

Act 3 - A full breakdown and explanation

Starting words

Hi! Chloe speaking here. As the main writer for the project (nearly everything in the game is written by me) I've been checking comments about the game whether on gamejolt, youtube or discord to find criticism and ideas for improvement of my own craft, and a main topic has come to my attention.

Act 3 is a bit messy storytelling wise.

While not everyone has faced difficulties understanding most of what goes on during the final section of the game it is undeniable that it is not crystal clear on communicating what's going on. That's why in this document I'll do as best as I can to explain everything that happens in Act 3 as well as give some extra commentary on the writing direction for the game as a whole. As a heads up, this is gonna be some heavy reading to do, so I'll try to be as organized as I can (which ain't much, but I'll give it an attempt nevertheless) to not difficult your (the reader's) understanding any further.

Needless to say, be a little patient for there is a lot of text up ahead.

We can begin now.

But before that...

A disclaimer

(Because someone might've skipped the lil' comment at the start and red text catches attention more easily)

There is a LOT to read here. This is not a light lil' doc you can spend 5 minutes reading to then move on with your day.

Thank you.

Sans' character

The main thing I feel like needs explanation is the approach to Sans as a character inside of Reckoning's story.

In Undertale

The intended approach was for every character to retain their original Undertale personality and make said personality have to adapt to the new role it found itself within, which in contrast with

projects that take a similar approach (mainly TS!Underswap), is the exact same role as in vanilla Undertale. This comes with its fair share of difficulties when it comes to writing Sans of course. In vanilla, Sans is a complex yet very misunderstood character.

The basic conception of Sans' persona is that of a lazy, pun-loving yet sharp skeleton when it comes to serious situations (this applies mainly to the genocide route, for it is the route most people think of when thinking about writing Sans, but it also applies to the date scene in Mettaton's hotel, as well as other scenarios).

While this understanding of him is pretty valid when viewed on a surface level, it does not take the whole picture of Sans' complexity and it becomes especially clear when his character is represented in other Dusttale related AUs.

A pretty overlooked detail of Sans as a whole is the way he doesn't interact with the rest of the world in a way that feels "meaningful". Throughout the game he won't interfere much with the human's journey besides throwing some funny shenanigans into the pot, whether messing a little with Papyrus' on his attempts at capturing you, tricking you into looking into that one telescope or stacking an ungodly amount of hot dogs on top of your head. While he very clearly shows connections with other characters, you never find out much about him from other people's mouths, telling how feeble his connections to most characters outside the main cast actually are. This leads the player to make up an image of Sans as little more than a comedic relief character, a presence to which feel relaxed around (of course this without any knowledge of other scenes in the game up to said point).

This image of Sans however, is shattered at the hotel date scene, where a few of his traits start showing up. While apparently laid back, he's been vehemently honoring the promise made to Toriel to protect you, regardless of his own feelings on the matter. On top of this, he shows a very sharp skill at reading other people's expressions, being able to tell whether you've died during your playthrough of the game or not.

While these traits are fairly well known, they aren't played around with and usually tend to simply be reiterated, when in reality it has a deeper implication. Sans can have a rough guess of what you, the human, is thinking just by your expression. While it's a vague guess he can make rational judgments based on it and give a pretty accurate conjecture. This type of skill is usually present in people who are very calculating. This ties to a lesser appreciated trait of him, his nihilistic/existentialistic behavior towards his own self, which is addressed in his dialogue during the end of the genocide route. Even in said scene, he acknowledges his own struggles to do what he's supposed to do: "look. i gave up trying to find a way back a long time ago." "to be blunt... it makes it kind of hard to give it my all." "...or is that just a poor excuse for being lazy...? hell if i know." These lines are usually interpreted as what Sans literally states; "laziness".

However, rather than inaction, there's resignation in this dialogue. Sans isn't procrastinating on whatever he's supposed to do because of unwillingness, but because in his mind he's already given up hope. This is what the line "and getting to the surface doesn't appeal anymore either." makes reference to. Regardless of an "ending" where the greater good is achieved, it doesn't make a difference at the end of the day for he doesn't have a sense of purpose. This purpose is "fulfilled" by the promise made to Toriel, which is his whole reason to interact with the

human throughout the game and once said promise is broken, he finds reason within himself to act up on his feelings for once. During the entirety of the genocide route ever since you two first meet up, Sans bottles up his animosity towards you in exchange for being true to his words, regardless of his brother's, Toriel's and everyone else's deaths. Don't misinterpret this as the usual edgy/depressive portrayals of Sans that have predominated the conception of his character however. While he keeps things to himself and doesn't let much of it out, it doesn't mean he's incapable of feeling, on the contrary, he deeply cares about those close to him. Regardless of the route there's always ill feelings towards the human for the murder of Papyrus to name the easiest example there is, and he advises you to stray away from the path of no mercy numerous times, an attempt to make it easier for him to stay true to his promise rather than actual preoccupation for the human.

There's a lot more nuance to be had around Sans as a character but some of the main features that were played upon within Reckoning have been addressed and if I kept talking about Sans we'd be here for all day long.

So, how does all of this play into Sans' role inside Reckoning?

In Reckoning

Reckoning somewhat follows the base Dusttale formula, Sans kills monsters with the intent of overpowering the human, you know the drill by now, it's been done hundreds of times. There's definitely some flaws to this trope, mainly the unjustified newfound murderous tendencies of the silly skeleton, uncharacteristic to his whole identity (and uncharacteristic to every other Undertale character besides Flowey). So, how do you get a character with no background on committing massive manslaughter (monsterslaughter?) to... commit said manslaughter? Here's where some of my own discrepancies with the game's overall story start appearing, although we do not need to go into detail for that just yet. An accident, in this Sans trying to prevent these two kids from running away and instead impaling them feels like a sufficient excuse to put him in course of this murderous road he takes throughout the rest of the game. While there certainly could've been better ways to portray this scene (instead of showing the aftermath only), it does its job well enough.

Another thing that was addressed far more directly in the game was Sans' relation with nihilistic tendencies, nihilism being a philosophical current, the current of "nihil" (latin for "nothing"), which postulates the irrelevance of universal truths, whether these come from religious belief or moral principles, in the affirmation that existence is meaningless. Of course, Sans' nihilism isn't as blunt as outright saying things like "god is dead", "morality is a construct of values implanted by the people with power" or other postulates of a similar caliber, but instead he questions the weight of his actions into the world he partakes in, the importance of his own contributions to the society he lives in and whether these carry any relevance after the day he's no longer alive arrives.

While in base Undertale there is a possibility Sans contemplates similar topics, in Reckoning he decides to act upon it, overworking himself as some sort of coping mechanism in the form of

acting like a royal guard, existing to make the world for others a better place and leaving himself aside in the process, escapism if you will. This is noticed by Papyrus, who as seen in the last moments in the game, motivates Sans to rely more on others, both duty-wise and emotionally. Of course this is interrupted by the arrival of the human, leading to the murder mentioned a bit ago. Sans during his journey never once enjoys the act of killing, contrary to other iterations of the Dusttrust formula, instead he condemns his own actions whenever he speaks to the human. He acknowledges the brutality of the things he's done and doesn't attempt to justify it at any point. Something to notice on the majority of scenarios where Sans is put into the role of a murderer is him falling into insanity, which is a safeguard to justify the ridiculous acts committed; while it is true an insane character is somewhat prone to said tropes, people often forget that it doesn't take a killer to murder, only thing you need is a reason to kill. In waterfall (or swamp technically for this AU) after talking things with Temmie (scene that shouldn't need much of an explanation), Sans is found by the Meldows (Snowdin replacement) population, who are apparently, viciously looking for justice, condemning Sans for murder of Chilldrake and Icecap. However, after replaying the scene you can see there are other sentences muted by the accusations of murder, concern and preoccupation for Sans' condition, genuine care. This mob searching to solve a vendetta is nothing but a byproduct of Sans' own thoughts, overwhelming himself with blame and remorse, interfering with his own senses into a deformed reality, to the point after closing and reopening his eyes they are no longer the people he knows, but humans thirsty for blood; this triggering a fight or flight response where he kills everyone in front of him. By the time you've found him in the lab he's resigned to this persona of a murderer, not out of enjoyment/pleasure from killing people but because in his mind he can no longer be perceived as anything else, something addressed more directly in the "who cares" monologue during the final encounter and his mental only degrades further as the fight goes on. To (finally) put an end to this segment, Sans isn't insane (at least not in the usual way people portray him as such), he is not a psycho who wants to put an end to you but he's forced himself to wear a mask that resembles said intentions, he's also unaware of the concept of a player but will make some remarks that address them.

Act 3 (for real now)

God I can finally start with the actual thing.

The analysis for phases 2 and 3 will be shorter because there isn't much to talk about.

Final Encounter (Phase 1)

The dialogue for phase 1 is mainly divided between 2 long monologues, before and after the battle, so we can start by analyzing each individually.

Before the fight

In the intro monologue, Sans opens by denying any eagerness and or expectancy for what comes up ahead, once again reflecting his defeatist nature of throwing the towel before the matter at hand has even started. He expresses a desire to feel the hope that is expected of him, that combative spirit so uncharacteristic of him that most players (not the human themselves, you, the person interacting with the game) would want, even more considering his journey has reached what could be thought of as an apex, despite it being miserable from start to finish on Sans' end.

Then the monologue moves on to Sans' nihilism, expressing doubt around the weight of both his actions and your motivations towards the inevitable end, discarding any relevance of these for the conclusion. Regardless of whether he attempts to kill you or not, the more or less effort he puts into fighting, it ends up with him dead and he expresses this idea as if he's already accepted said destiny.

Lastly, there's some meta commentary on the concept of a final fight itself. It's not a foreign concept for the last fight to be the main highlight of the experience, not only in Undertale fangames but videogames and media as a whole. It's an unwritten rule where the culmination (like the name of the track that plays during the fight, haha) of a story has to be the most memorable part of a piece of media. Sans addresses this ideal pretty bluntly, stating it's gonna be something "flashy all around, unlike anythin' you've seen before", a sentence directed straight to the player rather than their digital persona (the human), although Sans obviously doesn't know this.

This is taken a step further with the closing lines "who knows, you might even wanna style on me a lil'", which hints at challenge running, the player's excitement extending further than just expectancy for a flashy fight and being eagerness for a new challenge to overcome in a considerably fancier manner than the normal player.

(I apologize for the harshness on challenge runners in the previous rendition of this part of the analysis)

After the fight

Now, onto the ending monologue.

This one is both easier and harder to explain as there's no "segments" to be made, and it's instead one long downward spiral.

As mentioned in the analysis of the intro monologue, specifically the segment related to nihilism, Sans states this apathy towards his fate, acceptance of the inevitable end. However, this reconciliation with one's own fate is not something so easily achieved, and Sans knows this, for it's another mask he puts on, one to protect himself from the fear of no longer mattering.

Now that this mask is shattered, Sans transitions from what we could call passive nihilism to active nihilism.

A little disclaimer in case you don't wanna read about philosophical theory, just skip the following paragraph.

There are two states of nihilism an individual with said tendencies can find themselves within, these states are passive and active nihilism respectively.

Passive nihilism could be considered the transition between the “death of God” (a way to refer to the acceptance of the irrelevance of universal/greater truths) and what Friedrich Nietzsche (wrongfully labeled a nihilist, moreso a big inspiration for the current on itself) referred to as the Übermensch (super-man), who’s not a “super-man” in the conventional way one would imagine (supernatural powers and whatnot) but an evolved humanity, which transcends limitations like as societal norms, conventional morality, more specifically those derived from dogmas such as religion. The passive nihilist is someone who’s not fully moved past the “death of God”, that hasn’t overcome the nostalgia of an omnipresent guide to help their own moral compass. Furthermore, the active nihilist is the individual who **has** moved past this death of the omnipotent and effectively becomes the Übermensch Nietzsche postulated about.

Now that topic’s been dealt with, back to Sans.

At the end of the fight Sans truly accepts not his death, but that of his brother, his own parallel to the “death of God”. While Papyrus is far from this pedestal the concept of God (and its parallels) usually are placed in, he is undeniably one of the pillars holding Sans together, the one closest to him and his guide when lost in the dark. The “Who cares” speech isn’t an attempt at justification of his actions, but the acceptance that Sans’ course of action before the end is now up to him and nobody else, as everyone, including Papyrus, is dead, their course has already ended and these deaths are no longer a burden he will continue to carry. Grief is something he hasn’t moved past just yet but he acknowledges that from an outside perspective, **the player’s perspective**, nothing he’s done so far matters anymore in the context of the fight. This is where the active nihilist finds a paradox, because even if “life” may not have a transcendent meaning or a specific purpose, the biggest pleasure a nihilist can receive is to keep living, for there is nothing else they could do, besides killing themselves, for the epitome of the Übermensch is to live a life worth living all over again. Enamoured with this revelation, Sans confronts the human once again.

Final Encounter (Phase 2)

Dialogue wise there is not much to unpack here.

Now defeated, Sans talks to Papyrus. You could make a parallel with this to how he asks his brother if he wants anything from Grillby’s in the no mercy route back at vanilla Undertale.

He questions if Papyrus’ death was something orchestrated, a way to escape bearing the weight of Sans’ struggles because in his point of view, he’s no more than a burden.

He dwells in nostalgia for the times before the human’s fall when things were simpler, then tells Papyrus to wait for him. He then looks at the camera and asks “are you excited?”; this question directed at the player, more meta stuff because the final phase is ahead, you get the gist of it, final phase cool and whatnot. Sans absorbs the souls and the game crashes.

There are a few comments to make around the scenario where phase 2 plays out and an incoherence.

The background for the phase 2 fight is the same forest you enter during the end of the game. You could interpret this as since Sans already has interacted with the souls, illusions/images of the realm constructed out of Sans' psyche (more on that afterwards) begin appearing.

The reason why Sans gets the human souls is up to interpretation, call it cheap or whatever you want, it's flashy and what people would expect of an AU of this nature, not a very rational plot device but effective nevertheless.

Final Encounter (Phase 3)

There is no dialogue to unpack here, to whatever the fuck's happening in p3 we go.

Now that he's absorbed the souls, we can assume Sans has breached a new frontier of power/magic/whatever. Reality starts breaking apart, an apparition of Papyrus enters the scene and gets more messed up as the fight goes on. Sans' face blurs and acquires cartoonified features, representation of the mask he attempted wearing back then before the human's fall. As the fight progresses, Sans becomes more and more unstable (he already was from before but it gets worse) and everything deforms.

The phase ends with a faceless Sans, an empty husk of whatever he once was to then implode, reality is torn apart.

Carnival

Okay there's more interesting stuff, sweet.

Sans is gone, you're instead met with a realm made out of his own psyche and remnants of the memories of who he once was, this is the world now.

You could describe Nowhere (it's how I like to call the dreamscape section thingy overall, not rly the official name, call it however you want) in a couple different ways.

On one hand, it can be interpreted as the 5 stages of grief, Carnival referring to Denial and Anger, Initiative standing for Bargaining and Depression, the Forest concluding with acceptance. Another way to look at it (and at least from my perspective, a more interesting one) would be the three components of personality in Freudian theory (by the guy with a few things to say about mothers, yes, that one): The Id, the Ego and the Superego. The Id (Carnival) is vulgarly, the component driven by pleasure and impulses, one which revolts against the very concept of pain,

the most straightforward and irrational part of our (in)consciousness, where if something is seen as good, then it is good, vice versa when something appears as bad.

While Carnival definitely does not revolve around pleasure, it does indeed serve as a reflection of Sans' most basic desires; a world where nothing goes wrong, everyone's happy and colorful, a utopia where there's nothing that can hurt him anymore, the birthday scene being the most pure form of this desire's satisfaction. Everyone taking a small break from the day-to-day flow, rejoiced in celebration away from the positivist urge to do something of worth, pure inactive bliss. The way you attack the carnival people can be a parallel of Sans tearing this fantasy apart with his own hands, butchering those who are happy and the way their faces deform when killed is a product of Sans' disdain for his own acts, self punishment for acts once deemed horrible. Killing the cop is the loss of control, slaying the repressive part of the self and the fragment of personality the next part of the world related to: the Superego.

Initiative

There's a block in front of you.

You start pushing onwards.

For what feels like an eternity.

Eyes stare at you in your absurd task.

Yet duty calls, there's no time to think about that.

...

Do they feel pity?

Will it suffice?

Is it acceptable?

The block falls, and so do you.

The Freudian Superego is the morally correct part of the personality. The censoring one, that tries to keep everything under control. A set of rules so strict almost everything seems like trespassing. It is also very judgmental while awfully aware of external judgment, it's a more conscious fragment of the psyche than the Id but a part of it still remains in the unconscious. In Initiative ("that'll be enough" world) you see a reflection of Sans' Superego. His role as a trainee for the royal guard demands a more active participation on his end than his role in vanilla Undertale. He assimilates this as an excuse to abandon inaction and contribute to the population, as it is expected of any other monster, all of this masked under the guise of doing things for the sake of making his brother happy; while not a false affirmation, it is incomplete. Ask yourself, have you, the reader, ever felt the need to provide something, anything, as a human being? To study for a career, to have a job, for the sake of making the world a better place?

Positivism as a theory proposes scientific/authoritarian enactment as the one source that properly validates knowledge/experiences, all in virtue of progress.

If something does not qualify as a contribution, it is discarded and deemed worthless.

This has become a problem in the modern era, where everything we do has to hold an

objective, a reward, a product. Sans falls into this ideal as an escapism of his nihilistic thoughts, and starts doing everything in his power to improve the quality of life for the population, this at his own expense. He overworks himself to the brink of exhaustion, and keeps this act in pursuit of achieving the Id's desires, constantly frustrated by problems that seem to surge without end. And he crumbles under this weight.

Papyrus confronts Sans and talks reason into him, vindicating him of the responsibility he had put upon himself, exhorting him to rely more on other people and to enjoy his own life.

Then Papyrus dies.

The Superego once more takes control, and demands for a duty to be fulfilled.

Gotta do something of worth.

The Forest

After venturing into a seemingly bottomless hole, you arrive at a forest, the Ego's dead husk.

The Ego is the part of personality in charge of keeping both the Id and the Superego at bay, as well as the most rational one. It often does what it can to satisfy the other parts' demands while not completely giving into them. It is also the most conscious one of the three.

The forest is the manifestation of what the Ego once was, along with some of the most deeply rooted aches within his mind, before his existence came to an end. Warped images of the other parts' requests are seen throughout this realm. Burdens to carry, those once important to Sans now dead and merged into a nearly unrecognizable being, a hand reaching for the sky, as if it was yearning for it, yearning for freedom.

But said freedom is unachievable. Sans is no more. He no longer has to suffer. Only leftovers remain.

And the forest remembers you.

After running away from the hand creature, you find yourself at the edge of a cliff.

A figure sits there, a familiar yet unseen figure.

You encounter Sans.

Or whatever's left of him.

The last remainder of the Ego in a coarse shell, vaguely reminiscent of what was.

Sans. Sans the skeleton.

Whatever that might mean, if it even means anything anymore.

After an exchange of words, you move onward.

And move onward.

Sans is still there.

There's nothing left to see of the world, for its blueprint no longer exists.

Yet you are forbidden to leave.

You sit next to Sans.

Extras

Trivia

(Basically just a couple fun facts on some of the game's writing)

- Every scene in the game was written in a single sitting respectively, excepting Temmie which took about 3 sittings because of the complexity of its dialogue.
- There's an unused easter egg for the name "Papyrus", as I was told that the game would allow you to input a name longer than 6 words (which ended up not happening).
The flavor text goes as it follows:
"* INACCEPTABLE!
* MY MIGHT SHALL NOT BE MATCHED!"
- Overworld interactables were a last minute addition, done in less than a week before the game's release. Rocks being the most prominent type of interactable because I thought it would be funny.
- The flavor text for one of the rocks is a reference to the Small Rock item in The Binding of Isaac: Rebirth. It corresponds to the exact stats the item gives in the game.
- The flavor text for a rock in front of a house is a pun on the name of a specific breed, the Rottweiler (Rockweiler).
- The flavor text for the "Threaten" act for Chilldrake during the Meldows encounter was slightly edited to be less violent, the original rendition goes:
"*You tell Chilldrake you'll snap its sunglasses and carve its eyes out with each half.
*** ...what, you didn't do that?"**
(the highlighted segment being the one removed in the game).
- The "Sunskt" item in Meldows encounter is called "Sunskirt Cookie" but was abbreviated because it took up too much space.
- Temmie's particular form of speech is inspired by characters of rubberhose-styled animations, which has been misinterpreted as a southern accent.
- While writing Temmie's dialogue, the idea of forming words with the uppercase letters in the sentences came to mind, but was discarded after forming a few words because it was too niche. The words that remain are "ALONE, HOAX, ERROR, SUDDEN", they are a reflection of Sans' thoughts.

- There's a reference to a line from the game Ultrakill nearing the end of Temmie's dialogue, "Something wicked this way comes.", which in itself is a quote from William Shakespeare's "Macbeth".
- During the cutscene that plays after the Temmie scene, two different lines of dialogue play when there's dialogue coming from the mass of monsters. The lines in the front are actually Sans' thoughts, blaming him for what he's done. The lines in the back are what the monsters are actually saying.
- Originally there was no lore regarding the drones utilized in the final encounter, nor the liquid that Sans drinks in the true lab. The screen entries were written pretty late into development as a way to not leave these unexplained and so Substratum D and the drone models came to be.
- The "Who cares?" monologue is heavily inspired by the ending of the book "The Outsider", by Albert Camus, which is also a story with a nihilistic protagonist, although plays quite differently from Reckoning.
- The normal Undertale Sans encounter flavor text for the check option was an inside joke of my own, where I spent days thinking about making every single interaction with Sans end in the lines "Sans, Sans the Skeleton."
- The response to the "What happened?" question in the regular Sans encounter is meant to deceive the player into thinking he'll do a recap of the entire game, instead being a fakeout.

Commentary

(a couple remarks on some criticisms made on the game, basically me playing devil's advocate)

- Some people have remarked the lack of scenes dedicated to characters other than Sans, it is worth to remark that it was stated in the first devlog of the game ([which you can read here](#)) that this game would not expand as much in the world as a whole, being mainly focused on Sans' arc.

- Phase 1 on final encounter not being difficult can be justified from a story perspective with the fact that Sans is **not** in a position where he is looking out to kill the human at all costs, but has resigned to the inevitability of the fight itself. While an argument could be made for patterns being harder based off the fact he's at a higher power level than in previous encounters, bear in mind how much longer he can last fighting compared to previous instances and vanilla Undertale, he's not being weak by any means, he just isn't attacking viciously and this noticeably changes once phase 2 is reached. The game was never intended for a hardcore only audience, nor was it meant to be just a boss rush (as a couple people have complained about story segments being boring).
- The gap of information in between the end of act 1 and the start of act 2 is pretty big and what happens in said gap isn't properly addressed besides a few bits of flavor text. As a brief summary of the encounter between Sans and Alphys: Sans arrives outside of the lab, where he encounters Alphys once more, she explains she doesn't want to fight Sans but that he was warned to disappear from the map and attacks him, Sans kills her in self defense.

Ending words

If you've read all the way through the document, thanks! Honestly writing all of this was a bit of a headache (specially trying to explain philosophical theory, I hope it wasn't too hard to understand but honestly it probably was, I apologize). I also hope this document has done a good job at summarizing the entirety of act 3, as well as feeding a bit of the reader's curiosity. There's not really much else I can say besides thanking you for having the patience to go through this entire thing, the thought of someone actually doing it makes me feel like I've succeeded at my job on the team.

Have a nice one.

-Chloe.