

A young man stands in his room, he has neatly trimmed and parted black hair and is wearing a brown polo shirt and khaki shorts. It is this young man's 13th birthday which means it is time to give him a name. What is this young man's name?

CHAGRIN SEEDFLAPPER

No, no, no. You're obviously trying too hard to be offensive, and not only does this not even sound remotely offensive by human standards, but if there were a race that had such terminology this phrase would probably just sound confusing and not even offend. Try again.

JACK HOFFMAN

Much better. That certainly doesn't seem to have any overt innuendo, even extraterrestrial in origin, to it. What will you have young Jack do?

JACK: LOOK AROUND ROOM

Your room is rather standard for suburban living. Pictures of religious figures, and crucifix themed paraphernalia dot your otherwise empty walls. Against one wall sits a desk holding your computer and various empty soda bottles. Against another sits a chest of drawers and a simple bed.

JACK: RETRIEVE ARMS FROM CHEST

Assuming you intended the chest of drawers specifically and not your own torso, you use your arms that you clearly had all along to search for something that could vaguely fit the description of arms. Alas the drawers simply contains clothing, so the best you can come up with are the arms of a long sleeved, hooded jacket. You captchalogue the hoodie in your fetch modus. It appears in the upper section and becomes grayed out, awaiting a corresponding item to enter the lower wing. Your modus is currently set to an 'if/then' programming function, you can only access items in the bottom 'then' section if a corresponding item is set in the 'if' section and can validly precede the 'then' item using some nebulous logical reasoning. Unfortunately, when empty, items must first populate the 'if' section, though once sufficiently filled items can be rearranged back and forth to facilitate access, provided anything entering the 'then' section has a valid 'if' argument. You're certain adding a few more items will make more sense of the modus.

JACK: PICK UP ALL THE SODA BOTTLES

You quickly captchalogue all of your empty soda bottles, they enter the 'if' section, but a small notification informs you they can be paired to the hoodie and moved to the 'then' section if you so choose. However the hoodie seems unable to be paired to

the bottles in the opposite way. The now cleared desk reveals a pair of brown envelopes with a green logo printed on them.

JACK: MOVE BOTTLES TO THE OTHER SECTION

You move the bottles to the 'then' section under an argument that 'if' you wear the hoodie and get hot, 'then' you would drink a large amount of soda. Your modus accepts this argument and assigns all of the bottles to the hoodie, making them accessible for removal. You are certainly clever at making up bullshit arguments to make your modus work.

JACK: COLLECT ENVELOPES AND ASSIGN TO 'THEN' SECTION

Ok, maybe not that clever. You absolutely fail to come up with a way to tie wearing a hoodie or drinking soda to the envelopes and they sit uselessly in the 'if' section of your modus. This is especially troubling as these envelopes contain your copy of the Sburb beta launching today and you were hoping to play with your friends rather soon. Now you'll need to find some way to force them into the 'then' section to install the game. Speaking of friends, one of them is pestering you as we speak.

JACK: ANSWER FRIEND

amazinglyAwesome began pestering aggressivelyPassive

AA: Jack!

AA: Jackie.

AA: Jackaboy.

AA: JackaMAN.

AA: Jack the manboy.

AP: sorry i was wrestling with my inventory

AP: also never call me a manboy ever again

AP: it just sounds...off

AP: :P

AA: When are you going to switch off that arbitrarily imprecise and dare I say wonky fetch modus?

AA: Also I will refer to you as manboy whenever I feel like it!

AA: Ok, maybe it is sort of weird...

AP: right because you're the queen of all modi

AP: everyone bow down to ms opposites

AP: n-o\_

AP: thats me bowing

AP: that's a bowing emoji

AP: just for you

AA: I humbly accept all prostration.

AA: And else is much simpler than then.

AA: I guess you got something important stuck under it?

AA: And given today's date with the impending event, this important thing was most likely your game.

AP: no and absolutely not

AP: do you take me for some kind of foolish fool who would do such a thing?

AP: perish the thought entirely

AA: If you have a copy of the latest Game Bro, you could argue that if you read the article about Sburb, then you would play the game.

AA: That should allow access to the disks.

AP: well it's a good thing the disks aren't what's stuck

AP: in fact don't even take that as confirmation that something is stuck

AP: cause my modus rules and things never get stuck

AP: XP

AP: though of course if i had done such a thing the magazine idea would be rather helpful so i will keep the thought in mind

AA: Also speaking of the date reminds me to wish you a Happy Birthday.

AA: Has my gift arrived yet?

AP: probably, the mail would be on the table downstairs

AP: which is also where i left the trash heap magazine known as game bro

AP: again...not that i need it for anything modus related

AP: also thanks, for the happy birthday wishes

AA: Be sure to message me when you've managed to remove the Sburb disks from your modus, I do want to begin playing and the start screen is demanding I find a client or server to connect to.

AP: jeez! you've already installed it?

AP: no hilariously wacky adventure to acquire the disk where you battle past parental figures, infuriating inventories, aloof and mysterious animals, ancient ruins, and general hijinks?

AA: Some of us are more on top of things than others.

AA: And my father is not nearly as...puritanical as your mother.

AP: your dads cool

AP: still playing videogames at his age

AP: and he covers your home in sweet posters from all those old games and movies

AP: instead of all this religious garbage

AP: \_ \_

AA: How about we solve your gaming dilemma before you once again subtly attempt to convince me to swap parents with you.

AP: there is no dilemma

AP: however i should definitely make sure to grab this mysterious gift you sent me

AP: and perhaps the game bro magazine just in case i need to try your idea

aggressivelyPassive ceased pestering amazinglyAwesome

JACK: BE THE OTHER GIRL

You are now the other girl. A spunky, yet sarcastic 13 year old girl with brown hair styled into a ponytail slightly offset from the center. You're wearing a black gamer themed t-shirt with the text "Keep Calm and Hit Reset" along with a black skirt. What is this girl's name?

R4D1C4L1SC1OUZ G4M3RG1RL

Preposterous, even if you didn't think leetspeak died out years ago numbers certainly don't belong in names. Also the ideas of girl power and gamer girls are both rather annoying and you wish people would just act normal around girls who play video games and not stick them on a pedestal. Try again!

MARY WATSON

Much better. Coupled with your middle name of Jane, you feel your father's love of comics and video games somehow contributed to you being named after Spider-Man's love interest. Which is fine and dandy to you because Spider-Man is quite awesome and you'd probably make out with him any day.

MARY: EXAMINE ROOM

You live in a small room in a 2 bedroom apartment. Your computer desk sits next to a simple bed and your walls have all kinds of superhero movie and video game based posters. You don't have a chest so to speak, but do keep most of your relatively few non-digital belongings in a large piece of luggage.

MARY: RETRIEVE ARMS FROM LUGGAGE

You reach your perfectly functional arms into the luggage bag and retrieve a large Nerf brand armament. It would be good to keep such a thing handy in case your father begins one of his impromptu dart battles. You also find a few novelty, gaming themed items.

MARY: CAPTCHALOGUE NERF GUN

There's simply no need as you have already allocated your Strife Specibus to the machinegunkind specification. While you may technically be able to wield actual

automatic rifles with it, your relatively uneventful, modern day, outer city life has left it most useful for Nerf and water based weaponry. You store the Nerf gun within your strife portfolio.

MARY: WELL THEN CAPTCHALOGUE THE NON-MACHINE GUN ITEMS

That is a request that makes far more sense given how the blatantly simple inventory system works. You collect a novelty wooden Legend of Zelda shield from your first convention, a sweet spring loaded, wrist mounted assassin's blade based on Assassin's Creed...plastic of course, and a high quality statuette of Gordon Freeman you had custom ordered. You allocate all three items to the 'if' section of your if/else modus. Much simpler than a 'then' modus, you say. You simply have to argue why the two items are opposites to move one to the 'else' section and freely retrieve it. As an example to yourself, you assign the shield (defensive) opposite to the blade (offensive), and the shield appears in your 'else' section. It's so versatile, you can even freely swap the shield and blade without modifying the argument as it remains opposite regardless.

MARY: FULFILL YOUR DESTINY, MAKE OUT WITH SPIDER-MAN

You walk up to your Spider-Man poster from the 2002 movie depicting Spider-Man right before the famous upside down kiss. Oh Toby Maguire...he can be your superhero stalker any day...He's amazing...No, you are. As you lean into the poster, your door slams open and you flail away in a panic. You definitely weren't kissing your movie poster, what a preposterous notion. Your father stands in the door, twin Nerf pistols in his hands. It seems his fatherly instincts kicked in the moment you equipped your own weapon.

MARY: STRIFE!

>Aggress: You wildly spray darts in your father's direction, he deftly performs a middle-aged roll beneath the assault and counters with a precise shot to your forehead. Boom, headshot. The gamer's gumption meter ticks slightly in his favor.

>Abjure: You retrieve the Zelda shield and block several incoming shots, one of the darts bounces back and hits your father.

SWEET REFERENCE!

The reference to Link bouncing back projectiles ticks the gamer's gumption meter back in your favor.

>Assassinate: You stow the shield and quickly swap the if/else argument, accessing the assassin's blade. After a leap and a mid-air youth roll, you tackle your father and plunge the blade into his chest. Or rather the plastic spring-loaded blade harmlessly pokes him in the chest. As you whisper

“Requiescat in pace” your gamer's gumption meter maxes out! And your father falls, defeated.

A moment later he stands and dusts himself off before nodding with fatherly pride and absconding from the room. You love your dad, he's so cool. Even if he is a bit of a nerd. All of these references to gaming remind you that you're eagerly waiting to play the Sburb beta with 3 of your friends, none of whom are even remotely ready to start playing. You have already been pestering two, as the game seems to specify needing both a server and client, one of whom was being a cagey dork who definitely needs to fix his fetch modus, the other as it turns out finally messaged you back.

purportedAskance began pestering amazinglyAwesome

PA: And lo, a mere 2 hours and I re-enter the 21st century

AA: Sweet, how was your visit to the middle ages?

PA: I only acquired 3 diseases

AA: Dibs on the plague.

PA: Noted

PA: Hopefully the internet remains connected

PA: Else I shall yet again be whisked away to the land of swords and sorcery

AA: And do you have the game ready to go?

PA: Of course not, I have been attending matters of grave importance

PA: Had I not focused entirely at glaring angrily at the technician I fear he may have taken twice as long

AA: Leave the tech support alone next time and install the game.

AA: Or shall I refer to him simply as 'the help.'

PA: If he had actually helped and not just wasted time...

AA: Well now you're wasting time.

AA: At least Jack has an excuse even if it's not a good one.

AA: You're literally late cause you were too busy acting like a snooty snob.

PA: It is vital to my character, you're aware of this

PA: If I am fated to bear the burden of my grandmother's fortune I simply must play the part

AA: Well with your vast hoard of treasure did you actually manage to purchase the game?

PA: Of course

AA: Yet it isn't installed.

AA: It isn't stuck in your inventory too is it?

PA: Of course *not*

PA: Is AP still stuck faffing about with if/then?

AA: Or really isn't better...

PA: It takes a deep wealth of intellect, and in fact simply wealth, to keep an or modus sufficiently organized and supplied

PA: Which I own both, therefore mine is  
AA: Then where is your god forsaken game!  
PA: I have sent Jeeves to retrieve it from the post office  
PA: He should return shortly  
AA: Why is it at the post office and not your house?  
AA: Did you ruin another mailman?  
PA: Mailperson!  
PA: And he wasn't fired  
PA: Yet  
PA: Simply refused to deliver to my mailbox  
AA: Your mailbox that's up your mile long driveway.  
PA: Exactly the one  
AA: Just...message me when your butler returns.  
AA: The only other person I can get a hold of is Jack and apparently we need two people each to connect to to play this game.  
AA: I assume we can't double up, but can just kind of loop the 4 of us in a circle.  
PA: I shall call him at once and get an estimated time of arrival  
PA: Also please don't use butler, he's a housekeeper  
AA: I literally don't know the significant difference between those two things.  
AA: But fine, I'll be here...waiting.  
PA: Do have patience madam, he should arrive posthaste

amazinglyAwesome ceased pestering purportedAskance

MARY: BE THE NEW GUY

This 13 year old gentleman? With the blond hair styled backwards, the suave blue suit, and the expensive looking pair of eyeglasses? Sadly he's currently too rich for you to be. At least at this moment. And besides, you're too busy being this girl we've never actually met before! This happy-go-lucky lass of 13 has straight black hair cut to shoulder length, a fancy gold and white dress, and a nice pair of thin, dark sunglasses. What exactly is this girl's name?

DARKSHADES MCDOUCHBAG

Not a fan of people who wear shades indoors I take it? Well you didn't even manage to spell douchebag correctly! So looks like you're gonna have to try again!

ASHE WINTER

Of the esteemed and aloof Winter family, living on your own private mountain with no one but your often absent Grandfather and your white furred dog by your side. What do you do first?

ASHE: LOOK AROUND ROOM

Well of course, your room looks just as you remember it. Solid golden walls, a golden 4 poster bed centered in the room, a desk off to one side and a large wardrobe on the other. There is a single window across from your bed that you catch occasional glimpses through at the expansive golden city below.

ASHE: WAKE UP THIS INSTANT

Wake up? You're obviously wide awake, seated upon your bed. What a silly idea.

ASHE: IF YOU WON'T WAKE UP, THEN AT LEAST BE THE OTHER GUY

Fine then, you start being the other guy, by which you obviously mean Jack. You're standing in a downstairs hallway, various crosses and other religious iconography dot the walls. Outside this hall is the living room where the coffee table, the mail, and a video game themed magazine await. Unfortunately you can hear the sound of religious programming droning out from the television, so your mother most likely awaits within the very same room. The dastardly woman finds anything fun evil, which means things like video games and movies, with their fun violence, magic, and monsters are usually completely vilified and restricted. Luckily a few Bible themed games you downloaded convinced her not to ban you entirely, letting you sneak play time with more fun games whenever she's busy with televised sermons.

As you sneak up to the edge of the hall, you take a peek outside. Your gift! In a lovely green box set upon a small pile of mail. You must acquire it, and abscond to your room as the no doubt amazingly cool item inside would be immediately confiscated if your mother saw it. There is also a blue envelope, the calling card of the rich fellow we haven't met yet, as well as several white envelopes which while not especially interesting you're quite aware Ashe would use one. You'd think all that snow around would make a girl tired of the color white, but at least you convinced her to change her text color to the default black some time ago. Briefly you wonder what she must be up to, considering Mary seems adamant to start playing yet to your knowledge Ashe has still not logged on today.

Unfortunately lost in thought, you failed to notice the television cut to commercial, giving just enough of a break for your mother to notice you peeking out of the hall!

JACK: STRIFE!

>Abstain: Your mother gesticulates to the television, attempting to encourage you to listen to the word of the lord. You close your eyes and hold up a hand. Please mom, allow me some space!



>Agnost: She attempts to shove a Bible at you, you wildly exclaim that the Bible states you must make your own journey to know the lord, please back off a bit!  
>Atheos: Dammit mom, you're a man now, and quite honestly all this religious stuff just sounds preposterous! You don't even think you believe any of it, and her heavy handed attempts to force the issue have only pushed you further from it!

Your mother takes a step back, dropping the Bible, tears welling up in her eyes. You hold a hand out, attempting to reassure her but she doesn't have it and runs off to her bedroom, sobbing. She has no son!

JACK: HARSH...BUT NOW'S A GOOD TIME TO GRAB YOUR STUFF...

You quickly search the mail, finding both envelopes from your friends and captchaologue them, the gift box, and the game bro magazine that was beneath the mail into your 'if' section. You also snag the letter opener from a nearby cabinet, you don't need to use it but you can relate it to mail to easily force your modus, before hurriedly absconding to your room. Once there you sit at your computer. You argue that if you received letters then you also received a package to access your gift box, setting it on your desk. Then argue that if you had a letter opener then you could open your letters to access both of the envelopes, funnily enough this argument also ends up applying to the Sburb envelopes, making the game bro magazine even more useless and leaving it to clutter your 'if' section.

JACK: PESTER MARY

You definitely wouldn't want to immediately open your gifts...obviously that would not be the thing you do. Instead you go right to messaging your rather impatient friend.

aggressivelyPassive began pestering amazinglyAwesome

AP: and now i have the disks ready to use

AP: i didn't like what i had to do to get them

AA: Everyone remembers their first kill.

AP: XP

AP: i had to get my mom out of the room

AP: so i uh...dropped an 'A' bomb

AA: Wow, no joke? You told her the A word?

AA: Harsh, Jack.

AP: ugh i know

AP: look she'd find out eventually

AP: im a man now i have to make my own decisions

AA: Technically you're a teen now. Man isn't for another 5 years.

AA: Although there is something...

AP: if you say manboy again im not even installing this game

AA: Perish the thought! I would never do such a horrible thing to my best friend.

AA: So did she take it well?

AP: well surprisingly it turns out she's also atheist

AP: all this religious iconography was just here when she bought the house and she can't actually remove it

AP: we had a good laugh and bonded over it

AP: she ran sobbing to her room and i think im technically disowned right now

AP: that's actually what happened

AP: :<

AA: Again, Jack, harsh.

AP: cease the harshing

AP: you know its also pretty harsh my own mother can't accept my choices

AP: just cause she has the bigger reaction now doesn't mean i don't need therapy in 10 years

AA: Truly, the most traumatic of experiences any child could have.

AA: Having to tell a parent that you actually believe all that science mumbo jumbo.

AP: oh shut up you got off lucky with your awesome dad

AP: straight up indoctrinated into atheism from day 1

AA: I was told to mindlessly follow the great prophet Darwin.

AA: Enough tomfoolery!

AA: Let us install this game and begin at once!

AP: is anyone else ready?

AA: Richy rich is busy being rich, and I think Ashe is still asleep.

AA: They're gonna have to join the fun later.

AA: Let's get in and power level this, um...whatever kind of game it is.

AA: Beat like the final boss before either of them finally quit being lazy and/or pretentious.

AP: did you actually type tomfoolery?

AP: is that an actual word im reading in your text?

AA: Silence! Install!

AP: shush, i am

AP: cool spirograph designs

AA: Spyro what?

AP: i very clearly typed spiro ms perpetual gamer's gumption

AP: spirographs are drawing tools that move in various circles and stuff

AP: i had one as a kid, they look cool, its what all these twisty circles would come from

AA: Wow.

AA: I had an NES as a kid.

AA: Sounds like you just had a bunch of lame dorky stuff.

AP: ignoring that

AP: so how do i connect?

AP: no wait i see you in the list for clients

JACK: SELECT MARY AS YOUR CLIENT

The game window changed, displaying what appeared to be a small bedroom. A young girl sat at a computer. Across the top of the screen was a menu and your mouse cursor changed to resemble the house design from the envelopes.

AP: whoa

AP: is that you?

AA: Is what me? Can you see my character?

AA: I don't have anything on my end, no character creation or anything.

AA: Although it has informed me a server has connected.

JACK: JUST START MESSING WITH STUFF

The most obvious thing anyone would mess with first is the bed, so you select it, your cursor picks the bed up and allows you to move it around.

AA: What the hell!?

AA: Jack, are you doing this?

AA: If not I regret to inform you but I appear to have a poltergeist.

AA: Jack?

You accidentally release your mouse and the bed flings into a wall, crashing through and landing on the ground below.

AP: sorry, was doing stuff

AP: you mean the bed

AP: um...oops?

AP: :o

AA: Oops is definitely one option for reaction.

AA: Also 'I apologize for destroying your bed, here's my eternal allegiance.'

AA: Irregardless, the heckin Jesus Jack, the game is letting you do that?

AP: yeah i also have build options

AP: sort of like the sims

AP: by my...um...money? is sort of low

AP: i only got 20 units of these blue things that sort of looks like d20s

AP: and building seems to cost one per anything i build unless i try to go too big then the cost starts going up

AP: wait irregardless isn't actually a real word...

AA: You're literally playing sims with my real house and my word choice is what's important...

AP: wow your dad's computer looks amazing

AA: Yes, his setup is totally decked out.

AA: Oh wait, is there like a furniture menu? Can you give me a sweet setup?

You search around the menus for a bit, locating one with several large machines listed. Luckily they all seem to have a cost of 0.

AP: yes actually

AP: though a tad sparse

AP: i got like 3 weird machines i can drop, but they're all free at least

AA: If they're free, it's most likely starter equipment. Can you just drop them anywhere?

AP: seemingly

You deploy something called a Totem Lathe in the space where Mary's bed used to be.

AA: Perfect, a replacement thing to sleep on.

AA: Looks incredibly comfortable.

Next you move the living room couch to deploy something called an Alchemiter in the center of the room. Sadly the couch also ends up sailing through a wall of the apartment.

AA: You see that was a joke.

AA: I don't want to sleep on large pieces of machinery.

AA: But the problem is you've literally just flung my actual option B out of the apartment as well.

AA: And once again only left cold steel in its place.

AA: I can only ask...why?

AP: sorry, there's not really a lot of fine motor control on the cursor

AP: it just kinda grabs whatever i click and the options are basically drop or fling at high velocity

AA: Well I may not be able to sleep anymore, but at least you haven't removed any other essential furniture.

Carefully, you set the toilet back down amidst a spray of water from the broken pipes and torn up floor.

AP: yes...correct...

Mary's hand unceremoniously meets her face. Her father, having heard the commotion, opened the bathroom door then gesticulated confusedly. At which point Mary got a clear view at the wrecked condition of her commode.

AP: i just need to practice some

AP: then i'll figure out how to fix or replace the furniture

AA: I humbly accept my role as guinea pig.

AA: Also evilly await my turn to do exactly this once I have my own client.

AP: i fear this will create a vicious cycle of revenge

AP: eventually circling back to me

AA: Imagine me casually stroking a cat as my evil plan unfolds perfectly.

AP: look this is the last machine

AP: called the...cruxtruder?

AP: ill just set it

AP: shit

AP: it like bumped the ceiling or something and my cursor lost grip

AA: Ahh, option C is now under a few tons of metal.

AA: As such neither I nor my poor father you idolize so greatly have a place to sleep.

AA: I never expected you capable of such vast cruelty.

AP: cmon dont make me feel bad

AP: im really trying

AA: I am mostly messing with you.

AA: The fact you're somehow able to play a video game with my actual real house is legitimately super sick.

AA: Even my father thinks it's sort of neat. Even as he laments his bed.

AA: I cannot wait to screw around like this, so what do I do with these machines?

AP: no idea

AP: there's also this

You set a pre-punched card on the ground by Mary, she picks it up.

AA: I've never seen a captchalogue card with holes, doesn't that ruin the item in it?

AP: there's really no tutorial

Mary sets about examining the machinery closely, eventually returning to her computer.

AA: After careful and deliberate examination with my trained gamer's eye.

AA: I am stumped.

AA: But my father noticed hinges on the, you said Cruxtruder?

AA: Perhaps you can bash it open.

AA: Maybe if you pick up one of the other machines...

There was a loud crunching and cracking from the bathroom, and the sound of fresh jets of water spraying out.

AA: That was my bathtub wasn't it?

AA: Jack, my things. My precious things.

AP: i couldn't actually move the other machines, it costs some currency i don't have

AP: and i figured the fridge was kind of more important

AP: sorry...

A flashing green orb, and a green rod of some kind of hard plastic popped out of the Cruxtruder as the bathtub knocked the top open.

MARY: THROW SOMETHING SUPREMELY NEAT INTO THE FLASHY ORB

The neatest thing you have on you is your custom ordered Freeman statuette, which...well, sacrifices in the name of science you guess. After arguing the wooden shield (natural) against the plastic statue (manmade) you remove the statue and fling it orb-ward. The orb flashes brightly, revealing an image of the good doctor's face above a sideways crowbar. The orb emits many unintelligible sounds and begins following you around as you return to your computer.

AA: The ghost of Doctor Freeman I presume.

AP: the right orb in the wrong place

AA: Let me guess, no tutorial on this thing either?

AP: none, got anything else to chuck in?

AP: maybe you can keep powering it up

AA: I'm slightly worried that the Cruxtruder began a countdown timer shortly after opening actually.

AA: A bit over 4 minutes. So maybe we should move on for now.

AA: I believe that rod is long enough to slot into this contraption though.

AP: 'totem lathe'

Jack deposited the item next to you, you quickly captchalogue it, and note that the system labels it as a cruxite dowel, before arguing it (unnatural) against the wooden shield (natural) and inserting it into the Totem Lathe. You then rather smoothly argue the shield (unpunched card), against the pre-punched card (punched card), then insert that in the card slot you found earlier while examining. The Lathe quickly spins the dowel and carves a wavy contour into it. You then bring the dowel to the living room. The timer on the Cruxtruder ticks down to one minute.

MARY: ENTER

You argue the cruxite dowel (unnatural) against the shield (natural) again and remove it, placing it on the Alchemiter pedestal. A price, apparently zero, appears on the display and you hit the button. A green tree suddenly sprouts, grows to full size, and deposits a twin set of cherries onto the Alchemiter. You pick them up and give them a sniff, they smell like cherries you suppose. From across the room, your father gets your attention motioning towards the Cruxtruder, apparently time is running out. Through the hole the sofa made, you notice the sky turning a rather worrying shade of red. Quickly you bite into one of the cherries and a blinding flash engulfs your entire apartment.

AP: mary

AP: hey are you there?

AP: things look kinda weird at your house

AP: and your dads hassling the ghost freeman

AA: Sorry, I was momentarily stunned by the view outside my apartment.

AA: Did the entire thing teleport somewhere?

AP: seemingly...

AP: hey, he probably shouldn't touch that

Another flash went off in an adjoining room and, after investigating, you find the Freeman orb has transformed into what appears to be the ghost of your father in an HEV suit.

Gordadsprite: So...I tried to grab the crowbar.

Gordadsprite: And I think I'm a ghost now.

Gordadsprite: Also Gordon Freeman.

Your palm once again meets your face.

AA: Father...why would you touch an otherworldly ghost that we already know absorbs things and apparently evolves?

Gordadsprite: Honey, there was the possibility of an authentic Half-Life crowbar...

Gordadsprite: Plus I seemed to have gained all manner of knowledge of this game, bordering on the omniscient.

Gordadsprite: More importantly I have an HEV suit now.

AA: Okay, yes, objectively that is rather sweet.

AA: Also omniscience?

Gordadsprite: Apparently I'm now your tutorial.

Gordadsprite: The game logic sort of prevents me from revealing too much, also the Freeman in me really doesn't want to talk.

Gordadsprite: Plus you've been doing great on your own so far!

Gordadsprite: We even managed to escape before the meteorite hit.

AA: I'm sorry, before the what now...

Gordadsprite: That's what the Cruxtruder was counting down to.

AA: And...what exactly happened?

Gordadsprite: We're in the Land of Steam and Brass. In the Medium.

Gordadsprite: Basically you gotta adventure through it to beat the game. It's kinda steampunky.

AA: I had noticed.

Outside the apartment a vast array of pipes stretched out, various puffs of steam vented from them constantly. Occasionally the pipes worked around odd machinery full of gears, cogs, and springs. Churning away at some vast unknown purpose.

Gordadsprite: My little girl's gonna be such a badass Witch of Time. That's your class basically...and aspect...like you were assigned a skill tree based on witchy time magic.

AA: I don't get to pick? lame.

Gordadsprite: Apparently there's some weird timey wimey crap going on, and like you're predestined to play this so you've always been a Witch of Time, and...I don't fully get it yet.

Gordadsprite: Knowledge is just kinda there, still gotta piece it all together. Then I can pass it on to you.

Gordadsprite: For now though I would answer your friend, I can hear the notifications going off constantly.

AA: Right, Jack. Um...can I...?

Gordadsprite: This thing only prototypes twice, so it's safe to touch me.

MARY: ANSWER FRIEND

You give a quick hug to your fatherly sprite before heading back to your computer. There's messages from Jack, and the rich boy finally got back to you.

MARY: ANSWER JACK FIRST

AP: so is your dad dead now?

AP: hes glowing has a tail and is floating

AA: Well...maybe? Apparently he's my tutorial now.

AA: And he says my former location was hit by a meteorite, so mind checking the news for me?

AP: really? wow ok one sec

AP: so apparently there's meteors coming down in a lot of places

AP: is the game doing this?

AP: holy shit, did this game start like the apocalypse?



AA: Possibly, I would say let's not panic, and focus on getting everyone else playing.

AA: Teleporting here has saved me from a fiery fate, and assuming the three of you are destined for the same means we should probably get a move on.

AP: ashe still isn't online

AA: That's fine, we still have a little time. Hopefully my incoming messages are there to tell me at least one of our friend's is ready to join...

AA: I shall check them posthaste.

AP: ...posthaste huh?

amazinglyAwesome ceased pestering aggressivelyPassive

MARY: BE THE RICH BOY, DO IT NOW

Alright, fine! As Mary technically owns her own private planet now, she is in fact rich enough to be the other boy. As such she is now this suavely pretentious boy who's yet to have a name.

ASSHOLE MCMONEYBAGS

Really now, what rich person would actually have a last name like McMoneybags? Although you're certain some celebrities may have actually attempted Asshole as a first name...however you're still gonna have to try again!

RHYS DONAHUE

Excellent, a suitably fancy name for a suitably fancy boy. You're standing in the foyer of your lavish mansion. Your housekeeper Jeeves has just arrived with your copy of Sburb and is offering it to you on his customary silver platter.

RHYS: CAPTCHALOGUE JEEVES SO HE MAY SERVE THE GAME TO YOU IN YOUR ROOM

What a preposterous idea, there's no air in those captcha cards and your dear housekeeper certainly wouldn't survive.

RHYS: CAPTCHALOGUE AIR AND JEEVES SO HE HAS SOMETHING TO BREATHE

Now hold on a minute, that may actually work. At least for anyone who could captchalogue one thing and another thing. Unfortunately you're far too pretentious to use anything other than an 'or' function for your fetch modus. While not as complicated as an if statement, you do have to captchalogue two items at once which then become

delineated by an 'or' function. They don't necessarily need to be related in any way, however the act of choosing one side of the or statement causes the other to cease existing permanently. It would take quite a supply of money to afford losing so many objects, luckily that's exactly what your grandmother left you.

RHYS: FINE, THEN JUST TAKE THE GAME AND THE SILVER PLATTER

You're going to ignore the word and as you instead take the game or the silver platter. The two items appear in your inventory, separated by a slash mark.

RHYS: HAVE JEEVES RETRIEVE ARMS FROM CHEST

Well you clearly used your arms to collect the game, however you do send Jeeves to fetch your dueling rapier from the sparring room as you bring out your phone to check in with Pesterchum.

RHYS: MESSAGE MARY

purportedAskance began pestering amazinglyAwesome

PA: Good news, Jeeves has delivered my game

PA: He also brings word of worrying developments in the news cycle

PA: I do hope you're alright

AA: Great!

AA: Not the news thing, the game, and yes I am currently ok.

PA: Good show, I believe given your impoverished state you do not have a war bunker nor panic room

PA: So I wish you luck, I will probably wait out the current disaster within mine

AA: No, wait!

AA: We need to play the game!

PA: Come now, AA...

PA: Meteors are raining down from the heavens

PA: This is no time for gaming tomfoolery

AA: The game's what is doing the tomfoolery.

AA: Sburb has some kind of crazy universe altering power and I believe, due to today being the launch, that it has caused the apocalyptic scenario currently ongoing.

AA: Advertently or inadvertently.

AA: I managed to escape the destruction of my neighborhood by playing, I was teleported to some alternate dimension or something.

AA: You need to get on and connect to Jack as a server, get him through the same process as me, then we need Ashe to wake up and complete the loop.

PA: Madam, I know you aren't one for wild japery

PA: And given the odd state of the world I suppose I shall take your word

PA: Very well then, explain this process to me?

AA: Not really much time for a full run down before you start, I fear a meteor may already be on its way to Jack's location.

AA: Just install the server and client applications, then select Jack from the list of clients.

You sit down at your computer, having made your way back to your room while conversing.

PA: Alright, I suppose I shall check in with AP and begin this process

purportedAskance ceased pestering amazinglyAwesome

purportedAskance began pestering aggressivelyPassive

PA: Fear not for your savior has arrived

AP: right

PA: My word your home is...religious

AP: wait you see my house?

AP: are you connected to the game?

PA: I am indeed

AP: the mouse is kind of sensitive so try not to fling anything through a wall

PA: Do you take me as some kind of barbarian?

Jack's chest of drawers suddenly rocketed through the wall, landing in his backyard.

PA: Ok, well the sensitivity is quite high

AP: those were my clothes

PA: I'm sure they weren't that expensive

PA: I assume I drop these devices?

AP: i need all the free stuff

The hole in the wall sealed back up with a thunk, then with a second thunk a door appeared in it's spot.

AP: why are you building, we don't have a lot of that currency stuff

PA: We have 200, and this construction only costs something like 5

AP: 200? that's more than i got with mary

PA: Well obviously my enhanced status gives me more resources

AP: what exactly are you making

You finish your construction with several more thunks from beyond the door. Jack stepped out, carrying his phone. There was a simple, flat platform with all necessary devices neatly lined up.

AP: sweet

AP: you also gotta smash open the top of the cruxtruder

You form a solid cube of wall material and use it to bash the Cruxtruder, the top pops and a glowing orb exits, followed by a brown cruxite dowel. Jack collects it and heads over to the Totem Lathe.

AP: you just like to spend money don't you?

PA: It was only 10 units of build grist

AP: what?

PA: The blue polygonal items, did you not even open the wallet?

AP: no, but it makes sense you'd figure out how to that first thing

PA: So what is this flashy ball then?

AP: apparently i gotta throw something into it so it becomes a tutorial ghost

PA: Ahh, well I have the perfect spirit guide for you then

AP: wait what are you...

You grab a copy of the Bible from the lower floor and drop it on the orb, with a flash of light the orb was replaced with a floating crucifix.

PA: Perfect! Who better to guide your soul on this journey than Jesus

AP: i dislike you

AP: :|

AP: are you even religious?

PA: Of course not, I love money too much to give it all away to a church

PA: But I can tell by your home decor that you very much appreciate the gesture

AP: heavily dislike

AP: >:|

Jack argued that if he used the pre-punched card, then he could carve a dowel to access the dowel itself and applied it to the Totem Lathe. He then argued that if he put holes into the hoodie card, then it would resemble the pre-punched card to access that.

PA: Your inventory stinks, it took you like 30 seconds to remove two items

AP: shut up, us peasants can't afford to destroy half our stuff on a bullshit or modus

PA: No, I understand the sentiment

PA: Have you noticed the sky yet?

Jack took a moment to look up from what he was doing. The sky had turned a bright shade of red and in the distance he could see the streaking tails of meteorites.

AP: rather worrying

PA: I'm seeing similar phenomena near my home

PA: I do say this game takes itself rather seriously

AP: almost done, just gotta print this thing on the alchemiter

JACK: ENTER

An absolutely massive meteor breaks the cloud layer, heading right for your house. A brown stone appears on the Alchemiter, and a similarly brown sword sprouts from it. You leap upon and begin to heave on the blade, barely a moment before impact it slips free and a light engulfs your house.

You blink as you stare up at a starry sky, a figure floats into your view. From his small goatee, to his long hair, and his crown of thorny branches you instantly recognize him and squeeze your eyes shut in annoyance.

AP: "DONAHUUUUUUUUUUUE!"

Jessusprite: Cmon now, practice some forgiveness for your brother there.

Jessusprite: He just wanted to ensure a powerful guide.

Jessusprite: For both your soul, and this game.

JACK: EXISTENTIALLY FLIP OUT

You decide to take a moment flipping out over the fact the literal Jesus is now a permanent fixture in your home. More so than he was already, you suppose. Even if this is just some game abstraction, you're already wrestling with a lot, theologically speaking, today and it's nice to vent the stress.

Meanwhile, Mary has kept herself busy fending off some rather incessant houseguests and is getting a relieving pester from an until now absentee chum.

MARY: ANSWER CHUM

palpablePall began pestering amazinglyAwesome

PP: bleh

AA: Don't bleh me, I didn't force you to oversleep.

PP: and i didn't force you to shut up

PP: guess we both made mistakes here missy

PP: i think that correlates

AA: Woke up faaaar on the wrong side of the bed today I take it.

PP: whyd you leave me like 5000 messages girl

PP: yiu know i need my beauty rest  
PP: however will i manage to look myself in the mirror otherwise  
AA: Do you actually own a mirror?  
PP: grandpa probably has one in his bathroom  
PP: so whats all the fussitudinousness about  
AA: Originally, I was fussing over the fact we had all agreed to play a certain game today.  
AA: More recently my fusses have taken the form of the literal apocalypse you were attempting, valiantly, to sleep through.  
PP: all lies  
PP: been awake for hours  
PP: just didnt think your apocalypse biz was important  
PP: so whats going on with that exactly  
AA: The game seems to have spawned a host of meteorites, which have been raining down on the planet.  
PP: maybe thats whats got snowman all flustered  
PP: boys been whimpering at my feet  
AA: You seem a bit nonchalant to learn the world is ending.  
PP: shit happens

#### MARY: GREET YOUR HOUSEGUESTS

You fire a barrage of nerf darts at a black carapaced creature wielding a crowbar, and wearing a halo. They bounce off harmlessly. However Gordadsprite equips an smg and fires his own barrage of very real, yet still ghostly, bullets. The creature explodes into a tiny pile of polygonal items which disappear when you touch them. Gordadsprite informs you the currency is called grist.

Another leaps in through the wall hole wearing an armored suit and angrily brandishing a crucifix. Your fathersprite opts for the shotgun this time, blasting the creature to grist instantly.

AA: Well some shit is what needs to happen soon.  
AA: Jack's been quiet, so hopefully by now he's entered the medium.  
AA: You need to help Rhys enter, then it's my turn to aid you.  
PP: enter the what now  
AA: The medium. It's basically the game world, and it's a real place you really get teleported to upon completing a starter task.  
PP: sweetness  
PP: thats how i avoid the meteors right  
AA: Yes, actually. So do you have your game copy handy?  
PP: hell if i know  
AA: Oh my sweet Jesus another one.  
AA: Am I really the only person even remotely ready for this gaming gettogether?

PP: a hard mode hootnanny

PP: chill though girl

PP: things probably in the temple

AA: How'd you manage to get your game in the temple!?

PP: cause goddamn everyrthing ends up int he temple!

PP: temples like a magnet for things that suddenly like become televent to my life sat the oddest times

AA: Please if you can retrieve it quickly? I fear you and Rhys may actually be in danger.

AA: I pine for the days where the biggest obstacle was a parent and an inventory system...

amazinglyAwesome ceased pestering palpablePall

MARY: BE ASHE, POSTHASTE!

You are now Ashe Winter. We've already had a physical description, the only notable difference being your golden dress having been replaced by a red t-shirt and black jeans. A large white dog sits, anxiously at your feet.

ASHE: RETRIEVE ARMS FROM CHEST

You're pretty certain there isn't a chest in here, nor ever was. You do retrieve your arms though, they happened to be in your sleeves, obviously attached to your shoulders just like arms tend to do.

ASHE: LOOK AROUND ROOM, LOCATE CLOSEST CHEST

You take a long gaze around your room, there is nothing there but an all-encompassing black void, just like usual.

ASHE: REFUSE TO STARE INTO VOID, LEST IT STARE BACK

Fortunately the void isn't actually a void, rather it is all a small, blind girl can see when looking around her room. Yes, earlier you made fun of a blind girl for wearing shades, and then proceeded to tell her to look around. Don't you feel like a real horse's ass?

NARRATOR: SHUT UP

ASHE: BANISH YOUR HELLBEAST BEFORE IT CAN DOOM YOUR SESSION

Half those words didn't seem relevant right now. And Snowman is your trusty yet perfectly normal seeing-eye husky, personally trained by your grandpa, not a hellbeast. If

he wasn't around, and you had managed to wander several dozen miles to the nearest road, crossing it would be very dangerous.

ASHE: ENOUGH INTRODUCTORY DELAY, ONWARDS TO THE GAME

You quickly retrieve both a jacket and knit hat from your inventory, they had been paired together under your 'and' function modus. Two items must be captchalogued at once to form a valid pair, at which point the pair may be removed. It can be annoying to remove a pair, only to not need one of the items, so you try to pair up similar items in the hope you need them both at once. It's simple, but you already have to deal with being blind, let's not add overly restrictive and complicated inventory to the mix. You equip your walking cane, which luckily sits in your canekind strife portfolio and doesn't need to be paired. At least you're pretty sure it's set to canekind, though you couldn't actually see the options and you just let it auto-allocate by equipping the walking cane as a weapon.

As you step out of your eccentric, mountaintop home into the ever present snow Snowman takes point and you begin the quick hike to the temple. At least you think it's a temple, that's what grandpa called it. If said building had any identifying iconography, you've certainly never seen it.

ASHE: SKIP THE WALK AND ENTER THE TEMPLE

Despite your attempts, you can't skip the walk and it still takes around 5 minutes. However you are now within the main chamber. The walls are decorated with amazing pictures of all kinds of sights, and many wondrous gadgets and machines line every inch of the floor. You're pretty sure at least, you haven't seen either of these things to confirm, and the ease with which you can walk kind of puts a damper on the rows of machines theory...but still. After you give the floor a good cane thumping to get your bearings, you find the base of some sort of altar. You don't know what the altar is for, nor the plant growth on top of it, but there have been a few items of dubious usefulness that appear near its base from time to time. A quick feel of the floor finds a couple items, mainly a set of envelopes and a ring that seems to have a few jewels set around it. You captchalogue the envelopes and ring as a pair then head back towards the temple exit.

ASHE: SUCCESSFULLY SKIP THE WALK THIS TIME

Once again, you find yourself unable to skip the walk, however given how impatient some people are, you instead decided to be a much calmer Jack for a while. Currently you, as Jack, are mid conversation with Mary.

AA: That is hilarious.

AP: mary, i'm already dealing with the apocalypse and my mother

AP: one of those things is assuredly worse than the other



AP: and yet now i have to deal with the existential idea of a religious figure coming to life in my room

AA: I'm not certain where religion fits into the gamer's gumption meter, however I feel Rhys has certainly won over you this time.

AA: Oh my god, and he's a ghost too. Literally the holy ghost.

AA: You there?

AP: sorry jesus was hassling me about videogame stuff

AA: That sentence was both ridiculous and hilarious.

Jesussprite: Come now Jack, you have the entire Land of Lights and Circuitry to explore.

Jesussprite: As Knight of Blood, you must unite your friends.

Jesussprite: Though with faith, all things will come to you in time.

AP: then why even bother exploring if it will all come to me?

Jesussprite: Idle handles are a devil's plaything, Jack.

AP: you're already being contradictory!

Jesussprite: I am simply asking you to take the road less traveled.

AP: THAT'S ROBERT FROST! AND BARELY APPLICABLE!

AP: i swear mary, it's everything i expected from a book of old metaphors and plagiarized mythology come to life

AP: donahue shall rue the day

AP: RUE IT!

AA: Is he at least giving you sweet tutorials?

AA: Oh, also where'd you end up?

AA: Mine's like all steampunk style.

You take a moment to scan the planet around you. The ground appears to be dark colored circuitry, with various capacitors and resistors forming what would be trees and other landscape features. Streaks of different colored, neon lights outline most everything.

AP: lots of technology and neon

AP: i guess it could be considered cyberpunk?

AA: Sounds sort of like Tron.

AP: was tron cyberpunk?

AA: Um...maybe? Usually it involves gritty dystopias. But neon and high tech tend to be prominent.

AA: Are you trying to relate your planet to mine by the suffix punk?

AP: no

AP: i mean...steampunk made me think of cyberpunk and now i can't get the connection out of my head

AA: I'll judge once I see it.

AP: wait, when are you gonna see it?

AA: When I get there, duh!

AA: You really should listen to the word of the lord.

AP: X|

AA: Gordad told me that my second gate actually leads out of yours.

AA: Which reminds me, you really need to get to work building my house up.

AP: information overload, hold up

AP: what's a gate

AP: also gordad? That's terrible

AP: i hate that i already can't think of anything better

AA: Look up, those 7 floating spirographs, as you called them, are portals.

AA: First one sends you somewhere on your planet, you then have to search the area for another which exits at the second gate above your server player's house.

AA: You then enter the third gate in the column, which once again sends you somewhere random this time on your server's planet.

AA: Find the next gate, head to the next server in line's house, etc.

AA: The 7th gate is probably a final boss, but Gordad is sorta blocked from revealing too much at once.

AP: wait so you fall out of the second gate?

AP: that's pretty high up...

AA: Ideally Rhys builds your house tall enough to safely land on by then.

AA: Which is why you need to get to work building mine, there will be falling teenagers to catch after all.

AA: And I do need to get to my first gate.

AP: we do have substantially more grist now

AP: and some of this shale

AP: i can actually deploy this thing called a punch designix

AA: Nice! Go for it.

You set the Designix next to the Lathe, then proceed to build out a platform for foundation around the apartment.

AP: you fiddle with that while i get to work on your tower

AA: You got it!

MARY: EXAMINE DEVICE

The device appears to be a keypad attached to an odd counter with several slots.

MARY: FLIP OVER CAPTCHA CARD

You turn the novelty wooden shield card over, finding a captcha code. You suppose that's why they've been called captcha cards all along...Putting two and two together, you insert the card into the Designix, then type out the code. A cachunk sounds from the machine and the card comes out punched with holes!

#### MARY: LATHE AND ALCHEMIZE THAT THING

You turn the crank on the Cruxtruder and pester Jack to deposit the resulting dowels by the Lathe, things will go quicker if you don't have to run to your father's room every time you need a new dowel. You argue the (unmachined) dowel against the (machined) assassin's blade and machine a dowel without inserting a card, resulting in a dowel slightly thinner. The result is a perfectly generic object, aka a useless green cube...Jack deletes the object, refunding the build grist though you hold onto the dowel as having a (machined) one could be useful for inventory navigation. Next, you machine a dowel out of the punched shield card. The result, unsurprisingly, is an exact copy of the shield. Congrats, you've managed to destroy your wooden shield just so you can pay for a new one with grist.

The process gives you a few ideas however, and soon you find yourself able to mass produce captcha cards by reading the code from an empty one, as well as getting a few codes from Jack, namely a replacement bed.

#### MARY: AND

And? And what exactly? Oh wait...*and*. You quickly insert both a punched shield card and a punched blade card into the lathe, resulting in a completely different totem. The Alchemiter spits out an assassin's creed blade, made of wood, with a master sword design for the actual knife. Ok, if the equivalent of and-ing the cards works, what if we or-ed the cards by punching one card with two codes? The result is a plastic shield with the Auditere family insignia emblazoned on it. Your eyes go wide and your smile goes giddy with possibility...

Master assassin's sword && Wooden hylian shield = Auditere shield with spring loaded master sword spikes. Hmm...not really useful for your specibus.

Nerf machine gun && Wooden hylian shield = Nerf brand foam shield, legend of zelda branded. Actually less defensive than the wooden one.

Nerf machine gun || Wooden hylian shield = Legend of zelda branded, fully automatic wooden crossbow. Hell yes, now you have an actual weapon. But maybe it could be better.

Nerf machine gun || Assassin's blade = Semi-automatic, wrist mounted blade launcher. Plastic, but getting there.

Nerf LoZ auto-shot bow && Iron crucifix, provided by Jack = Holy Triforce brand automatic crossbow, complete with magical light arrows. Things are getting god damn real, but one more addition.

Holy Triforce auto-shot bow && Assassin's blade = You have made the Holy Assassin's Forearm Mounted, Fully Automatic **Avenging Spirit Crossbow**.

You triumphantly wield the absolutely awesome device of cold judgement. This beast is a solid chunk of metal firmly strapped to one arm firing arrows surrounded by a magical aura of light shaped like a motherfucking eagle. Absolutely nothing is going to top this, but that doesn't mean it's time to stop!

Gamer Tee && Wooden hylian shield = Gamer Tee - LoZ themed. The tee replaces your Keep Calm and Hit Reset shirt with one depicting the Triforce.

Gamer Tee && Assassin's blade = Gamer Tee - AC themed. This one simply depicts the main logo for the assassin's creed games. The Alchemiter seems to lack the snarkiness necessary for joke t-shirts.

Gamer Tee && Avenging Spirit Crossbow = Authentic assassin's hood. Now we're talking.

Gamer Tee && Authentic assassin's hood = Authentic assassin's hoodie. A little more casual and modern, you like it better this way.

Copy of Portal && Sneakers = Long-Fall Sneakers. Exactly what you expected, using a copy of the game Portal you quickly alchemize something to help with any potentially long falls. The previous conversation with Jack made you slightly worried about the possibility.

Assassin's blade && Spider-Man poster = Plastic Spider-Man silly string launcher. Ok, this one is obviously one step removed.

Authentic assassin's hood || Assassin's blade && Silly string launcher = Authentic Spider-Man web shooter! You're actually not certain if the crossbow is still number one, you get to literally be the Spider-Man now!

Someone seems to be pestering you, but the computer is so far away! Maybe that can be fixed.

Computer && Assassin's blade = Wrist mounted computing device. Like a cell phone, except as a watch. No, not like an apple watch!

Computer watch && Assassin's Hoodie = Hood mounted computer system. This one sort of turns on whenever you bring your hood up, like a heads up display. Though it sort of gets in the way given it covers your whole face. You grab an old headband from your luggage bag.

Computer watch && Headband = Head mounted computer system. Much more compact, this one extends like a scouter from the side of your headband. Though during all the computer tom foolery, god you need to stop using Rhys' vocabulary, your friend has ceased trying to pester you.

palpablePall began pestering **amazinglyAwesome**

PP: hey girl  
PP: think i got your disks  
PP: i mean it waas a couple enveloped but inside were definitely some disks  
PP: i got both these things installed and idk what to do  
PP: far as i can tell non of my narratore programs sync with this window  
PP: alright youre busy  
PP: whatever  
PP: i get it no time to elp the disabled ill just click randomly til i get it  
PP: hah got it without you see if i ever ask you for anything  
PP: also im kidding you know i love you girl  
PP: just getting your game on and all  
PP: ill see you soon though  
PP: well i mean you know what i mean

palpablePall ceased pestering [amazinglyAwesome](#)

MARY: BE THE OTHER FRIEND

You are now the other friend. Though not the one who recently attempted to pester Mary. However you are currently in the middle of a conversation with that particular friend.

palpablePall has shared a file: [heyrichkidisthisyou.jpg](#)

PA: Well PP, it does appear by your screenshot that you have connected to me  
PA: Congratulations are in order I say  
PP: sweetosity  
PP: my random typig skills grow better by thye day  
PA: Though you do still make many typos  
PP: jeez dude harsh af  
PP: you realize im blind over here right  
PP: blamin me for not seeing when i maske typos  
PP: being all ableist as shit right now bro  
PA: No I didn't mean...  
PA: Ok, look PP  
PA: Wait, I just said look, I didn't mean look like that...  
PA: Sigh  
PA: I do hope you accept my sincerest apologies for this transgression  
PP: weow dude chill  
PP: you are too easy t oset off with the pc stuff  
PA: Please, madam, if you wouldn't toy with my emotions  
PP: like im totally storing this iunfo for future trolling  
PP: just fyi

PA: You are cruel...

PP: so whats i gotta do in this game

PA: Well for AP I had to place several contraptions

PA: From which he elicited his entry into the game

PA: I was also given the ability to redesign his home as I needed

PA: So I suppose the best option would be to deploy all my own machinery

PA: And one moment my housekeeper desires word with me

RHYS: STRIFE!

You size up Jeeves, he's a feeble old man who only desires to serve you dutifully. Why ever would you need to engage him in combat? Is that something less wealthy people do with their caretakers?

RHYS: STRIFE THE OLD MAN THIS INSTANT

Oh very well.

>Accept: You graciously accept the tea set upon a silver platter which Jeeves calmly offers you, setting the ensemble on your desk.

>Appraise: You tell Jeeves he is doing a wonderful job as your housekeeper, and you are thankful for his dutiful service. Jeeves simply nods and informs you he's just in it for the paycheck. Fair enough, you agree that you would feel the same, sharing a small chuckle with him.

>Ask: You ask Jeeves if he managed to retrieve your arms, as previously instructed. He nods and hands you your dueling rapier. You stow it in your Strife Specibus under duelingkind, then end this charade of a combat engagement.

RHYS: GET BACK TO ASHE

PP: so how do i deploy the whatsits

PP: is it as hotkey or something

PP: or is there a button i click to drop them all at once

PP: you there bro

PA: Apologies, I had to deal with my housekeeper

PA: There should be a menu at the top of the screen

PP: right sure

PA: Yes one of the icons will open what's called a 'Phrenalia Registry'

PP: yes definitely

PA: The machines are located in there, you simply click and drag then into my home

PA: You haven't been following at all because you can't see the screen...

PP: you seemed to be on a roll and didnt want to interrupt

PA: So...might I remind you of the apocalyptic urgency with which we both must find ourselves entering the game

PP: you might

PP: but urgency dont make my eyes work

You take a moment to pour a cup of tea as you pointedly stare at the reddening sky through your window.

PA: We're going to die today, I assume

PA: A fatal flaw, a weakness in our group

PA: It was a good run all things considered

PA: Farewell, Ms. Winter

PP: fuck off dude i got this

PP: random typing skills remember

ASHE: RANDOMLY TYPE LIKE A MADWOMAN POSSESSED

Several minutes of typing and clicking later, and you're reasonably certain you've finished. Not out of actually knowing what you've managed to do, but rather due to Rhys informing you he believes he has everything.

PA: This may be worse than just waiting for the apocalypse

PA: M.C. Escher would become confused navigating this place

PA: You've managed to turn my mansion into a fractal drawn by an epileptic 2nd grader

PA: I would be impressed, if following the downright Lovecraftian style impossible geometry wasn't giving me a headache

PA: Also apparently the Alchemiter can affix to the ceiling seemingly in all defiance of gravity

PA: Once again, bravo

PP: im detecting unsavory levels of harshness from your statements

PP: i can assure yu i see nothing wrong with my design whatsoever

PP: may6be your feeble brain just cant handle my genius

PP: also nice job insulting kids with epilepsy

PA: I elect not to respond to that

PA: Instead I shall begin my own procedure to enter the game

PA: ...I shall need Jeeves to fetch a ladder and headache relief

purpotedAskance ceased pestering palpablePall

RHYS: ENTER

You make your way to the Cruxtruder, having already opened due to random, flying debris in the scuffle your server instigated, as such you grab a neatly dispensed dowel, captchaloguing it or a nearby bust of some ancient dude. One of many affluent art installations your grandmother had placed around her mansion.

Quickly dashing through the house, leaping over, or sliding under, various non euclidean geometries that used to be halls and corridors. In your foyer you find your pre punched card, quickly captchaloguing it or a priceless vase.

The Totem Lathe found its way into the extensive walk in pantry in your kitchen, somehow she managed to remove, then recreate the door sideways, then open it and insert the lathe. The machinations of the blind randomness astound you. You select the dowel, and pre punched card, the bust and vase are erased as per your or modus. You grab the totem or a can of beans and begin making your way back to your room, where the Alchemiter awaits on the ceiling. You take a shortcut through your grandmother's study, youth rolling through a window in the middle of the room.

A brief flash lights up behind you, the glowing orb that had been drifting in your wake had collided with a rather esoteric taxidermy project, a mighty, though stuffed eagleope. Half eagle, half elk, 0% antelope...hey you don't name these things. It seems the newfound instability of the house, combined with rolling through the misplaced window, destabilized it from its wall mount and apparently this thing is now your sprite. Brilliant.

In your room, Jeeves presents you with the requested ladder, however regrets to inform you the bathroom has become a second kitchen and he could not locate the medicine cabinet. Again, absolutely astounding.

A moment, and a lad scramble, later you're holding the totem up to the Alchemiter pedestal as you press the button. The device prints a stand holding a teapot, and as you reach for it an errant fractalized set of wall material collapses and bumps your ladder, sending you tumbling down. The teapot in your grasp collides with the floor and shatters, engulfing your house in a bright light.

## RHYS: EXAMINE SURROUNDINGS

Sadly Rhys is currently at the bottom of a ladder, unconscious, so he cannot examine anything. One thing he could certainly do is be someone else, so that is exactly what he does. Mary yells as she expertly performs a sidelong roll, firing a barrage of eagle-tipped arrows at the massive hulk of a creature. It retaliates by slamming an oversized cross down, though she twips out of the way with a quick shot of webbing.

## MARY: STRIFE THE HECK OUT OF THE OGRE

>Assault: You fire another hefty clip of magical projectiles, the ogre is bleeding from several puncture wounds though still stands.

>Avoid: You deftly dodge several slow swings of the massive cross, countering with even more arrows between rolls.



>Amaze: Channeling your deep-seeded connection to the Amazing Spider-Man, which is to say you were just named after a character, you shoot a line of web at a nearby tower of piping and swing around it, gaining momentum before impacting the back of the ogre's head with your heels. The blow is enough to fell the wounded beast and it explodes into a small shower of grist.

As you collect your spoils, your headband dings a notification as Jack messages you.

aggressivelyPassive began pestering amazinglyAwesome

AP: excellent finisher

AA: Thanks. That guy was a lot tougher than the imps.

AA: Also he had antlers.

AA: Last time these guys changed aesthetic was when you prototyped the Bible.

AP: i prototyped nothing, the bible was forced upon me

AA: Right, well my point being if these guys got something new, does that mean Rhys successfully made it into the game.

AP: not sure, he hasn't answered me for a good minute

AP: i really wanted him to drop the designix thing so i could go all punch crazy and get some awesome stuff

AP: also it's sort of necessary, i've got imps standing menacingly around my house and no real way to defend myself

AA: Do you have anything that could loosely fit your Strife Specibus in the meantime?

AP: i...um...never assigned a specibus

AP: my mother was kind of against it

AA: Well hop to it!

AA: These guys mean business and anything's better than nothing.

AP: all im carrying that could remotely be considered a weapon is a novelty letter opener

AA: I mean...perhaps you could assign it as dagger or knifekind?

AA: What options does it present when you select it?

AA: You there?

AA: Jack...?

AP: well it did not auto-select daggerkind

AA: What happened? You spaced for a few minutes.

AP: an imp with wings leaped upon my balcony and i panic assigned the letter opener card to my specibus to fight it

AP: but the opener was paired with its base, a hunk of glass in the shape of a rock, like a sword in the stone thing

AP: and now i'm apparently using embeddedswordkind

AA: Embedded sword?

AA: What does that even entail?

AP: i would guess...swords in stones...

AP: why is it always me

AA: What became of the imp?

AP: the glass rock is a good few pounds of solid glass and i thumped him good with it

AP: he became grist

AA: Weird and awkward specibii aside, at least you beat him.

AA: Perhaps you can find...something good to fit it when you get a chance to alchemize.

AP: if moneybags would hurry and answer me

AP: DONAHUUUUUE!

AA: I'm gonna check in with Ashe and see if she knows what happened to Rhys, and probably start connecting with her.

AP: i will, i suppose, continue on your house

AP: despite the lack of work being done on mine

AP: >:(

aggressivelyPassive ceased pestering amazinglyAwesome

MARY: HASSLE THE DISABLED

amazinglyAwesome began pestering palpablePall

AA: Hey Ashe, ready to enter the game?

PP: totally girl you know it

PP: though i thnik i killed rich boy

AA: Wait WHAT?

PP: chillax homes

PP: i jus t mean he aint responding to mne

PP: like i definitely did everything perfect

PP: and he was all complaining about my artistic lack of vision

PP: that came out wrong

AA: Ashe what happened!?

PP: hes just been quiet

PP: so like

PP: maybe he died

PP: like wait lemme screenshot this sburb thing

palpablePall has shared a file: [restinpepperoni.jpg](#)

AA: You really scared me there.

AA: But he just seems to be sleeping, and judging by what I can see out of his window he has successfully entered the medium.

PP: cool beans i aint caused no manslaughter

PP: i mean like yet

PP: still time

AA: Silence your silliness.

AA: I'm connecting to you.

You access the Sburb interface on your headband computer, since you are out exploring your planet, and select Ashe as your client. The screen boots up and reveals a slightly sparse room, no posters or other paraphernalia on the walls, a four poster bed centered against one wall, a wardrobe to one side and a computer desk to the other. Various stuffed animals dot the room, most of them canines of some description.

#### MARY: DEPLOY ARTIFACTS

You wouldn't exactly refer to them as artifacts...though you do neatly and carefully arrange them in the available corners and open wall space within the room. You even throw in the punch designix, perhaps with proper guidance she can alchemize some rather neat dog-themed items?

AA: I believe that about does it, though I did notice a few extra items in the phrenalia registry.

AA: But given your disability I won't go through the rigamarole of having you test out unknown technology.

AA: I shall have Jack look into his and see if he can deploy them for me.

PP: did you destory any of my house

PP: i hear thats a thing usually

AA: No, judging by your screenshot you did enough house destroying for the both of us.

PP: everyones a critic these days

You give Ashe a heavily detailed account of what to do and in what order so she sets about the task with the efficiency of a well informed blind person. Which isn't that efficient all things considered, but at least better than a completely uninformed person with sight.

The sprite orb floats around aimlessly as Ashe feels around the Totem Lathe controls, catching the attention of Ashe's husky who begins barking at the flashing ball. Though your viewport doesn't convey sound, you believe Ashe is attempting to calm him as he jumps around excitedly. You cringe, fully expecting what comes next and are completely unsurprised when the dog manages to leap into the orb and with a bright flash it is replaced by a floating, stylized dog head. Ashe seems utterly oblivious, of course, and goes back to working now that her canine has 'calmed down.'

## MARY: WHERE EXACTLY ARE YOU?

You take a moment to examine your surroundings, you're in a village. The huts are formed from discarded piping and clockworks and are inhabited by humanoid lizards wearing victorian era outfits. They have not yet engaged you in conversation, though have been staring at you...expectantly?...for some time now.

Back at your computer, you see Ashe engaged in the act of throwing darts at a dart board atop her alchemiter. Apparently her task was a little more complicated than eating cherries, and while her accuracy seems fairly bad you're certain she can get it without your aid.

You take some more time to explore the village, eventually coming across an overly large iron gear blocking what appears to be a cave. The reptilian consorts close in slightly, as if they were waiting for you to reach the cave.

AA: I don't really know what you guys want me to do here...

The statement was only met by a few of the creatures flicking their tongues in your direction. You take another peek at your computer, Ashe is now flipping out and gesticulating angrily at the dart board which apparently still has not been hit. She's got this.

Maybe this door is part of your quest to be a Witch of Time or whatever? You thrust your hands out and make contact with the surface, nothing happens. The single, short hiss from a member of the crowd comes off as just a tad bit mocking.

## MARY: CONCENTRATE AND DO THE TIMEY THING

You close your eyes and dig deep into your consciousness for whatever connection to your class you apparently have and give another mighty thrust, slamming your palms against the gear. At first nothing happens, and the impudent reptile gives you another hiss. But then the gear begins to rust, eventually becoming completely rusted over, then begins to crumble ending up as nothing more than an ancient pile of dust.

You stare at your hands in amazement as various hisses of wonder erupt around you, it's like you fast forwarded the huge iron gear thousands of years. Behind it lies a small cave containing a spirograph portal. Your second gate.

You stop to check in on Ashe before going through, she has the board pinned to the ground and is angrily slamming darts in point blank. Third one's the charm and must hit a bullseye because a white light fills your interface, shortly thereafter the view through one of Ashe's windows looks dramatically different. Bravo, old girl!

But for now you've got some progress to make yourself! You leap through the gate and instantly find yourself dozens of feet in the air over Jack's house. The Long-Fall Sneakers take the impact of your landing but you still need a moment to shake off the

panic. You appear to have landed on a makeshift balcony where all the game devices are set up. Jack is staring with awe from a connecting doorway.

AP: wow that was incredible!

AA: Hey thanks! It was also terrifying.

You drop a small stack of punched cards.

AA: Also here, I couldn't catalogue the design, too big, but I went ahead and punched a card for every hard copy game, movie, and poster I had.

AA: I didn't have many...what with the advent of digital mediums and all...

AP: no this is great! thanks so much

AP: whatever rhys is busy with, he isn't helping me at all

AP: but at least i can get armed and start fighting these creatures for real

AA: Yeah, that's gonna be an issue.

AA: You need to get to your first gate and apparently I need to reach your third.

AA: And Ashe showed me that Rhys is apparently unconscious right now.

AP: well we'll wake his butt up when we get there

AP: for now lets do some of this alchemizing!

AA: Unfortunately you're kind of low on grist. Since you haven't started fighting.

AA: Also I need to get some cards punched for your...weapon. And anything else you want to customize.

AA: So first off I'm gonna head home, punch those for you, and also get you to check out anything new in our registry.

AP: ugh fine...

AP: ms gets-to-have-all-fun

AP: >:(

AP: DONA-

AA: Shush!

AA: Also, have you opened my gift yet? I bet we could use that.

AP: oh no i forgot what with all the distractions

AA: All the hubbub.

AP: no

AA: The hullabaloo?

AP: stop

AP: \_ \_-

AA: Open it, you dingus!

JACK: BE THE DINGUS, OPEN THE BOX

Oh hell yes! Inside is an incredibly well designed replica Spider-Man mask! No, wait, there's a letter of authentication! This is the ACTUAL mask from the first movie!

AP: mary is this...

AA: It is indeed.

AP: i don't even know what to say!

AP: what is an adequate comment for this situation?

AP: this thing is completely amazing

AA: I knew you'd appreciate it. That was like the first movie I shared with you.

AP: my sincerest thanks couldn't ever be enough

AA: Oh stop.

AP: no seriously, this is equivalent to like a life debt

AP: i am indebted to you forever now

AA: Silence! Just accept your gift dude.

AA: You're like my oldest friend, and you know I hated how much your mother hid you away from everything cool.

AA: So this commemorates the moment I got you out of that.

You quickly don the mask, sadly it is a little big and saggy for your small, teenage head. Mary poorly stifles a chuckle at how silly it looks so you quickly strike some poses, mimicking Toby Maguire figuring out how to shoot webs, and the dam breaks sending Mary into a laughing fit. After she calms down, you share a hug then she turns to your equipment to get herself back through your gates. You notice a blush after the hug, but attribute it to the laughing.

#### MARY: ALCHEMIZE SOMETHING TO HEAD HOME

Long-Fall Sneakers & Iron-Man DVD = Long-Fall Jet Boots. Your superhero themed arsenal grows ever more awesome. You equip the jet propelled flying shoes and abscond back through Jack's second portal, then retrace your steps to your first exit portal which spits you out in a rather well designed room. Apparently Jack has been quite busy, considering he has much less to do, and has successfully built your house up and around the gates, creating elegant rooms for safe landings around each.

You hassle Jack for the captcha codes on a few of his items, and get him to not only reorganize your devices in a more sane manner but check what new things are available.

The Jumper Block Extension attaches to the Alchemiter, the punch card shunts stick to it and appear to alter the Alchemiter based on the punched cards inserted, if an upgrade is feasibly possible. A few of the items you try result in replacing the scanner with various devices, or replacing the pad with various busts. Not necessarily useful, but if you could find a way to captchalogue the other devices maybe you could create one compact device that does it all.

There's also a CD for a program called gristorret that allows players to share in the grist hordes of all other players. It also seems to collect extra grist, which until now has been wasted on your relatively underdeveloped grist cache limits.

You fly back through the 2 gates and deposit yet more cards for Jack, and hand him a copy of Gristtorrent. After he finishes booting up the program and beginning the siphoning process, you bid him farewell and continue on your journey through his third gate.

## JACK: MAKE THIS HAPPEN

You're doing this, you're making a reference to a webcomic that you haven't read, but have heard of tangentially through Mary.

Hoodie && Iron-Man DVD = Iron Man Armor, Teen Edition (top half). You hit gold almost immediately...if not for your currently tiny cache of grist, you can't afford it! You do however store the info in your mind for later

Novelty Letter Opener && Assassin's Creed Game = Novelty wrist-mounted letter opener, AC branded. Ok, let's try the other way.

Novelty Letter Opener || Assassin's Creed Game = Wrist-mounted miniature excalibur sword with attachable launcher for small, glass rocks. Ok, you need something to specifically tell the Alchemiter what you're going for, luckily you planned for this with Mary.

Assassin's Creed Game && Embeddedswordkind Specibus Card = Assassin's Used Saber. Appears to be a saber-style weapon stuck in a metal breastplate. The odd shape and hollow nature of the breastplate really throw off the balance, this specibus is gonna be annoying.

Legend of Zelda && Embeddedswordkind Specibus Card = Time-Tested Master Sword. Ok, this one's a bit better. You recognize the master sword design, within a basic pedestal. Much like the one used in Ocarina of Time to age Link. The base is symmetrical and weighty making the whole thing function like a hammer with a bladed shaft and a rather small handle. The letter opener had an extra long handle and rounded glass rock, though it's small size made it inefficient for fighting. Maybe if you had a more real version of it though.

Time-Tested Master Sword || Novelty Letter Opener = **The Excaliboulder!** This is more like it, your specibus may be weird, but it can still hold some cool stuff. A real excalibur looking blade lodged in a round, stone boulder. The long handle and wider blade make it much easier to swing, you would probably say it's akin to a greathammer if you knew medieval weaponry, with the added benefit of slicing anything too close to smash.

Excaliboulder && Hoodie = Authentic plate armor. Honestly not that exciting of a change, though it was what you were going for. But you do have more grist now that the torrent program has been working...

Plate Armor && Iron-Man DVD && Long-Fall Jet Boots && Authentic Web Shooter || Gamer Tee = The Iron Spider-Knight, light armor edition. You throw a T-Shirt in there hoping it lightens the plate a bit, which seems to work. Beyond that though **THIS THING RULES!** Traditional medieval armor, the mail chestpiece and pants have

Spider-Man designs, while the plate arm and leg guards look like Iron Man armor. The boots have the flight and long-fall capability of the jets, however instead of repulsors the gloves come equipped with web shooters. You ditch the helmet in favor of upgrading your totally awesome gift.

Spider-Man Mask || Teen Sized Ballcap = Teen Sized Spider-Man Mask. A perfect fit, and a surprisingly comfortable material.

Teen-Sized Mask && Jack's Computer = Computer-Hud Spider Mask. Donning this, you find the eye lenses now display a heads up display of your computer desktop, it even copied your harddrive as it was.

You think you're as decked out in superhero gear as you can currently get, and really pulling off this whole knight theme if you do say so yourself. Didn't Jesus say you were a Knight of Blood or something...You mean the game abstraction currently taking the form of Jesus, there definitely isn't an actual Jesus.

Maybe you should find him and clarify...Oh no...you hope your mom hasn't found him.

#### JACK: FIND JESUS

She has. Once you show yourself downstairs she excitedly invites you to talk with her 'new friend' and correct any silly ideas you may be having. She also scolds you and tells you to take off that devilish costume in front of the Lord!

Jessusprite: That's alright ma'am. I have no qualms against what he's wearing.  
Jessusprite: Your son is also a very bright and special boy, please don't be hard on him and practice forgiveness.

Your mom agrees and takes back her scolding, you facepalm at the hypocrisy. She insists that Jesus give you a first hand lesson on His teachings.

Jessusprite: I'm sorry ma'am, I do not have a copy of the Bible at the moment.  
Jessusprite: Though I do have much to discuss with young Jack.  
Jessusprite: No, no. That's quite alright, I don't need a copy right now. Please, I insist don't touch me wi-

There's a flash as the Bible is thrust into Jesussprite's lap, you groan. Your sprite is now twice as biblical! What does that even mean, will it be two Jesus'...Jesii? Unfortunately no, the sprite prototyping system draws inspiration from a different part of the Bible for the second prototyping...

Your sprite casually twirls his pitchfork, two massive, spiral horns jutting from his forehead. It still looks like Jesus, but also much eviler...



Jescifersprite: I really don't want to alarm you. Either of you. But I fear I may be at least partially Satan now.

Jescifersprite: *And we're gonna have one HELL of a fucking good time, bitch!*

A devilish grin spreads over the sprite's face. Your mom's eyes roll up and she faints, falling backwards onto the floor. You attempt, and succeed, a x2 Facepalm Combo.

RHYS: WAKE UP ALREADY!

You slowly blink your eyes open, you have no idea how long you were sleeping but it feels like an exceedingly long time. You immediately notice the flashing alert on your computer and read the message.

palpablePall began pestering purportedAskance

PP: hey moneybags when you wake up i need to chat with you

PP: though idk if ill be awake when that happens

PP: shit sucks i guess

PP: if thats the case then come over to my room and shake me awake or something

PP: and dont stare directly into the blue planet

PP: mega eye strain

PP: trust me i would know

palpablePall ceased pestering purportedAskance

You glance out of your single window at the vast expanse of Prospit's moon below you. Golden skyscrapers line every inch of its surface. You shield your eyes as you glance carefully upwards, the bright, blue orb of Skaia floats close enough that you could reach out and touch a cloud if you tried. Across the moon you see the second spire, topped with a golden orb much like your own, containing the room of your fellow Prospit dreamer. You somehow understand all this information, despite having no idea what's exactly going on. You have a multitude of fuzzy memories, seemingly from two different lives.

RHYS: CLOUD HOP YOUR WAY TO ASHE'S ROOM

An errant cloud drifts quite close to your spire, with perfect timing you could leap onto it...

Except clouds are mostly water vapor and you fall right through, luckily though you can and always have been able to fly. You stop your descent and fly over to Ashe's window, inside is the girl herself passed out on her bed.

## RHYS: GIVE ASHE A HEARTY WAKE UP SMACKDOWN

You couldn't possibly bring yourself to hurt your friend! Instead you give her unconscious form a light, and ineffectual poke. When it fails to elicit wakefulness you abandon the endeavor and let her remain asleep, for now. Perhaps if there's an emergency you can wake her up then. Instead you head out to explore Prospit, drawing the attention of the white carapaced citizens, who gaze at you in wonder. You humbly accept their awed expressions with a few well timed waves as you glide through the city streets, nothing of any real importance seems to be going on here right now.

RHYS: IF YOU'RE NOT GONNA DO ANYTHING THEN BE SOMEONE WHO  
WILL!

Fine, you are once again Jack. You are busy ignoring some rather silly advice from your sprite to fly to your last gate and beat the game immediately. What foolish gamer tries to take on the final boss at level one? Well...speedrunners maybe, but you aren't that good. You are currently exploring the neon urban jungle of your planet, the bright lights and technological flora seem to be a good mask for a dingy underbelly as you hesitantly glance down a few alleys. The city seems populated by a race of humanoid crows, all in relative poverty.

Suddenly, feathery limbs wrap around you and pull you into an alleyway! You flail about, attempting to ward off your attackers, giving a crow a good smack on the snout in the process. It gives you a wide-eyed stare in response, prompting you to profusely apologize despite the fact they assaulted you first. Your compassion moves another of the crows to open a small hatch and invite you down a secret tunnel.

Through a series of various caws you learn...absolutely nothing, you don't speak crow. However documents within the secret base beneath the street reveal the crows engaged in some kind of rebellion against the Raven elites. You're really not one for politics, especially among birds, but you do sympathize with the poor crow class. After explaining their plight, the crow resistance leader brings you to an iron door. On the front a red symbol is painted, you vaguely think it looks like a crying eye? Or maybe a bleeding cut? Either way it doesn't necessarily bode well for you, even so the leader urges you to open it. As you take the handle, the red symbol glows and you hear a locking mechanism click, allowing the door to swing open freely. To a chorus of cheerful caws, you peek inside and see your second gate! You bid farewell to your new avian allies and abscond through the gate, engaging your jet boots to slow your descent into the apparent madhouse below you.

Rhys probably lived in a mansion at some point, but so many pieces had been removed, flipped, changed position, or had misshapen parts added that the structure appeared more like an abstract art piece than a house. You knock on the sideways front door and are greeted by a blue, ghostly version of what you imagine an old butler looks like. Though he also had antlers and wings...yet another bird person you suppose.

Jeeagleopesprite: I'm sorry, sir. Master Rhys isn't taking visitation at this time.

AP: oh hey, you're his butler right?

Jeeagleopesprite: I am his housekeeper, Jeeves.

Jeeagleopesprite: SCREEEEEEEEEEEE!

Jeeagleopesprite: Apologies for that, sir.

AP: did you just screech like an eagle?

Jeeagleopesprite: It seems to happen.

AP: so where's rhys? I need him to get back to work on the game

Jeeagleopesprite: He was injured, and is currently sleeping.

Jeeagleopesprite: I dare not disturb him for fear of exacerbating any damage.

AP: thats bull! he's got to wake up and get to work or were all screwed i think

Jeeagleopesprite: Believe me, sir, as a sprite I am quite privy to the role Master Rhys must play.

Jeeagleopesprite: Though as his faithful housekeeper, I have his well being to look out for.

AP: fine! can you at least tell me what kind of bomb went off in this place?

Jeeagleopesprite: I believe that would be the work of madam Winter.

AP: we...we put a blind girl in his server position...didn't we...

Jeeagleopesprite: Quite right, sir.

You yet again give your face a good palming. You decide to web zip your way up the variously misshapen structures, hoping to get a higher vantage point before you fly right up to the next gate. If rich boy wants to sleep through the entire game, fine, the rest of you will just beat it without him. Though as you make your way up, the sound of activating jet boots catches your attention as Mary drifts down from Rhys' 4th gate. Oh man, perfect time to surprise her with your sweet new gear. As she deals with a rather familiar sounding spiel from Rhys' butler, you use your web lines to casually drift down behind her, upside down, just like Spider-Man would do. After a few choice words, she huffs as Jeeves shuts the door then turns around and is stunned seeing you hanging there.

MARY: FULFILL YOUR DESTINY, BE MARY JANE.

You approach the hanging super hero slowly and he speaks.

AP: so...i was in the neighborhood

This is exactly how you imagined this happening...Ok maybe one of two things is different. You're in a weird abstract game world and now a rainy alley in New York, also he just sort of showed up and didn't even fight off any crooks...But you can't resist your destiny. You walk right up to him.

AA: You are...amazing...

AP: the gear? yeah it's pretty great, though i'm not fully convinced on the knight theme yet

AA: But...you are!

AP: what? hold on, are we quoting that scene some more?

AP: is that what's happening?

AA: Do I get to say thank you this time?

AP: mary are you paying attention?

AP: hello?

This is the moment, you reach out towards his mask.

AP: hold on, a second...mary, wait

You grasp the edge of the mask and pull it just far enough down to reveal his lips, which you eagerly meet with yours. As a slightly socially awkward teen, you have no idea what you're doing, and Spider-Man isn't helping with all that flailing around. Your eyes widen as a bit of sense returns to you...there's only one person you know who would be in a Spider-Man mask, and suddenly you find yourself flailing as well which results in the both of you falling over into a heap.

AP: mary what in the world was that!?

AA: OH MY GOD, JACK!

AA: I'm sorry, I just...the mask and the lines and...destiny, Jack. DESTINY!

AP: what destiny!? you planned that?

AA: No I didn't, I mean...my destiny as Mary Jane, Jack!

AP: that sounds utterly ridiculous, also you kissed me!

AA: I know, I just, I'm...I'm sorry!

AA: Can we just forget it happened?

AP: i doubt i can

AP: first kiss and from my best friend?

AP: kind of memorable...

AA: Well...if it's any consolation it was mine too.

AA: I guess we traded.

AP: ha...well i suppose

AP: at least i learned not to ambush you with any references to super hero movies

AA: No, feel free to. Maybe just vet the scene a bit beforehand?

AA: We can avoid any unplanned kissing easier that way.

AP: saying unplanned implies there might be planned kissing

AA: Don't psychoanalyze me Jack!

AA: I mean...did you...want there to be planned kissing...?

AP: um...do you?

AA: I don't know...maybe.

AP: i will...think on it

AP: it's not a hard no, but i do have to consider how all this affects me  
AP: like in relation to the rest of my life rollercoaster that keeps hitting new loops  
AA: Yeah. Yeah, I get it...  
AA: So, cool suit by the way.  
AP: thanks! it's pretty sweet  
AP: i think i'm gonna head up to the next gate though  
AA: Right yeah, should keep moving right?  
AA: I guess we'll reconvene at Ashe's house? I have been building it up in my spare time so we'll have landing spots.  
AP: awesome, see you then  
AA: Yeah!

Jack takes off for the third gate and you head towards the fifth. As you appear somewhere on Rhys' planet you catch up with Ashe, who you've been trying to guide through alchemy. She has somehow managed to create an unholy abomination of random items fused together.

amazinglyAwesome began pestering palpablePall

AA: Is that the product of randomly typing on the designix?  
PP: hell yeah girl  
PP: aint it a thing of beauty  
AA: Um...sure? What is it?  
PP: hell if i know feels like some unholy abomination of random crap  
PP: also i think i accidentally captachlogued the toem thinger  
PP: trying to pick up some totems and i anded it accidentally  
PP: i tried to drop it and it melted  
AA: Is it...the pile of green slime?  
PP: the hells green  
AA: Your Lathe is still there, and it happens to be next to a small pile of slime.  
PP: weird i know my modus accepted it  
PP: i thought trying to grab my own machines mighta like destabilizeds that shit or something  
AA: Can you show me what you did?

You drop a cruxite dowel by Ashe so she can captchalogue it. She promptly steps forward and trips over the dowel then angrily waves her arms about.

PP: damn dowel thingsd rolling all round  
PP: gkeep getting under my feet when im not looking  
AA: ...Right, yes. Thought while it is there, you can perhaps use it for and-ing?  
PP: dont worry about the b;lind girl or anything  
AA: I'm sorry...

PP: im jut yanking your chain not like you puta dowel there on purpose or anything

PP: theyre round and roll around soemthime and i cant always keep track of them

PP: so this is all i did

You're thankful the conversation topic shifts before the guilt can overwhelm you. Ashe captchalogues the dowel and Totem Lathe, the dowel disappears as expected though the Lathe remains. Ashe then removes the resulting cards and shows them to you, one is a dowel while the other appears to be a greyed out image of the Totem Lathe almost like it both successfully and unsuccessfully captchalogued.

AA: Can you turn the cards around please?

She does so and the Lathe does indeed have a valid captcha, you excitedly note it down and have her repeat the process with the other machines. You quickly punch some cards with these codes then try using them in your punch card shunts, this ends up adding a Lathe and Dowel dispenser to the Alchemiter. You deploy a grist torrent CD and instruct Ashe to run it, a bit of screenshot based guidance later and she's activated torrents for all of your grist types. Shortly after you have access to enough to deploy some of the more expensive machines, have her ghost-captchalogue those and show you the codes. The upgrades result in an Alchemiter with an integrated punch card extension, far more compact than the entire jumper block, and a holo-lathe able to scan cards then ready a holographic carved totem for alchemization without even needing to actually carve or punch anything. Though a dowel dispensary and designix are both also located within the Alchemiter now if eventually necessary.

You quickly deploy the necessary jumper block for Ashe, then send her the codes for upgrading her own Alchemiter. Once it's ready, and much more user friendly, you tell her she only needs to stick two or more cards into the holopad slots and hit the main button to combine them.

AA: Even a blind person should get the hang of it!

PP: hey i resemble that remark!

PP: no ut i got this do yout thing girlk

AA: Jack and I are actually on our way, we should arrive after some nebulous task on Rhys' planet.

AA: And here's some codes for a few cool gadgets.

PP alrighyt ill see you guys soon then

You share codes for the long-fall jet boots, web shooters, headband computer, and a couple different types of weapons. You also help her properly punch cards for a few items she's collected around her home. Ashe gets to work as you make your way through the veritable forest of criss-crossing strings you've found yourself in.

ASHE: DO IT! ALCHEMIZE!

Teen Girl Outfit && Long-Fall Jets = Probably your clothes with integrated jet boots. Your shoes do seem to activate and begin levitating you, however you are unable to verify this fact due to...unforeseen circumstances.

Cane && Web Shooters = Maybe a Spider-Man themed cane? It fits into your specibus and may even have neat functions though you can't find them.

Unholy Abomination && Cane = This cane feels kind of wrong, weirdly angled and uncomfortable to hold.

Some Sword from your Grandpa's Room && Probably Spider-Man Cane = A cane with built in blade, probably still Spider-Man themed.

Headband Computer && Shades = Shades. You're assuming they have an integrated computer HUD but hell if you know.

Weird Random Cane && Snowman's Chew Toy = Weird cane with a comfortable, rubberized handle. No idea what this thing does, but at least you can wield it now.

Spider-Man? Canesword? && Comfortable Random Cane = **A weird, random cane...sword?** Honestly when you try to draw it, the blade feels nothing like a sword. In fact it feels different every time you draw it. Once it even sprays a burst of sticky strings you hope is spider webs around it. Often it doesn't even feel like it should fit inside the sheathe part of the cane.

Unholy Cane-bomination && All of your friend's weapon cards = Basically the same thing, though you figure every weapon Mary brought is now integrated into its randomized arsenal.

You figure that's enough fooling around, you made something that may pass as a weapon sometimes and prevented death by falling, so it's about time you actually get to work on your quest. Luckily Mary has kindly set up a guide rail up a staircase leading right to your first gate.

On the other side of the portal you see absolutely nothing, obviously. Though there are several whirring, slicing, and thumping sounds at varying distances away from you. There are also occasional ribbits. And even one familiar bark!

PP: snowman did you go ahead of me

Seeingeyesprite: Woof.

PP: im supposed to be the gamer here silly

PP: come here

You pat your thigh, beckoning to your beloved friend. The gesture is only met with a whine.

Seeingeyesprite: Woof! Whine.

PP: well fine then i guess i wont pet you

PP: do you know where im supposed to go

Seeingeyesprite: Woof!

The barks seem slightly further away, so you follow them and eventually enter some kind of building. Snowman leads you to a bank of computers and you fiddle with the keys and buttons.

There's a hum followed by a zap, then a rather deep ribbit. Snowman barks excitedly and makes quite a racket dashing around the room. You figure he just really enjoys having frogs to chase after and brought you to some kind of frog teleporting machine. Silly dog.

PP: i dont have time to summon a bunch of frogs for you to harass boy

PP: im supposed to explore this world or something

PP: find a gate and teleport to my homegirls house

Seeingeyesprite: Whine!

PP: shush now cmon

You make your way out of the building, Snowman takes one last glance at the white frog with rainbow-flashing eyes hopping back into the depths of the laboratory. His sprite programming told him just how significant that thing was. However his seeing-eye-dog programming told him he needed to protect his master, the Page of Space, from the incredibly deadly devices littering the Land of Traps and Frogs.

JACK: ARRIVE

You thank the weird, humanoid, bear-like creatures as you pass through the hatch marked with the symbol you've associated with Blood. You ready yourself for the fall and leap through the portal, landing suddenly in a rather well designed room. Stumbling slightly, you reorient yourself and activate pesterchum via your Spider-Hud.

aggressivelyPassive began pestering amazinglyAwesome

AP: i see you've been quite busy here

AA: I have basically completed a tower spiraling among all 7 gates.

AA: And good work on making it there, were you able to defeat the cyclopes?

AP: cyclopi?

AP: i haven't encountered any

AA: I suppose I am one stage further in the game, perhaps that has led to more difficult enemy variation.

AP: whoa wait i just realized, you're at the last gate right?

AA: Yes. And no.

AA: I am currently at home.

AA: Some of the stronger enemy types proved too difficult, so I returned home to upgrade my arsenal a bit now that we have far more and varied grist types.



AP: i should keep that idea in mind

AP: ashes planet looks...dangerous

AA: I actually haven't made it past Rhys' yet, but can see hers through the view window.

AA: There are certainly a lot of deadly looking traps.

AA: I fear for our impaired friend, though her dog will hopefully guide her safely.

AP: maybe we can figure out some guidance system?

AP: you think if we try mixing something with daredevil?

AA: That could work if I had any of his memorabilia, sadly it wasn't my favorite movie of all time.

AP: yeah i think i have first hand knowledge of your favorite movie

AA: Oh my god Jack...

AP: i mean i get it, you're mary jane watson after all and there i was being all spider-man

AP: it's fine, i'll redesign my outfit then you won't accidentally mistake me for any cool superheroes

AP: :P

AA: No, but Jack it...it wasn't entirely because you were Spider-Manning it up.

AA: Like that was sort of an excuse to do it.

AA: But I did know it was you...

AP: soooooo

AP: you made a conscious decision to kiss me because my costume gave you adequate cover to...

AP: make up an excuse if i flipped out?

AA: Sigh. Basically.

AA: You did sort of flip out a bit.

AP: if im putting this puzzle together correctly though, that means you actually wanted to kiss me

AP: or *want* to...?

AA: You're like my oldest friend Jack. We've shared in basically every aspect of camaraderie possible.

AA: We both love videogames, we both love superheroes, we chat so freely and openly.

AA: I didn't want to jeopardize that...

AA: But like the literal apocalypse happened, and we're borderline at the "last people on earth" scenario.

AA: So I took a chance on these feelings I've felt for a while now.

AA: No hold on, I don't mean that like "I wouldn't date you unless you were the last guy on Earth."

AA: Rather I was willing to ignore what was obviously a crush to keep the friendship, like hold out for other options rather than gamble this one.

AA: And now the only option is...Rhys, so I figured it's now or never.

AA: No, like wait I don't mean...

AA: CONSARNIT!  
AA: Why must this be so hard?  
AA: You know what I mean, right Jack?  
AA: Hello?  
AA: ...  
AP: i don't think i could date someone who seriously uses the word consarnit  
AP: XD  
AA: God damn it Jack!  
AA: I needed a laugh though, really snapping the tension there.  
AA: So like...  
AP: i do get it, you jumbled those sentences to all heck, but i get it  
AP: and maybe...i do like you too  
AP: maybe i'm not quite at that point?  
AP: though i could definitely sort of feel that point approaching  
AP: you've been 13 for a few months longer than me though so maybe its just a maturity and/or teenager thing  
AP: XP  
AA: You still need time to graduate from the position of manboy?  
AP: and fastest break-up in history  
AA: Shush.  
AP: hold on a sec, ashe's dog ghost is here and kinda going crazy  
AP: think he wants me to follow him  
AA: Wait, Snowman?  
AA: Is Ashe there?  
AA: Let me find her in the view window.  
AA: OH MY GOD, ASHE!

You hurriedly follow the Seeingeyesprite through the first gate and he leads you on a rather long, winding path past many deadly traps and the occasional hapless frog. Eventually he brings you to a scene as grisly as it is heart wrenching. The sprite floats in nervous circles, whimpering, nearby the bisected body of Ashe.

AP: i don't...  
AP: mary what...  
AA: I...I...I don't know Jack.  
AA: Maybe she tripped? Snowman wouldn't have been able to grab her, he's still a level one sprite and would have absorbed her.  
AA: Is  
AA: Is she?

The saw blade had neatly sliced through her waist, leaving her torso separated from her legs. There was a massive pool of blood surrounding her.

AP: what do i do mary  
AP: i should bury her right?  
AA: You gotta kiss her dude.  
AP: im sorry what...?  
AA: Wait, hold on.  
AA: Slightly better.  
AA: I said you gotta kiss her.  
AA: What, dangit.  
AA: What are you talking about, father!?  
AA: Right, yeah. This is MJ's dad.  
AA: In the darker green.  
AA: Dang, you kids got some spiciness going on in this chat log.  
AA: Oh. My. Good. Lord. GET OUT OF MY ROOM!  
AP: i...uh...um...  
AP: -\_-"  
AA: It's perfectly natural for a young teenager.  
AA: But as your father, this is probably a good time to bring up...  
AA: **The Talk.**  
AA: It is absolutely the single worst possible time for that.  
AP: uhhhhhhhhh  
AP: so what was that about kissing ashe?  
AP: also you guys are like sharing a keyboard...but also arguing with each other?  
AA: Nah man, I turned on speech detection, also you totally gotta smooch that corpse back to life.  
AA: Trust me, magical sprite tutorial knowledge.  
AA: This is one of the ways to trigger an extra life.  
AA: GET OUT OF HERE YOU CREEPY WEIRDO!  
AA: Major laceration detected, morphine administered.  
AA: Hey, young lady, watch the arrows.  
AA: But fine, I'll leave you two lovebirds alone.  
AA: OUT!  
AP: so...  
AA: Ugh, I guess if he's got all this dumb sprite knowledge.  
AA: You should probably do what he says.  
AP: if i kiss ashe's corpse this isn't going to be weird for you right?  
AA: It's going to be very weird for me, Jack.  
AA: But it's because you're kissing a bloody corpse.  
AA: Not because we're kind of dating.

You carefully lift the top half of Ashe's body and hesitantly pucker your lips before meeting her cold, blood smeared ones. You're not sure how long you need to do this, but ultimately nothing happens and you set her back down after an awkward few seconds. A grimace crosses your face as you try to spit the taste of blood out of your mouth. Unsure

of what happened, if anything, you are at least slightly relieved that her dog sprite has calmed down and become much more content. With his own brand of sprite knowledge, and Mary's Dad, if they think you did something right then you can't exactly complain.

AP: that was disturbing

AA: I may have changed my mind about kissing you ever again.

AP: i don't blame you

AP: did that even do anything

AA: She's still dead, and didn't like...respawn at her house or anything.

AA: Maybe if- WAIT, SNOWMAN NO!

AP: snowma-oh...

You turned around just in time to catch a bright light surrounding Ashe's body before it dissipated, revealing a ghostly, half-dog version of your friend.

Unseeingleyesprite: woof loverboy

AP: what in the hell...

Unseeingleyesprite: ima sprite now

Unseeingleyesprite: like duh

Unseeingleyesprite: thogh still blind which sucks

Unseeingleyesprite: also a dog

Unseeingleyesprite: also duh

Unseeingleyesprite: also also woof

AP: is...this the extra life?

AP: that somehow required kissing your corpse

Unseeingleyesprite: this is snowman doing his own thing

Unseeingleyesprite: probably some nebulous sprite reasoning

Unseeingleyesprite: that i havent been a spirte long enoug hto comprehend

Unseeingleyesprite: the corpsesmooch was to transfer my consciousness to my dream self

Unseeingleyesprite: THAT i have been a sprite long enough to comprehend

AP: dream self?

Unseeingleyesprite: oh shit yall havent woken up yet hgave you

Unseeingleyesprite: i think the bard did

Unseeingleyesprite: thats rich boy in sprite talkl

Unseeingleyesprite: speaking of not waking up and moneybvags

Unseeingleyesprite: i need to go get his butt out of bed

Unseeingleyesprite: and continue on the page of space quest

Unseeingleyesprite: cause i or maybe she aint getting off the moon anytime soon

Unseeingleyesprite: you two should really take a break and have a nap though in the meantime

Unseeingleyesprite: later weirdo

The Ashe-ghost floats away, leaving you still relatively stunned and incredibly confused. A minute later you finally check back in with Mary.

AA: Jack, what even...

AA: Answer!

AA: Or let me talk to her...it?

AA: Get off your butt!

AP: sorry, a lot of information there

AA: Well dish! What's going on?

AP: that's still ashes sprite

AP: real ashe is apparently on the moon?

AP: in some version of her called a dream self

AP: also she apparently won't make it back from said moon for a while

AP: so the ashe sprite is going to finish her gates for her and probably wake up donahue

AA: What moon? And what's a dream self?

AP you know everything i know about this situation

AP: ashe suggested we need to wake up, which seems to entail falling asleep

AA: After the emotional rollercoaster this has been, and the physical exertion of the game in general, a nap actually sounds great...

AP: i can agree

AA: See you later.

AP: yeah same

AA: Um...have a good nap, I...love you?

AP: i don't think we are at that level of relationship yet

AP: but will attribute it to a lack of knowledge and exhaustion

AA: Ugh, thanks. Sorry. G'night.

amazinglyAwesome ceased pestering aggressivelyPassive

ASHE: RESPAWN

There's no need to respawn if you've always been spawned. Spawned here in your bedroom in fact, on Prospit's moon. You're seated on your four-poster bed rubbing your temples, being dead was not a fun experience. Also suddenly gaining sight was also pretty jarring, you're not coherent enough to decide which was worse. You have your eyes squeezed shut to avoid looking at...anything, and you're wondering where exactly you are and what happened. Though, you do have a vague idea of where you are. This is the room from your dreams, which themselves are only vaguely remembered.

You slowly open your eyes and start to finally adjust to seeing for the first time since you were too young to remember, back when your grandfather accidentally left your carrier outside for an hour at high noon. Dumb, little, baby you apparently stared at

the sun long enough to permanently damage your eyes which developed into full on blindness in less than two years. He would always apologize even as he insisted he doesn't remember being in the temple for more than a minute or two. He also claims he was assaulted by some lass who tackled him from out of a magical portal, so you take his excuses with several grains of salt.

You stand up and examine the room, the layout matches what you know of your other room though you certainly hope it wasn't this bright of a color. Do people with sight just like to flaunt by making everything bright and colorful? Regardless, the room is equipped with a computer and you take a seat before logging into pesterchum. Oddly enough, it informs you that you are logged in on two different devices and before you can investigate a memo opens by itself and...you begin typing?

palpablePall has opened a memo "Blind leading the blind"

PP: sup sexy

PP: get your beauty rest all taken care of

PP: um

PP im confused and my head hurts

PP: dam im dumb gimme a sec

palpablePall (Device 1) has changed their name to palpablePallSprite

PPS: better

PP: what do you mean by sprite

PPS: means im chugging me some lemon lime soda

PP: i doubt that shits basically swill compared to orange

PPS: almost had you

PPS: but yeah you right

PP: you really didnt also i have a headache so like lay off a bit

PPS: dang one little deathh and you losty all your fun

PP: hold on i need to shut off this narrator your typos come out all garbled

PPS: oh so youre gonna not only chatise me but just ignore me

PP: i can just read it damn

PPS: wait you can see

PPS: oh come right the hell onbe with this bullshittitude

PPS: here i go magically being all morphed with a fog ghost and i dont get sight

PPS: but the daed girl come sback with fully working eyeballs

PP: fog ghost you mean frog ghost

PP: or dog ghost

PPS: i mean the shut up ghost

PPS: dang whole process got me mad enough to

PPS: to

PPS: woof

PP: so dog ghost

PP: oh snowman he was a sprite wasnt he

PP: did he try to save me is that why im here

PP: i got sucked into a sprite and the game put me in a backup save or something

PPS: naw that was ol knight in copyrighted armor smooching out bloody lips up

PP: who did what now

PPS: if you kiss a corpse they get an extra life girl

PPS: just like in real life

PPS: why you think necropgilia is illegal

PP: diseases probably

PPS: its the rich hoarding all the extra lives

PPS: i bet moneybvags smooches corpses all dat lojng

PPS: in all seriousness though thats your one extra life

PPS: for now so loke dont waste it

PP: ok and where am i

PPS: prospit our home away from home

PPS: or at least the moon thats stuck yo it witha big old chain

PPS: bardy boy should actually be awake judging by what y sprite data is telling me

PP: i know were usually pretty insufferable in a good friendly way

PP: but man you are way too high energy on top of that

PPS: im part dog

PPS: just wanna run around and chase shit

PPS: also woof

PPS: go find atm machine boy

PPS: youll be kinda stuck there for a bit but helping me wake him up and getting this game moving full sail will speed hat up

PP: bluh fine

PP: what about his house and stuff like im supposed to build that

PP: and i need to go through gates too

PPS: ill covera ll that

PPS: ok ill do trhe gates screw building his ohouse

PPS: dang blind ungriently interfpace

PPS: everyones got rocjet boots anyway we can just skip byulding

PPS: in the meantime find the castle

PPS: not only will it draw richy like mothg to a flame with its affluence

PPS: so hell be there

PPS: but its actually where youll eventually need to fo to ghet back here

PP: i dont get how any of our friends stand talking to us

PP: between the attitude typos and refusing to even say their names

PPS: thas out quirks girl

PPS: sight making you all pretentious or something

PPS: like you lost your blind roots and now you're too good for the inner blind city

PPS: shits racist af

PP: blind isn't a race you're not gonna get me with that schtick

PP: i know all your moves

PP: and i am far more offended that you would expect me to fall for your fake offense just because i have sight now

PP: seems like you're the real racist here thinking sighted people are just less intelligent

PPS: damn we are hard to deal with

PP: i learned from the best

PP: also i guess in this metaphor i also taught the best

PP: basically we're collectively the best at being the worst

PP: truce

PPS: fine but get your sweet butt over to the castle i'ma go deal with sleeping beauty but if you catch him there before i wake him up say hi

palpablePallSprite has closed a memo "Blind leading the blind"

## ASHE: FIND RHYS

Something half remembered from a dream tells you you can fly, and after a simple test you discover you can. You fling yourself out of the only window and take off, soaring along the tops of buildings. Below there are lines of white, carapaced humanoids that seem to be hastily loading things onto a myriad of ships. Many of them look up and watch you fly by with reverent awe.

Prospit, being rather small, takes little time to explore by flight and you soon reach a lavish palace. Perching yourself upon some decorative archway you take a glance through a window, spotting Rhys wandering through the grand hall. He seems to be making his way towards a throne room.

## ASHE: BE RHYS AND ENTER THE THRONE ROOM

We haven't been him for a while, so it sounds like a good enough plan. You are now Rhys casually strolling through a rather nice foyer through a lavish doorway into a well decorated throne room. A tall and regal looking caparaced woman is having some heated discussion of some kind with several advisors nearby the throne, but she calmly waves them away and turns towards you as you approach.

You give her a small, polite bow as she is obviously some form of monarch. She meets it with a small laugh before returning a far more extravagant bow, for some reason she holds far more respect for whatever station you seem to hold on Prospit.

After the exchange of greetings, she kneels to be closer to eye level.



**WQ: Hello there, young bard. I see you have finally awoken, this is great...for our kingdom needed some good news this day.**

PA: Madam, I do apologize but mayhaps you have mistaken me for someone else

PA: I dabbled with the violin in my youth, though I am far from what you could call a bard

**WQ: You will grow into the title, in time. Of this I am most assured.**

PA: I shan't want to disappoint one of such fine standing

PA: Perhaps I should fetch my violin then? I may be able to play something if memory serves forthwith

**WQ: Ha. I would so love to hear it, but alas, there is no time.**

**WQ: I have a rather important...meeting with a representative of the opposing army I must keep later today.**

PA: I should not distract you then, m'lady

PA: I was merely exploring this rather decadent planet while I have the pleasure of being here

**WQ: Think nothing of it, you are exactly where you need to be, for I have need of you bard.**

She reaches her hand out to him, a small gold ring, dotted with 4 silver baubles, sits on her open palm.

**WQ: You must keep this safe and ensure it reaches where it must end up.**

PA: And where is that? I must say I don't know of a way to leave this planet, in all honesty, so the list of locations would be rather thin

**WQ: I cannot say, events past today are sadly beyond my knowledge. But I have faith that you will succeed, and it shall eventually reach its destination.**

**WQ: In a way, it already has. And yet has only just begun a long journey there...**

PA: Well confusing riddles aside, I shall certainly accept this task

**WQ: I knew you would, young bard.**

You take the ring and the queen looks at you warmly, placing a hand on your shoulder. Though before she can continue speaking an advisor returns, gesticulating fervently at something on a clipboard. The queen rolls her eyes, gives you another bow, then engages the advisor. You take this time to leave, not wanting to intrude further on royal business.

Outside the palace, you examine the ring closer. It isn't embossed or engraved with any form of clue and is just a plain golden band with 4 attached silver balls. You decide to put it on and nothing happens though you do admire it for a moment or two.

PP: whatcha got there rich kid

PA: Gah, Jesus!

You jump, startled by the sudden and loud voice behind you. Unfortunately you trip and fall down the staircase, taking a rather nasty hit on the head as you do.

As the sleep begins to dissipate from your mind, you notice a pair of hands gripping your shoulders.

PPS: riiiiich boy...

PPS: riiiiich vboy...

PA: Ugh who is...

PPS: your greed and selfishness has killed me rich boy

PA: PP is that...are you...?

You are greeted by the pale, ghostly form of your blind friend.

PPS: IM DEEEEEEEEEAD!!!

PA: AAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!

PPS: repent in your greedy ways scrooge

PPS: lest this ghastly future come to pass

PA: I repent, I'll give it all to Tiny Tim, I swear!

PA: Just leave me in peace, spectre!

The ghost erupts into raucous laughter. You blink away the last of your grogginess and take better stock of your surroundings. You're in your room, on your bed. There appears to be some kind of bandage around your head. Taking a closer look, the ghostly version of Ashe has ears and a snout very similar to a dog, and her overall look reminds you of the Jesus character you helped Jack create. Her laughing dies down and she looks in your direction, you angrily clear your throat which only serves to start an all new fit of laughter.

PA: Are we quite finished?

PPS: oh my god that was absolute gold

PPS: i gotta tell dream me all about that shit

PA: I don't find it nearly as humorous as you seem to

PA: And what the devil is going on? How long was I out?

PPS: i dunno like a couple hours

PPS: or like 6 or something

PA: SIX HOURS!?

PA: What of the game, the meteors, is everyone...

PA: You're a ghost, oh my word did I mess something up?

PPS: chillax bro god damn

PPS: im not a gghost im a sprite

PPS: ok well i did die but that shit was my own vblind ass failt

PPS: i got better thou8gh

PA: But the house construction? I was to extended AP's home, we had to reach some kind of portals of some kind

PA: I must attend to this posthaste, oh to delay so long...

PPS: dude again just chil;l

PPS: manboy just made some sweetie rocket boots and skipped that shit

PPS: like didnt even need you

PA: Didn't need...ah...well I see

PA: You though, you needed to build my house. surely without my help you were lost in your task

PPS: shit i aint been making your dumbass house

PPS: doing my own thing

PPS: getting my gates done and fighting off your smellt butler to wake you up

PA: So you just...sort of ignored my part of the game as well?

PA: And then AA? I mean...she was relying on AP so I guess I couldn't have been much aid anyway

PA: Though has she not made it very far? Surely she came calling

PPS: your sprite butler said they showed up but i guess they didnt really try hard to get inside

PPS: they kust kinda moved on

PA: So I was basically just left to lie unconscious for a fourth of the day then...

PA: At least you cared enough to check up on me, thank you for that Ms. Winter

PPS: meh this is literally like my last stop beofre meeting my denizen

PPS: didnt want to get ahead of the other dudes and i kinda cheated to get here so fast with fancyt spite powers and knowing all the ansers

PPS: plus im not really the me thats gotta meet my denizen

PPS: i didnt really have anything better to do and thought itd be finny to fuck with you

PPS: totes worth it

PA: Well... at least I can provide some passing entertainment when you literally have nothing else to occupy you

PA: I believe I am done with this conversation and Jeeves looks rather insistent I come speak with him

PA: Good day to you, madam

PPS: pfft whatever later drama queen

You turn your nose up and head towards the insisting sprite at your doorway. Jeeves is now a rather nice shade of blue, with bird wings and antlers.

PA: Jeeves, my faithful housekeeper

PA: You have some rather eccentric adornments I see

Jeeagleopesprite: Why yes, Master Rhys.

Jeeagleopesprite: See there was a wild animal within the home shortly after your accident.

Jeeagleopesprite: In my attempts to ward the beast off I accidentally came into contact with it.

Jeeagleopesprite: Though happy to report, I am far more equipped to assist you in this game now given my vast array of knowledge.

PA: Capital show, my good man

PA: What knowledge, pray tell, do you have to share

Jeeagleopesprite: Well, sir. Firstly you are something of a Bard of Heart

PA: I have a recollection of being called a bard recently, actually

PA: In a dream I recieved-

You stop yourself short as you glance at your hand and notice a simple gold ring, with silver balls attached to it, on your finger.

Jeeagleopesprite: Excellent show, Master Rhys! Already acquiring the white ring!

PA: I...um...this was in my dream though

PA: Well yes...obviously I have done something quite important for the team

Jeeagleopesprite: We should get that to the Witch or Page at once, they would be far more equipped to ferry it to its intended purpose.

PA: Right I'm...sure they would then if you insist

Jeeagleopesprite: Currently the Witch would most likely be the easiest, considering where Ms. Winter has ended up.

PA: The sprite in my room?

Jeeagleopesprite: No, no. The other one, sir.

PA: Ahh yes...two of them, lovely

Jeeagleopesprite: Matters for another time though, Ms. Watson is occupied awakening at the moment and we best not disturb her slumber

PA: So what even is a bard of heart then if a witch or page is just so much more important

Jeeagleopesprite: Sadly, sir I cannot reveal everything and learning to connect with one's classpect on your own is incredibly important, especially for a Hero of Heart

PA: Well then what exactly can I do, Jeeves!?

PA: My word, I sleep for six hours only to find literally none of my friends cared that I wasn't there to assist

PA: No one even bothered to wake me up until they got so bored that playing a prank on me was worth the apparent displeasure of my company

Jeeagleopesprite: I apologize, sir. I feared your injury to be more serious and did not want to exacerbate it.

Jeeagleopesprite: If it makes you feel better I took the liberty of alchemizing some items to assist you in your quest.

He deposited several items in front of you. A modified version of your fancy suit, apparently with built in armor plating and rocket shoes. An upgraded rapier that appears

to vibrate with harmonic frequencies and fire sonic waves. And several other odds and ends like a hands free computing HUD built into a pair of glasses and apparently some altered form of web shooters the Spider-Person always used in Mary's movies.

Jeeagleopesprite: You must arm yourself and explore The Land of Strings and Graffiti.

Jeeagleopesprite: Find the gates, traverse all four plants, and learn what it means to be a Bard of Heart before finally confronting your mighty denizen for **The Cho-**

PA: Yeah, I don't really care right now

PA: Apparently my portion of this game isn't actually all that important

PA: And here, get this to the Witch or whoever more important needs it

You toss him the ring, he quickly snatches it as you dejectedly storm off. On your way through the various spatial anomalies that used to be your mansion, you pass a display case with your old violin and bow. Remembering your discussion with the queen, you decide to take it and learn it actually fits into your dueling specibus just fine.

You spend some time aimlessly wandering the ruined, urban landscape interlaced with metallic strings stretching seemingly for miles. Playing various chords, you dredge your old violin training up from your mind as you go, strumming out rather simple classical songs before stopping and sitting on a bench to relax.

PPS: that was quite the encounter there wiuth your butler

PA: Ahh, so you followed me, hmm?

PPS: the music helped

PA: Another brilliant prank at my expense is forthcoming I surmise

PPS: nah dude im actually sorta bummed about that

PPS: like sorry you know

PPS: didnt know youd feel like that about it

PA: It's...not just the prank, it's just

PA: No one even cared that I was gone?

PA: Apparently as a bard or something I'm just not important enough and the witch has to take over my quest?

PPS: its not really about the bard its about heart

PPS: the witch is gamer girl, witch of time

PPS: im well other me is page of space

PPS: time and space are necessary to win the game but any extra aspects are hjust glorified assistants to them

PPS: helping in the reckoning helkping acquire thr rings maybe helping make the frog

PA: I'm not even going to ask

PPS: shit though man look at me i died within like 2 hours of starting my quest

PPS: now im just this titorial in a game with four god dan tutorials

PPS: and im still fucking blind so can barely even meet the usefulness lkevel of the other 3

PA: Maybe we're both kind of useless here then

You start playing another classical tune to poignantly mark the conversation.

PPS: god you are so pretentious

PA: Just shove off, would you?

PPS: how have i noticed the surroundings more than you

PPS: look around youre in a syrtaight up punk af world

PPS: pull some sick riffs man

PA: I only know classical songs

PPS: shit dude here i still got some of my old crap in my inventory even though ima sprite

She produces an old model iPod *and* a set of headphones.

PPS: i got s few greatest hits albums on here for punk

PPS: listen to them

You stop playing and take the item.

PPS: your violen though will probably never be punk

PPS: shits kinda weak

PPS: but hey man you wanna rebel against the syustem holding you down punks the way to go

PA: Hmmph...

PA: Guess I shall become punk then

PPS: thats like the least punk way to say that

PA: Yeah well...F...Fuck off

PPS: hell yeah man thats the spirit

PPS: ima go do sprite shit dude but take a listen

PPS: find yourself you know

PA: Yeah...and thanks Ashe

As she floats away, you put on the headphones and select a playlist. You don't really care as much for the guitar, the violin has always sounded more sophisticated...man you are kinda pretentious...but after a few songs you do find yourself strumming along to one you enjoyed and decided to listen to again.

The music floats out from you and a nearby set of strings lets out a gentle hum, mimicking your playing. An odd bear-humanoid creature emerges from behind a brick wall, can of spray paint in hand. He watches you play, glancing between you and the

humming strings a few times, then begins nodding his head along to the music. You notice him and stop suddenly, he stops nodding and looks at you disappointedly.

PA: Oh...uh...hello there

PA: I'm sorry were you listening to me?

He nods eagerly. You smile and restart the song, playing a bit more earnestly this time. Soon several more emerge from various places around the area to join him in rocking out.

JACK: WAKE UP

You sit up in bed, rubbing sleep from your eyes. You're in a rather purple version of your room on a four poster bed. You vaguely have an idea where you are, as if you just woke up from a dream and are slowly coming back to reality. You're on Derse, in your tower. Looking out the single window, you see the expansive purple city beneath you. In the distance there is another tower with a figure floating just outside the window.

You leap from the window, catching yourself and flying towards your fellow dreamer, Mary. She smiles as your approach, waving excitedly, and the two of you take off to explore the city.

Beneath you are droves of black carapaced people, many of whom stare at you with faces full of fear, anger, or even disgust. There are warships being prepared and armies being fitted for war.

You find a relatively empty alley to land in and a newspaper catches your eye.

**"Assassination attempt planned, beginning of all out war imminent."**

You're both rather troubled by this, it seems some Dersite agents are already well underway with an assassination of the Prospitian royalty. On top of that, this event seems to coincide with a fabled event called The Reckoning where the war between the black and white armies will be decided once and for all.

While reading this most troubling news, neither of you notice the figures coming up behind you. Within moments, the two of you are wrapped in oversized nets and wrestled into submission. Those responsible seem to be a small contingent of Dersite carapacians led by a rather short one in a ridiculous outfit vaguely reminiscent of the prototypings. He contacts a superior on a handheld device and his intentions appear to be quite dire for the two of you. You attempt to reach out towards Mary in her net, and she tries to do the same. As your hands come close to meeting, you feel a warmth inside of you, almost as if you could do something.

JACK: DO THE...UM...BLOODY, BONDY...JUST DO THE THING ALREADY!

Your hand meets hers and a power wells up within you. Your friend, maybe more but it's still not quite figured out, is in danger! A red glow envelops you and the two carapacians holding your net. They suddenly drop it and turn angered glares at the rest of the group, who begin backing off. Though not fast enough, as your guards charge at them and an intense scuffle breaks out.

In the confusion, you assist Mary out of her net as the Courtyard Droll is wildly attempting to explain what is going on to his superior, who is still on the phone, and not paying enough attention. The two of you quickly take off, shaken after your encounter. The black army really hates the heroes apparently.

You state how it isn't safe on Derse right now, and she agrees, so the two of you plan to abscond on a warship and hide on the battlefield. After finding a suitable one just preparing to leave, the two of you dash through some portholes and hide deep within the cargo hold in a large, mostly empty crate containing what appears to be pre-filled out parking tickets. As if the Dersite government already planned to give tickets to the entire populace and was just waiting for the moment they screwed up. As the ship traverses the vast medium between Derse and Skaia, the two of you drift to sleep on your paper bed.

#### MARY: TIME TO WAKE UP

You climb out of bed, vaguely worried about something you remember from a dream. The reckoning? Assassinations? Heavy stuff, probably best to move on with the game if you want to cut all this off at the pass.

You don your recently modified Assassin's Hoodie, now armored thanks to some of Jack's items. As well as your Spirit Crossbow, now more just a basic repeater body with swappable attachments on a rotating, wrist mount. Currently you have the crossbow head, a new machine gun head that apparently has time warping abilities, a portal gun head you fashioned for mid-combat traversal, and a more rapid fire variant of the web shooter. It's all a bit heavy to have on one arm, but you've climbed many rungs on your echeladder and your vim stat is increasing at a healthy rate.

It takes only a couple minutes to quickly dash through the gates in order, depositing you back on Rhys' planet where you begin assaulting the local fauna of unusual size. It goes much smoother after upgrading your arsenal and soon you find yourself assisting some consorts in their band, not the most difficult application of time magic but if a glorified metronome is all you needed to be, then fair enough.

The larger monsters provided so much grist, and so many experience points you actually find yourself at the top of your echeladder, perfect timing if you're head for the final boss. And so that's just what you do, flying into the uppermost gate on Ashe's planet and coming out somewhere deep within yours.

The air hums with discordant mechanical sounds and jets of steam as you descend the staircase, which eventually opens into a vast chamber. Within, you come face to face with a massive, snake-like creature with a flaming head.



**HEPHAESTUS: AHH, WITCH. FINALLY YOU DECIDE TO GRACE ME WITH YOUR PRESENCE. TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH.**

His booming voice grates on your ears, but you grimace and bear it.

AA: Um...hello, yes, sorry. Our group is dealing with some minor...delays.

AA: And so I didn't want to mess with any potential timing conundrums from coming too early.

**HEPHAESTUS: OF COURSE THE HERO OF TIME WOULD BE CONCERNED WITH THE TIMING OF IT ALL.**

AA: So...are we going to fight now?

**HEPHAESTUS: HAH, IF YOU WISH TO BE CRUSHED SO MUCH, I WOULD HAVE NO ISSUE OBLIGING. BUT I HAVE AN ALTERNATE IDEA IF YOU WOULD HEAR IT.**

AA: Oh like a quest? Instead of a boss fight? Sure, why not.

**HEPHAESTUS: THE LAND OF STEAM AND BRASS HAS AGED POORLY. MANY OF HER COMPONENTS NOW RUN COUNTER TO THEIR ORIGINAL PURPOSE, AND MANY OTHERS RUN AT IMPROPER SPEEDS.**

**HEPHAESTUS: THE DISCORDANT SOUNDS OF MISALIGNED CLOCKWORKS ARE OBVIOUS TO ANY WHO LISTEN.**

AA: It did sound a bit off, I guess I need to fix it?

**HEPHAESTUS: YOU WILL NEED TO FULLY REALIZE THE ASPECT OF TIME IN ORDER TO BRING THE PLANET INTO ALIGNMENT.**

**HEPHAESTUS: BUT YES, THAT IS THE CHOICE I OFFER. FIX MY MASTERPIECE, RETIME THE GEARS AND REALIGN THE STEAM PIPES.**

**HEPHAESTUS: OR FIGHT ME, CLAIM MY GRIST HOARD BY FORCE, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO PARADOX SPACE.**

**HEPHAESTUS: THOUGH THE GRAND PURPOSE OF MY MACHINE MAY BE MORE NECESSARY TO YOUR SESSION THAN YOU REALIZE...**

AA: I...guess I can give it a try. How do I know what speed, or timing, or whatever this whole thing is supposed to run at though?

**HEPHAESTUS: PERHAPS FIND SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS TURNING DISCORDANT SOUNDS INTO MELODY BETTER THAN ANY OTHER. I HEAR BARDS MAY BE GOOD AT SUCH THINGS.**

AA: O...K...so Rhys might know something?

AA: But I think he's still asleep? Man, we need to catch him up fast.

AA: And the whole fully realized Witch of Time thing? So I need to just, like, practice using my powers?

**HEPHAESTUS: FOR THAT, THE SECRETS ARE GUARDED BY DEATH ITSELF. THOUGH IF YOU SLEEP ON IT, YOU MAY HAVE AN EPIPHANY.**

AA: Ugh, I just woke up and the only epiphany I had is we've got much less time to complete this than I thought.

**HEPHAESTUS: THE URGENCY MAY BE A PRODUCT OF YOUR OWN MISUNDERSTANDING, WITCH.**

**HEPHAESTUS: EVERYONE IS WAITING FOR THE EXACT SAME SIGNAL TO BEGIN, EVEN YOU HEROES.**

**HEPHAESTUS: AND THE SIGNAL WILL NOT COME UNTIL YOU ARE ALL READY FOR IT.**

AA: Great, so one of these I will know it when I know it things?

AA: Everything just falls into place at the right moment, then everything becomes chaos and we gotta make sense of it, or else.

**HEPHAESTUS: IN A WAY, I SUPPOSE YOU COULD LOOK AT IT LIKE THAT.**

**HEPHAESTUS: ONE PIECE OF ADVICE I CAN OFFER, THERE ARE FOUR MAIN QUADRANTS OF THIS LAND. EACH REACHED BY ONE OF THE GATES.**

**HEPHAESTUS: INCLUDING HERE BENEATH THE PLANET'S SURFACE.**

**HEPHAESTUS: ONCE THESE FOUR KEY AREAS ARE RUNNING ON SCHEDULE, THEY WILL DRAW THE REST OF THE PLANET INTO SYNCHRONIZATION.**

AA: So take the gate and get that specific area running on the right timing. Do that four times and I'll be done.

AA: But if I want to know the correct timing I need to somehow become a fully realized Time Witch and also ask Rhys for his Bardy opinion.

**HEPHAESTUS: THAT IS, AS YOU MAY SAY, THE GIST OF IT.**

**HEPHAESTUS: AS A FIRST STEP I RECOMMEND SIMPLY EXPLORING THE SURFACE, FIND ANYTHING YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED BEFORE. THIS IS THE LAND BUILT FOR THE ASPECT OF TIME AFTER ALL, WHERE BETTER TO LEARN OF IT.**

AA: I guess I'll do that.

**HEPHAESTUS: GOOD LUCK THEN, WITCH.**

AA: Man, I really don't like being called Witch, it just sounds rude.

AA: Also what do I call you? Sorry, I guess I forgot my manners...

**HEPHAESTUS: I am HEPHAESTUS, master OF THE FORGE, BUILDER OF THE machine.**

AA: Alright Hephaestus, I will be back after I got this place running smooth.

You take your leave, carefully examining the machinery along the long pathway as you head back to the gate. Some of it does certainly seem out of sorts, you touch a set of gears that appear locked up and they become engulfed in a large, red gear symbol you recognize as the symbol of Time. The floating gear seems to have stopped them from moving, temporarily, and you quickly remove the smaller gear and put it back on backwards. When they resume motion, they are moving in sync and no longer locked, however...you touch them again and now turn both gears around. Once again, they begin moving in sync, but at a slightly slower speed. You have no idea which version is correct.

Instead of guessing and potentially messing up something through ignorance, you heed the Denizen's advice and make your way back to your house to simply fly around your planet and explore. When you arrive, however, you see Jack in your living room. Talking to your father. This...can't be good.

Gordadsprite: And that, son, is why it is always important to wear a co-

AA: Father, I hope you aren't talking about anything that could embarrass me.

Gordadsprite: Not at all honey, in fact this conversation is just as important to you too. Take a seat by your little friend here and I'll take it from the top.

Jack had a vacant, thousand yard stare directed at you. As if he's seen or heard something truly horrible. He mouths the words "help me" when he notices you looking.

AA: You know what, father, maybe another time.

AA: We have important, game-related things to discuss as I just finished speaking to my Denizen, and there's a Reckoning happening soon.

AA: As my sprite, I'm sure you understand the importance of all of this.

Gordadsprite: You know what, sweetie, you're right. We'll have to reschedule this talk, and I'm sure I've shared enough with young Jack here that he can guide you through it when the time comes.

He gave a conspiratorial wink to Jack, who only shuddered in response. Then he entered into the necklace he had given you which stores sprites for transport. You left it on the living room table as your father was prone to steal kills when he got into the gaming zone while exploring.

AA: Jeez, man, that bad?

AP: i had no idea relationships were so...involved...physically

AA: I am more worried than I have ever been at what exactly your poor, innocent, Christian-raised mind has been exposed to.

AP: are...we...going to...

AA: Please don't bring this up right now.

AP: all i did was mention making babies to him to see if he had any spritely advice

AA: Oh good lord, Jack, why!?

AP: what's the issue? that's what i ended up doing on ashes planet

AA: What...?

AP: i ended up in a lab and there were some weird machines

AP: there was some computer monitor that locked onto all of us and...i think our parents in the past

AP: it ended up creating weird green goo copies of us and mixing it together before forming babies

AP: i recognized me and my mom thanks to her picture albums and there was a cute little girl that i think was you

AA: Aww, you think I'm cute?

AP: of course! what kind of sort of boyfriend would i be otherwise

AA: So you found some machines, summoned some weird slime by targeting us in the past, and it all got mixed together to form baby versions of us and our guardians?

AP: basically, the four of us, your dad, my mom, and the grandpa and grandma respectively of ashe and rhys

AP: i mean i'm assuming, ive only seen that portrait in rhys' house and have no idea what ashes grandpa looks like

AP: oddly enough it only spit out a baby when two slime clones were sucked up

AP: i came out when my mom and ashes grandpa were mixed so like...maybe we're cousins or something?

AA: Or straight up siblings? Guess me and Rhys were in a similar position?

AP: yes you were

AA: Good to know we aren't somehow accidentally related if we're dating.

AP: also all the babies got teleported away

AP: but i'm pretty sure it was supposed to happen, they even stole a bunch of my stuff!

AA: You got robbed by pre-toddlers? This ought to be good.

AP: well i had sort of been...grabbing random things from everyone's houses

AP: you know maybe we could use some of them for alchemy and no one else was stockpiling goods

AA: Yes, justifying stealing, 100% understandable from a noble knight such as yourself.

AP: quiet you, i didn't even take anything from here, just had some of the stuff you already stockpiled for alchemy

AP: ashes grandpa had some neat stuff and i borrowed a stuffed dog plush from her

AP: thought i could make her a nice , comfy plushy outfit themed after her dog

AA: How very 'brotherly love' of you.

AP: i didn't even know i was her brother, just thought she'd be kind of down after she died and then kind of accidentally erased her dog and replaced him with a version of herself

AP: regardless i was practicing my fetch modus while waiting for all the machines to finish mixing the baby goo

AA: Please never refer to the process like that, ever again.

AP: and i hadn't recovered the stuff and all the babies just kinda grabbed one object each before they inevitably teleported away

AP: so anyway that was my weird experience with my last planet, what have you been up to

AA: Oh right! Yes, I spoke to my final boss.

AP: neat did you slay him valiantly?

AA: No, he actually gave me a quest option instead of fighting him, so I agreed to it.

AA: I need to somehow fix the planet sized machine we are currently sitting upon.

AP: is that really easier than just fighting the boss?

AA: I imagine it would be similar in difficulty, he was fairly imposing.

AA: And if he's as hard as tuning a giant machine that I have no idea how to fix, then I'd rather go with the option that doesn't put my life directly on the line.

AP: fair point, guess I'll find out what mine wants soon enough

AP: do we know if the others are caught up yet?

AA: I imagine, given her sprite knowledge, that Ashesprite has already completed her gates. Though since she isn't the prime Ashe it wouldn't surprise me if she isn't allowed to handle the Denizen.

AP: and donahue?

AA: I don't even know if Ashe successfully woke him up yet. You didn't see him on Ashe's planet? It would have been his first stop.

AP: no i didn't and i like literally took a nap on her bed for a while

AA: Jack! Rude.

AP: i mean she's like dead and on a moon, do sprites even sleep?

AP: she wasn't using it and I was tired!

AP: plus that dumb jescifer character is at my home

AP: don't you put this evil on me watson!

AA: Well I suppose it would be hard to sleep near literal Satan.

AP: he is not literal, just a game abstraction!

AA: Man, testy aren't we?

AP: imagine if you had a sprite that symbolized everything...anti-gaming

AP: like if that lawyer who tried to ban violent games was your sprite and just spewed his anti gamer nonsense at all times

AP: that how i feel with my sprite.

AP: also don't say testy...it reminds me of your dads lecture...

AA: Why would it remind...Oh...oh my.

Your face flushed quite hard and you pointedly made sure not to look anywhere near Jack's lower half.

AA: What horrors your young mind has experienced...

AP: i mean...maybe one day if we get married...

AA: Oh lord Jack, stop.

AP: i'm just saying, the knowledge could prove useful

AP: especially the detail with which he described the female-

AA: STOP! CEASE! NO MORE FROM YOU!

You flip the fuck out, flailing your arms and making noises to drown out Jack. He smirks, then begins laughing, which soon spreads to you as the tension breaks. Once you both calm down, you feel Jack's hand slowly enter yours and you swallow hard, but don't pull away.

AP: sooooo...have we come to a consensus on if we're dating yet?

AA: I...uh...wasn't aware we were waiting on one.

AP: i feel like we've had this conversation twice and the ultimate answer was 'maybe definitely'

AA: That is a pretty ultimate answer.

AA: And if I recall our last one, you were the one who wasn't quite sure if your feelings had matured to that point yet.

AP: they could use some convincing i guess

The two of you were sitting quite close together, and as you turned to look each other in the eyes you realized just how close your faces were to each other.

AA: What...kind of convincing.

AP: maybe...retry what started this whole thing

AA: You mean the..."accidental" kiss?

AP: if it was less accidental and more on purpose

AA: That...could be very convi-

You were cut off as Jack leaned in and kissed you. It wasn't anything heavy or passionate, but it was very tender and sweet and the two of you held in for quite a while. That is until a voice startled the two of you.

PPS: well well well

PPS: what exactly did i walk in on here

PPS: i mean seriously im still blind here whats going on

PPS: the conversation i heard from the other room makes me think you two started making out

PPS: did you two dudes totally start making out

PPS: grody does this mean im stuck with classical punk rich guy now that you got your grubby fingers all around prince charming

AA: Oh lord...hi Ashe. Or...Ashesprite.

PPS: unseeingeysprite girl

AA: That sounds horrifyingly complicated.

PPS: so dish my main gaming chick being all up on guy who took my first kiss all hero like

AP: i was merely triggering the extra life

AP: also we...definitely are dating now

AA: Finally convinced you?

AP: it was a sound argument

PPS: barf

PPS: if sprites had stomachs or ate anything there would be a pool of lovey doveyt vomit all over your floor

AA: Gross.

AP: also ashe were sort of siblings so it wouldn't have worked out

PPS: yeah i know sprite bull kinda spoils all the fun stuff

PPS: so you finally did yuour extoviolofy stuff

AP: extoviolofy?

PPS: man you know im blind cant see the words coming out my mouth

PPS: ectobiology

AA: I don't think that excuse works when you aren't at a keyboard.

PPS: all these bugots up in here

AP: i did do the baby making process, yes

PPS: dang boy youy move fast so how was he girl he hit all the right button combos if yo ucatch my drift

AA: Oh my god he means the ectobiology you were literally just talking about!

AP: all the right button...OH...oh no yeah the other...baby making...process

PPS: hehehehe you prudes are so easy to rattle

AP: i havent hit any of...mary's buttons...

AP: though her dad did inform me of where-

AA: JESUS, BOTH OF YOU!

AA: I am changing the subject, Jack you shut up. Ashe did you wake up Rhys yet?

AP: harsh

PPS: i did but man feels like shit

PPS: we just kinda ignored him all day and now he thinks we donmt need him

AA: Did...you tell him otherwise? Get him on his quest?

PPS: pfft no i gave him a playlist of puink rock and told him to do his own thing

AA: Consarnit Ashe-

AP: consarnit again...?

AA: -we legitimately need him to finish his quest!

PPS: chillax girl no we dont

PPS: hes a hero of heart which is like the opposite of blood

AP: oh my aspect?

PPS: blood is about bonding with others but hearts all about yourself

PPS: rich boy literally needs to do everything on his own in his own way or hell never fully realize

PPS: and if that means randomly exploring his planet til he passes out dead from a drunken bender on his quest bed then thats where hes gotta end up

Meanwhile, Rhys was busy puking off the side of a rather large tower the bears had dared him to climb. He was way too drunk to say no, punk bears know how to party and Rhys really needed to lie off the shots he kept getting fed the more he played.

AA: What do you mean pass out dead!? And what's a quest bed?

PPS: cant say much sadlyt sprite rules

He backed off from the edge and plopped down on the weird stone shaped like a four poster bed. His head throbbed and his vision was so blurred. He really need to lie down and fuck it, this thing looks like a bed.

PPS: like basically alls i can say is that secret is guarded by death itself

AA: God damn riddles! Hephaestus said the exact same thing.

AP: so wait is donahue gonna be ok? i don't wanna kiss him back to life if i can help it

Long ago, he heard something about not sleeping on your back when drunk. But the thoughts were so hazy and he was already comfortable. It'd be fine, if he just...passed out...like this...

His eyes drifted shut and he began sleeping peacefully.

PPS: nah you wouldnt have to in thisn case

AA: Plus I suppose I would handle it, you took care of Ashe so the least I can do is offer to take over Rhys.

AP: what do you mean ashe, in this case?

Still sleeping, Rhys vomited again. Due to his position, the vomit pooled in his mouth and throat, suffocating him.

PPS: ugh sprite rules suck

PPS: to be as vague as possible theres more than one way to respawn

As the last bits of life drained from Rhys, the four orbs atop his Quest Bed's posts began to glow. Somewhere on Skaia, his dream self appeared atop a similar bed, face blue from lack of air.



PPS: and eventually were all gonna need to use the second one  
PPS: even the other me

Rhys' body was enveloped in a bright light. His clothing morphed into a rather fanciful outfit and hat, colored a mix of pink and dark maroon, and he floated above his quest bed staring down at his hands. His fingertips crackled with pink sparks and he felt...powerful.

PPS: but let's be honest that kind of thing is probably far off  
PPS: dude is just enjoying his punk and his sprites taking care of his gates  
PPS: though he's an idiot and lost the ring to the lolac consorts

AA: Consorts?

AP: lolac?

PPS: cmon guys lolac is the land of lights and circuitry

PPS: consorts are the little weirdos that wander around but don't fight

AP: oh you mean the crows i have to help!

PPS: the ravens more specifically

PPS: you should be able to get it back during the blackfeather war

AP: the rebellion?

PPS: you should visit your denizen shell explain more about it

PPS: your choice will heavily involve the consorts since you're all about bonds and shit

AP: alright, i guess i'll head off then

AP: you're...um...good, right mary?

AA: Yeah, yeah. I mean apparently I need Rhys' help to figure out my quest anyway. So feel free to go off and start yours. Go get 'em, tiger.

Jack gives you another kiss before taking off for the highest gate on your planet.

PPS: you dudes sucking face sounds like someone made realistic versions of squiddles dolls

PPS: i'm actually glad i'm blind so i don't have to witness your adolescent slobbering

AA: Quiet you!

Ashe giggles as you shoo her. Jack passes through the uppermost gate, entering the lair of Aphrodite. And Rhys...Rhys drifts among an excited crowd of bear punks, strumming his violin like mad as pink energy flows off of him.

All around, strings begin to pluck themselves, following his rocking solo. The energy spreads off of him, beginning to engulf the local area, awakening sets of the planet's strings left and right, and growing. Unfortunately though, the concert abruptly ends as the old, simple violin cracks under the pressure of his God Tier enhanced

playing. Looks like he's gotta pay a visit home and make something that can handle the new Rhys.

MARY: THAT SOUNDS EXCITING, QUICKLY BE THE OTHER GUY

You wholeheartedly agree, and quickly be the other guy, Jack, walking through a hallway towards your Denizen. There are many alcoves that contain raven and crow consorts in white robes. They appear to be lounging, conversing, and otherwise simply coexisting within the space.

At the end of the hall, you pass through a pink curtain into a massive, decadent, yet apparently empty bed chamber.

AP: um...hello?

AP: anyone around?

AP: i...believe i have business here?

AP: you have quite a lovely...palace...

A sultry voice hisses around you as a massive tail coils down in front of the doorway.

*Aphrodite: Why thank you, sir Knight.*

*Aphrodite: You are as courteous as you are handsome.*

You nervously back away from the tail as you follow it upwards. A massive snake sits, threaded through various loops of fabric attached to the ceiling.

AP: oh my...um...hello madam

*Aphrodite: You may call me Aphrodite, cutie.*

AP: you are...rather beautiful yourself, ms aphrodite

*Aphrodite: I do so love you heroes of blood. So complimentary.*

*Aphrodite: I wager you make compassionate lovers...*

AP: i wouldn't know

*Aphrodite: Hmm hmm hmm...we could test the theory.*

AP: but we only just met, isn't dating...moving sort of fast

*Aphrodite: Ah yes...dating is exactly what I was referring to.*

*Aphrodite: So innocent. It's adorable.*

The snake stretched down and began coiling on the massive, circular bed, unblocking the door in the process. Overall the conversation seems to be getting into...odd territory so you attempt to bring it back on topic.

AP: so well, courtships aside, i believe i am supposed to get a quest from you?

*Aphrodite: Well don't rob me of all my fun.*

*Aphrodite: Unnerving conversation or...other activities...watching you sweat would be quite enjoyable.*

AP: \*ahem\*

AP: right...yes...so the quest

*Aphrodite: Ugh, why a Knight. So straightforward and stalwart.*

*Aphrodite: A Mage would quite enjoy all the things I have to...teach about bonding.*

*Aphrodite: So yes, yes, yes. The Choice I suppose.*

*Aphrodite: Option 1, as always, defeat me.*

*Aphrodite: Though I may offer some alternatives to combat to...satisfy...that urge.*

AP: i would rather not have to hurt anyone, so what alternatives

The snake's devilish grin immediately made you regret asking.

*Aphrodite: Join me in my bed and we can have a lengthy test of...endurance.*

AP: you know i think i would prefer to hear option 2

*Aphrodite: Spoilsport.*

*Aphrodite: Option 2 involves ending the Blackfeather War.*

AP: the crow rebellion?

*Aphrodite: The crows are rebelling against the ravens' tyranny.*

AP: there are ravens just outside and they don't seem tyrannical

*Aphrodite: My personal followers have learned the joys of camaraderie.*

*Aphrodite: Perks of living with a Denizen of Blood I suppose.*

*Aphrodite: On the surface, the ravens do not understand the struggles of those outside their courts. They have spent too long within their own circles.*

*Aphrodite: The crows, similarly, only listen to their own talk of racism and oppression by the ravens*

AP: and you would like me to help the crows overthrow the ravens i presume

*Aphrodite: You presume incorrectly.*

*Aphrodite: I want the two races to exist in harmony, much like my followers.*

*Aphrodite: The ravens are not evil, just rich and sheltered.*

*Aphrodite: Neither are the crows, too fed up to see reason.*

AP: oh ok

AP: so convince the crows to talk to the ravens, in order to make the ravens see that something should be done about this...caste system they have created

AP: some kind of peace treaty to ease up on the crows

*Aphrodite: You do catch on easily.*

AP: when is this conflict taking place?

*Aphrodite: Right now, actually. The Raven King just acquired a rather shiny trinket, a ring from another hero's sprite, and staged a conference simply to show it off.*

*Aphrodite: The open display of opulence finally enraged the Crow Leader into action and he launched an attack on the capital.*

AP: oh no! am i too late?

*Aphrodite: You have time, though I would wager you should begin taking care of it soon.*

*Aphrodite: There is a rather large tower due east from your home base that marks the location of the capital. I would guess the Raven King stood atop it to show off his prize, so you may find him still there.*

AP: i guess i will be off then! thanks ms aphrodite

AP: sorry i couldn't engage in any dates with you, but i do have a girlfriend now and i couldn't disappoint her like that

*Aphrodite: Well she's quite lucky.*

You are already well on your way out of the room as Aphrodite speaks, you give her a quick wave over your shoulder as you dash back down the hallway. As you leap through the portal you catch yourself midair, then immediately begin flying east, soon spotting a massive, cylindrical, red tower amidst a vast technologically advanced looking city. The ground below is a massive war consisting entirely of blackbirds. Atop the tower, you find a large bird wearing a regal outfit and crown surrounded by several smaller birds brandishing various weapons. He must be the king, and is standing on some sort of raised stage with four banisters. It seems you were just in time to intervene in an attack!

JACK: QUICK, INTERVENE AND PROTECT THE KING!

You land in between the angry mob and the king, holding up your hand and telling the group to stop this foolishness. Unsurprisingly, one of the crows decides to just unceremoniously stab you with some kind of spear when you get in the way.

Eye wide in pain, you collapse backwards onto the King's bed shaped stage, he flutters away in panic. The other crows immediately begin chastising the attacker with

various caws, you figure they were saying things like “Do you know who that is?” or “How could you do that!?” or even “God dammit Jerry, again with the spear?”

Well, you would figure that if you weren't currently dying. Somewhere, in a Derse transport, another version of you startles awake as a bleeding wound appears in their chest. They panic, noticing a sleeping Mary next to them, but as they reach out to her they fade away. Shortly after, they appear upon a quest bed on Skaia as the life ebbs from their eyes, and the quest bed banisters begin to glow.

Back on the Land of Lights and Circuitry, the glow envelops the entire top of the tower and you float out of it wearing a bright red, hooded care and loose fitting red clothing, almost like pajamas. You drift down and land between the groups, Jerry readies his spear again.

AP: i believe i said STOP

You hold up your hand and a wave of red energy flows out, immediately all of the crows drop their weapons and bow their heads. You turn to address the Raven King.

AP: your majesty, i have urgent things to discuss

AP: do you have somewhere less...open?

The King nods hastily and points a wing towards the palace. He then begins to take off, as you lift off to follow you address the crows.

AP: have the rebellion leader meet us in the palace

AP: this conflict needs to end peacefully

AP: except you, jerry, you follow me before you make any more trouble

The crow who stabbed you cocks his head and lets out a confused caw, as if to say “Who the heck is Jerry?” What a Jerry thing to say. He does follow you and the King towards the palace though.

JACK: BE THE OTHER LAD IN PAJAMAS!

You are now Rhys, currently sneaking into your own home to avoid any potential conversations with your spritely housekeeper. You take note that much of the eyesore that was your home has been tidied up and someone has begun properly forming it into a tower to your gates. Like you need those things. That said, several of the more esoteric pieces of construction have been set aside around your house like some horrible art gallery.

You pry open a window into your room, waving in your posse of punk bears behind you. Inside you find your alchemiter, now with several attachments. Perfect, you need to make yourself a new violin. Borrowing one of the bear's jackets, for proper punk aesthetic, you do some minor alchemizing.

Punk Jacket && Broken Violin = Smashed Punkolin. Apparently a punkolin is a violin with extra graffiti, spikes, happy face decals, and enough sturdiness to survive a few slams against the stage. Unfortunately this one has already apparently been through a few too many and comes out pre-smashed. You'll need a repaired violin, or perhaps some other combination, for a functional instrument.

Duelingkind Specibus && Punk Jacket = Punkharmonic Rapier. Well this thing is useless, though is slightly reminiscent of the rapier Jeeves created. You haven't needed a weapon once, anything that your posse of headbanging consorts can't help beat up can just be zapped into non-existence with your awesome new powers.

Duelingkind Specibus || Punk Jacket = Battle of the Band. Close, very close. But it's an electric guitar, which is to be expected.

Duelingkind Specibus || Punk Jacket && Classical Record = Punkolin. There we go, you grabbed a record of classical music or two and added one to the recipe, changing the guitar into a violin. It's metal, sturdy, decorated with rebellious paraphernalia, and has an interesting effect on the sound produced. Like an electric guitar combined with a violin.

As you start up a song, to the delight of your group, a noise outside catches your attention. Followed shortly by a voice.

AA: Rhys!

You sigh, Mary soon enters through the door of your room.

AA: Rhys, you *are* here!

AA: I knew I saw you on Ashe's computer, where have you been?

PA: I've been out

AA: Out where!? Rhys we've needed you for this cockamaimy game!

PA: Ahh, so *now* you need me

AA: What do you mean by that?

PA: No one cared when I was apparently unconscious

PA: Didn't even bother trying to wake me

AA: That's a load of bull, your housekeeper kept us away!

PA: PP seemed to force her way in just fine, and all she wanted was to harass me

PA: AP apparently didn't need me to build his house

PA: I haven't had one single effect on this game, I may as well not have been here

AA: Come on dude, don't act like this.

AA: We didn't want to mess with you, your housekeeper told us you were hurt and needed rest.

AA: Yes, we found ways around the house building, but that doesn't mean we don't need you.

PA: Hmmph

AA: Seriously? Dude, like the whole first part of this game is basically singleplayer. We're all entering the co-op point now though and we actually need you.

PA: Right, yes, now that *your* fun is being interrupted better get me to do my part

AA: Hey look...that's not...

PA: Not what? Not entirely incorrect?

AA: Man, I thought we agreed to play this together...

PA: Weird, I had the same thought

AA: Ugh! You're being kind of a dick.

You start to play a sad song on your violin.

AA: Really!?

AA: Look I'm sorry. alright?

AA: I get it, we sort of left you out.

AA: But here I am, trying to get you in on the game and you're the one throwing this drama queen act and refusing to play.

AA: So if you wanna leave yourself out on purpose, then fine!

AA: Be that way.

You continue the sad song into a second, more haunting refrain. Mary throws her hands up in frustration and leaves. After a minute you reach the end of your impromptu song, a couple of the bears had begun holding up lighters in solidarity.

PA: \*Sigh\* I know you're there PP

PA: Whatever ability I got let's me sort of...sense it

Ashesprite floats in through the door. With a quick glare and a jerk of your head, you send the bear group out through the window for some privacy.

PPS: dumb heart powers

PPS: cant even hide from you

PA: Didn't want to deal with me being a dick, as she puts it?

PPS: i mean you kinda were

PA: They deserve it, only care about whether I'm playing when it interferes with their game session

PPS: nah i get it

PPS: everyones kind of a dick tbh

PPS: like in this situation

PA: Well...you aren't that bad

PPS: even after i scared the hell outta uou

PA: It was...rather funny, in retrospect

PA: And I enjoyed our chat, we have a sort of kinship is being...less useful to everyone else

PPS: i thin kyoure starting to get a lkeg up on me though

PA: Well you no longer have legs

PPS: man making fun of my blindness and my lack of legs

PA: Indeed I am

PPS: damn can i no longer rib you over that now thats uive fone and made you all piunk

PA: I've become immune to your harassment

PA: So what leg have I gotten up on you?

PPS: youre god tier duh

PPS: the dumb looking outfit and weird powers

PPS: how was the ascension

PA: Unpleasant, I believe I drowned in my own vomit

PPS: sick

PPS: likem ultiple uses of the word

PA: I'm assuming you can't reveal anything due to nebulous sprite rules?

PPS: youd be saiurprised how much inane exposition ive unlocked now that one of you has ascenced

PPS: but i know you dont care much about it

PPS: short version is youve become a max level heart player basically automatically

PPS: and have all this weird soul vbased power especially when it comes to yourself

PPS: any unlocked a whole set of super levels betond max to ascend firther in

PPS: also your basically immortal

PA: Wow wait, really?

PPS: you can only die if the game deems it heroic or just

PPS: so a worthy self sacrifice or a death you really deserve

PA: Huh, cool I suppose. Means I have even less responsibility to do anything

PPS: pfft be enough of a dick and im sure gamergirl can make you feel some justice

PPS: you really should go talk to your denizen though

PA: And why should I? Advanced the game so everyone can run off without me again?

PPS: i mean your alternative if to hang out on this desolate planet wit hthe bears for all teernity

PA: Maybe I like the bears

PA: Maybe the bears act like I'm awesome and treat me like a rock star

PA: It feels nice to have an adoring, grateful crowd

You sit down on your bed, leaning back against the wall. Ashesprite floats over and leans against the same wall a few feet away.



PPS: you dont wanna leave this place though  
PPS: go back to some semblance of a regular life outside  
PA: I get to be a god here! And a rock star!  
PA: You want to go back to a boring old Earth so bad?  
PPS: i dont even know if we go back to earth  
PA: You don't know something?  
PPS: my allknowingness only applies to the game not after it jackhole  
PA: What do you think happens?  
PPS: we reenter some normal version of space instead of the weird paradoxical version were in  
PPS: maybe get deposited back on a normal planet  
PPS: maybe get a new one all to ourselves  
PPS: maybe lose all the cool shit and powers or maybe keep them  
PPS: damn i dont even know if i can go  
PA: Why's that?  
PPS: cause im this sprite dog bullshiot thing  
PPS: woof you know  
PPS: maybe i go back in the box with the game board  
PA: I don't think I would enjoy that  
PPS: oh yeah  
PA: You're the only one I've enjoyed chatting with here, so far  
PPS: youd have the real one im just the copied version  
PA: I'd rather keep this version around  
PA: The other one would probably feel just as important and entitled as AP and AA  
PPS: entitled huh  
PPS: coming from the rich guy  
PA: I'm the perfect judge for it

You start playing one of the various songs you've memorized from Ashe's playlist. She waits for you to finish playing before speaking.

PPS: you know i didnt thgink you could get pubk on a violin  
PPS: but youre pretty well naili9ng it  
PPS: guess its more the attitude than the instrument  
PA: Thanks, I suppose being a dick helps then  
PPS: here take this

She hands you a small medallion on a thin string. It's circular, white, and has a green spirograph on it.

PPS: i can only make one and i msuipposed to give it to the other me  
PPS: but i want you to take it

PA: What is it?

PPS: us sprites can go inside it and be carried around or transported through like gates and stuff

PPS: baically an inventory system for storing me

PA: You want me to just carry you around on my neck?

PPS: well no dummy

PPS: i want you to take me out of here with it

PPS: just like go talk to your denizen

PPS: actually beat this game and if you get to keep eveyrthing youre carrying then maybe if youre carryuinmg me i get to go too

PA: PP look I-

PPS: what have i told you about asking the bliund girl to look

PPS: just do this man please

PPS: im just this tiny insignificant bit now and ive literally played almost my entire part in this already

PPS: everything is now up to this other version of me who arbitrarily got picked to be the important one

PPS: so the sooner we get out of ehre the sooner i can find something to do again

PPS: and hey maybe you and me can figure something out together once we ginally drop all this responsibility behinmd us

PPS: but for now you justy gotta play a couple important parts

PA: ...

PA: Yeah...

PA: Alright PP.

PPS: sweet

PPS: just like skip rtight there by going throug hte second gate to prince charmings planet then go right to the top one of his

**You take a moment to slip the necklace on.**

PA: I'll get on that, see what inane task I have to do then use my powers to beat the final boss

PPS: awesome moneybags you got this

PA: Hey, so PP...why don't you ever call us by name?

PPS: pfft ause im the funny quirky girl or maybe the annoying one

PPS: cause...well i mean

PPS: i guess if im not making someone laugh or getting on their nerves

PPS: they just start to pity me cause im blind you know

PA: I don't pity you

PPS: why do you only use our username initials

PA: I...guess I feel like distancing myself

PA: Just in case it turns out people are only my friends because I'm rich

PA: It will be easier if one day they just abandon me

PPS: i dont see you like that...rhys

PA: I mean, you don't see anything, Ashe

PPS: pfft shut up thats my line

You share a laugh, and soon realize just how close she had drifted next to you. You reach out and take her hand, just holding it for a while.

PPS: i should get back to my room and message other me on prospit

PPS: she needs to get somewhere to properly ascend

PA: One more bit part to play?

PPS: you know it

PA: I guess I'll go see this Denizen then, save everyone single handedly

PPS: dont forget to pick me up before crossing the finish line

PA: I won't forget

She releases your hand and drifts out of your room, you take another look at the medallion she gave you before rising off your bed and floating back out of your window. With a parting wave to your consorts, you fly up towards your gates.

#### ASHE: TALK TO YOURSELF

You are currently Ashe, lying on your bed, bored. You've done just about everything interesting on Prospit as far as you can tell.

After Rhys fell unconscious you delivered him to his room and unceremoniously dropped him on the bed. Then you attempted to bother the queen, only to find she simply found your various pranks charming. You figure being seen as one of the saviours of her race, if not the entire universe, makes her less inclined to get annoyed with you. You then flew around the planet, watching white chess people go about the hurried business of packing ships for some kind of migration or evacuation. For hours. Hooooooooours.

And now that you've finally decided to give up on doing anything productive ever again, your computer pings out a message alert.

palpablePallSprite has opened a memo "Get iff your butt uts gi time"

PPS: ok baby time to get the show on the road

PPS: well almost i guess

PP: bluh you know i need my beauty rest

PPS: nu uh that excuse dont fly here

PPS: get that lazy booty shaking

PP: ugh whatever

PP: do i finally get to get off this ball of yellow paint and do something

PPS: not quite w  
PP: grrrrrrrr  
PPS: grrrrrrrrrr  
PPS: woof  
PPS: dammit dont tempt snowman im like getting the woofing under control  
PP: is he like actually still in there  
PPS: ehhhhhhhhhhhh  
PPS: iunno  
PP: so what do i do where do i go  
PPS: the palace  
PP: ugggggh i was just there  
PPS: well no one told you o leave girl dont blame me  
PP: is it the queen do i need to ask the queen for something  
PP: like a spaceship  
PP: i was there that whole time and never even asked for a spaceship  
PP: what even  
PPS: spaceship could work but theres a better option  
PPS: palace basement kust follow the syairs dpwm  
PP: and what will i find in this magical basement  
PPS: cant tell you  
PP: i have to worst urges right now involving you  
PPS: hehehehehe  
PPS: sprite riles its screw upo all the sirprise if i tell you now  
PP: ok fine and after that  
PPS: you gotta wait  
PPS: ...  
PPS: you there  
PP: i was taking out some frustration on a pillow  
PP: why am i waiting EVEN MORE  
PPS: you gotta wait for the cue then everything will make a lot more sense  
PP: and the cue is  
PPS: rhys rocking the hel out is your cue  
PP: right cause hes a bard i guess  
PP: but more importantly rhys huh  
PPS: y...yes rhys  
PP: rhys  
PP: huh  
PPS: shut up your acusatory face  
PP: we dont even use each others names  
PP: and yet youre all out on rhys  
PPS: hes cool and nice and shut up  
PP: ok whatever like i dont even care that much about richy rich  
PP: but youre a sprite

PPS: and  
PP: thats like a ghosty thing thats half dog  
PP: bit odd  
PPS: well he doesnt seem to mind  
PPS: maybe he just likes me for me  
PP: look girl we have all the same insecurities  
PP: just sayin this may not last once he finds someone else  
PP: without all the dog parts and you know legs  
PPS: youre being really actually kinda mean  
PP: i just want to look out for us  
PP: hes rich so hes gotta be like super shallow  
PPS: hes not ge doesnt wabt ti be that rich asshole stereotype  
PPS: hes being his own gfuy and  
PPS: and hes rea;;y cool ok  
PPS: also you dont have to look out for me jusyy cause you arent vblind anyumore  
PPS: im the one who hd to do all your gates and handle all your stuff because  
you were dumb enoughh to walk into a damn sawvlade  
PP: wow ok ok chill  
PP: jeez your typos are going nuts are your hands shaking  
PP: just whatever alright ill be off this planet soon enough then i can take over as  
the main ashe again  
PPS: right the main ashe  
PPS: the important one  
PP: yeah you get it  
PPS: just get to the basement youll find a dumb rectangular rock slab there  
PPS: sit on it anbd wait til the thing happens  
PPS: i dont feel like chatting anymore  
PP: alright whatever  
PP: more waiting for me then

palpablePallSprite has closed a memo "Get iff your butt uts gi time"

You take off out the window, flying right for the palace. Stopping only a moment to ask for directions to the staircase, you fly through the palace halls and down the stairs.

Deep beneath Prospit you find a vast chamber with a stone slab suspended in the middle. It's surface is black, and there's an odd design printed on top. You casually drop onto its surface and settle in to wait for whatever cue you're supposed to get from your team's Bard.

BARD: CUE LIKE YOU'VE NEVER CUED BEFORE!

Rhys raises his violin in anticipation...then realizes he doesn't yet know anything about the cue and stares, confused, at his violin. In the meantime, Mary is doing something interesting and not confused at all.

And therefore you are now her, currently standing on top of a rather large tower inlaid with various gearboxes and piping. You're taking pot shots at various winged enemies while you have a discussion with Jack via your HUD.

AA: I do believe this is the one.

AP: like a big cylinder with a bed on top?

AA: This thing's a bed? Looks horribly uncomfortable.

AA: What do I do, sleep on it?

AP: i just sort of fell on mine after jerry attacked me

AA: So I need to be stabbed then lie on the bed...

AA: Pardon my skepticism but...

AP: ashe did mention extra lives

AP: just let some random imp show up and attack

AP: wait you're killing all the imps aren't you

AP: your grist is going up stop killing things

AA: But Jack...resources.

AA: Also you're asking me to not only let an enemy beat me in a video game.

AA: But literally, in real life, die to said enemy.

AA: I need to psyche myself up.

AP: fine i understand

AP: so...donahue...

AA: Not talking about it.

AA: He's being a drama queen.

AP: but like we did leave him out

AP: maybe not on purpose really

AA: I thought you didn't even like him?

AP: he annoyed me with the jesus sprite

AP: but he did ensure my entering experience was streamlined

AP: and he was enjoying himself, which he kinda missed out on

AA: What were we supposed to do!?

AA: His housekeeper said he was hurt!

AA: Aren't we terrible friends if we disturb him and get him seriously hurt?

AP: that's a fair point too

AP: this is a nuanced situation and we should have a discussion together about it

AA: He played a doggone sad song on a violin right in my face!

AP: objectively funny

AA: Don't start with your flim flam.

AP: ...um...my...

AA: \*Glares\*

AA: Don't you have crows to calm down?

AP: they're being rather stubborn  
AP: the negotiations are...probably failing  
AP: everyone just needs to calm down and talk it out but they're too riled up  
AP: much like you and donahue i might add  
AA: God dangit!  
AP: ok ok sorry  
AA: No that wasn't you. Ugh you're actually right, and I just don't want to accept being wrong so am being obstinate.  
AA: One of the blasted imps snuck up on me and almost knocked me off the tower.  
AP: are you ok?  
AA: Well yeah, I got jet boots.  
AA: But my crossbow came loose and tumbled down who knows where.  
AP: aww...that thing was badass  
AA: It was...I have other weapons on me though.

You sigh as the imp pops into grist and sit upon your quest bed. Far down below one of the gearboxes attached to the contraption engulfing your tower creaks as a crossbow lodges firmly between the gears. Nearby several sets of pipes begin to shake as the entire contraption starts to malfunction.

AA: I don't know, Jack.  
AA: Maybe my self-preservation is just too strong.  
AP: you just let it happen, just close your eyes i guess  
AA: Could you maybe...like come and do it?  
AP: i don't think i could  
AP: i care too much for you to do that myself  
AA: I need this though! I can't figure out all this timing stuff and I need those fancy Time Witch powers.  
AA: Heck the gears on my tower aren't even spinning!  
AP: you have gears on your tower?  
AA: It's a whole thing wrapping around it, gears and steam pipes.  
AA: I swear the bits at the bottom of the tower were at least doing something.  
AA: But I just looked up at this steampunk contraption that sort of extends up above my tower and all the gears are stopped.  
AP: weird  
AP: maybe try to start them again  
AA: Even the pipes seem strained, they're shaking a bit.  
AP: ok that sounds dangerous  
AP: hello mary, are you there?

You scream and clutch your face, a pipe burst and sprayed you with burning hot steam. The entire steampunk device engulfing your quest bed tower creaks and shakes ominously.

As you frantically rub your eyes the tower lets out a loud series of snaps and a massive set of gear breaks free and crashes down directly onto your quest bed, right where you were lying. Somewhere on Skaia an unrecognizable mess of shattered body parts in a purple dress materializes on a maroon quest bed and the orbs on the posters begin glowing.

Moments later, amidst a fading glow, you float up from the wreckage wearing a maroon outfit. The hood extends in twin tails out behind you, and your feet are clad in shining, ruby slippers. You stare at the mess of broken machinery for a minute before extended your hands. A dark, red glow engulfs the tower and the various steampunk piece begin to rewind themselves back into position. As the tower finally settles back into working order, your crossbow flies back up onto the top platform, and you greet it with a facepalm.

AA: Well I think I accidentally took care of it.

AP: i moved the viewfinder over to you

AP: that was absolutely amazing

AA: I think my crossbow jammed the tower and caused a catastrophic meltdown.

AP: neat

AP: is that ironic?

AA: That it was my own crossbow?

AP: yeah or is it at least that sort of fake ironic cool people do

AA: I really don't know, am I really wearing ruby slippers?

AP: i never guessed you were actually wicked

AP: perhaps i've misjudged you all these years

AA: This game makes weird decisions sometimes.

AP: so can you do the time stuff now?

AA: I can certainly influence the machines a lot easier, but I still don't know what timing to use.

AP: are there any hints? schematics, markings, heck a freaking metronome or something to follow?

AA: It would be useful to have a guide to match everything to.

AA: I mean it's all clockwork so it kind of...ticks.

AA: A metronome would actually be ideal if I had one to follow.

AP: maybe keep exploring and listen for any steady beats

AA: I guess, meanwhile you need to find something to calm or at least distract the crow guys long enough to draft some sort of treaty.

AP: only issue is i don't know if i can leave, i believe i'm the only force holding them back right now and if i take off trying to find something they'll be at each others throats



AA: I wish Ashe were answering, I could use some spritely insight...that isn't also trying to give me tips on my dating life.

AP: my sprite only antagonizes people half the time and apologizes for it the other half

AP: oh freaking ugh...

AP: i need to go, the rebel leader is starting something

AA: Yeah alright, good luck on that.

AP: mmm hmm, same to you

aggressivelyPassive ceased pestering amazinglyAwesome

BARD: THAT SOUNDS LIKE MULTIPLE CUES FOR YOU AT THIS POINT

Sadly, Rhys still has no idea what cues are being discussed and why he's even involved. However as just about everyone else seems to be waiting on some big event, he figures it's as good a time as any to be himself.

So you're Rhys, the Bard of Heart, traversing a hallway completely lined with various mismatched mirrors as you head towards the chamber of your denizen. As you walk you take a nice look at your outfit, noticing just how utterly ridiculous it is. The only thing that could make it worse are some embarrassingly shaped undergarments, luckily it was designed by whatever nebulous designers made this game and not by some insane clown.

Eventually the hall opens into a large, oval chamber with yet more mirrors lining the walls, ceiling, and even occasionally on the floor. At the far end is a large, fancy couch with a giant snake resting upon it. It is a dark pink coloration with a mane of glorious blonde hair, and all of it's attention seems to be devoted to one of the mirrors as it stares at its own reflection. You approach, and the snake appears not to notice you. You clear your throat and, again, receive no attention. So you sternly call out to it.

PA: Excuse me, *sir*

Pointedly stressing the word sir to express your annoyance. You've dealt with lavish types before and know just how to traverse conversations carefully.

Narcissus: Go away. I am busy.

PA: You are simply gazing at your own reflection

Narcissus: I know, isn't it grand?

PA: I believe you owe me some form of quest

PA: In order to complete this game

Narcissus: I owe you nothing.

PA: I knew this would be a waste of time

Narcissus: Getting to see me is never a waste of time.

You huff indignantly then ready your Punkolin before harshly dragging the bow slantwise across the strings, producing a loud screech. With a bit of effort of will, you direct some of your weird heart energy into the instrument and the screech produces a sonic wave that collides with, and subsequently shatters, the mirror the snake is gazing into. Almost immediately it switches to a different mirror, though its expression seems far more stren.

Narcissus: That was rude, child.

PA: Long as you feel more inclined to speak now

PA: Or shall I play a few more discordant riffs?

Narcissus: \*Sigh\* Bards.

Narcissus: Fine, what do you want?

PA: I want whatever quest I'm supposed to get to continue this game.

Narcissus: You're a hero of heart aren't you?

Narcissus: Figure it out on your own.

You ready the violin again.

Narcissus: I'm being serious. Heart, it's about the self.

Narcissus: It's quite literally all about you.

Narcissus: I mean at least when it's not all about me.

PA: So what exactly does a Bard of Heart do then?

Narcissus: Something big, that you want to do, obviously.

PA: I wouldn't call that obvious

PA: I mean what even is a bard anyway

Narcissus: A weird class that either single handedly drives his team to victory or destruction, sometimes both, with singular massive expulsions of their aspect.

PA: Honestly, didn't fully follow that

Narcissus: Petulant youth.

Narcissus: Do something for you, and do it big, and it'll either help everyone win or kill everyone.

PA: Like what

Narcissus: By the gods whatever you want!

Narcissus: Go play your blasted instrument for all I care.

PA: A...concert then?

PA: A big one?

Narcissus: You have a planet covered in guitar strings and a god tier body acting as an amp.

Narcissus: Even you should be able to put two and two together with a margin of error like that.

PA: You're kind of a dick.

Narcissus: Selfishness is the name of the game for those of us blessed by the Heart aspect.

Narcissus: Now leave me to my extraordinarily important business.

The snake continues staring at its reflection, making various faces and poses, as you exit the chamber with an idea taking shape in your mind. Though some of the snake's words ring in your head. Selfishness is the name of the game for Heart players...

You admit, you were sort of a dick to Mary, it wasn't her fault you were unconscious. It isn't even Ashe's fault in all fairness. You probably could have devised some system of screenshot sharing to helpfully guide her along and everything would have gone better. And then Mr. Hoffman with his awkwardly assigned sprite, that was just petty tomfoolery on your part. Heck you even had poor Jeeves, your elderly yet beloved housekeeper of many years, perform all of your tasks for you and you threw that back in his face.

Alright, you've decided, if a bard is there to perform one big event that pushes their team to victory, then you've got one hell of an apology tour to put on.

BARD: ...

That's...that's probably where you put the cue.

BARD: OH RIGHT! FINALLY, CUE THE MUSIC!

Minutes in the future, but not too many, you're hovering above the Land of Strings and Graffiti. In one hand you have your bow, in the other your sufficiently punk themed violin. You decided on a few songs to put in a single set, some of your favorites from Ashe's playlist, and the one she had accrued the most listening time on, assuming it was her favorite. You know she's feeling a bit down, so hope that will cheer her up.

A few punk bear consorts have begun to gather in anticipation as you flex your will and tap into whatever weird, soul powers you have. After a deep breath you place your bow on the strings and draw one solid note across them, a pink energy comes off you in a wave and extends over the surface of Iosag. Every set of strings it touches reverberates with the same solid note, loud and long.

Across the medium, on the Land of Lights and Circuitry, Jack quickly glances up as a low hum audibly vibrates across the sky. His attention goes back to the arguing blackbirds, the momentary lapse was somehow enough time for the Rebel Leader to

draw a weapon, no doubt smuggled in by Jerry, and you have to quickly abjure his attempts at regicide.

Equidistant, though on the opposite side of the medium at the Land of Steam and Brass, Mary stops pulling her hair out attempting to get a large contraption running as the hum vibrates across her sky as well. Then a steam pipe whistles out a burst of air and she quickly stabilizes it with time magic.

And directly in the center of your game session, just within Skaia's outer atmosphere sits Prospit. And deep within Prospit sits Ashe, atop her Sacrificial Slab. Being so deep underground, she's completely oblivious to the humming sound overtaking the golden planet, however above ground a nefarious group of black carapaced individuals take full notice of the sound.

In fact the Hegemonic Brute among them pulls out a radio to confirm with his superior that that was indeed the signal he was waiting for. After a few choice insults about his intelligence, he's mostly certain it was and signals the demolition crew to light the fuse before the entire group absconds through a hastily erected emergency portalizer back to a Dersite transport vessel.

Within the palace sits the white carapaced queen and king, upon their thrones. As the humming fades, they take each other's hand, prepared for the inevitable as a massive explosion engulfs not just the palace but a decent chunk of the planet, including a secluded chamber deep underground where a young, formerly blind girl waits. Flames engulf the room, but deep within them the Slab begins to glow and moments later Ashe, clad in a short black cape, black shirt, and a rather small black colored pair of hot pants, flies out of the burning rubble of Prospit and shoots off like a rocket towards the Land of Traps and Frogs.

## RHYS: PLAY TRACK 1

You start into the first song of your set, bow flying across the violin. As your heart powers take effect, you can swear it sounds like there's multiple yous playing every different part of the song simultaneously. The various stringed instruments interweaving the surface of your planet begin to belt out an exact copy of your song throughout the medium.

Back on Iolac Jack frantically abjures the rebel crow's attacks. In fact so frantically it takes a second to realize there's no longer any attacks to abjure. Blinking, he finds both the crow and raven leaders are staring skyward, listening intently to the music that suddenly began playing from the sky. As the crow begins to nod his head along with the turn, the raven starts tapping his foot. Outside, the two armies have stopped fighting to listen as well, and many begin rocking out to the music. He takes the distraction to get the attention of both leaders and hurriedly begins talking about a peace treaty. Eager to get back to listening to the impromptu concert, and emboldened by seeing the two blackbird armies enjoying the music in unison outside, the leaders sign a rather hasty treaty but enough to give the crows a fair shake in society.

As thanks for helping stop the rebellion, the king absentmindedly gives Jack the ring he had been proud to show off earlier. It's gold, with 4 silver balls attached. He graciously accepts and captchaloguees the ring, the king heads over to dance with the crow leader and Jack lets out a long sigh before flying homeward, making sure to leave a quick message for you.

AP: hey donahue

AP: um...well thanks i suppose

AP: i guess you aren't all bad even if you're annoying sometimes

AP: :/

AP: but hey your music was good enough to convince some bird people to give peace a chance

AP: :P

AP: so yeah like...rock on buddy

You bring the first song to a close and take only a moment's break before starting in on a heavy bassline for the next song.

On losab, Mary reclines against a pillar of brass tubing, having taken her own break to listen to your song. As she begins tapping her foot to match the bassline of the new song her eyes widen with an idea and her hand meets her forehead. Metronome!

Quick as a flash she zooms around the planet, speeding up and slowing down clockworks with temporal energy, matching the ticking gears to the thrumming bass of the song. All over, pipes begin to settle down and various jets of steam begin to run wilds through the newly operational systems. As everything comes together on this quadrant of the planet, the entire surface shifts into a new position. Emboldened, Mary continues matching the gears and eventually all four quadrants have shifted, revealing a hole going straight through the core of losab. As she peers into the hole, it lights up with some kind of time portal, on the other side you see what appears to be some kind of stone building containing an altar with a giant pink flower.

Mary summons her sprite for advice.

Gordadsprite: In my expert opinion, I'd say it's a portal.

AA: Really? I would have never guessed.

AA: And what, pray tell, am I to do with said portal, oh all knowing tutorial.

Gordadsprite: Go through it.

AA: You don't think, maybe, this planet wide time portal generator has some more important use than sightseeing some past event?

Gordadsprite: Perhaps, this being some weird end result of your quest, your entire team should come together with their own quest knowledge or rewards to figure out the use of the portal.

AA: Is that your spritely riddle way of saying ask Jack what he got from his quest?

Gordadsprite: I'm legally not allowed to say yes, but I don't have to say no.

AA: Thanks, Father.

Gordadsprite: Remember, if the copsprites show up, I said nothing.

AA: Noted. Love you.

After unsummoning him back into his necklace, Mary boots up Pesterchum to message Jack, though decides to leave a quick message to you as a sort of thanks apology.

amazinglyAwesome began pestering purportedAskance

AA: Hey Rhys...I really am sorry we didn't wait for you, or push past Jeeves, or something.

AA: But I really am glad you decided to play with us, you actually gave me a great idea that helped me get through my own quest thing here.

AA: Thanks for that!

AA: I hope you're having fun, man, message me later!

amazinglyAwesome ceased pestering purportedAskance

You take a moment to stretch out your arm, it feels like you're playing an entire orchestra and your shoulder is getting a bit tight. Even so, a moment's break later and you ready your bow, delving into the song Ashe enjoyed listening to.

Somewhere in the medium, Ashe zooms towards her planet but suddenly veers off course as a fleet of purple battleships careen towards her. Watching them, it's obvious they're on a direct course for the blue, cloudy planet nearby Prospit.

In only a minute or two, they break through the atmosphere and begin to descend towards the planet's surface. As they do, Ashe notices a vast array of meteors begin streaking towards the planet from all sides, the planet develops some kind of shield made of spirographic gates as the meteors draw closer. Something is clearly up, and Ashe figures it's a good idea to get a move on. She still needs to have a chat with her Denizen about what she even needs to do, and will maybe ask about this phenomenon while there...considering her sprite is being a bit moody at the moment.

Oblivious to the war breaking out on Skaia, you drift along the surface of Iosag, stopping just above a small bench not too far from your home. Upon it sits Ashesprite, her ghostly tail pulled up to her chest. As your final song comes to an end, you float down and land a respectable distance from her.

PA: Hey, so how was it?

PPS: it was good i guess

PPS: dont know why you grabbed that song though i kind of hate it

PPS: literallyt used to play it just to fall asleep at how boring it is

PA: Ahh...I see, so that would explain the accumulated listening time...

PA: That would be my bad then

PA: But at least I helped you get a good nap, right?

PPS: heh...yeah

PPS: why do you keep hanging out with me

PA: Well if I recall it's you who keeps stalking me

PA: But I have developed a fondness for your company I suppose...

You walk over and take a seat on the bench next to Ashesprite.

PA: The whole kinship about being essentially left behind by our friends and all

PA: And getting me to loosen up a bit and be a punk, as it were

PPS: you still sorta talk like a rich d bag

PA: And I play punk on a violin

PA: The rich d bag genes run deep

PA: Are you ok?

She was still sitting with her ghost tail up to her chest, arms wrapped around it. She also hadn't turned towards you once since you landed.

PPS: what am i to you rhys

PPS: we did all this opening up you held my hand

PPS: are we something or am i reading too deep into things

PA: Oh...um...well...maybe, I mean if you feel like we are...I...am not opposed to the idea...

PA: I would be happy to state we're close friends at this point, but am...amicable...to...something more...intimate

PA: Ugh, I suck at relationships

PPS: kinda yeah

PPS: but like why would you care about that with me

PPS: im just some weird ghost dog thing

PPS: i got freaking dog ears and a snout

PPS: woof!

PPS: and i even bark when getting worked up

PPS: like why wouldnt you want some normal person with you know legs and human features

PA: I know I'm rich, but I like to think I'm not that shallow

PA: Legs are overrated anyway, might even get mine removed now that I can fly

PA: Imagine it, never needing to worry about putting on pants again...

You notice Ashe finally crack a smile at your dumb joke, you move closer on the bench and put an arm around her shoulders.

PA: I don't need all that from a relationship...

PA: I like that we kind of get each other

PPS: ok but what baout...

PPS: i mean like isnt there...repopulation to think about

PA: Now I know you're running out of excuses

PA: There's like 4 humans left, and unless I'm wrong in assuming everyone went through the ascension process then we're all functionally immortal

PA: Even considering we have the time to do such a task, the sheer amount of inbreeding required...

PPS: ugh gross

PPS: ok whatever then but just...the other me is basically the same person and she-

PA: Come on now, it's getting silly, you're literally trying to pawn me off on yourself

PA: Stop trying to argue your way out of this

PA: I say we're a couple now, and that's final

PA: No more self-deprecating remarks attempting to dissuade me, all you've managed to do is cement my decision firmer

You pull her in closer into a side hug, squeezing her tightly. She attempts to bury her face further into her tail, but there's an obvious smile and even a ghostly gray blush on her face. After a few minutes, she finally breaks the silence.

PPS: thanks

PPS: we should probably move on to dealing with the reckoning then

PA: The what?

PPS: skais getting destroyed by the derse army and meteors

PPS: theres like a day before we syrtaight up lose the game

PA: Wait, really? Since when are there time limits

PPS: chill boo

PA: Don't call me that...

PPS: you guys just gotta kick the black kingsd butt and you basically win

PPS: should be easy cause all 4 of yuou went god tier which is like...not even necessary to beat him and is kinjda super overkill

PA: I guess I need to reconvene with the other players then

PA: If this is the final boss then I suppose you should get in the necklace thing?

PA: We may not get a chance to revisit our planets before the game...closes down or whatever

PPS: oh huh yeah...good call bae

PA: Jesus

PPS: just like resummon me once you get wherever the game sends you

PPS: we'll...um...talk then i guess



The medallion around your neck glows slightly and Ashesprite shrinks, getting sucked into it. You take off, flying back home to get on your computer and message your other friends about the troubling news you received.

Far away, though not that far, and in the past, though not very far at all, a Hegemonic Brute radios his superior.

**HB: We got the scepter.**

**DD: Just the scepter.**

**HB: Boys is lookin through the rubble as we speak, but so far there ain't no ring.**

**DD: Our...glorious leader wants that ring.**

**DD: You know what'll happen if those hero types get their mitts on it.**

**HB: We lookin boss, we lookin. Maybe it was destructed-like in the blast.**

**DD: Yet you have the scepter.**

**HB: That's what I said boss.**

**DD: The scepter that was in the very same blast.**

**HB: Pretty sure, yeah.**

**DD: The specter that isn't destroyed.**

**HB: Yes, boss! How many times I gotta tell you we got the scepter?**

**DD: Was trying to make a point, suppose it doesn't penetrate a certain thickness level of skull.**

**HB: What?**

**DD: Nevermind, have the boys continue to scour the ruins.**

**DD: Meanwhile make your way back with that scepter, our sovereigns need at least that much before our fleet reaches the Battlefield.**

**HB: On it boss.**

The Hegemonic Brute ends the call.

**DD: Idiot.**

HB makes his way to the emergency transportalizer, ending up back on the main battleship of the Dersite fleet. The Draconian Dignitary is waiting and quickly retrieves the White King's Scepter from him and sends him back to continue looking for the White Queen's Ring.

Moment's later, DD presents the scepter to his own black carapaced sovereign. The Black King takes it and holds it up, a small ring of meteors appears around the head of the scepter and then disappears in a flash of red. The Reckoning has begun.

The meteors within the veil, one by one, begin shooting towards Skaia hot on the tail of the Dersite fleet. Some time, but not much, later, the fleet zooms past an oddly dressed girl leaving her startled and confused as a massive amount of meteors follow in its wake. The fleet crosses into Skaia's atmosphere and begins to touch down mere

moments before the atmosphere fills with hundreds of gates prepared to catch the incoming barrage of space rocks.

Unnoticed by many, the first wave of meteors is met with the incoming transportalization of a host of infant humans. Created via ectobiological mishaps, the paradox clones of Mary and her Father, Jack and his Mom, Rhys and his estranged Grandmother, and Ashe and her simply strange Grandfather appear from whatever pan-temporal transportalization whisked them away from the lab. It had been only a seconds long journey for the tots, despite the hours since Jack accidentally created them. The 8 meteors carrying the babies enter 8 distinct portals and crash land on Earth at various points throughout history.

Iris Donahue crash lands into a small mountain, unveiling a vast vein of gold and eventually kickstarting a lucrative mining business, earning a vast family fortune.

Will Watson lands within a public park in the center of an urban sprawl, where he is adopted by a family. Sadly the loss of the park resulted in a childhood spending hours playing video games rather than going outside like a normal child.

Neil Winter lands on the outskirts of a remote expedition, immediately catching the attention of a group of archaeologists studying a set of ruins who adopt him into a life of adventure.

Lily Hoffman lands in a small suburb, right in the backyard of a religious, southern family. The event only serves to strengthen their faith as they thank their God for such a miracle and they raise the child in piety.

Rhys lands directly upon his Grandmother's limousine as she is driven through various mountain roads, surveying potential sites for additional mining ventures. The only survivors of the crash are Rhys himself, and the faithful Donahue family chauffer Jeeves. Jeeves plays the child off as a hidden heir to the fortune in order to maintain his rather cushy job, though surprisingly DNA tests confirm the child's identity and Rhys becomes the young heir to a massive fortune.

Mary crashes directly through the screen of an old style drive-in theatre. There aren't many guests, though the event does terrify a woman currently on a romantic date with a nerdy young man, leaving him alone yet again. Though he decides to adopt the small girl in the crater, and not just to keep the very authentic looking Spider-Man mask she was wearing.

Ashe lands atop a remote mountain, and is quickly rescued from the snow by an intrepid old man and his team of trained huskies. Sadly, an accident merely a year later leaves her permanently blind and ruins Neil's plans to raise his own explorer partner and eventual successor. One of the huskies, who had taken a liking to the girl, soon becomes her trained service dog.

Jack lands on a local, suburban church during Sunday service. Many in the congregation claim the event is satanic in nature, but one woman believes her familial prayers have been answered and adopts the child. However, the lack of local church services, and fearful suspicion from religious neighbors, robs him of a proper Sunday School and religious education.

Back in the incipisphere, well within the medium and both far away and long after any of the above events, Mary sends a message to Jack in order to follow up on the advice her sprite definitely didn't directly give her.

amazinglyAwesome began pestering aggressivelyPassive

AA: I have finally completed my quest, I hope you have had similar success.

AP: indeed i did

AP: that impromptu concert instilled some kind of music based sense of unity among the blackbirds

AP: and i was finally able to draw up a peace treaty

AP: granted i don't know anything about peace treaties but as long as it holds out until we win the game i doubt it matters if civil unrest develops in a couple decades

AP: XP

AA: I'm sure the birds care.

AA: What if I care about the happiness of all bird kind, Jack?

AP: um...do you?

AA: Nah, this is a game and we've gotta be close to the end right?

AA: It probably just like...shuts off and we wake up back home.

AP: or we live here now, with the birds and lizards, forever.

AP: -\_-'

AA: I grow weary of the sounds of clanging gears and hissing steam.

AP: well here the circuits hurt to walk on, and the place is just too colorful to look at for long

AP: but at least there aren't literally death traps every few feet like lotaf

AA: Regardless of speculation of the end of the game, I have another dilemma at this stage of it.

AP: oh?

AA: The Great Machine or whatever it's called apparently generates some kind of time portal and I don't know what to do with it.

AA: However my Fathersprite hinted that you have either gained some kind of knowledge, or at least a reward that I could use with it.

AP: i got a little ring from the raven king

AP: does that help?

AA: Not as far as I know, but my Father knows what's up. Can you bring it to me?

AP: yeah sure though...

AP: what would be a good argument if say...i had to get it out of my sylladex...

AA: If I keep up my rate of facepalming in this game, I will surely develop bruises.

AA: Do you still have my gift?

AP: ... <.< >.>

AA: Those shifty eye emojis surely don't mean you lost my heartfelt and sentimental gift...right?

AP: it was stolen!

AA: ...

AP: by you no less!

AA: I stole my own gift back?

AP: baby-you did

AA: Ahh, the baby debacle. I am now reminded of my Father's insistence of...Talks, thanks for that.

AP: he only wants to ensure that if...in the future...we ever...

AA: If in the future we ever do anything that requires additional discussion, that will be a discussion for future us to have.

AA: I refuse to give up my childlike innocence and naivety just yet.

AP: :P

AA: What all do you have at hand for inventory management.

AP: i grabbed a decorative suit of armor at donahue's

AP: his grandma stole the helmet though

AA: Mmmm...can't see it.

AP: i still have empty soda bottles, a hoodie, and...game bro

AP: D:

AA: You don't have any false arms, potentially?

AP: why would i have fake arms? like what kind of person would even have fake arms at the ready?

AP: i'll think of something

AA: You really need a better fetch modus.

AP: hey my modus is...

AP: :<

AP: yeah...i think i have an idea that'll work so ill be right over

AA: See you soon, then.

aggressivelyPassive ceased pestering amazinglyAwesome

purportedAskance began pestering amazinglyAwesome

PA: So...hey

AA: Ah hah, so we are finally speaking again.

AA: Good.

PA: Right, right, right...

PA: I...am sorry for being somewhat of a dick

AA: It's fine, we kind of deserved it I guess.

PA: No, it was overly rude and overly dramatic

AA: Seriously, I get it, I understand why. It was sort of the necessary kick in the head that led to understanding.

PA: Really though, my behavior was quite uncalled for and far too sarcastic. I should have taken the opportunity and happily joined you all in playing

AA: Now, now, quiet. We did not perform our friendly duty and ensure you were having fun, it was our bad.

PA: Yes, though I must sincerely apologize for not seeing your side of things. I was lost in my whole rebellious punk ideals at the time

AA: Ok can we stop? This is getting ridiculous.

PA: My stern upbringing of both pomp and circumstance prevented me from breaking the polite apology loop

AA: We're free now, no more tomfoolery.

PA: Unmitigated poppycock.

AA: Shush.

PA: To answer your prior messages, I am having fun though, you enjoyed the music?

AA: Quite so, and it gave me insight necessary to complete my quest.

PA: I could have expected as much, apparently Bards perform big events that cause team-wide victory

AA: Egotistical as ever I see.

PA: Merely quoting my Denizen, though they were rather egotistical

PA: Also Ashe brings some rather pressing news that may sour our respective successes

AA: The sprite one?

PA: Yes, she is just a valid an Ashe as PP is

AA: I didn't try to insinuate otherwise, I'm just like the only one of us who uses names so I have to keep organization in my head.

AA: Wait, you call her Ashe but not Ashe-Ashe?

PA: It's...complicated

PA: My personal insecurities run deep and that is really all there is to say on the matter

AA: Whatever dude, what's this dire news.

PA: We have entered the final level, so to speak, and have a time limit to complete it

AA: How dire is this time limit?

PA: Approximately 1 day

AA: That isn't too bad...Jack is on his way to me, we have one bit of business I need to deal with first.

AA: This is Time Witchy junk.

AA: Then...conviene with Ashe, the non sprite one, and go...

AA: Where is the final boss?

PA: Assumedly on the large, blue planet

AA: There's a large blue planet?

PA: I dreamed on Prospit, it was borderline touching it

PA: Perhaps we can simply fly there?

AA: Maybe, make your way here, Jack has just arrived and I must do something with this time portal.

PA: On my way

purportedAskance ceased pestering amazinglyAwesome

Jack lands next to you and holds out his hand, on it sits the queen's ring. It looks slightly familiar.

AP: the idea worked out, this is the only thing i got so hopefully it's what you need

AA: According to the vague instruction from my Father it is.

AA: What did you settle on for your modus?

AP: i'd...rather not say

AA: C'mon I'm sure it's not that weird.

AP: it's a bit embarrassing

AA: Spill it, Jack!

AP: fine! bluh

AP: >X(

AP: i...grabbed a picture of you i had...

AP: and argued if i ever proposed then i would need a ring

AA: ...O-oh...t-that's...

Your face starts to heat up. Are you blushing? Oh god you're totally blushing.

AA: That's...not that embarrassing.

AP: it's sorta lame though, like we just started dating and my minds already going there

AA: Well it's...you know...not an inaccurate argument.

AA: If...or when maybe...that happens a ring would be helpful...

AP: ugh im bringing it up too early though right

AP: like theres dates and spending time together and growing together

AP: courtship is like this whole process

AP: and now you're embarrassed, i'm embarrassed

AA: I'm not embarrassed, just...incredibly flattered.

PA: Wow you two are so hopeless

PA: I feel like I walked into a high school teen romance movie

AA: Quiet you!

Rhys floats down, landing a few feet from the two of you.

PA: Though maybe walked is the incorrect terminology

AP: donahue...

PA: Hello, AP! How goes the sprite?

AP: he told me my mom...does unspeakable actions in hell then asked me to turn the other cheek and forgive his rudeness

PA: Splendid! All is working out then I see

AP: \_ \_

AP: at least my god pajamas look neat and not some weird, poofy hat

AA: Rhys! Hey.

AA: Just in time for me to...jump into this hole.

You indicate the hole containing the time portal.

PA: Excellent, tally ho then!

PA: I shall keep Mr. Hoffman here company here in your absence

AP: \*glare\*

AA: Right...don't kill each other please, I think we're out of lives.

PA: We shall be the best of friends! Please, handle your business

Rhys casually placed an arm around Jack's shoulders.

AP: you are a perpetual burden on my psyche

You shake your head, pinching the bridge of your nose, before deciding there's no point in even trying. Instead you hop into the hole and feel yourself phase through the surface of the portal.

PA: You know, we can only truly perish if the death is considered heroic or just

AP: so if I smash you with a large rock...

PA: Would you believe I deserved it?

AP: maybe

PA: Then no, you really let a second Bible into your sprite?

AP: i dont wanna talk about it

PA: And you're also proposing to Ms. Watson?

AP: leave me alone!

You shiver slightly after the odd sensation, however you are certainly on the other side of the portal. It is some kind of ruin, various pictographs line the walls and the small, dark chamber containing your return portal only has one exit. As you follow the hallway it comes to a sealed door. With a bit of time magic, you age the door into ancient dust and step, blinking, into the brightly lit chamber beyond.

You don't go far, however, as your eyes adjust to the light you fail to notice the ledge directly beyond the door. With a startled shout, you tumble down. A gruff voiced, middle aged man in a stereotypical explorer's outfit looks up from the glowing altar only to see a woman wearing robes and a pointed hood falling upon him.

Neil: What the devil!

As you collide he gets thrown back onto the altar and absorbed into a glowing orb on top of a bed of leaves. The timer, running off some default setting, sets itself to just one hour.

That's...probably fine.

A new glowing orb appears on the altar, you get ready to toss the ring in, though channel some time magic into the altar. Hopefully it just kind of...knows what to get set to? Assuming this is all predestined anyway, can you really mess anything up? You toss the ring into the orb and, judging by the spacing, the timer is set for 13 years and 4 months. That seems just vague enough to be right...right?

In a moment of clarity, you remember where you saw the ring before. It was sitting on Ashe's desk while you were working on Rhys' house. Is this the temple Ashe always claimed to find things in? Where her game copy was? You take a quick glance at your inventory, noting the Sburb copy you've been carrying all day. After you installed it, you neatly resealed the game in the envelope and tucked it safely within your sylladex. That was certainly something that's been there all along.

Regardless, you quickly toss the game copy in after the ring then abscond back through the time portal before any consequences of accidentally assaulting an old man can appear.

One hour later, a large pink bulb sprouts from the altar and a frightened man tumbles out.

Neil: A witch, come to-eh? Oh, well um...nevermind then...

The wails of an infant beckon from outside the temple, he quickly goes to investigate. His young, recently adopted charge lays bundled up in a carrier. She has her arms crossed over her face and is positively bawling.

Neil: Come now, Ashe, that is no way for a Winter to behave.

Neil: I was gone but a moment.

Neil: Perhaps though the sun is a bit much today, it is rather bright out.

Neil: I say, wouldn't want you getting sunburned, off we trot.

The old man loads the baby carrier onto a snow sled led by a few huskies and guides them back home.

As you emerge from the hole, you note an extra party has joined your male friends.

AA: What in the heck are you wearing!?

PP: oh shit hey girl these are my god pajamas you know

AA: With the shorty shorts? And the blood? Why are you covered in blood...again?

PP: i mean its not *my* blood



PP: its that lame ass snakes

AP: she apparently killed her denizen

AA: What the hell Ashe!?

PP: was tryna bog me down with like parental duties and shit

PP: aint got time for that ima free independent woman

PP: i just didnt bother telling anyone cause i didnt think it was important

PP: fight was kinda dope though so i sorta feel bad for anyone who missed that

AA: I'm sorry, but...parental?

PA: Repopulation, far as I can gather

PA: She was apparently tasked with helping repopulate a human civilization  
post-session

PP: see parental bs

PP: using big weird words getting all nasty about mixing my goo up and spitting out babies

AP: ...was...was the big word ectobiology?

PP: that was totally it probably some depraved sexual deviancy tryna make me get pregnant with a billion kids or something

AA: Ectobiology is...we have machines...you wouldn't need to get pregnant!

AP: i accidentally turned a bunch of weird ghosty slime into babies using a secret lab

AP: also the babies were actually us i think

PP: ahh so we couldve just like printed a bunch of babies

PP: cool

AA: But you killed her...and you didn't even bother informing ANYONE of your decision?

PP: yeah whatever not like anyone wouldve cared for some drawn out scene

PP: giant spiky snake chick talkin about frogs and cloning some crazy super frog

PP: then telling me i could choose to be some new mother of mankind or some shit like i wanna birth 7 billion babies

PP: i just kinda quietly killed her when no one was looking

PP: still think i won since my house started building itself

PA: Yours did as well, apparently finishing all 4 quests...or the alternative option...triggers something

AA: You are exasperating...

You fly up for a good look at your home, it seems to be building itself straight up on it's own towards a distant, bright blue dot.

AA: Is that Skaia?

PP: totes i just flew home from there like half an hour ago

AP: skaia?

AA: Apparently the planet in the middle of our incipisphere.

PA: According to Ashe we must go there to fight the final boss

PP: i said what now

PA: No, not you PP...the no less valid sprite version of you

PP: oh right yeah you two are like totally up in each others biz now

PP: first name basis if you catch my drift

AA: Wait, Rhys, are you dating Ashesprite?

AP: oh my god donahue you're dating a half dog ghost girl?

AP: that's a bit weird i'm going to be honest

PP: it really kinda is man

PP: like im half of that half dog ghost girl and im still telling you thats weird af

AA: Quiet, the both of you!

AA: I'm sure Rhys doesn't appreciate you insulting his lady friend.

AA: And besides it's very-

PA: It's fine AA...

He raises a hand to the sprite-containment medallion around his neck.

PA: I know how I feel, let the peanut gallery say what they wish

AP: sigh...im sorry dude, just seemed odd to me

AP: but i mean you can't pick who you love

AP: heck i'm a blood player i should be supportive

AP: are we good?

PA: Yes, yes, we're 'good'

PP: for the record im not sorry shits still weird

PP: we good

PA: ...No

PP: cool

AA: Ok, enough.

PA: I agree, my potential love life aside we have a game to win

PP: whatre we doing

AA: Going to Skaia and killing a boss.

AP: do we need to prepare? alchemize some stuff?

AP: usually you gotta gear up, get like potions and ammo stocked to full

PA: According to Ashe this boss is balanced more for standard players, us all going god tier is overkill

AP: so the cool powers and flying and all that is gonna make this easy mode

AA: Honestly that's a bit disappointing.

PP: i just wanna smack it with my cane of many angles

AP: wow jeez what is that mess?

PP: its like a weird cane abomination of random crap but theres like a spacey dimension inside that can pull like anything out to smack things with

AP: i still just have excaliboulder

AP: it's currently called true excaliboulder and its made of stronger materials and stuff but its still just a sword in a rock

AA: I managed to upgrade my crossbow with various extra attachments from a bunch of cool video game guns.

PA: I can send sonic waves from my violin

PA: We should be good, I mean we also can't die

AA: ...

PP: ...

AP: yeah you mentioned

PA: Right, yeah...Ashe told me, apparently we can't die unless we really deserve it or we're sacrificing ourselves heroically

PP: hehehehehe

AA: Um...so as long as we don't heroically protect each other we can't die?

PP: can i go test it out back on my planet

AP: please don't...

AA: Ugh...overleveled, overpowered, and invulnerable?

AA: This is going to be boring, honestly...

PA: Let's just get this done and go home, or wherever this game sends us after

PP: meh fine

AP: alright, lead the way

AA: Such a lame ending...

The four of you take off towards Skaia, dodging various meteors on your way. As you near the planet, you see that most of the meteors are passing into the various gates. On the surface there are numerous soldiers fighting a massive war, and the white carapaced army is slowly falling at the might of a mighty black carapaced army and a monstrous pair of rulers. The Black Queen seated upon the shoulder of a massive Black King.

The two have evidence of all of your sprites, reminiscent of the various monsters with sprite-based traits but turned up to 11. Eagle wings, beaks and thick antlers from the eagleope. Armored HEV plating and various weaponry from the Half-Life games due to the Gordon Freeman statue. Thorny crowns and cross iconography from the Bible, including burning rays of holy light. And lastly, and oddly the least interesting, pointed ears and bushy tails thanks to Snowman, though the claws and fangs kind of do add a bit of combat potential.

As you all drift down towards the rulers, a host of large, floating lily pads sprout around them to act as platforms. They let out combined growl/eagle screeches in your direction. You land and pose, just a little, for fun. It's time for one *Hell* of a...

## STRIFE!

The King brings a massive crowbar down on your lily pad, you all leap to the sides and fly upwards as the broken platform falls to skaia. Mary immediately begins giving callouts for the fight.

AA: Ok guys, avoid AOE's, watch for adds I don't like those flying monsters encroaching on the battle. Ashe, can you focus on the Queen?

PP: why do i need to focus the queen i want to fight the big one

AA: You're a Space player right? Can't you do some spacey thing and get her away from him? Please?

PP: ugh fine

Ashe holds her hands out towards the queen and the two of them vanish and reappear some distance away. Mary begins firing barrages of arrows and bullets from her various machine gun weapons and Jack takes off straight up. Rhys casually begins tuning his violin.

Ashe begins her own assault on the Queen, equipping her Cane of Many Angles while giggling. With a quick flash she teleports behind the queen and draws her weapon, apparently a park bench, before heartily smacking the Queen. Twirling away from her attack, Ashe resheathes the weapon only to redraw it as, apparently, a small letter opener. Rolling her eyes she quickly tries again, receiving a cool looking ninja blade as a result, which she teleports and uses to slash at the queen's back.

Again and again Ashe darts away, redraws her cane-blade for some new object, then teleports back in for a quick attack. The queen catches on quick though and Ashe meets the wrong end of a shotgun upon landing from a teleport.

PP: well fuck

The gun goes off and Ashe is sent sailing, a chest full of buckshot. The other kids yell in panic, which quickly subsides as her seemingly dead body begins to glow before reorienting itself into a perfectly alive and unharmed Ashe.

PP: bluh why is it always me getting killed

AA: Man, immortality is really going to ruin this...

PA: PP would currently be dead if not for it...

AA: Would you quit fiddling with that thing and fight!?

PA: I want to ensure the strings are in tune

AA: For what!?

PA: This, obviously

Rhys sets the violin on his shoulder and readies the bow before belting out an insane solo, pink waves of sonic energy flow out of the instrument and buffet the King. He reels back, grasping at the sides of his head. As he does, a Jack shaped missile crashes down on top of him at incredible speed, Excaliboulder first. The huge stone encasing his sword smashes the king's head with an audible crack and the King stumbles away, dazed.

AP: thanks donahue

AP: wasn't sure if i could get the aim right from that high up with him flailing his arms but the distraction helped

PA: Anytime...pal

AA: That actually gives me an idea, Rhys go assist Ashe, will you?

PA: If I must

AA: Jack, help me get two of these lily pads directly above each other.

AP: um...ok

Rhys floats over to the Queen fight, Ashe is very carefully continuing to dance around with weird and improvised items as weapon, but is far more wary of the different gun barrels continuously being levelled at her.

PA: Need any help?

PP: no

PA: Alright, I'll go hang out on that lily pad

Ashe just barely dodges a rocket, twice when the queen guides it back towards her.

PP: ugh fine yes

PA: Well now I'm a bit disheartened, perhaps if you say the magic word

PP: i swear ima smack you with whatever comes out of this cane next

PA: You wouldn't do such a thing to your dear friend

Rhys gets lightly bopped with a stuffed animal, the current iteration of Ashe's cane blade.

PA: You wound me, Ms. Winter

PA: The betrayal, I can't take it

PP: bluh whatever please help distract this bitch

PA: \*Sigh\* More distracting

Rhys focuses his power on the soul of the queen, then plays a rather sad song. The queen immediately bursts into tears and Ashe draws a Legendary Piece of Shit sword from her cane just in time to slash right at her neck. The Queen hasily raises her hands to block but to no avail, the sword slices right through both her appendages and neck. She bursts with a small explosion.

PP: awesomeness

PP: we did it du-

Rhys was already casually drifting back towards the other fight, examining his bow as he did. Ashe quickly catches up.

PP: man are you still being all dramatic

PA: It's mostly just boring at this point

PA: I'm lightly distracting our enemies while the rest of you deliver the death blows.

PP: dude you got a support role lighten up

PP: i literally spent like 80% of this game either dead or lazing about on prospit

PP: you had some key part of like everything

PA: I spent most of it passed out, I remind you, thanks to someone's blind shenanigans

PP: and since you woke up you inadvertently helped both of them-

She indicates Mary and Jack as they get the lily pads into position. The King seems to just barely be shaking off the previous hit.

PP: beat their quest

PP: you were the one entrusted with the white ring and in a roundabout way got it where it had to go

PP: played a game wide rock concert

PP: got a version of me to fall for you

PP: and are currently helping defeat BOTH of the bosses

PP: for someone who 'hasnt really been a part of this game' theres sure as hell a lot of stuff that couldnt be done without you

PA: Why is it always some version of you that comes to cheer me up?

PP: cause manboy and gamergirl are too absorbed in each other to pay attention

PA: Hmm..

Rhys watches with mild interest as Mary alters her wrist gun to its Portal setting and fires two portals directly above one another on the lily pads.

She clasps hands with Jack and activates one of the fraymotifs she purchased. A blood symbol and a time symbol superimpose themselves over the two and Jack leaps into the portal, falling out of the upper one only to fall again into the lower. He begins to accelerate as he falls, aided by Time magic speeding him up far beyond what would be terminal velocity.

The King, finally cognizant again, begins to charge towards them. Mary quickly flips the top lily pad sideways and Jack rockets out on an absolutely ludicrous speed, his sword colliding with the scepter in the King's outstretched hand with such force that the scepter's head vaporizes in a cloud of dust. He then continues to sail past the King, suddenly yelling in panic as he disappears towards the horizon.

AA: Maybe that was overdoing it a bit...

PA: I think he could have used 1 or 2 more mach levels

PP: hehehehehe

PA: You probably shouldn't let the King get away

AA: What, where!?

Mary turns her attention away from the rapidly shrinking spec formerly known as Jack and scans the area below. A much small, much less monstrous King scurries away and Mary dashes to catch up. She lands on him, sending him to the ground and causing him to skid a few feet with Mary standing on top of him.

AA: Nope, you aren't getting away so easily.

PA: So I guess we kill him now

AA: I...sort of don't want to. Now that he isn't all giant and monster-y it feels a bit wrong.

PP: ill do it

AA: No! Ugh.

PA: I doubt we can just sort of...leave him be

AA: Can we find a way to just get him out of the session?

AA: Like just completely out of the incipisphere.

PP: theres a bunch of portals still open around skaia i could just teleport him into one

AA: Where do those even go?

PP: earth generally trust me space bs

PP: if we send him to one like long after the apocalypse we sorta caused...which actually he kinda caused by sending these meteors in the first place...and is basically happening as we speak...then hell probably avoid getting roasted by meteors and just kinda live on a dead planet for a while

AA: I mean...it's harsh but sort of fitting I guess. Go for it.

Ashe does her Spacey thing and sends the former King to a meteor right before it enters a portal leading far into Earth's future. There he would wander, eventually ending up with a small band of others accidentally exiled via the reckoning. Hiding his former identity behind several face coverings and speaking very little, the Brusque Kerchiefed would assist them in operating several machines to terraform the dying planet back to life where one day it would eventually bear new, intelligent creatures who would unearth the buried technology necessary to once again run the game known as Sburb. But that's another story altogether, there's still our current one left to finish.

AA: So are we done...?

PA: I would have assumed something interesting would happen

AA: Same.

PP: kinda bs to be honest

AP: AAAAAAAAAAAAAA-

PA: Are we forgetting a step?

PP: ask your girlfriend

AP: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-

PA: She is safely awaiting any potential absconse from this game

PA: I wouldn't risk summoning her only to magically teleport away

AA: Ugh, I'll just summon my Father.

AP: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-

Mary summoned her Father from her pendant.

Gordadsprite: Excellent job kids!

Gordadsprite: You guys actually beat the King!

AA: Thanks, Father.

AA: Though are we missing something?

AP: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-

Gordadsprite: Well obviously, the goal of the game isn't to beat the black rulers.

PP: then whyd we even do that bull

AA: What more do we need to do?

AP: AAAAAA-OOF!

Jack lands, hard, a number of feet away from the conversation. Skidding a fair distance before stopping. He appeared to come in from the opposite direction he had flown off in.

AP: i'm okay...in pain....but alive

Mary rushes over to check on Jack.

Gordadsprite: Eh, let her deal with him, she doesn't actually need to do anything for this part.

Gordadsprite: You, on the other hand, Ashe...

PP: ugh i need to do more work

PP: none of these guys even had to fight some crazy snake boss

PA: You didn't need to fight a crazy, snake boss either

Gordadsprite: You killed Echidna...?

PA: Didn't even have the decency to do it on screen...

The sprite and Ashe stare at Rhys for a second, saying nothing.

PA: What?

Gordadsprite: Whatever, doesn't matter. Long as Echidna wakes up, the forge lights.

PP: is that the lava pit

PA: There's a lava pit?



PP: it opened up not too far from my house

PP: like i mean its technically just another trap but bigger and hotter

PP: also it looked like a lot of the normal traps shut off

Gordadsprite: The planet was mostly likely terraforming to make it easier to get frogs. Without all the traps, the frogs aren't dying every couple seconds.

PP: i think snowman liked frogs

PP: i kinda miss him

PP: i even found a machine that summons them for him to play with

Gordadsprite: Excellent, then you have a bit of experience! That's probably some old, defunct cloning tech but you can deploy some fresh machines from the Pernalia Registry.

PP: the huh

PA: [The Sburb deployables menu](#)

PP: why so i can summon a bunch of frogs in my house

Gordadsprite: Sort of, you need some very specific frogs and you need to actually fail to summon them.

Gordadsprite: To elaborate, you need to try to summon a frog, and then plan to go out and mess with the frog, like capture it or something.

PP: or toss it in the lava pit

Gordadsprite: That...would...work...though, why?

PP: might look cool

PA: [Why exactly do we need to attempt to summon frogs, and then go out and specifically prevent ourselves from summoning them?](#)

Gordadsprite: Ectobiology!

PP: gross didnt take you for that kind of pervert gamer dad guy

PP: and like with frogs too

Gordadsprite: Um...

PA: [She was told by Echidna to repopulate the human race, potentially using Ectobiology, and just basically assumed it was something naughty related to birthing a few billion children](#)

Gordadsprite: Well...that's...so...

Gordadsprite: \*Sigh\* If you try to summon a frog that still has something to do in the future, like get captured...or tortured, then you appearify paradox slime instead that contains a minor genetic imprint of the frog.

Gordadsprite: Mix up a few different slimes and you get a complete genetic code for a new frog...or sometimes the exact DNA of one of the parents, which inevitably means that tadpole will grow up and get sent back in time to become the original parent.

PA: [The babies AP created](#)

Gordadsprite: Exactly. But you actually don't want them, you want the new, mutated frogs.

Gordadsprite: Eventually you'll make one with a different sounding croak, and it'll also look kinda crazy. Breed and mutate that guy and you'll get a Genesis Frog tadpole.

PP: im lost what am i doing again

PA: I'll walk you through the process...what do we do with the tadpole?

Gordadsprite: Ironically...toss it into the lava.

PA: ...

Gordadsprite: And both queen's rings. That'll cause the tadpole to gestate into the adult Genesis Frog. THEN you guys win.

PP: i knew i had to throw frogs into lava

PA: Cmon, you budding serial killer, I suppose we have...probably hours of frogs to make. Fun

Rhys takes off, flying towards Ashe's planet as she follows after. Meanwhile, a short distance away Mary is chatting with Jack.

AP: it wasn't that bad of a fight, i mean he looked neat

AA: I literally launched you at like Mach 3 and you circled an entire planet.

AP: see? totally badass

AA: Yeah, obviously, but also it kinda drives home just how OP we were.

AP: did you really want a hard boss fight when the possibility of dying was on the table?

AP: not like we can just wipe and start over

AA: It wasn't even on the table! Ashe literally died and just glowed and poofed back unharmed!

AP: it wasn't heroic or just, just kinda her being dumb

AA: Right, which means all we need to do is just avoid doing anything to each other to require revenge, and avoid jumping in front of each other to take some deadly hit.

AA: Boom, problem solved, literal invulnerability with just a bit of forethought.

AP: i don't...think i could avoid jumping in front of you...

AA: \*Sigh\* That's really sweet in a way, thanks.

She leans over and kisses his cheek.

AA: But also terrible strategic thinking!

AP: bluh, bluh!

Gordadsprite: You two kids doing good over here?

AP: yes mr. watson

Gordadsprite: Call me Dad, we're practically family now what with you eventually marrying my daughter!

AP: uh well...maybe...someday

AA: Geez, Father! Stop pestering us about my dating life!

AP: so...um subject change...where are the other's going?

Gordadsprite: They're gonna take care of the last bit for a while, it's mostly a space player job but a little help doesn't hurt.

AP: should we all go?

Gordadsprite: Nah, too many people could mess something up more likely than help.

Gordadsprite: It's just some basic frog breeding using ectobiology.

AP: oh, well i have experience with ectobiology so maybe I should-

Gordadsprite: Actually, on the subject of breeding I think we can chat about the possibility of grandchildren...

AA: Ok, nope, I'm calling time here. Back in the necklace.

Gordadsprite: Aw, cmon now.

AA: Mmm mmm, no.

She holds up the pendant and her sprite is sucked back inside.

AP: well dodged a bullet there i guess

AA: Why does he have to be so...urgh!

AP: i mean he is your dad and like...we are boyfriend and girlfriend so eventually you're probably gonna need to let him talk

AA: I know just enough to know I'm not ready for that kind of talk.

AA: I just wanna hang out and keep playing games and watching movies with you.

AA: And then like hold hands, and kiss, and be all romantic.

AA: Anything further allegedly tied to relationships is for the future after I mature enough.

AP: i guess that's fair

AP: after all his talk i've sort of been overwhelmed with...weird feelings

AP: so i recommend putting it off and we'll just like continue what we had before with a little more romance

The two sat for a while, staring up into the clouds.

AA: It's like a slideshow of all the stuff we did...

AP: i wonder if the clouds were always like this

AP: like if we had made it here earlier, could we have used them as a guide

AA: Maybe. We just got so caught up in our planet stuff, Rhys got caught up in just ignoring the game altogether, and Ashe was busy being dead.

AP: i think we did decent enough without needing every kind of tutorial the game provides

AP: though mentioning their...general lack of competence does make me worry if they do need help doing the ectobio stuff

AA: You could message them.

AP: huh...pesterchum, actually been a bit since we've been on that

Jack withdrew his modified Spider-Man mask and donned it, accessing the built in computer hud.

AP: and they're both offline

AA: Figures.

AP: huh...do you have a chat room open?

AA: Not at all...maybe Ashe started something? I did notice a few open memos, from Ashesprite and her chatting, when I borrowed her computer.

AP: maybe, nothing better to do than look

agressivelyPassive began pestering local chat room "Is anyone out there?"

Current members:

perpetuallyReloading

agressivelyPassive

AP: oh, hello?

AP: who're you?

PR: Oh my Gog, someone actually connected?

PR: Kridon totally owes me a bet.

AP: right yes, well

AP: i was rather surprised to see a chat room, and more so to find an unknown username

PR: I know right? Crazy!

PR: You have no idea how pumped I am to find someone!

PR: :O

PR: So, like, are you playing this game too?

AP: i don't know why that didn't cross my mind

AP: :P

AP: but yeah i guess we're both out here in paradox space or whatever

AP: we like just beat the boss and are nearly finished though

PR: Oh...well that's good for you, I'm happy to hear it.

AP: are you guys still kinda early or something?

PR: No, we...

PR: We can't ever win.

PR: A lot of us died a while ago.

AP: that's really sad to hear actually

AP: did you try reviving them with...corpse smooching

AP: XP

AP: or we all did the ascension thing, that worked too

PR: The...person who killed them...

PR: He made sure the bodies couldn't be revived.

AP: oh...someone from your group...

PR: Yes.

PR: We've been just kind of here, sitting around for like half a sweep with nothing to do.

PR: Six of us died, not including...him. He just left and flew off into space.

AP: i'm sorry to hear that, i don't know what a sweep is but it's probably a long time

AP: that's honestly just like a really crappy situation it sounds like

PR: Yeah well, screw all that sad noise!

PR: Zaeekz came up with a plan, and we're gonna try it!

PR: Well he is, I think the rest of us just...sit here while he goes back and does something.

PR: Or maybe disappear.

PR: I don't really know which I'd prefer.

AP: you sounded pretty hopeful there though, for a second

AP: then you got all sad again

AP: :(

PR: Sorry I just get like that. I've been like that ever since I lost...

PR: I just lost so many...

PR: Even Hoppy, he just vanished on me...

PR: I think it was my fault, apparently a Princess of Blood is basically just a destroyer of friendships.

AP: hey i'll tolerate no talk like that

AP: this mess wasn't your fault by the sound of it

AP: and i bet this other guy will fix it all up

AP: and if you stop existing as a result well...

AP: at least a happier you gets to exist instead so maybe...that's just kind of...you know...

AP: ok i kinda lost my thunder there

AP: i'm actually also a blood player, our time player could probably explain changing history shenanigans better than i could

PR: Yeah, Zaeekz is ours, and gave a long talk about the plan, but I didn't pay much attention.

PR: I'll try to stay hopeful, it's actually been easier recently...to feel hopeful, you know?

PR: See, I'm even gonna do some color switching!

PR: The pep talk really helped, thanks...um...

AP: oh right, I'm Jack

PR: Thanks Jack, I'm Connie.

AP: nice to meet you

PR: I...think I need to go though, Zaeekz is messaging and I think that means he's gonna finally try his plan.

AP: i hope it all works out for you guys!

PR: Me too! Thanks again Jack, byeeeeeee!

PR: :D

perpetuallyReloading ceased trolling local chat room "Is anyone out there?"

agressivelyPassive ceased pestering local chat room "Is anyone out there?"

Mary had been watching with only minor interest. Once Jack removed his mask she reengaged the conversation.

AA: I take it the chat room was something interesting?

AP: huh?

AA: You were chatting for a good few minutes, who opened the chat?

AA: Was it Ashe or Rhys?

AP: oh um, no, i don't actually know who it was

AA: ...That's...odd.

AP: yeah i don't know, she said her name was connie and her group had been playing for half a...i think she said sweep?

AP: you ever hear of a sweep?

AA: Nope.

AP: i mean you're the witch of time right?

AA: Yes, because being arbitrarily assigned this particular aspect suddenly filled me with knowledge of all possible units of time measurement.

AP: ha ha. see how enthusiastically i laugh?

AP: i mean if something is sweeping that usually means big, so i guess it's a while

AA: Impeccable logic. I guess it makes sense other people started playing when we did, and managed to start a session before the end of the world...

AA: But how could they have been in here any longer than us if the game literally causes the apocalypse?

AP: oh i didn't think of that

AP: regardless, she said that her group failed, one of them went crazy or something and killed a bunch of them so they've just been aimlessly sitting around unable to progress

AA: Oof, that sucks.

AP: their time guy is gonna try to...i guess rewind the session and stop them?

AP: could something like that work?

AA: In theory I could see it, but he'd need to be crazy powerful to do that much.

AA: Though if they've just been grinding for some nebulous length of time, he could be pretty high level.

AP: i hope it all works out for them

AA: As do I.

AA: So no news from the rest of our group I take it.

AP: still offline, so i guess they aren't in need of assistance

AA: I wonder what they're doing...

Jack leans back and looks back up at the clouds, he catches a glimpse of one depicting an odd looking girl with gray skin and orange, spiral horns curving up and out from her head. The odd sight of her holds his attention long enough that the cloud fades before he can draw Mary's attention to it. He shakes off his confusion, but ultimately decides it's not worth mentioning in the long run.

Mary, on the hand, is concentrating on attempting to be both Rhys and Ashe and could probably use Jack's help.

## MARY AND JACK: BE THE OTHER GUYS

Rhys finishes playing a quiet tune on his violin and stows the instrument away before collecting the now sleeping frog or a nearby rock into his sylladex. Ashe floats nearby, casually observing. And by Ashe Rhys of course means the Ashe who is part sprite, and yet is no less valid of an Ashe.

PA: How many of these creatures, exactly, do we need?

PPS: one if you got the right one and it mutated correctly upon being slime bred

PA: Well given that doesn't appear to be the case...

PPS: probably a few hundred at this rate

PA: Lovely

PPS: at least you got my cheerfkl comapny babe

PA It was my intention to hold off summoning you, on the off chance we were suddenly whisked away

PA: But given the monotonous task of catching various frogs long before such a moment I preferred the company

PPS: nah i get ut no hard feelings

PPS: should have mentioned all this crap but something kinda convinced me we had already done it i guess

PPS: which is dumb considering im in chartge of doing it and aint no way i was fonna have any of this crap done early

PA: A fair point, was that your sprite programming telling you not to say anything?

PPS: no actually we could have started this bit before

PPS: heck there was even a lab with usable equopment on my planety like way back when i was me and my sprite was just snowman

PPS: it was just like i guess a memory telling me this goial was already done?

PPS: which is also weird cause i only have a clear list of game goals now that im a spreite so wouldnt have a goal based memory from back then and just ugh

Rhys approaches the next set of coordinates and locates the intended frog, which he once again lulls to sleep with music before calmly collecting it.

PA: If only your sprite memories are so goal oriented  
PA: And you feel this memory was from before you became a sprite  
PA: Could you be remembering something the Snowman sprite would have noticed and mentally checked off the goal list?

Ashe ponders the question for a moment.

PPS: well i didnt do much with frogs before dying  
PPS: i found the old lab and justy kinda fucked around with a random keyboard i found which did appearigy a frog  
PPS: though i didnt do any slime bree...  
PPS: oh my god  
PA: What?  
PPS: oh my god im so dumb is what  
PPS: we gotta get to my house take the fiurst gate and get back to that lab  
PA: What exactly did you remember?  
PPS: i told you about my random typing skills babe  
PPS: i fucking warned ytu  
PA: The ones that turned my house into a Picasso art gallery ravaged by a tornado?  
PPS: fuck off i liteally appearified the frog we need in that god damn lab first try  
PPS: snowman toally saw it but of course i had no idea what was gfoing on  
PA: So all of this frog hunting could have been avoided?  
PPS: so  
PPS: dumb  
PPS: i swear  
PA: Well, no worries, we spent some nice time together  
PPS: awww babe youre so nice

Ashe embraces Rhys and gives him a big lick on the cheek, to which he grimaces slightly.

PPS: hehehehehe sorry  
PPS: woof  
PA: Just...requires some getting used to is all  
PA: We'll head to your home, get PP to appearify that frog and then head out to capture it I suppose  
PPS: yeah we just need some of its slime to mutate into like a gfiant tadpole  
PPS: then we good

The two of you head back home, Ashesprite vaguely instructs Ashe where to aim the appearifier and eventually she locates the large, white frog with rainbow eyes still hopping around the laboratory's interior. Rhys takes note of the coordinates and begins



to head towards the first gate, though waits for a moment as the two Ashes have a discussion over just how dumb they collectively seem to be.

As Rhys idles around, he finds a ring exactly like the one the white queen gave him just sitting on Ashe's computer desk, next to the empty Sburb envelopes that once contained her game copy. He surreptitiously captchalogues the ring *or* envelopes, the queen had originally entrusted him with it after all, just as Ashesprite floats over.

The two of you head through the gate and after a brief trip arrive at an old laboratory. Several hijinks and shenanigans ensue as the two of you chase the frog around the lab, through various rooms filled with incredibly interesting lab devices. Good times are had all around, you can be assured of that, even if the event isn't given a more detailed description.

As Rhys' song ends, he captchalogues the sleeping frog *or* some kind of odd looking lab device from a nearby crate. Then retrieves his phone, sadly deleting the sweet punk jacket he borrowed from a bear some time ago...actually in retrospect that's kind of rude, maybe he'll have to make it up to that bear and alchemize some sweet new threads before finishing this game...

Nah, that'd probably take too long...regardless there's a notification going off telling you that Ashe is messaging you.

RHYS: ANSWER ASHE, THE HUMAN AND ALSO NO LESS VALID VERSION

palpablePall began pestering [purportedAskance](#)

PP: hey i think it worked

[PA: You acquired the slime then, I take it?](#)

PP: more than that it made this big ass tadpole

PP: took up an entire bathtub by itself

[PA: I'd say that's the one we're after](#)

PP: so then what do we do with all the other tadpoles

[PA: Just leave them in the tubs, they'll eventually grow legs and walk out on their own I assume](#)

[PA: And no, we aren't dumping a couple dozen baby animals into lava](#)

PP: ...

PP: i definitely wasnt thinking of doing that

PP: we do dump the big one in though

[PA: Apparently yes](#)

[PA: Along with both Queen's rings](#)

PP: right...

[PA: The rings you do not have](#)

PP: lies and slander

[PA: I know you don't have them because I have both](#)

PP: when the hell did you do that

PA: I snatched the...the enemy Queen's ring from the air, and or'd it with her own severed finger so I could properly store it

PP: the black queen you mean?

PA: I will stick with enemy

PP: bluh pc rich guy bluh

PP: sweet catch though

PA: It looks just like the White Queen's ring so I assumed it was important

PA: I also decided to grab the White Queen's ring from your desk as well, since we needed them both anyway

PP: isnt it kinda racist that youre perfectly comfortable using the white queens skin color but are really uncomfortable saying black even if its just a description

PP: like you got a problem with the word black even daring to pass by your lips

PA: I...look that's...

PA: \*Ahem\*

PA: I shall meet you by the lava pit, bring the tadpole please

PP: hehehehehe

purportedAskance ceased pestering palpablePall

Rhys collects yet more lab equipment in order to re-captchalogue his phone. Man, he's kind of running low on cards, which is to be expected since half of them constantly need to be deleted. At least there's never a shortage of small, random objects around to avoid any potential inventory based issues whenever he needs to pick something up.

PA: Looks like we're good to go

PPS: sweetness

PA: I suppose you should re-enter the pendant if we're actually going to end the game now

PPS: yeah would probably be a good idea to be honest

PA: I'm curious though...weren't we supposed to breed this frog?

PPS: pretty sure yeah

PA: But we didn't, and most likely won't ever, create it

PPS: well yeah cause it came from the future

PPS: if we had just created it then i wouldnt have been able to appearify itfp since we would probably have done the future capture bit

PPS: since i was able to do that it means we werent gonna do the things liek that

PA: Ok sure, but then is there any kind of real significance to the fact this frog technically never gets bred and yet still exists?

PA: Wouldn't that cause a paradox, in that we pulled this from the future after it was bred yet then we don't go on to actually breed it?

PPS: man i dont know all about time loop shit

PPS: someone bred this frog in the future then just had it sitting around doing nothing

PPS: cause if it was ever gonna do something i would only appear if slime

PPS: but instead i got frog

PPS: if there's any real significance to this whole bs then i don't see it

PA: \*Sigh\* Of course you don't

PPS: damn straight now get me in my pokeball and beat this game already

Rhys de-summons Ashesprite into the pendant and flies out of the exit, heading towards the lava pit to find Ashe. On the way, he makes sure to message Mary so the other two would meet up for whatever finale the game had in store.

In a room just off to the side, one neither Rhys nor Ashesprite decided to enter, sits an old set of frog cloning equipment. The monitor is currently locked onto a young girl's respitblock. It is quite obviously a respitblock, there's even a recuperacon and a side desk with a husktop. These are obviously things that identify something as a respitblock, and are certainly words anyone would know the meaning of. Given the previous use of this device, the room is probably the location where the frog was appearified from, though currently the block is empty aside from a large collection of firearms. There is most likely some real significance in some cosmic way to this being the frog's location, but as no one even entered the room, no one was able to make such significant observations.

Some time later, but not much, Mary and Jack finally touched down near the lava pit just outside Ashe's house. Jack was carrying his Mother, apparently having collected her from his house on the way.

AA: Sorry, the trip took, Jack had a detour.

AP: i didn't know if she'd be warped out or whatever if she wasn't with us

Ms. Hoffman seemed rather worse for wear and was looking around with nervous glances. Clearly being overloaded with rather magical and mystical game mechanics.

AA: I still have my father with me, did you collect your housekeeper.

PA: ...Um...no. I was not actually able to find him

PA: Whatever spritely business he decided to get up to, I'm sure he knows what he wants

AA: You aren't like...worried about him?

PA: Not particularly. He was a faithful housekeeper, but not like I had any real attachment other than cordial respect

AA: That seems a bit cold.

AP: he is a sprite so he probably knows what's going on

AP: so he would be here if he really needed to be, right?

AA: I guess...

PP: oh my god can we just get on with this thing

AP: yeah, this is the end right? i'm pretty pumped

AA: Ugh fine, I suppose if he wants to avoid this despite any omniscience, that's his prerogative.

PA: Right, so...

PA: As far as we've been led to believe, whatever process this is-

PP: dumping a giant frog into lava

PA: Quite. It is apparently the final goal of the entire game.

PA: What exactly it accomplishes-

PP: other than watching a giant tadpole get roasted

PA: -is still a mystery

AP: more sprite riddle bull stuff?

PP: pretty much yeah

AP: whoa is this thing the tadpole?

PP: no thats actually the reincarnation of my dog

AP: what?

PP: yes its the freaking tadpole it looks like a tadpole doesnt it

AP: no it looks like your face!

PP: ...alright ill give you that one

PA: Can we just move on with this process?

AA: Yeah let's get this thing started, I wanna see some credits.

AP: could there actually be credits?

AA: I don't know, I was being facetious.

PA: My lord, PP just dump the bathtub already!

PP: you got it bro

Ashe heaved the tub contained the flashing, rainbow tadpole into the pit. The metal tub quickly melted and the water disappeared in a puff of steam, though the tadpole showed no real reaction and simply sank below the surface.

PP: lame and like really anticlimactic

AP: isn't lava supposed to be too dense to sink in?

AA: Nothing actually happened.

PA: Just one last thing

Rhys produced the pair of rings and tossed them in after. In a sudden flash everyone present teleported to a floating platform orbiting just outside Skaia.

AP: whoa what the heck? where are we?

PP: by skaia duh

PA: Ahh, Jeeves. There you are

Jeegleopesprite: I decided to wait here for your arrival, sir.

PA: Good show then

AA: Something happening to the lava pit...

Mary was staring through the scope on her weapon towards The Land of Traps and Frogs. On the surface, the lava pit had begun to erupt and explode in plumes of lava. Suddenly the tadpole shot out, flying right for Skaia. The other kids had begun peering over the platform edge to watch along with Mary. The tadpole began to metamorphosize and grow legs as it continued its fast ascent.

It flew right past the platform and crash landed on the battlefield within Skaia, burrowing straight to the center. A massive eruption of light exploded outwards and the entire planet was replaced with a gigantic frog, its body seemingly made of stars, which released a single, resounding croak.

AA: Wow, what the heck is that.

Jeegleopesprite: That, Miss, is a universe.

AP: a universe?

Jeegleopesprite: In its entirety.

Jeegleopesprite: Every moment of every instance that ever could exist of one.

Jeegleopesprite: The Speaker of the Vast Croak.

Jeegleopesprite: The entire purpose of this game is to ensure his birth.

PA: To ensure...the creation of an entire universe?

PP: which is a frog how does that work

Jeegleopesprite: Best not to dwell on the minutia, Madam Winter.

AA: So...what do we do-

A large version of the Sburb logo appeared on one end of the platform. Each of the main squares was overlaid with one of their aspect symbols and a door was set into the bottom.

Jeegleopesprite: Your ultimate reward, to live within the universe you created.

Jeegleopesprite: Find somewhere to settle and simply live out your lives.

Jeegleopesprite: Much of the technology from Sburb will remain available and is excellent for terraforming or establishing a population.

Mary took hold of the door knob and opened it, a light spilled from the doorway and engulfed the party. Moments later the door shut on an empty platform drifting aimlessly around a massive frog.