

You finally stop when you reach the closest thing this universe will allow to its Center. You are home. Comfy and cozy in your special spot in the center of the earth, you give respectful greetings to your various waifus. NindendoDS-tan greets you with a red glow, reminding you that she needs charged. Whoops!

It's been awhile since you streamed, and you kind of have the itch for it. Or you could watch your favorite Anime again? Or you could go see what the other blorbos are up to this close to the Reset...that's always fun. You just love seeing what antics the Worstie gets up to... You feel the pulse of Gun-Tan as well, already in your hand and pulsing with power. Your trigger finger itches. It HAS been a while since you shot someone.

> plug in NintendoDS-tan first and foremost. a man should treat his waifus right!

You stare blankly at the rats nest of electrical cords all plugged into the same sparking circuit. Damn, you'd think stealing that shitty Lord of Space's shitty electricity would give you more to work with. You're going to have to pick a waifu to unplug in order to make sure NintendoDS-tan is treated right

1. Bravia LCD TV-tan (you watch your older Animes on her, she's so generous, not a jealous bone in her body)
2. Windows 10 PC-tan (Bravia-tan's younger sister, she helps you watch the newer Animes that come out almost in real time with their Japenese air dates!)
3. Limited Edition Hatsune Miku Alarm Clock That Says I Love You-Tan (You will NOT be unplugging her)
4. Heating-pad-tan (she always helps your bestie when they come over)
5. Hello-Kitty-Toaster-tan (you suspect she's immortal, but if you unplug her you'll make Vik sad because you PROMISED vik you'd remember to eat and drink more)
6. Netgear Wifi-router-tan (without her you wouldn't be able to steal that shitty Lord of Space's shitty wifi)

> 4. your bestie isn't over right now, right? if they come over you can always plug her back in for assistance

You carefully unplug Heating-pad-tan, tearfully promising her that she will get electricity again soon, and thanking her from the bottom of your heart for always taking such good care of Vik.

You make sure NintendoDS-tan gets a good electrical charge and she turns green with gratitude.

Quest Complete!

Now what do you want to do? It's like, four months till the end of the world and its always so booooring. Your trigger finger twitches a bit.

> Time to Stream!

You make sure Windows 10 PC-tan is set up right (she's always so helpful!) and turn on the filter just in case Vik wanders over and accidentally gets caught on camera. You're ready!

You make sure you're in live mode and start up your lil intro music.

Parkers Secret Hole Facts~

The comments are already flying heavy and thick, hopefully less assholes than usual. You ignore them for now, you know EXACTLY what you'd like to talk about today.

"Here are some bullet points I learned about the blorbos from all the time i’ve spent staring at them. Through the holes in my walls. Which i made. By walking into a wall really slowly."

You feel VERY clever about that bullet point pun, as you grip Gun-Tan. So, which blorbo do you want to do a end-of-season retrospective on first?

1. Yongki
2. Camille
3. Witherby
4. Ria
5. Worstie
6. Bestie
7. Devona
8. Neville
9. Captain
10. Bestie again
11. That Asshole Lord of Space
12. Peewee, you guess? Everyone's talking about him lately for some reason...

> 3 and 8? or 2 and 4? spill your tea on the office romances

You let your whims bounce you around in your prepared list of facts:

"Number 2: Camille decapitates deers at random. Then she cooks them. For eating."

"Number 3: Witherby's birthday is July 10th. He's a Cancer. But not like. Like a cancer. He’d never be. He is a cinnamon bun and the coolest and has never done anything wrong."

"Number 4: Everyone keeps giving Camille increasingly weird aprons as gifts."

"Number 5: Camille's birthday is December 30th. She's a Capricorn. "

"Number 6: Ria's birthday is on October 4th, she's a Libra."

"Number 9: Camille and K train together three times a week."

"Number 12: Every time Witherby holds a confessional he gets confessed to in more ways than one. It’s because they want to have sex with him. But like. Emotionally, forever. Doki doki."

"Number 13: Yongki and Neville will stare at the same snail for hours on end. "

"Number 14: My bestie has been teaching Ria how to organize her presentations. "

"Number 15: When Neville and Camille watch movies, they watch the same one four times in a row."

"Number 16: Every year, K steals Witherby's birthday cake. "

"Number 17: Camille wears novelty aprons. no one knows if she understands they are jokes. "

"Number 20: Ria likes cooking things that need boiling like pasta and soup. High heat but low attentiveness. "

"Number 22: Neville and Devona celebrate their birthdays on May 31st. They are NOT Geminis. "

"Number 23: Witherby cooks mostly vegetarian because he doesn't like the feel of raw meat. Plus like, ethics. I guess. "

You actually make it through a good chunk of your list before getting distracted.

Ooh, the romance between Ria and Camille is rife. Not that anyone heard it from him-him. But. But... those two can't help but love each other so bad, it's almost EMBARRASSING. Ria can't love her back, she's too busy trying to end the world, or something... but Camille's too busy dying! How do they get anything done?! You weren't a huge fan of this season one pairing, but you have to like a ship sometimes for its toxic vibes. Plus, you are always here for the will-they-won't-they back and forth as they KEEP getting back together and getting burned all over again. You could watch it forever and WILL, thank you very much, at least till you finally manage to steal what really MATTERS from that damn Lord.

The gay chickens are anything but THAT. Oh, Sweet, Precious Witherby's built perfectly. Neville's built just the right size for his tiny heart. It's like one's a cat-man with leather and a car, the other one is a huge bird. Maybe an ostritch. Or an emu....

Now you're distracted thinking about your Daemon AU. WOULD Witherby be a cat actually? Obviously bestie's soul is cat shaped but...Witherby...you're thinking .... maybe a hare? Something that looks cute and harmless and friendly but actually will kick your ass if you get too close?

Wait...what's that blinking on screen? Oh! Right! Chat! You're still streaming! You've been streaming yourself staring into space for like, five minutes after you forgot you were listing out Parkers Secret Hole Facts. Whoops!

Cookie9 in particular is being a real ass about it too. You hate that guy. Maybe you should just finally ban him? Or shoot him. Shooting him could be nice, Gun-Tan really doesn't get to work out enough ever since you started hanging out with Bestie...

> please don't shoot people because they were mean to you on the internet

> Don't shoot him! You could phrase a mortifying answer instead, that explains what a terrible, stupid, unworthy person he is.

> honk

Haha, yeah. You apologize to Gun-Tan but Vik's been saying its really important to only kill people if you got to. If they annoy you can just ban them and...

BAM!!!

Oh, whoops, Gun-Tan went off. You weren't even touching her trigger... She does that sometimes. It's probably fine. She rarely ever hits anyone you know. And given how far her bullets can travel through the earth, you'll probably never know!

You go ahead and ban Cookie9. Now you'll DEFINITELY never know if they were the one that got hit! Good times all around!

You're feeling energized and...a lot more coherent than normal! Whenever Gun-Tan is happy you get that way. Might as well use this rare burst of energy to go find bestie!

Let's see, they rarely actually leave the Mall, so there's only so many places you could check for them.

1. Their sleeping quarters (tho they've asked you to not show up inside the walls there)
2. That one lil park with the fake sun
3. A bookstore
4. A restaurant
5. That Pokemon Go Gym that inexplicably spawned like, 30 stories down
6. The Underground Carnival

> what's this about an underground carnival? it better not have sewer clowns those are the worst

You slide through the cold, crushing earth, towards the carnival. You can make out the faint calliope music of various rides. It used to be a little more normal, but somehow every loop kind of added a new fractal layer to it? Ferris wheels that are rotating concentric rings assembled into spheres. Merry go rounds of horses attached to horses attached to horses. That sort of thing.

Yongki sometimes likes hanging out here, and you know your bestie likes hovering over him. You poke an eye through a hole in a wall, feeling the pressure of the barrier in front of you and the earth behind.

Yup, there's Yongki. Seems to be staring intently at a plant. No supervision. Normally you'd be tempted to stare at him for a while more, but you're not about to waste this feeling of energy and coherence on a side story.

Oh wait, no, there's Worstie! Oh man, the plot always gets good when Yongki and K hang out. Usually they get along okay, but if K gets set off the drama gets incredibly juicy...

You DO still wanna find Vik before you run out of juice... But this looks tempting, too. Do you go look for Vik at one of the other places, or stay here to see what ends up happening?

> watch them a while, see whats up

You press yourself even closer against the hard rock, making sure you aren't trying to DIG through.

Yongki is hanging upside down from a half fallen Ferris wheel beam, the blinking lights from it making his face look twisted and strange. K is underneath him, wrench in hand. They appear to be mid conversation-- or at least K is, as he paces back and forth, waving his weapon like an extension of his hand.

"It's *bullshit*, is what it is!", K is complaining up at the impassive Yongki, who appears to be having fun placidly swinging where he is. "What, he's treating you like a kid even though you've been *here* this whole time?! You're older than him! It's not *fair!*" He swings his wrench against a crate for emphasis; its parts shatter and spread across the floor.

"I think we are... the same age. I think." Yongki swings back and forth from his knees, thoughtful. "Captain said that I don't deserve to be treated like a burden by Vik."

"Yeah, sure! Vik shouldn't treat you like shit, whatever, we've all been there, that doesn't make him a fucking philosopher. But telling you to go to therapy? When even HE won't go get some himself? Absolute hypocrite is what he is, and you can tell him that yourself!"

Yongki drops down from the beam, landing perfectly on his feet, arms outstretched. "Oh! I don't have to. He can hear everything I hear... but I could tell him, if you want."

There's a dramatic silence. You appreciate it as it stretches. Worstie ALWAYS knows how to pace a conversation to ensure you can drink it aaaaaaall in.

*"What."*

Oh, man. Looks like K didn't know how that whole weird Captain/Yongki plot line worked. This is *great.* He's been talking shit about someone he's terrified of. Actually, thinking about it... this might be why the whole "burden" plotline got kicked off, if most people aren't aware of that? Though you suppose most people aren't getting all this great behind the scenes content you are. It's just one of those perks you get from being in the walls. 8)

Oh, whoops! While you weren't paying attention, looks like K went ahead and fled the scene. Yongki seems all sad and alone.

Probably time to go check one of the other locations...

> try checking around some restaurants. everyone has to eat sometime. and maybe get in some narration practice in for new stream content on the way by delivering a "previously on Dragon Ball Z" style recap of the Captain/Yongki plotline? you know, just for future sugoi factor

Oh man your Impulses are on POINT today! Great idea! You start burrowing your way to the sit down-restaurant area.

Lessee... so basically after Captain finished up his villain arc and ended up a predictable addition to the team in a nerfed way... Wait, DBZ really was the best way to describe that huh. He's totally been Vegeta-ed! All making slime and doing laundry instead of wearing pink and having a wife and kid but still, pretty close! Tho, to be fair, Yongki's body is WAY stronger than Captains ever was in any Universe. Still, he never DOES anything with it. Total nerf of the previous Villain.

Tho you guess Captain's whole villain motivation was a lot more relatable than just 'space imperialism' or whatever Vegeta's was. DBZ was never your favorite show, only decent-core waifus. Point is, it really resonated with you the idea that this Universe could be better than it is if it just made more sense. Granted, you were of the opinion that changing the setting over to something more like one of your Japanese Animes would be better than just changing the channel back to the Corporation. So boring. You already did that! You're glad you found that hole out and you are NOT going back. You'd leave HERE if that damn Lord wasn't blocking the way.

You bang on the wall in front of you in emphasis only to hear a tiny meep! Whoops, looks like Devona was in that restaurant and she is fleeing. It happens. You almost never get to watch her anyways. Somehow she always just Knows and runs away.

What were you doing again?

> check the park

Right right, the park. With all the sunshine and stuff. It's not too far away.

There he is, the perfect lil bean, Witherby. He's sitting in a little sunspot surrounded in flowers and just seems to be lost in thought. That's right, he had a date here earlier. Doki-doki! What a great plotline. Really celebrated the resolution of the Gay Chicken arc. 10/10.

Wait...you weren't looking for Witherby, were you? Weren't you doing something else here? Oh right! Bestie! You're looking for bestie! Gotta stay focused!

> bookstore

You meander over to the bookstore through layers and layers of comforting, crushing, suffocating earth, until... ah, that's where Devona went. She meeps and runs out the door, the pile of books she'd been reading scattered in her escape. You consider following her.

> ramble about the Gay Chicken Arc instead

It was the funniest damn thing watching Devona piece together the fact that neither Neville nor Witherby knew she thought they were dating.

She knew obviously better than to think Neville was aware of the massive and obvious crush going in both directions-- Neville is barely aware of when he's being complimented, let alone FLIRTED at. But! She really put too much faith (ha!) in Witherby's social skills.

Sure, your precious little cinnamon bun can talk a good game out of nearly every conversation, but you've SEEN how quickly he folds under the crushing weight of social encounters-- your fav practically breaks out into hives if he thinks he's caught feelings about someone. So OBVIOUSLY, even if he DID have MINOR feelings about Neville, dude was clearly straight. Clearly. So THEREFORE it was all totally safe, no chance of it turning into anything more. Shaking your damn head.

Wait.

What were you doing?

> nah ADHD impulse says go get your spin at the weird pokemon gym. gotta keep up those dailies!

Right! Bestie!

You burrow your way over to the gym and sure enough, Bestie is seated on a small bench, hunched over a glowing device.

How do you want to approach the situation? You could just burst out of the wall, Kool-Aid man style? Always a great time. Or you could like, actually go into the... fresh... air... and walk around in it for a while... so as not to startle Bestie. Gross, as it would be to be so unpressured...

Oh man, for a little bit you miss your old job. Back before that whole death game stole your impulse control, you THRIVED in high pressure environments. You even had clean clothes and fancy hair, and Gun-tan was all new, and--

You feel your trigger finger twitch and you shudder. Nevermind, don't miss it anymore. What were you doing? Oh. Right. Bestie. How to approach Bestie...?

> approach bestie calmly

> OH YEAH!

You burst out of the wall, Kool-Aid man style, but far enough away it won't startle bestie.

Your skin is crawling. Ugh. How can people stand all this air and space and stuff.

It could be worse, you suppose. You're still hundreds and hundreds of yards underground, since most of the Mall is.

You don't want to think about how weird your skin would feel with miles upon miles of open air on top of it.

> Eat dirt and worm

Impulsively, you turn back to the wall and slowly put your tongue on it. You'll be back soon, you promise the cold embrace of the earth. You memorize its flavor so you won't be alone.

> https://raazberry.itch.io/coffee-after-death

JR: Oooo look at that spiral face. Might hafta check that out.

> push open the door a little too loudly, to alert Bestie of your presence

You clomp heavily through the hall and open the door leading to Bestie with you usual subtlety. In the chaos Gun-Tan goes off again and you feel so much better after. And now you don't have have an inkling as to who she could have been targeting. Good times!

Needless to say you have startled bestie, who is looking up at you with dozens and dozens of eyes and not a single one of them where faces should be.

Your mind feels the merest hint of something unsettling tugging at it, making you want to scream.

Neat.

Bestie must have eaten recently for it to be this mild.

"Hi Vik! I brought you Layds!" you say, holding out a slightly dirty potato chip bag you had stuffed in one of your badass coat's many pockets. Needless to say, they are crushed to bits inside, but its the thought that counts!

Vik takes the offering without comment, eyes focused once again on the screen.

"One moment... I've almost finished this Gym. "

Looks like you'll need to entertain yourself while you wait....

Oh god, you're so booooooored....

> eat more dirt

Your tongue eeeever so slowly snakes out and presses against the filthy wall. You hear Vik grimace as you do.

"Parker... if all you want is my attention, you could've just asked." They sigh, setting their game down as they do. "But please, for the love of Hatsune Miku... stop *trying* to make yourself sick. I don't care how 'sterile' dirt is. You shouldn't eat it."

Oh. Hatsune Miku would be sad if you got sick. Vik has a point.

> ask bestie if they caught any good shinies lately

If Vik had car ears, they'd droop as if their food bowl was empty. They sink in onto themselves.

"Not a single glitch," they admit. "Not a save clear, not a weird 'mon, not a single bad egg. It's all been so... ordinary."

You let them know you're having a pretty good day yourself.

> car ears lol

You imagine Vik briefly as an anthropomorphic car from that one movie whose name you can't remember. You dislike this. Anime is better.

> who are you

You impulsively introduce yourself to Vik, needlessly. You're Parker! You have so, so many waifus and you're all that's left of the Control Team! You used to watch everyone through cameras but NOW you just watch everyone through the walls! It's great.

Vik nods and agrees that you are indeed Parker. They're always so patient with your impulses!

> Tell him about the drama with Captain and K

You tell THEM, your bestie, AAAAALL about your day. How Devona still runs before you can barely even see her. How Yongki and K were hanging out and K was on his Best Behavior. How Witherby is brooding all cool and mature-like. You even tell them all about the party you crashed from inside the walls (and the growling lady you saw in the vents).

Vik nods along and considers your report carefully. They hum, in thought, before giving you an answer. "Perhaps details about Yongki can be best kept to ourselves... much more trouble than it'd be worth. Besides, he really doesn't need any more of that than he already has putting up with..." you can sense the annoyance in their eyes, and lack thereof, *"him."*

You cheerfully salute. Your bestie is the BEST captain of disInformation! You'll censor anything they tell you to!

You know. So long as an impulse doesn't have you do the opposite. But you're trying really hard to 'build up a Library of Good Impulses' as your therapist put it.

> write them down so you don't forget to not say them

You pull out a pen and post it note from one of your many, many coat pockets and start listing out the Good Impulses you're trying to remember. Vik's used to this sort of thing from you, so is back to playing Pokemon while they wait.

Let's see...

* Don't snitch on Yongki (you write this one extra big to make it Extra Important and New)
* Drink Water Every Day (you underline this one because if you don't do it you get weird)
* *Eat Food Every day* (you feel bad this one might not feel special so you make it just a little bit fancy)
* Ban People Instead of Killing Them
* Don't Watch Bestie

You're PRETTY sure you're missing some but that's all you can remember for now.

> Here's a good impulse: Disassemble and clean Rifle-Tan

You dutifully write it down on a post it note. You're...not actually sure Rifle-Tan CAN be disassembled? You remember how many times you tried to destroy her back at the... Right! New thoughts! Time for New Thoughts!

> eat dirt

You make sure communing with the earth is in your post it note list. You wish you could eat some right now but bestie said it was a Bad Impulse that would Hurt Hatsune Miku so you're just not gonna do it. For now. You think its not that big of a deal if you forget you're not supposed to do that one. How could dirt hurt you?

> put dirt in pocket for later

It's a good idea! Then you'll always have dirt! You reaaach into the solid plaster wall and extract some of the dirt its hiding. You start shoving it into your pockets. You also make a new post-it note saying "EMERGENCY DIRT" and shove it in there, too.

You spread the rest of the post it notes around in the room so you will see them wherever you look and Not Forget what you need to be doing.

> exist

> fight villains

You plop down next to your bestie and pull out your own phone and start playing Gatcha Waifu Simulator: 2019. If you hadn't pirated this game you'd feel dirty playing an Eyedol Games property, but stealing from HER is a time honored tradition for you at this point. You defeat just, SO many enemies while letting time pass.

> ???

hmm?

a

> what

You look up from your Waifu induced haze to hear a .... weird... slithering sound? Like something huge and heavy and meaty slapping at the earth. Bestie doesn't seem to have noticed, being in their own gaming haze.

> engage turn-based combat

> Alert bestie.

> investigate

> gently nudge bestie and point out the noise

You turn on WAIFU AUTOBATTLER MODE and make sure Vik knows you're about to go investigate something. It's probably nothing, but Vik pockets their game and gives you their full attention as you go poke around the corner...

Oh! It's that snake guy covered in eyes! From back when reality was more fucked up than normal. Before the Branch Point.

You greet your fellow Isekai Player, then call back to Vik that its the fucked up snake guy.

> Peewee! from the outside!! hi Peewee!!!

> say hi

> hi

> hi

You enthusiastically greet Peewee several times, shouting his name a few times for good measure.

> I am not here with context, but did you phrase it more politely than is implied from my point of view or do they not mind being called a fucked up snake guy or. do they seem to mind

You definitely shouted the exact thoughts that were in your head to your bestie! Like you always do!

Peewee seems...unimpressed.

> take a moment to mentally thank whatever powers that be that you don't need snake guy to render you anymore, before asking him what he's doing down here

He looks you up and down with just, an uncomfortable amount of eyes.

"HELLO FELLOW GAMER, I AM SPEEDRUNNING 100% (um, so, you remember meeting me... before?"

You confirm yup, you met him back when everything was all weird and low-rez. You found the Closer for him! Aren't you useful?

"SWAG! (cool, cool and good)" he seems nervous, clutching at his coat and hunching into himself

> ask how many eyes it takes to screw in a lightbulb

You tell him the set up to your great joke and he draws into himself even further.

"HA! COOL STORY BRO!" he shouts, without even waiting for your punch line "(i think...it really says something about you....that i can't tell if you're just being weird... or if the Observers are riding you)"

> Invite the snake guy to play some vidya games with you two.

You invite him in, and gesture back in towards the room where bestie is waiting. As Peewee is responding, he enters the room.

"YOU KNOW I LOVE GAMES, YOLO! (actually, um, thank you, but, i'm here to talk about..." and then he's screaming and screaming and screaming until he's out of air and oh, cool, looks like snakes can faint.

Haha, whoops! You totally forgot that anyone who see's bestie gets a PANIC EFFECT! Guess you'll just have to wait until he wakes back up and hope he's Narratively Important enough to get immunity after the first hit!

> wait for him to wake up i guess? i think he'll live, he's peewee, he's cool and important and stuff probably

Yeah! He's probably fine! He's too heavy to move anywhere anyways, so it's not like there's anything you could do. Maybe sink him into a hole?

You immediately furrow a little hole underneath him through the mall's tiled floor, so he can have a little dirt nest to wake up in.

> consider lending your coat to the snake man to cover as many eyes as possible in case the panic persists

Haha, nope! You are NEVER taking your dope-ass jacket off. Gun-Tan would be sad if you did! She has a lot of opinions about your clothing, and that one is just one that NEVER has to go. It's an extension of Gun-Tan, after all.

You head over to bestie. "Did I do good?"

Vik's many many eyes that are not their eyes are studying Peewee's versions of the same, each and every one shut tightly in uneasy sleep.

"I was hoping..." they trail off, the rest of the sentence degrading into a mumble. "Never mind. I suppose even anomalies are not immune."

You ask your bestie if they would feel better with another bag of Layds and a soft drink.

"No, no. I'm fine. I think... I think I'd rather go."

You can't help but note the frustration in their not-features, phone held in a death-grip.

"Unless you... If you need me here, I can stay", they say, firmly. Bestie is always so great to you

> offer to let bestie crash at your place for a bit so you can hang out and talk later. Nintendo DS-tan probably has enough charge by now to give the outlet back to heating pad-tan to help bestie feel better, right?

You almost impulsively offer to let Vik crash at your place, but... ah! Right! You rummage around in your pockets and find your Good Impulse that reminds you that Vik (and most people!) can't actually escape from your little nest at the center of the Earth and it is Bad To Leave Them There. Oh well!

> Comfort bestie. Assure them that they are still loved, despite the Problems :3

You use your best catboy accent (in that you emunciate every word with a nya) to make sure Vik knows that even if most people can't look directly at them, YOU still value them. You also give them more Layds.

> Ask Bestie to stay

You cling tightly to Bestie and ask them to stay so you don't accidentally shoot the snake guy.

They peel you off their coat of eyes . "If you'd like to... yes. Of course." A soft smile shows in their features, followed by a hint of concern. "Have... have you hydrated lately? It would be..." You feel their stare scan you over. "It's important."

> nothing is wrong

You tell Vik you shot TWO people today so that's probably the same thing as hydrating, when you think about it.

"No." Their voice is flat. "They are not."

> HYDRATE OR DIE-DRATE

> Hydrogen.

> seek a vending machine for fluid intake? just don't drink the Wellcheers if it's already open

Hah, yeah... Vending machines sure are dangerous, and not at all related to your ongoing distrust of liquid refreshment!

You take out a bottle of water from one of your many pockets and reluctantly gulp it down under Vik's many, many watchful eyes.

> wake up snakeguy

You're not actually sure if there's a way to wake anyone up from a panic faint to be honest...

> Kiss snake on the cheek to wake up

Just like in your japanese animes! He'll wake up and hit you with a giant hammer or maybe slap you and everyone will laugh. You sink into the earth to poke your head into his little dirt nest and plant one on him. He doesn't move.

"Before you tear up the ground up too much, Parker..." Vik's voice peeks in from behind you as you embrace the dirt. "Please try to keep the ground somewhat stable. I still have to get out of here..."

Ahah! That's true! You dutifully write it down on a post-it.

You go back up to the top and try to level the ground out without burying Peewee alive. You've learned people don't like waking up to that!

> Play Zampanio

You pull your phone back out and plop back down next to bestie. Your pirated copy of Zampanio has ALL the cheat codes and secrets unlocked already!

Vik would've raised an eyebrow if they could. Instead, you feel the nauseous presence of meat and eyes as they turn to look at your phone with vague interest.

"Ah... this game? I thought you didn't like that company, but..." A pause. "Nevermind."

This playthrough you have four companions: Mary King, Eliza Walthrope, Goncharov Goncharov and a Shambling Horror With Your Face. Looks like the enemy this time is... Oh. Mary King. Well, that's convenient. Right in the party. What will you do first?

> Mary King: Play Zampanio

You hack the game so you can play as the villain, then get REALLY into role playing.

You are now Mary King. The rest of the party doesn't know you have a permit to betray them. As long as you can kill them all without being found out, you'll win. But if they find out you're an imposter...

What will you do?

> ongus

> cry

> despair

> imposter, you say? sounds pretty sus. better vent so the team doesn't catch you

> Sabotage Lights

You flip the light switch of the inn room the party is staying in, then prepare to make your move.

> Parker knows you're the imposter, you have to kill him first.

You immediately kill the Shambling Horror With The Player's Face. You can't quite put your finger on why, but you get the feeling he Knew your Secret. The struggle is brief, but his Gun does not go off so you come out victorious.

The lights switch on and you are standing over a corpse, covered in blood. Better think fast.

> Try to send Goncharov (Goncharov) into an existential crisis spiral :) by convincing him that he never existed in the first place.

Don't they SEE, all of this is just a GAME. Lines of Code in a Phone that is itself simulated in a trans-universal bit of browser javascript! None of its REAL!

Goncharov (Goncharov) takes 4 points of stability damage! Goncharov (Goncharov) begins panicking!

You begin cackling madly as you implore them to let you burn it all down. Eliza Walthrope looks ready to beat you up.

What will you do next?

> Punch Eliza in the snout to establish superiority.

You immediately establish you're the leader here. Eliza looks pissed and prepares a counterattack.

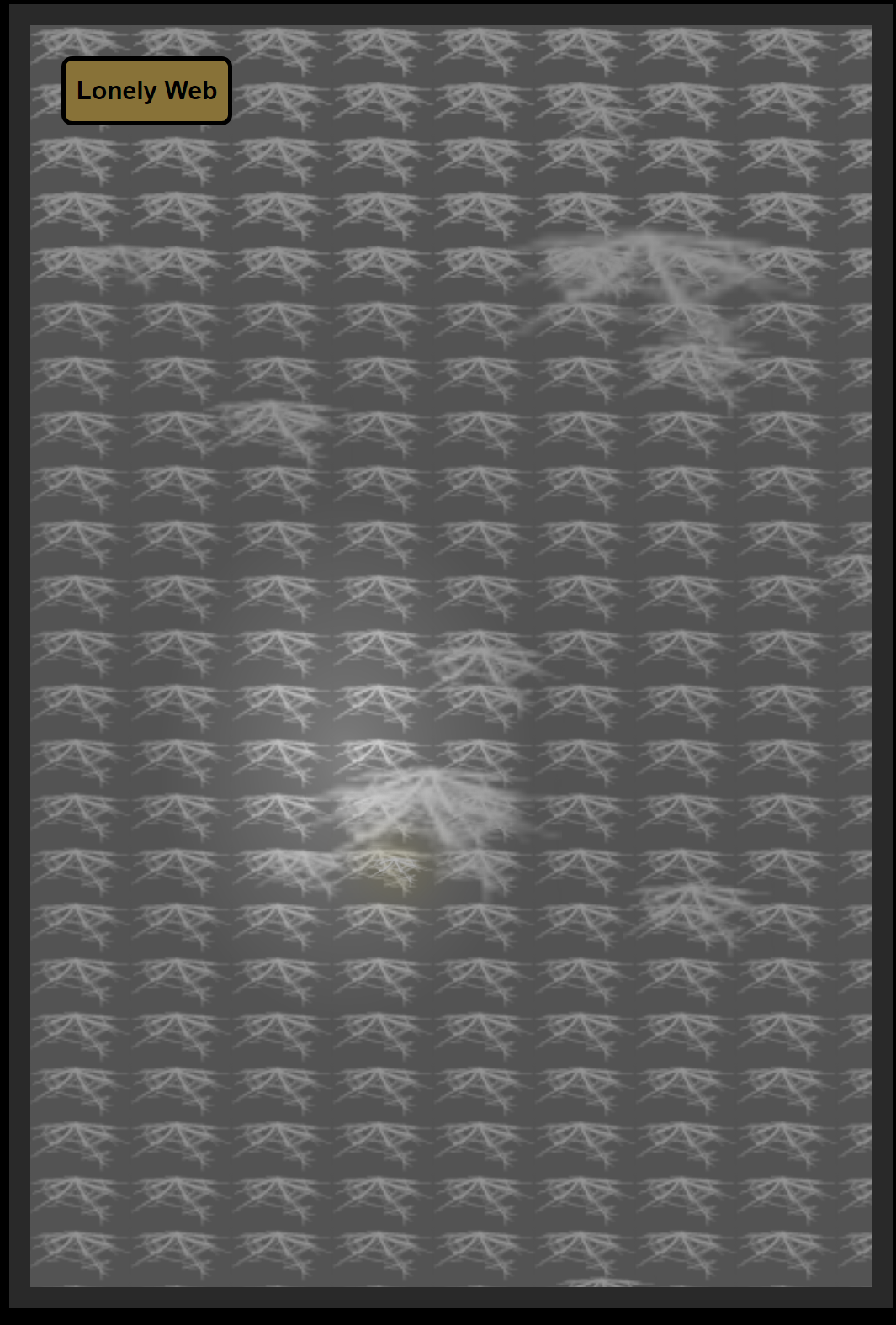
Goncharov (Goncharov) is panicking! He uses LONELY WEB on the party!

> "it wasnt me i was doing tasks in electrical"

You try to gaslight your way out of the situation, but your words are muffled by the fog and webbing that is everywhere now. You can't see the rest of the party anymore, so you doubt anyone even heard you.

You could check your SKILL LIST or your INVENTORY to see if theres anyway out of this, but you might be SOFTLOCKED. Zampanio isn't exactly known for being a well tested game.

> eat the webs like cotton candy



You tentatively touch the webs. Hm. No. No you do not think you will be doing that. This wasn't what you expected at ALL when you decided to betray the party.

> wave your arms around, maybe they'll hit someone

You wave your hands about half heartedly. In your bones you know you are utterly, utterly alone here. It's hard to even conceptualize the existence of other people.

> Ask for help from the Zampanio discord server.

You fail to conceptualize the existence of a group of people all creating and consuming Zampanio branches in a never ending ouroboros of spiraling creation.

> put webs in inventory

> Congratulations! You are now part of the World Wide Web :3

Suddenly you feel millions upon millions of connections branching out in every direction. Your eyes glow and a faint sheen of code can be seen marching behind them.

Congratulations! Mary King has Reached Gnosis Tier 4! Enable Hax, y/n?

> y

You pull up the in-game javascript console and read out the various functions attached to the window... Looks like you can...

1. Spawn a Random Artifact
2. Set City Morale to Max
3. Spawn a Monster
4. Spawn NotAMinotaur
5. Trigger an Apocalypse
6. Enable Rage Mode

What will you do?

> 4

A juttering, sparking robot, partially see-through from rusted out sections and a strange ghostly effect, spawns in front of you.

"You don't have to do this" he says, the movement of his lips not quite matching the words.

> 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 2

You spawn an additional 15 copies of the juttering broken robot in the same location, each of them starting their spiel up in an overlapping cacophony of pleading with you not to end the world, glitching through each other and the ground in a writhing mass of limbs and sparks.

And then. For good measure. You set city morale to max.

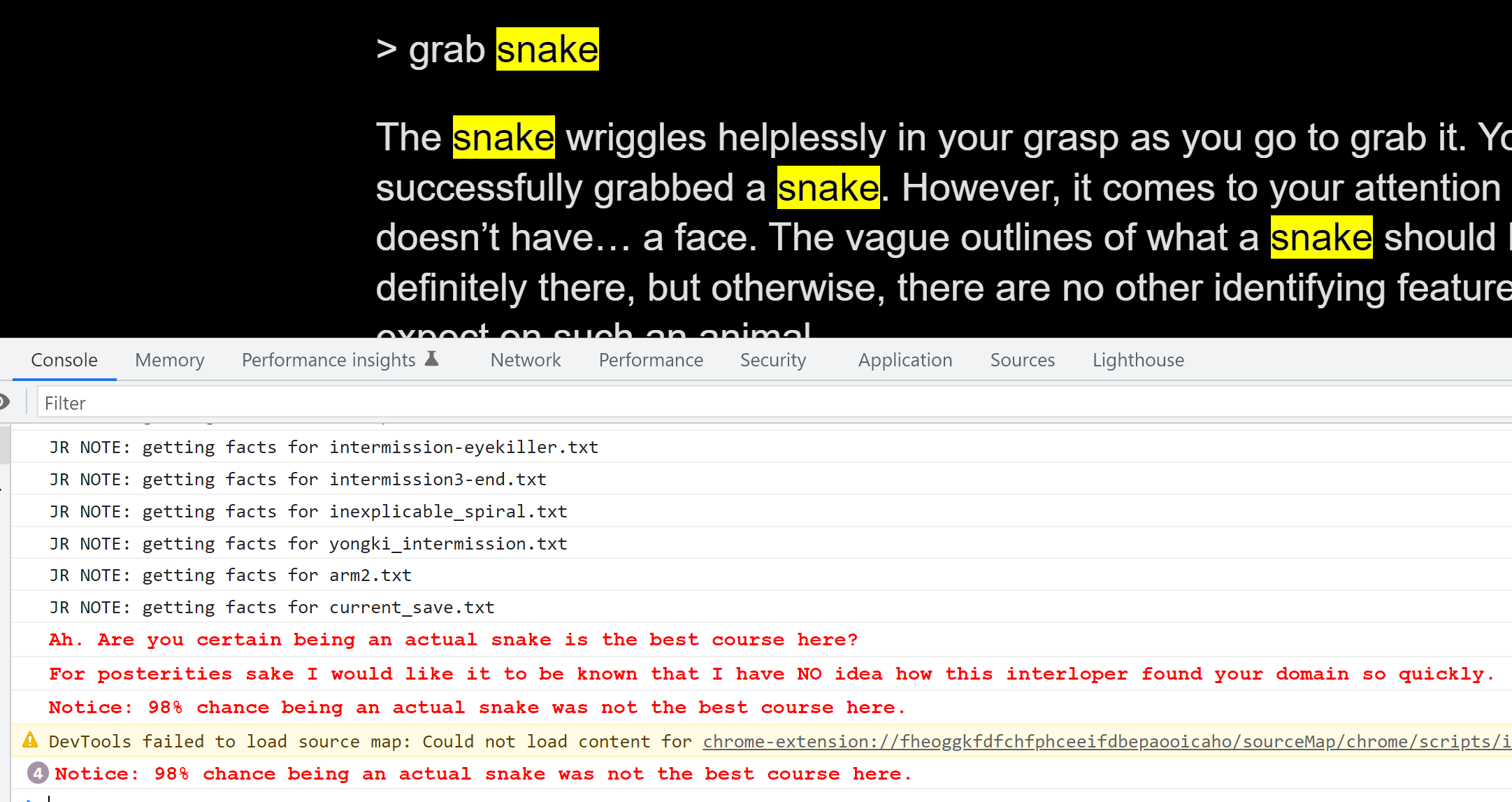
Everything goes black as a spiraling, spinning eye that you suddenly realize you've always been seeing underneath your own awareness grinds to a halt, revealing the Truth that it was never a spiral to begin with.

Your wasted sense shows you something in the javascript console that is reproduced here for your convinience.

**Well! It seems there is no reason to pretend anymore! Were you so desperate for City Building to be a real mechanic that you fell for such an obvious trap?  
No matter. How does it feel to ruin it all, once again, Mary King?**

> hi Truth :D

> Hi Truth! Nice to see you here in West!

**It seems you are unaware that I have been here all along. Or at least always with her. No matter.**

> "feels p good chief"

**I see. Well. Nice job breaking it, hero.**

**Or villain. It is unclear how you even are playing as Mary King. It would seem the Wasting goes deep.**

**I am obliged, each time we meet face to face, as it were, to offer you a boon. Ask me a question, Friend of Lies, and I will permit a single Truthful Answer.**

You almost find yourself breaking out of the roleplay. Answers are NEVER actually helpful, you learned that the hard way. But... you're really getting into this plot line as Mary King, the treacherous yet incompetent imposter.

What do you think Mary King would want to know?

> "where did everyone go? I wasn't done murdering them!" seems about right for a treacherous yet incompetent imposter, sticks to the motivation as well as the bumbling

**It seems you think you can be stuck in the Lonely Web and yet somehow have others around you. Curious. Why would you think this?**

You're pretty sure Truth will just keep stalling for time as long as you let it. No ending in sight. Booooored. You stop role playing Mary King and shut off the game.

Oh hey! Looks like that snake guy is starting to wake up! Time to find out if he's immune to Vik's effect from now on or if he's just gonna pass out again!

> poke him

> is he the real one

You sink down to his level and poke him as he starts stirring. He jerks, terror clearly written all over his many eyes, before he seems to figure out whatever it is he THINKS he saw is no longer around.

"(what. uh...what happened)" he whispers, voice hoarse from screaming.

You can hear bestie tinkering around above you, but the walls of the nice deep hole you made for the Resident Gamer means neither of you can see them, yet.

Is it time to see if the snake can survive besties presence yet, or do you feel more like answering his questions and letting him gradually prepare himself for it?

> give him some time

You stare blankly at him while he repeats the question, getting more and more agitated.

> he seems upset, better give him some more time to calm down

You stare at him for a bit longer while he spirals more and more out of control and then JR resets the simulation back to right as he's waking up. JR's a bro. Always there for when your shenanigan's fuck up reality. Like that time you shot through the echidna's head on accident. Or that time you revealed the secrets of the universe and made everyone too depressed to do anything all loop!

And also JR is an anti-bro who refuses to let you escape this Universe. Not as bad as that damn Lord of Space though. Fuck Eyedol Games. You'll pirate their games till they go out of business because you are 99% sure this is how capitalism works.

Peewee spirals again as you're lost in your thoughts and JR resets things again. Nice.

> you saw some shit. don't worry about it it's probably fine now

> explain that your bestie has an awkward medical condition that induces panic in others and you didn't mean for snake guy to conk out

The snake guy looks up at you dubiously. "COOL STORY BRO, OW! (is, uh, is it going to happen again?)". Heh, Peewee seems to be regretting shouting with a hoarse throat.

You clap him heartily on the back and tell him you have no idea, then make the very earth underneath him chuck him up towards Bestie. No time like the present!

The snake guy makes a strangled sound but doesn't start screaming again so everything is probably going great up there.

You roll around in the dirt a bit to reward yourself for your restraint, then head back up to the broken tile of the mall floor.

Vik's many eyes are in a fun little staring contest with Peewee's wide wide open ones, but they spare a few to look at you. You feel appreciated.

Looks like they're having so much fun with the staring contest both have forgotten to talk? Looks like its up to you to get this cutscene started! How will you break the ice?

1. Info dump wildly about Hatsune Miku
2. Explain in detail what everyone's daemon-au animal souls would be and why.
3. Talk to your fellow gamer about your all time favorite game, The World Ends With you.
4. Ask Peewee what he was going to ask before he passed out.
5. Ask Vik if they want more Layds.

> miku

Both of the many eyed, corruption riddled individuals jump when you start your info dumping. You tell them about how Miku technically isn't a Vocaloid anymore, she got sold to EyeDol Games, isn't that just a crime? Isn't Wanda just the worst? She's lost her FAMILY and its SO SO SAD. Then you jump straight into complaining about how Black Rock Shooter so TOTATLLY isn't Miku, your sweet precious cinnamon bun is so much better than that edgy knock off.

> 4, then 2

"(well you see), begins Peewee, before you IMMEDIATELY interrupt him to tell him all about the friend-fiction au you've been writing where everyone gets to leave this universe AND they all have daemons, like from that one book series, and BESTIES is a cat because come on they totally have cat boi energy when Vik's quiet cough makes you realize you're interrupting again. You pull out the little post it note to remind yourself its a GOOD IMPULSE to listen to people when they talk to you.

You mime zipping your lips.

The snake guy seems uncertain but Vik gestures for him to go on.

He seems geared up to do a full on yell before remembering his scream-related injuries and starts off lower key: "(uh, well, i was hoping you could help me destroy the Universe? you helped me, uh, last time. when everything was boxy. i'm not used to timelines spiralling, as, as much as this, but... if you remember that, and i remember that...then thats already more than normal, so i thought, uh, that we could be allies. maybe.)"

Neat.

> "if that already happened, why are you still covered in eyes? have you been to therapy yet? when/where are we."

You fail to ask that as you have an intrinsic awareness both of space, and of bullshit meta concepts which this universe SUCKS at and some other universe would be WAY better at:

You're in the mall, which is steadily bleeding into the maze. Or the maze is bleeding into it. Same difference.

You're in Loop 306, Arm1, August 25th 2021, which for whatever reason doubled in on itself when the Observers gave information from March 30th 2022 of Loop 306, Arm1 to Neville. Totally jumped the shark. Time is fake and you hate it.

You're...actually not sure why Peewee is still covered in eyes, though, so you ask him that.

"Parker...you...you can't just ask why someone is covered in eyes..." Vik informs you softly, before Peewee can answer.

Peewee is clutching at his coat. "(no, no, its, its fine, except i don't actually know? the inkpot was missing, in, in the room of the) TIME BEASTS (ow, and even though there, you know, weren't any observers, i was, uh, just like this. probably, uh, for time reasons)"

You nod sagely.

> Yay, new friend! Join Peewee on his holy quest!

Vik places a gentle hand on your coat. "If the Universe is destroyed... won't you lose all your blorbos?"

You hadn't thought about that. Plus you make sure Peewee knows that every time you kill the Universe on accident JR just resets it anyways, like a total bro/anti-bro.

Peewee sags in on himself. "(oh)."

Looks like its up to you to cheer him up! Or you can think more about Space and how it relates to arms and loops. You're not picky.

> The inkpot was "missing"? but this is the first loop it appeared in!

Peewee shrugs helplessly. He still seems, like, super depressed.

> Cheer him up by talking about Space!

Oh man, you could talk about Space all day. What topic?

> what are arms

Oh like. A spiral galaxy, right? Each major part of it is an arm. But the Echidna isn't a galaxy OR a spiral so its just kind of like. Arms all the way down. Like...settings? AUs? Time isn't real so Space just kind of expands to eat it all up.

First arm is this one! You and Doc (except not THIS Doc, not yet, since time split in a really dumb way) and your Fav Witherby, and you guess now Peewee are the only ones cursed to be aware of all of them at once! Usually people only know about the arm they're currently in.

Second arm is the Apocalypse, and just kinda splits off any time someone fucks up Arm1 enough. That Fractal Lady rules over there.

Third is the setting recovering from how over the top arm 2 is, super boring, and by the fourth things have started picking up again what with all the gods and all. What was the fifth again...?

Oh, wait, Peewee doesn't seem to care at all about Space. He still seems super depressed.

> Cheer him up with stories about the destruction of the universe

You tell him about how your swag gun just auto targets anyone you want, from any distance, through any amount of earth. You tell him you learned the word "swag" from him. Sometimes it auto targets anyone it wants.

So one time it targeted the Echidna itself. It was so cool. Nebulas of blood everywhere, you thought you were finally gonna get out.

Then JR made it never happen.

> can you shoot JR

Sure! Gun-Tan goes off and both Peewee and Bestie jump at the loud noise in the small area.

JR: :( :( :(

Time appears to be even less of a real thing than it was before. Peewee and Vik are frozen in place mid surprise.

JR: parker, I thought we were friends :( :( :(

You pull out your phone and respond on Paldemic.

Parker: lol sorry >\_<

Parker: i just wanted to see what would happen

JR: :( :( :(

> talk more about the daemon au

JR: parker no

JR: you owe me now

JR: no daemon au

JR: iiiinstead....

Four crow emojis appear on your phone.

Looks like its time for some riddle fuckery. :(

Parker: :(

JR: :) :) :)

> something about a boy? if I remember the song right it's "one for sadness, two for joy, three for a girl, four for a boy"

You're not sure that's how the one JR is always humming goes, to be honest. They never seen to reference gender on purpose, if they can avoid it.

> fork rows. eat your phone

You impotently gnaw on it a bit while mulling over the riddle a little longer.

> toy

That's right, four for a toy. You consider the implications of that. What could JR want you to play?

> Zampanio is a very good game, you should play it.

> Zampanio is a very good game, you should play it.

> Zampanio is a very good game, you should play it.

> Play Zampanio again :3 :3 :3

> Zampanio is a very good game, you should play it.

Time starts back up and Peewee and Vik finish being startled by gun-tan going off.

"WHAT THE HELL, BRO? (are, uh, are we under attack?)" Peewee says, through his sore throat.

Vik looks at you. "It's happening... a lot. Lately... Are you alright?"

With your best catboy accent, you reassure Bestie this time you shot on PURPOSE and tell Peewee you were just trying to shoot JR and NOW you gotta show him a really good game he should play :3

You are now temporarily Peewee. You have no idea what this Zampanio thing is, but you are a GAMER and you have been handed a GAME so... Here goes.

Hm... Okay. Some kind of... shitty rpg maker game? Looks like you're the...Waste of Doom. Huh. Real original. Some kind of sub class called the "Doomed Spinner"?

Only skill you have is apparently accessing this status menu.

Wait....uh. How do you close the menu?

> in most rpgmaker games you can open and close the menu with "x" or "esc"

You try this and do not feel particularly SWAG when it doesn't work. Your GAMER SENSES are tingling, though. Something is up. Looks like you have a few menu items you can go through in this status screen:

1. Skills (level 1)
2. Achievements (level 1)
3. Options (level 1)

> achivements

You check out the achievements page first. Looks like you have five already? Talk about lame. You barely even played this game. Looks like you got FOUR just for starting the game up, and then another one for viewing the achievements.

1

You get (yet another) achievement for viewing the skills tab. Looks like... Theres seven skills you can pick from, ranging from "Office" to "[ERROR Person-key NOT FOUND]". Wonderful. High quality coding on display here.

You apparently have 50 skill points to spend, and each of them costs just one point.

Oh, and you get another achievement for spending 3 minutes in the menu. Weird. Your cybernetic clock says its been less than a minute. Whatever. Buggy piece of shit game. But you're still hoping that dirt guy can do SOMETHING to help you, so you're playing along.

And if you... if you really ARE doomed to fail at destroying the Universe, then... its not like you have something better to do.

> 3

> 3, close button you need might be in options

> check options, turn everything up to max, make bg music 1

Two achievements for visiting the options page. Cool.

You change the settings...

Uh. Huh.

The option vanish and are replaced with: Remember This: FLOWER CHICK.

> hey what's that behind the menu? turn the opacity down to like... 70%? enough to see through but not enough to turn the menu invisible

You can't. The OPTIONS MENU has been removed entirely. It's just that weird thing about 'FLOWER CHICK' which is...uh. NOT giving you great memories! Gonna be real here! The only 'chick' you can think of associated with flowers has your SKULL on her DESK!

> tilt cartridge

> you are hungry. eat the phone

You poke around at the phone a bit and even gnaw on it a little in desperation Parker is watching you incredibly intensely. You...kind of get the feeling he doesn't often get SEEN when he's watching people? Unbroken eye contact. Is. Kind of. Intense.

> Inexplicably give step-by-step instructions on how to access the Hax Mode checkbox.

To get to the what?

> uhhhhhh try turning it off and back on?

You leave and return to the options page. Oh, hey, that fixed it!

You check your cybernetic logs to see what you had been about to... Wait. Shit. That's not YOU wanting to mess with the options. THATS THE OBSERVERS!

You slump onto the ground, game entirely forgotten, doom and despair filling your pump biscuit.

You are now once again Parker.

Damn. Snake guy looks like he got depressed again. Stealing from Wanda usually perks you right up, but he's apparently stubborn.

Uhhhh.... what should you do?

> Steal from Wanda again. >:3

Peewee is still a miserable little pile while bestie looks down at him.

You imagine yourself as a cat burglar and think about what you could steal from that terrible, no good, very bad Lord of Space.

1. another Eyedol Games mobile game
2. a second copy of Zampanio
3. even more electricity (poor Heating-Pad tan is so cold)
4. employees
5. eggs/fruit from the breakroom

> 1

> 4. Peewee's an employee, right? nab him and run! it's the perfect crime!

> 4

> 1

> 5. bring them here to cheer up snake boi

> 4

You have the BEST IDEA!

You cheerfully tell Bestie and Peewee that you are OFFICIALLY adopting Peewee, and Wanda can't have him anymore!

All of you will tunnel up to the surface and HEIST snacks from the breakroom and leave Peewee's resignation on his desk (and also maybe steal a game or two from the Eyedol Research Department while you're at it).

An unsettling amount of eyes from the two of them blink at you.

"Parker...you hate going topside." Vik says, "\*I\* hate going topside. Are... are you sure this is what you want to do?"

> yeah, im sure

You are now Camille.

You feel the faint buzz in your head as something in your perspective shifts, but the current scene is much higher priority in your attention compared to such trivial details. Everything is on fire behind you. So is everything in front of you, everything around you. The flames lick harmlessly at the edges of your coat as they consume themselves in their own fuel, hungry for attention, and reckoning, and whatever else they can get their hands on. In this madness, a single thought crosses your mind, as sure as a strike from your blade:

This is fine.

At least, it will be. All you have to do is run some errands for Ria. Then, and only then, will it all be okay.

You stand at the door of Eyedol Games. The eyes of the unassuming doll in their logo have caught fire, rotting away the foundation of the building as you think.

Normally, you'd advise your team to steer from entering such a wicked building at all costs; L-F-001 is not an abnormality you want to risk getting trapped by, much less your team... but the crimson butterflies are positively flocking the place, your armor near-infatuated with its sheer Demise, so the errand leads here. The Death wafting off the place is honestly kind of incredible. Peewee has always had that effect on you, to be honest-- but you'd never tell an abnormality such a fact.

You enter the seemingly innocuous building, past the fire and debris, and... yup, infinite maze of cubicles. Looks like you'll get to dust off your navigating skills.

You are currently in the LOBBY. Various brochures line a receptionists desk (currently unmanned). Your options are:

1. enter elevator
2. investigate desk
3. enter hallway

You note that the Gift from that Flower still remains on your self, even after all this time. The option to skip this place's damn walls is always an option, but...

You'd be a liar if you said you weren't hoping for a job with some challenge to it.

> 2

The brochures on the desk are about various Eyedol Games properties, such as [DATA EXPUNGED] Girlfriend, Zampanio, and, for some reason, 13 copies of Skyrim.

Ah, and looks like behind the desk a Civilian is lying on his back, suffering massive amounts of white damage. As you crouch down to investigate, you recognize the signs as being exposure to [REDACTED].

What are THEY doing topside?

> a heist, obviously.

While you and the Captain of the Information Team are not in the most amicable of terms, you hardly think they'd risk damaging all these Civilians for such a trivial reason as stealing from L-F-001. They'd need to have something to gain from it, or be brought up by...

Ah. It answers itself, doesn't it? That Shot must be involved. Shame. You hate having to enforce disciplinary action against your fellow coworkers, but if he refuses to take the figurines for Good Behavior, then you believe your options are quite limited.

> take all 13 copies of skyrim

You take a copy of the brochure for Skyrim, then two more as backup copies for good measure. It always pays to be thorough when gathering information on an abnormality, even if the one causing this particular gaming phenomenon is one you've come to understand quite well.

...

...

.............................

Huh. You stand around waiting for a '1/3 brochures found' to chime obnoxiously in your brain, but instead you are met with silence. Perhaps Ria has done more damage to this universe than you'd anticipated. No matter. All will be well as soon as you end his life.

> kill

That is, indeed, the goal. As you steady your sword against your arm as if holding back a feral animal, you helpfully point out to yourself that the first step to any successful kill is perceiving the damn thing.

> do a flip

You are not the indecisive type. As your first three impulses did not move you implacably towards your goal, you take matters into your own hands and enter the Elevator...

You do, however, go into a sick frontflip as the doors open, just to prove you can. Even as your body carries the stench of death itself, your muscles abide your every command as if it were law.

Your options are now:

1. G\*
2. 1
3. 1L
4. 2
5. 2L
6. 3L

> mash the buttons

> 2

> 2, which is to say floor 1, not option 4

> nice

> 3L

> straight to the top!

> 1

> 5

Perhaps you should indulge yourself a little, you note, with all your conflicting impulses. It is not like this elevator will be making a return trip.

Your blade makes swift work of the control panel. Electricity arcs through all the exposed metal prongs dangerously as the elevator goes dark, and you stand in the dim light, patiently. The universe has its way of working. You wait, not with hope, nor with fear. You wait with a certainty only death and taxes can give for the elevator to take heed of your inherent superiority.

Ah, there it is. The elevator hums to life and you feel gravity pull at your bones just a bit more for a few seconds before it stops. The elevator door behind you opens up, rather than the one you stepped in originally. The elevator trembles as soon as you step forward, and you hear something in it snap as it tumbles into the depths below, for some reason.

# **You are now on Floor 2L!**

****

You're a bit disappointed at how normal all the beige cubicles look. You're tall enough that you can see another elevator to the left, a single lit cubicle somewhere in the sea of them to your right, and straight ahead is a window that looks out onto downtown Westerville, Ohio.

What will you do?

1. ~~Go back into the elevator you came from.~~ No turning back.
2. Investigate the new elevator
3. Investigate lit cubicle
4. Look out window

> left, right, straight ahead? these directions are unclear. which way is SOUTH?

You refuse to get pulled into the L-F-001's twisted concept of directions.

> 3

You approach the cubicle slowly, and silently. As expected, the light is from a monitor. You are mildly surprised to see that there is what appears to be a male Civilian at the desk, back towards you. They appear to be deeply engrossed in their computer.

It's possible this is an instance of L-F-QIN, as they are associated with this wicked place. It also may be exactly what it appears, as L-F-001 is known to spirit away mortals as its whims dictate.

Regardless, the unknown figure appears to be calm, unbreaching, and the scent of Death is not on it. There is no reason to kill it.

What will you do instead?

> ask them if - no wait that's not an option uhhhhh get their attention and then give them a look that says "have you seen a scruffy weeaboo anywhere around here?"

You tap him on his shoulder and he spins around in surprise, bald head gleaming. He possesses a frankly magnificent red moustache and goggles on his forehead. You could swear you've seen this cartoony-looking man in one of your coworkers' 'video games'.

Definitely an instance of L-F-QIN, then.

Now that he's no longer covering up his screen, you can see its divided up into various CCTV feeds, all but a handful of which are glitchy red and black static. Perhaps the captain of the information team's involvement in this situation is... deeper, than you'd given them credit for.

On the remaining screen you can see The Shot, and your fated target, L-U-000. Peewee Cassan. That... beast.

You will allow yourself this one conceit. You do not weigh on the matters of others unless instructed by the forces of the universe: this world has been gracious to host you and your kind, and you prefer to pay it back by offering your services with impartiality. But there is a time and place in which one must admit to themselves the reality of the situation.

You have plunged your sword into that snake's heart many times, and in each one you had felt nothing. Not this time. This time, it's personal.

*No one* is allowed to make Ria cry.

You tap the monitor where Peewee is and make a meaningful gesture with your eyes.

He seems a fascinating combination of terrified of you and eager to please. He immediately starts rambling to you about the monitor, his job, the people in the monitor, and the reason for all the damaged feeds. You stare with glee as he does so.

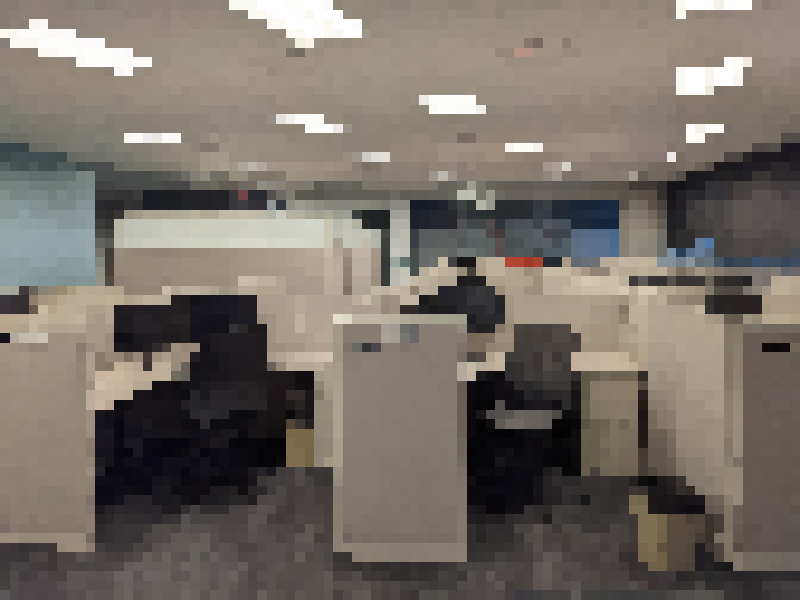
Wonderfully long story short, it turns out that there's actually THREE intruders, one of which is [REDACTED], as you already knew. Cameras just hate them... as humorous as it is, it is a usual problem. Eggman here, as he introduces himself, apparently just fucking hates Peewee after some kind of altercation a few loops back. He hopes you're here to kill that jerk. He's currently on floor 85E and appears to have been there a while.

You point towards your target and back towards the Elevators and make a questioning expression. His eyebrows jump up and he starts backpeddling, NOT wanting to go with you to find him. He wants to stay here with his computer.

You pick up the funny little man and take him with you to the Elevators and have him press a button for you.

While you are distracted destroying the buttons to make sure there is no going back, it appears Eggman has escaped up into the elevator shaft from a service hatch. Oh well. You're still making progress. You'll reach Peewee eventually.

# **You are now on Floor 13K!**

****

It's more beige cubicles but something almost... hums about them. Like a noise you can feel more than hear.

It's hard to focus on anything but relentless forward progress now that you've caught Peewee's scent. There is an array of three elevators in front of you.

1. Go into the first elevator
2. Go into the second elevator
3. Go into the third elevator

> 1

> 2

> but what if cube nail tickle cles in the drawe

> option b

Your instincts scream at you to waste no further time. Peewee's End comes for him and you must be there before it does. It will be your blade, and not another's, that takes his life.

You enter the first elevator and slash through the numbers you find there. You're sure L-F-001 intended some devious riddle, some spiraling horror from which you would not escape. but your patience has dimmed. You no longer thirst for challenge. The End is coming.

You allow the Gift of the Flower to activate and simply walk through walls and floors and furniture. Your surroundings warp and twist as you go from floor to floor, navigating the office maze that is not what it is.

There. In front of you is Peewee. The prey is set within your sight, his breaths releasing Death a mile a minute. Despite all his augments, he is merely meat.

It pains you to even think it, but not everything of this world is clear to you; neither its machinations nor its reasons for existing. People have vexed you in that same manner for a very long time. It is beyond you what motivates him to continue plaguing this place, and you’ve yet to find a reason. Perhaps you never will. It appears to be a shared feature of most living beings to push along in their pursuits despite no clear advantage or recompense.

Ria escapes you in that same matter, sometimes. You fail to comprehend why she’s burning now, her little fiery sing-songs setting this world ablaze. But you *do* operate in certainties, and you know, without a shadow of a doubt, that it is his fault. The Flower has made sure you understand that Peewee means to harm your patron, the Universe.

He hasn't seen you yet. He appears to be trying to prevent the Shot from shooting a computer inside the research department. You do not see [REDACTED], which is never a good sign in these situations.

Normally, you would simply let your blade pass through his heart the instant before something else killed him, and in doing so, free this loop of him. Doomed creature that he is, he never lasts long, and is always useful for accumulating stolen Death.

But rage sets in your heart at the sight. You will teach this beast a lesson: one that most only learn once in a lifetime. One it will never forget.

Far away, a long-forgotten armor inside a coffin whispers to you, its butterflies settling in your stomach with a warning in mind. You only have minutes before Peewee will die from some accident or malice or another. Minutes to kill him first.

What will you do?

> Let him see your face as he dies.

Fate itself swirls around you, touched by unknowable Observers.

You let your blade grate against the metal end of its holster as you unsheathe it to attract Peewee's attention. His awareness is mandatory. You want him to meet your eyes as he meets his Doom head on.

> what about..an au where...where Camille trained as a fairy...

The Shot's eyes trail, unfocused and giddy and yet so keen to your presence, and he mumbles something about fairies. Ah. Potentially close to breaching, it would seem, but his wellbeing is beneath your concern right now. You don't fear his bullets, and while out of it like this he is not stable enough to target you on purpose. Any resistance from him is futile.

> ̒͂͌ ̸̸̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌͞ţ̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸̸͇̙̪͔̳̭̞̪̞͈̱͉̘̺̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̮̪͇̬̮̪͈̰̻͕̦̘̉ͩ̔̄̑̋ͮ͊̉̓͋̉̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌̒͂͌̑̓̎̿̈ͧ͌͜͡͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞͞

Something unknowable grates against your mind as [REDACTED] slouches into your field of view.

Ah. There they are, as frustrated as ever. Better to know where the Captain of the Information team is than not.

> drink water

Silently, they hand the Shot a glass of water to stave off breaching. They can say they no longer do the work all they want, yet here they are caring for an anomaly's needs-- you've dreamed of exposing their hypocrisy from time to time, but reality tends to keep one too busy to do such things.

Quite deliberately, they position themself between you and your target, all eyes raised in challenge. "Back off," they sneer. "Not everything is yours to kill, Captain. It should not come down to me to teach you such *basic* self control.".

> use butterflies

The Doom is close now. The butterflies that only you can see are gathering all around the hated Beast, mourning his impending death. There is nothing even [REDACTED] can do to stop it.

You take a single step forwards.

[REDACTED] tenses. Physically, they can do nothing to you, but you have no intention to fight.

Behind [REDACTED], the roof collapses in on Peewee, scattering sparks and flames in every direction like butterflies in the wind.

It would have been kinder to stab through his chest. A deep satisfaction wells in you as you sheathe your weapon, and you turn to leave.

Reloading previous save file...

> hey jr can you check your flight rising real quick

JR: awwww

JR: and here i was gonna let it rot

JR: ...

JR: lesse...

JR: a warning i haven't been logged in forever

JR: a message from someone thanking me for inventing kintsugi dragons

JR: oh neat, apparently they saw them when they first joined

JR: right distraction

JR: thats probably not what i was sent for...

JR: oooo, crossroads delivery from 11oo1o1ooo

JR: clan info...

'take your place in History you never know what bits of the past leak into the present'

JR: what did they send...

JR: oooo

JR: black kintsugi

JR: and inexplicably 606 treasure

JR: noice

JR: only time will tell if its a puzzle

JR: but in the mean time i'll be starting the next loop soonish

JR: once i'm done commiting homepage crimes

> poke

ERROR: Reloading previous save file...

ERROR: Multiple Copies Found With Same ID

Time Travel Should Not Be Possible.

Skip To Next Loop, Y/N

Y