

The Bardic Type Patreon by Thomas Bell

(01/January/2021 - 01/August/2021)

[My Very First Developer Blog!](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

First off, thank you for supporting my writing! I'm incredibly excited and nervous about setting this up, so much so that Ziva (my mom's dog) has taken to resting her head on my leg as I write as if to say, "Relax already, sis."

I can't wait to share more of *Mind Blind* and my other projects with you guys. For now, I'd like to share a little bit more about what January has in store for this Patreon. I'll be posting the rewards throughout the month, and here's the current timeline:

January 1st: The very first Mind Blind "Saucy Side" will go up tonight (I'm editing it right now)! These are two versions of a ficlet featuring Kent and Kenna. It's nothing explicit (like *MB*, it's PG-13), but it's cheeky enough that I probably wouldn't read it aloud to my mother 🙄 Saucy Sides will feature the various ROs in, ahem, semi-compromising positions, and will always be written in second person, keeping Button vague in terms of gender and sex.

January 10: A short story featuring Regency-Era Gray and Nick. I'm holding back releasing it until after my writing group edits it for me. I foresee a lot of various *Mind Blind* AU's in their future, so shout out to Kelly and Arianna! I plan to release at very least one short story a month (more if time allows). Each month's stories will star different characters.

January 15: The third chapter of *Lady Death's Diary* will be posted (the first three are already up). Since the first chapter was already posted on [my tumblr](#), I decided to make three chapters available this first month. That way, you get two new chapters. Going forward, subsequent chapters will be posted on the 1st and 15th of every month until we reach the end. (Feedback is always appreciated, btw, since I'll be submitting *Lady Death* to agents after one more edit!) The entire manuscript is 90,000 words, and each chapter is 10 pages.

January 22: Mind Blind Chapter 6 will update for Patreon supporters! There will be a separate link for you guys, but the save files will use the same name so you should be able to use the new version without any complications (other than the complications that always arise when playing from a save, like Button always being a "she" and Sally's visions not resetting).

January 31: Interview with the chosen MB cast member will be released! I'll be putting up a poll for you to vote on which character you'd most like to ask questions, and you can then ask those questions on the Sanctum of Spoilers Discord, under the channel "mb-cast-interviews." I'll collect those questions and post their answers, and you'll get to choose a new character every month!

Some things, like the Discord Q&A for UCRT Members and Hero Zeroes, I'll cooperatively schedule based on people's time zones.

I'll also be posting teasers for *Delivery*, a few polls about *Mind Blind*, and potentially a few poems.

. . . **Now, onto what I'm currently writing for *Mind Blind*^{**}.**^{**}

Rewriting Checklist:

There's a lot of typos that need addressing (I slacked off during the holidays to write multiple Regency England AUs after being inspired by a certain Netflix series, whoops).

I need to fix an issue that occurs if you don't tell Glitch about your mind blindness, and plan on adding another dialogue path to Sally's meetup that will happen if you don't talk about Gray, Glitch, or K with her. This path (which brings Sally's movie-day variations up to 7!) will let Button talk to Sally about how they feel over the possibility of Hope visiting, and will trigger if you meet with Sally first and aren't romancing her, or if you plan on wooing Rosy or nohone. (Noh pun here, nope.)

I also want to go back and add triggers to how Button feels about Hope in Chapter 3. Implementing them will cause a save reboot, however, so it's on the backburner for now.

Chapter 6: I've had a lot of Chapter 6 written out by hand for months now, since it will include two major scenes that I've been building towards since the beginning. These "Major Scenes" are ones that happen for everyone regardless of path and are essential to the main plot, and include things like Aeon (and Nick) exploding. So, yeah, there's a *lot* of drama heading down the pipeline.

One of these scenes will have pretty awesome payoff if you're on K's route, if I do say so myself (and providing I properly execute it).

There's another assignment coming up as well . . . which I am not looking forward to coding, because the way assignments work behind the scenes is pretty convoluted. Simple stat checks would be easier, but way less fun. Rosy's second assignment may be pushed back to Chapter 7, however, since I'm still figuring out all the details. One thing I can promise: ping pong balls will be involved.

[Mind Blind Blooper Reel #1](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

It's the first batch of *Mind Blind* bloopers! On these posts, I'll share (amusingly out-of-context) text that didn't make it in to *Mind Blind*'s current draft. I'll be posting a minimum of two of these per month (probably more), since I do a LOT of deleting and rewriting.

Without further ado, here are some lines from *MB* Chapter 5 that didn't make the cut:

"Mi cabeza es tu cabeza, hermano."

Sally glares at you. "Stop showing off that you can speak Spanish."

You cannot, in fact, speak Spanish. It's simply that Sally, despite her three years of taking the language in high school, really, really can't.

Kiss! Kiss! Kiss! Nick chants.

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! you chant back.

He sputters. You've never witnessed someone sputtering before—had assumed it was one of those vague literary descriptions that no one does in real life. You were wrong.

Because when your hand alights on his shoulder, Grayson Black sputters.

"K is . . ."

". . . a liar. I thought people who like dogs were supposed to be the honest type. It was cat lovers that I always side-eyed."

". . . a confusing conglomeration of sexy and suspicious."

". . . an opportunity for me to pet puppies. Nothing more, nothing less."

"But what does it *mean*?"

"The way you just used it? 'It' means the direct object of a verb, referencing something lifeless, in this case, some innocent artwork."

"You didn't see it. The broom was suspicious. Also, I hate you."

[Delivery for the Damned: Sneak Peek #1](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

So many firsts today! It's exciting!

Here's the first Patreon peek at *Delivery for the Damned*, my next interactive fiction project after *Mind Blind*. I usually work on one major project at a time (right now: *Mind Blind*), while the seeds of my next project begin to coalesce.

In *Delivery*, you'll play as a delivery person to assorted villains in dangerous lairs/castles/crypts that can't be accessed by normal mail service. After all, evil overlords, demon royalty, and mad scientists shop online too! But their lairs aren't always the most delivery-accessible. That's where you come in. (The ROs in this one will all be clients inspired by villain archetypes.)

I've talked a little about [the future ROs on my tumblr](#), and will be giving more information on them in the future. Right now, I wanted to introduce you to Lydia O'Leery (who is very eerie), a major side character who is not romanceable on account of her, er . . . let's call it health issues.

Introducing Lydia O'Leery

Golden curls, Irish features, and *extremely* pale skin (transparent, even).

Lydia is your former mentor. Former not because you completed your training, but because she died. Which may have been kinda-sorta-ok-definitely your fault. Whoops.

Death hasn't stopped Lydia from continuing to be a pain in your rear, however. Her ghost still chides you on any job missteps while haunting her old room—only now, she doesn't pay rent, forcing you to take on more jobs in order to keep your landlord happy.

Keeping your landlord happy is important: Reggie ate the last tenet who fell behind on payments.

Reggie will be introduced next time!

Choosing your history with Lydia (and how it resulted in her death) will play a major role in shaping your character. In *Delivery*, I'm tentatively looking at moving away from personality stats, and instead letting your character (not proficiencies, though) be set by past events that you can choose.

[Delivery for the Damned Location](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

Welcome to the very first *Delivery for the Damned* development poll! Evil overlords, demon royalty, and mad scientists shop online too! But their lairs aren't always the most delivery-accessible! That's where you come in. (The ROs in this one will all be clients inspired by villain archetypes.)

I'm going for a darker, almost noir vibe in *Delivery*, which means I want its location to be very "once upon a midnight dreary." I also want the location to be someplace I know intimately, for authenticity, so I chose three places where I actually lived. Luckily, I've lived in several cities where it rains *a ton*.

Please vote on where you'd like to see *Delivery* take place! I love all three cities, so whichever ranks the highest will be the setting.

London

Dublin

Seattle

35 votes total

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 1](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

Chapter One:

The girl in the neighboring cell pressed her face against the bars, her nose intruding into my own cramped enclosure as to sniff out secrets.

The dungeon's lone glowstone lantern was cheaply enchanted, its bluish light pale and flickering, but illuminated enough for me to make out her disheveled curls and stained apron. A servant in the castle above then, rather than a noble resident. Her cheeks were still rosy and plump, not yet starved of sunshine and food. I'd pretended to be asleep when the guards had brought her down earlier, to avoid making myself a target. My imprisonment had thus far lasted a week, assuming I'd correctly kept count of bread heels, but already my jailors recycled their insults. I'd gone from being a traitor, to a witch, to a murderess, to a whore, and then back to being a traitor and witch again. They'd obviously been recruited for their brawn rather than creativity.

Comparatively, my fellow captive seemed armed with an inexhaustible supply of profanities. She'd hurled them against the bolted door until her voice grew hoarse and she decided to address me instead.

"You almost look like the Crown Princess."

"I was the Crown Princess." I paused, then amended my statement, "Almost."

Her eyes traced a pointed path from the ragged hem of my dress to my unwashed hair, once a sleekly brushed curtain but now fell in matted clumps barely covering my earlobes.

"You don't much look like a princess now," she said.

"Prince Loren ended our engagement. Although I am still the daughter of a duke."

"You don't look like that either."

I couldn't help but be amused by her bluntness. Few members of Court had ever dared to be honest with Verdan's future queen. After my arrest, their fear of me had silenced them instead of reverence, the only difference between their condemnation and awe being a higher curl to their upper lips as I'd been dragged from the throne room to the castle dungeon.

"My father would agree," I said. The Duke of Kothe had always been a stickler about maintaining proper appearance, but his lectures could no longer reach me.

The girl heaved a sigh and collapsed backwards onto her pallet. We both ignored the fat cockroach that scuttled away from the straw at her landing.

"My father will be appalled, when he discovers I'm locked in here," she said. "Your family hasn't petitioned for your freedom?"

I ignored her question. "Who is your father?"

"The Castle Steward. No doubt he's already working on a way to have me released." She thrust her hand through the bars without bothering to rise. "I'm Emilia."

"Tru." I shook her hand. Hers was calloused but mine was the filthier by far, a week's worth of grime embedded under my nails and cuticles chewed jagged.

She tightened her grip and pulled me closer, until my arm could go no further through the bars and our faces were but a breath apart. Her eyes widened.

"Lady Vitrola Rhys," she said. "I've dusted that angry brow a hundred times in the castle's portrait gallery—used to wonder what reason a rich lady could have to look so annoyed by life. Silent Fourth, you really were Prince Loren's betrothed. I thought you a madwoman with a passing resemblance."

"They say I'm a madwoman regardless."

She gave a contemptuous snort and released my hand to prop herself up on her elbows. "If a sweetheart ever treated me the way His Highness did you, I'd have tried to murder his new girl too. His betrayal must have broken your heart."

I shrugged. Loren's wandering eye hadn't come as a surprise, and my heart was too scarred for him to wound.

Emilia interpreted my lack of reply as agreement. "Not that I'm in a hurry to be wed, mind you. There's plenty of keen lads, but once a girl agrees to go steady with one, she's trapped if someone better comes along." She shot me an apologetic look. "The rules are different for princes, I guess."

My laugh had languished too long unused to be easily summoned, and it caught in my throat when I tried to chuckle at her statement's truth. Emilia, perhaps concerned by my silence that she might have overstepped, redirected the topic towards an increasingly inventive list of revenges which she intended to extract upon the man responsible for her imprisonment.

"Of course," she finished with a sigh, "my words are all gust. Lord Delos could cost my father his position. Best case, the arse doesn't press charges because he's too embarrassed to explain why I threatened his bits with a butter knife. Maybe thinks twice before he gets handsy with the next maid."

I grimaced. Armond Delos was an uppity toadstool usually found stuck to Loren's side like horseshit on a polished boot. He was the worse type of noble, believing respect to be his birthright without realizing it needed to be earned by upholding one's responsibilities. It came as no surprise that he'd broken Bellcrest Castle's code of conduct.

"Delos's bits deserved a sharper implement," I said. "If Steward Hamen is your father, he won't allow you to be kept here."

She buried her face in her hands with a groan. "Papa wanted me to apprentice under my aunt, but I told him that I'd go mad measuring the fat feet of dowagers for slippers and begged him to find me work at the castle. Less than one month later, and I'm already making trouble."

"Armond made trouble when he cornered you," I corrected her sternly. "King Eldin doesn't tolerate assaults on his subjects, especially when they're working under his own roof. Armond will face repercussions once you reveal his actions."

"Lord Delos threw a bag of coin at a guard," she whispered, "and the guard threw me down here. How many more purses for them to throw me somewhere else?"

"I won't let that happen."

She lowered her hands and stared at me. The blatant pity in the maid's eyes pierced deeper than any courtier's contempt. Neither of us spoke after that. Emilia pretended to sleep, her shoulders shuddering in suppressed sobs that I likewise pretended not to notice. Any kind words I offered wouldn't be believed, and only come across as empty condescension.

Without natural light, the passage of time was measured only by the increased cramping of my stomach and dryness of my throat. When the jailor arrived for his daily visit, he threw my loaf through the bars, guffawing when his aim proved true and the bread struck my forehead. Emilia's portion, he tossed beside her cot, and for once he bent to place the cups of water upright on the floor rather than dropping it midway and forcing me to lap droplets off the cobblestones like a street dog. His hungry gaze lingered on Emilia, strengthening my resolve to see my pretty jail mate freed.

"Does he always treat you like that?" asked Emilia after the prison door slammed shut. She tested a tooth on the dark bread before wincing and using her fingers to tear through its crust.

"Better I let him hit me with stale bread than have him aim a second time with the water," I said. "He only brings one cup a day, so take care not spill."

"Still." She sounded upset. "It's not right, even if you are a witch."

My gut twisted at her words, and I set the bread aside. Emilia noticed and hastened to add, "You must have loved the Prince deeply, to have been driven to such measures."

Had I loved Loren? The earliest pages of my diary asserted as much. But those emotions belonged to a different life, one where I'd been naïve and optimistic and hadn't spent six months trying to poison his replacement bride.

"I'm not a witch," I said.

The hard bread took her a moment to swallow, and she stuck out her tongue in disgust once it had gone down. "Everyone knows that you tried to curse Prince Loren's new betrothed. Not that I blame you overmuch, but Papa says magic is so dangerous that even the Court Sorcerers hardly ever work spells." Her voice lowered conspiratorially. "Between you and me, I'd like to see a spell cast. Just once, mind you, and from a good distance away."

"I tried to poison her, not curse."

Emilia's brows lifted at my insistent clarification. "Better than magic, I suppose."

I closed my eyes. None of the Table of Law's Councilors had believed me at my trial, yet for some reason I wanted her to understand. She'd been truthful with me, brutally so, and I was reluctant to pollute one of my rare honest relationships with lies. But how to explain? She'd sounded so confident in her claim Steward Hamen would do everything in his power to rescue her, so long as he learned of her location. Our fathers were too different.

"Do you have any siblings?" I asked.

She nodded. "Three brothers."

"Are they protective of you?"

She snorted. “Not Adger. He thinks that just because he’s a year older, he can boss me around. But the younger two are sound.”

“What would they do if your lover scorned you for another? Or if Lord Delos hadn’t been put off by your butter knife? What would they do to a man who wronged you?”

“Beat him bloody,” she answered promptly. “After I had my turn, of course, and after my mother whipped his knuckles raw.”

My heart squeezed at Emilia’s offhanded mention of her mother, but she’d otherwise given me the answer I’d hoped for.

“My father’s power in Verdan is second only to King Eldin’s,” I said. “His pride won’t be appeased by giving my ex-fiancé a broken nose, and even that is considered treason when the man being punched is the Crown Prince.”

Her mouth formed a perfect oh as she interpreted my meaning. “War,” she said simply.

My lips cracked as I smiled, but the sting was worth it now that someone finally understood. Of course, unlike Emilia’s father, the Duke of Kothe cared more for protecting Rhys family pride than his actual family. I’d read the letter he’d sent me after Loren’s decision to annul our engagement and had translated between the lines of his bluster. My father would not remain loyal to a Crown that had dishonored his daughter. If said daughter died in the crossfire of his retaliation, along with a thousand other of Verdan’s citizens, so be it.

Although she’d finished her bread, Emilia kept her hands pressed against her belly in a futile attempt to tamper its pangs. I’d done the same during my first few days. I passed her my loaf through the cold iron bars, which she accepted after a half-hearted protest. An empty stomach wouldn’t kill me.

My execution was scheduled for tomorrow.

* * * *

A fist of fear pummeled within my chest. I forced my footsteps to ignore its panicked beat and keep pace with two soldiers escorting me from the dungeon. The leader kept her hand on her sword hilt, ready to draw the weapon should I try to bolt, while the one following behind snickered each time his overlong steps caused his boots to scrape the backs of my bare heels.

Emilia, exhausted from her night spent weeping, had somehow slept through the wail of rusty hinges when they’d opened my cell door. As the guards locked heavy manacles around my wrists, I’d choked down my enraged protests so as not to wake her. Best the girl stayed unconscious for as much of her ordeal as possible. Despite my intention to quietly comply, bile had burned its way up my throat. I had learned to not let fear show in my face, but it still controlled my stomach. The taller soldier had leapt back as I dry heaved, disgust twisting his craggy features—perhaps he now trod on my feet as petty vengeance for our reversal in power, however temporary it had been. His instinctive withdrawal had

sparked my current plan: one which would be humiliating and most likely end painfully, but was the only way to fulfill my oath and keep Emilia safe from Armond's bribed guards.

For the time being, I lowered my head and bit my lips so as not to cry out as my assaulted ankles dripped blood onto the floor. We exited the first hallway and started down a narrower second. In an attempt to come across as biddable, I quickened my steps whenever the first guard yanked on my shackles and slowed when she paused.

"Eager for your crowning, princess?" The heavy-footed guard laughed uproariously at his own joke, ignoring his colleague's annoyed glare.

Execution is preferable to your company.

Even decapitation wouldn't make you less ugly.

When my father invades Bellcrest, I hope he kills you first.

I ached to lash out with a dozen retorts but held my tongue. He snorted at my docility, and his next step kicked my calf hard enough to make me stumble. The other soldier spun around.

"That's enough, Maris," she snapped. "Stop messing with the witch."

Witch. No wonder she hadn't curtailed his abuse sooner; from her standpoint, I was less than human. I doubted she would accept my explanation that the spellbook in my bedchamber hadn't been mine, and that I had no idea who planted it there for the maids to find. No one had, except Emilia, not after guards had raided my closet and discovered the vials of aspswort extract, powdered blackvein leaf, dreamroot, and vanilla that had taken me half a year of experimentation to perfect. Six months that I'd spent vividly smiling at Loren and his new fiancée while smelling like cough compress and wearing gloves to hide the blackvein burns on my palms. There was nothing magical about chemistry, but the Table of Law's perception of my guilt mattered more than reality.

Maris sneered at me. "As you order, Lieutenant."

She turned back without acknowledging his reply, but shortened my chains' tether until the two of us walked abreast. More likely to avoid further delays than to protect me, but my heels nonetheless appreciated their reprieve.

My anxiety climbed higher with every step of our grim march. I had expected to pass at least one member of the castle staff by now, but the halls were abandoned. Had the servants been warned to keep their distance from the witch, lest I curse them for witnessing my final moments? I'd been relying on curiosity to draw out at least a few. Only a short stretch remained before we reached the courtyard where the wagon awaited to take me to Bellcrest's main square. By then, it would be too late to save Emilia.

Another ten steps. The final door was an armlength away. I could no longer wait. I crashed into the lieutenant with a choked gasp. My nails dug into her surcoat, and my body went limp so that she was forced to clutch my upper arms to prevent us both from toppling over. Maris tried to pull my hair, but the short strands slipped through his fingers, making me ironically grateful for the shorn bob I'd been given to better facilitate the guillotine's final cut.

I groaned loudly, and then once more for good measure. The lieutenant's grip on my chains slackened in her attempts to push me off. Maris, smarter than I'd given him credit, released my hair and tightened beefy fingers around my neck. I didn't dare let go of the lieutenant to claw at his hands, even as my instincts screamed to fight back and it became harder and harder to take in air. Despite being unable to see his face, I couldn't risk suffocating trying to ascertain his vantage point.

I puffed out my cheeks and gagged.

As threats went, it was far from elegant. Father would have been appalled by my plan's crudeness even if he'd have struggled to critique its efficacy. Maris paled chalk-white at the prospect of being spewed with sick. His clammy fingers released my neck, and he recoiled, exactly as he had in my cell. My knees straightened, and I ripped my chains from the lieutenant's hands. The sudden removal of my weight put her off balance, and the unexpected force of my shove was enough to push her aside.

I didn't look back to see if I'd successfully knocked her down or if she'd managed to catch her balance before falling. My legs pumped with speed fueled by desperation and terror and some fragment of lightness that might have resembled hope. I'd lived in Bellcrest Castle for the past three years, since my engagement to Loren, and knew which corners to turn and which passages to dart down.

Boots thudded behind me, but the two soldiers were hampered by their ceremonial armor and weapons almost as much as I was weakened from my captivity, and I possessed both a head start and no incentive to conserve my strength. My only goal was to reach the kitchens and tell someone about Emilia. Maris and the lieutenant knew my escape was impossible: more guards stood vigil at all palace exits, and even if I made it up the stairs and leapt out a tower window, I'd still be killed by the fall. "Justice" could be corrupted, paid off, or hidden from, but it couldn't be outran.

Before my imprisonment, I'd preferred the company of my books to joining Loren's friends for archery or hunting. A week spent in a dungeon had not improved my athleticism. My legs ached and my lungs burned, until I continued forward mostly out of momentum and my breath wheezed with every stride. The footsteps behind grew louder, closer. The kitchens were too far away. I wouldn't make it. My promise to Emilia had been a lie.

Maris, however, was not so winded that he couldn't simultaneously yell obscenities at my fleeing back as he ran. He lacked Emilia's innovative panache, but bellowed loud enough to draw attention. A mobcap peaked out from behind one of the hallway doors, its wearer's eyes wide beneath the lacy rim as she observed the ongoing chase.

Thank you, Maris, you bloated bovine bastard.

My scream drowned out his shouts. It ripped my throat, raw and guttural, and echoed through the hallway. “Steward Hamen’s daughter is in the dungeon!” I yelled. The girl cowered behind the door as if it were a shield but didn’t look away. “Tell Hamen! Emilia is—”

Pain exploded through my right temple and cut short my words. Maris’ fist drew back again; this time, his blow knocked me to the floor. I heard the door shut. Even if the servant believed me insane, the mad witch’s ranting would be too good of gossip to keep to herself. Someone would report my words to Hamen, and the Castle Steward would petition King Eldin for Emilia’s release. Armond wouldn’t be able to bribe someone to make her disappear, and even if he lied about his reason for ordering her locked up, Hamen hadn’t become Castle Steward without gaining the King’s trust. His daughter would, at very least, receive a trial. I could only pray to the Triad that hers proved fairer than mine.

Maris kicked me twice before the lieutenant caught up and barked at him to stop. Her rough hands hauled me upright, and Maris squeezed my shoulders so tightly I feared the bones would shatter, holding me still as she jerked heavy burlap over my head. The darkness made running impossible, but I no longer had cause to flee. Had the soldiers been able to glimpse my smile through the sack, it would have confirmed their opinion that I was a lunatic.

My ribs were bruised, my sight blinded, and within an hour I would likely be dead.

But I had kept my promise.

* * * * *

They uncovered my face only when it came time for me to ascend the scaffold’s steps. The sun shone sadistically bright, its beams refracting miniature rainbows off the guillotine’s polished blade, and the unseasonably warm day had cajoled nobles and commoners alike to revel in Bellcrest’s reprieve from winter’s chill. Down in the streets, spectators munched snacks of salted nuts and hoisted their children onto their shoulders for a better view of the spectacle. Up in the wooden stands, the nobility covered their noses and concealed smug smiles behind perfumed handkerchiefs. It was the perfect day for an execution.

“Vitrula Marianne Rhys, by order of His Majesty King Eldin Tivall, you are hereby stripped of your former title and rank for the crimes of treason and unlicensed witchcraft.”

“Yes, well, I am quite evil.” I raised my shackles slightly, mobility further hindered on account of Maris having bound my arms together with rope on the wagon ride over after I’d elbowed him, and waggled my fingertips at the pontificating chancellor. “I’ll hex you if you don’t hurry this up.”

The official’s beady eyes widened. He took an involuntary step back, nearly tumbling off the edge of the scaffold. I smirked. Most of his victims probably pled for a pardon or a stay of sentence, but I refused to grant anyone the satisfaction of hearing me beg. Upon regaining his footing, he glared back at me before reading the next charges from his scroll with increased gusto.

“For conspiracy to murder Lady Letticia Catherine Brown, fiancée to His Royal Highness Prince Loren Tivall, by means of forbidden magic . . .”

I looked up to the stands, to the occupied throne no more than fifteen feet away. My eyes locked with Loren’s, his as blue as the sky above. I was no longer so foolish as to dream that he might put a stop to this farce. That this time, he would save me. His perfectly shaped lips pursed before he turned his head towards the young woman seated beside him.

Letty.

The crowd’s jeers faded to a dull roar as I contemplated the couple. They resembled the lovers from an illustrated book of fairy tales that I’d reread as a child until the spine had cracked—both with golden hair and elegant features, his as masculine as hers were delicate. Letty’s fists clenched in her lap, and the shadows under her large violet eyes somehow only served to make her look more ethereal. Loren leaned over to squeeze her hand, whispering something into her ear that earned him a tremulous smile.

Shame that I hadn’t succeeded in poisoning her.

“For using your dark arts to curse an apple which would grant death to any whom consumed it . . .”

I rolled my eyes. If I’d known magic, I wouldn’t have been caught before I could put my plan to (literal) fruition. Methodology aside, the poisoned apple wouldn’t have *killed* Letty. Only sent her into a deep slumber, my hypothesis being that the Council wouldn’t countenance a sickly future queen and that they’d demand I be restored to my former position before Father finished gathering support for his ill-conceived retaliation. Unfortunately, when the ex-fiancée of the Crown Prince tries to poison his current betrothed, people automatically assume assassination.

“You are hereby sentenced to death.”

The executioner’s gauntlets pressed down on my shoulders. I complied, gently lifting my skirts in a mocking mimicry of a curtsy as I fell to my knees. The crowd roared approval. My expression stayed stoic as I positioned my neck upon the guillotine’s rest—cushioned, out of consideration for my former noble status. My life was forfeit. I would not surrender my last scrap of pride as well.

I had only one thought in my head before it detached from my body:

Not again.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 2](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

Chapter Two:

It was my fourteenth birthday. Again*.*

I touched the nape of my neck, shuddering as I recalled the sharp kiss of metal and the *hiss* of its descent. My hair fell in loose waves past my shoulders. Another three years wasted, trying to survive past age seventeen. This last life, I'd truly believed that I would be able to marry Loren and escape my destined doom. Future queens were much harder to kill. After all, who wanted to deal with the political repercussions of murdering a monarch? I'd thought my method for removing Letty to be foolproof, but once again, I had failed, this time thanks to an illegal tome of spells that I had never read yet had somehow found its way atop my nightstand in perfect time to be discovered by the cleaning staff. If nothing else, I had to applaud my murderer for ingenuity. They had framed me before, but never for illegal sorcery. The fact that I actually *had* planned on poisoning Letty must have come as a delightful bonus for them.

I had failed, and I had died, for the . . . I took mental tally. . . seventh time.

Seven times, I'd perished before turning eighteen, only to be transported back to the day of my fourteenth birthday after each death. The experience had been traumatizing the first time, when I'd expected my death to be permanent. Most deaths were, I assumed. But somehow, I'd been cursed (or blessed, if one insisted on optimism) to repeat the last three years of my life, presumably until I prevented people from killing me. Thus far, I'd failed abysmally.

Enough. Dwelling on my failures wouldn't prevent another.

My memories would only be vivid for the next few days. Within a month, I'd only recall the vaguest sequence of events, as if my last life had been naught but a dream. I needed a plan to protect myself. Being subjected to multiple executions and assassinations had taught me that my actual innocence was irrelevant, and that I needed to be proactive in order to avoid being entrapped. My priorities had shifted several lifetimes ago from being a merciful and wise queen, who lived happily ever after with her handsome king, to simply staying alive by any means necessary. Unfortunately, my father's ambitions meant that my betrothal was the only thing preventing civil war between Kothe and the rest of Verdan, which was the only reason I didn't knot my bedsheets into a ladder and escape out the window.

I hurried across my childhood bedroom, which like my hair had reverted to its state of three years before my death. The ironwood credenza in the corner had been a gift from my father when I'd turned twelve and finally become, in his judgement, old enough to manage Rhys household affairs and ignore the ledger discrepancies that marked his less-than-legal expenditures. I opened the top drawer and took out a blank sheet of parchment. A proper journal would come later, with the chapter of this most recent death added to my faithfully memorized account of demises prior.

I dipped a silver pen in the inkwell and wrote, in the loose scrawl of my younger hand:

1. Executed
2. Ambushed
3. Executed
4. Shot
5. Pushed
6. Poisoned
7. Executed

Reading over the list of my endings, it was difficult not to feel bitter. At least bitterness tasted better than despair, an emotion I'd become intimately acquainted with during my first death. And my second. The events leading to my third end had been so horrific that to start over had come as a relief. Death six had inspired Plan Poisoned Apple, although in retrospect attempting to poison my romantic rival may not have been my most brilliant scheme. But nothing else had worked. Unless I did something drastically different, my prognosis of living to eighteen this time around looked grim.

I sometimes wondered my former timelines continued, after my deaths. The thought of my corpse lingering in another world disturbed me, and I shook my head to clear it of the gruesome image. My actions had either saved Emilia, or she'd reverted to her younger self along with everyone else and I'd allowed that bull-faced guard to bludgeon me for no reason. What had his name been? Regardless, I'd done all I could, and now needed to focus on my own survival.

I locked my list back inside the drawer and slid the desk key into my slipper. Its edges dug through my silk stocking into my sole. There was no time for wallowing, no matter how well-deserved. I'd bemoan fate's cruelty over pots of hot chocolate when my continued existence was less precarious.

I sighed, forced a smile, and opened the door.

Theo stood in the hall with his fist poised pre-knock. My older brother wore the same russet coat today that he had my seven other fourteenth birthdays. The silver cufflink on his left wrist, emblazoned with the Rhys falcon, had already come half unclasped. Three years my senior, he was markedly handsome in the unfinished way of young men. He shared my wavy dark hair and pale gray eyes but whereas our similar sharp features caused me to appear stern and humorless, he looked authoritative and dashing. Life, as always, was unjust.

So too was death.

"Let's get this over with," I said before Theo could compliment me on my new dress. Younger me had adored the ruffled confection, which required four petticoats to maintain its flounce and left my legs hot and sticky after dancing. I'd decidedly aged past the style—mentally, if not physically. Some soured part

of me wondered if it would be preferable to die permanently rather than relive my teenage years ad perpetuum.

I grabbed Theo's wrist, tightened his cufflink so he didn't lose it this time, and dragged him down the hallway to the top of the open stairwell, its gilded railing polished to high sheen in honor of the occasion. In the ballroom below, high-ranking guests from all over Verdan traded inanities and stifled yawns. They paced around the edges of the grand room, convention dictating it impolite to dance before my arrival. Only good manners prevented them from tapping their toes on the marble floor.

Their moods had been livelier at my execution. Theo, noticing my frown, patted the top of my head. (Triad, how I couldn't wait until my growth spurt in a year!)

"Don't worry, Tru," he said. "All you need to do is nod and look pretty."

My tight-lipped smile was more a grimace. "Onward, then, to certain doom."

He laughed, assuming I spoke in jest. "That's the spirit! Shall we then, princess?"

Eager for your crowning, princess?

"Don't call me that," I said. "Don't ever call me that."

Theo just chuckled again and proffered his arm. I laid my hand in its crook, and together we descended the stairs. Our feet had not even alighted the last step before my father blockaded us. With his silver hair and matching eyes, he looked like an older, sterner version of Theo. Duke of Kothe was more than a title for my father: it informed his entire personality.

"You're late," he hissed through his smile. "Vitrula, you know today's importance."

"Apologies for ruining my birthday for you, Father."

His eyebrows rose fractionally, though he was too well-disciplined to advertise an emotion as gauche as shock. Initially, it had taken me until age sixteen to fully master the art of sarcasm. I'd gained a streak of defiance following my third death, after my father's attempt to secede Kothe from Verdan had resulted in us both being hanged for high treason.

Father grasped my shoulder in what no doubt came across as a doting gesture to the surrounding guests. But his hold was too tight to be affectionate, reminiscent of my recent executioner's iron grip.

"Prince Loren arrived five minutes ago," he said in a low voice. "You will make a good impression. He will offer for your hand and gain Kothe's support for his future reign. Do not fail me*.*"

I fluttered my lashes in exaggerated sweetness. "Unless you remove *your* hand from my person, I shall burst into tears, prostrate myself at your feet, and loudly beg for your blessing to marry a stable hand named Garrett. Why, my reputation might never recover."

Father's arm fell to his side, and for once his stagnant grin dropped with indignation. "What in Aelium is wrong with you?" he demanded. "Who is Garrett?"

"Nothing is wrong with *me*, Father." My own polite smile never faltered. Congeniality was the best mask to keep Court vultures at bay and not provide fodder for their gossip. "But I highly doubt King Eldin will permit his only son to wed a girl whose affections are so improperly otherwise engaged."

His frown deepened into an outright scowl. "Your affections are *not* engaged. This stable boy will be let go of his position immediately."

"He doesn't exist," I informed him calmly. "But imagined scandals are as effective as real ones. I'll play your game—I'll flatter Prince Loren and be the perfect lady. Only remember: our family's reputation depends as much upon my behavior as it does your own."

Theo snorted at my proclamation of Garrett's nonexistence. Garret had not only worked at our estate; he'd personally taught both my brother and me to ride. I'd insisted that he retire from the stables when his arthritis had begun to make caring for the horses difficult. Because, in addition to not being the recipient of my romantic affection, Garrett was not a day younger than seventy. He now served as the honorary caretaker for one of the Rhys family's unused hunting lodges.

Luckily, my father had always been disinterested in knowing those in his employ, whereas my control over the estate books let me easily provide placements for staff who aged out of service. And then utilize their names for blackmail.

"I'd listen to her, Father," said Theo. "She's becoming more and more like Mother every day."

The harsh planes of my father's face softened, and for the first time he gazed at me with an expression almost resembling approval. My mother had died four years ago while travelling to Anterdon to oversee trade negotiations on behalf of the Crown. In my hazy recollection of her, she'd been colder and more aloof than even her husband. Theo claimed our parents' union had been a love match, proving truth to the saying that there was someone out there for everyone. Most everyone. Love was a luxury I couldn't afford when my only chance of survival hinged upon marrying Loren.

"I know you won't embarrass me." This was as close as Father ever came to expressing pride.

"I'm feeling thirsty," I announced rather than respond to his sentiment.

My family didn't need to know that refreshments were located on the opposite side of the ballroom from the prince I was supposed to be pursuing. Usually, I didn't delay in finding my future fiancé, but Loren's easy nonchalance at my recent beheading had rendered me uncharacteristically avoidant. It was one thing to know your betrothed had never loved you; it was quite another to witness him flirting during your execution.

As amusing as it was to imagine the guests' reactions if had I entered the ballroom cradling my own decapitated head (half the nobles, I estimated, would be too polite to comment), injuries from my deaths

vanished immediately upon my return to age fourteen. Emotional wounds faded less easily. My practiced façade of composure already felt fragile; confronting Loren might shatter it completely.

Dying had gotten progressively easier with each life. The day after never did.

Theo and I elbowed our way through a crowd of well-wishers who bobbed like floating ducks as they bowed and curtsied. Most I hadn't yet met, but all were effusive in wishing me the happiest of birthdays in hopes of a breadcrumb of approval: my father wasn't alone in anticipating my imminent engagement to Verdan's Crown Prince.

"Lady Vitrula, you look positively radiant today!" exclaimed an older gentleman.

"Like a *princess*, one might say," agreed his young wife pointedly. I recognized the beauty mark on her left cheek. Lady Gwendolyn—she would be a widow within a year. Or was it two years? Already, inconsequential details were beginning to fade from memory. I needed to return to my room and record the particulars of my deaths before they slipped away entirely.

The rest of the crowd parroted Lady Gwendolyn's compliment. I nodded in cool acceptance of their praise, torn between amusement and anger by the obsequiousness of those who had so recently celebrated my execution. By the time Theo and I reached the refreshment table, only a few slices of birthday cake survived.

I glared at the platter in disgust. "*Lemon.*" I'd forgotten that detail.

"Isn't lemon cake your favorite?" asked Theo.

It had been, until death number six. Being poisoned had a way of ruining one's favorite dessert.

"I'm craving chocolate today," I lied.

"Then chocolate you shall have! I'll head to the kitchens and have Cook whip you up the most decadent cake in existence."

"You could ask a footman to go," I said, but Theo had already seized his opportunity to escape. I couldn't blame him: the kitchens held infinitely more appeal than an overcrowded ballroom. Cook ruled her domain with a fist firmer than King Eldin's own, but she had a weakness for my brother's mischievous charm and willingly catered to his most outlandish midnight demands. No doubt a chocolate cake would soon be forthcoming.

But I didn't to wait for a different dessert. I'd indulged my weakness long enough. The sooner I faced Loren, the sooner I could return to my room, rewrite my diary of deaths, and identify what to do differently in this life. Even if the mere thought of seeing him again made me want to start running and not stop until I reached Anterdon. Without being waylaid by the highwaymen, this time.

A woman's dulcet voice interrupted my encroaching panic attack. "If you're plotting an escape route, might I suggest the far east window? It's blocked by a particularly garish floral display. The foliage matches your dress, so no one will spot your departure."

I turned. Lady Delphine, Bellcrest's Court Sorceress, sauntered close with a bemused smirk on her painted lips. She must have arrived as part of Loren's retinue, though I'd never had the chance to interact with her much in any of my past lives. Her beauty was the sort that demanded attention: sunset auburn waves that fell to her waist and grass green eyes, her coloring almost too vivid for her pale complexion. Instead of a ballgown, she wore a deep-cut robe that clung to lush curves I was now too young to possess and would (to be blunt with myself) never fully develop.

She was also one of the few authorized sorcerers in all of Verdan. Most magic had been banned over a century ago, after rebels had razed half of Bellcrest with magefire during the Northern Uprising. Now, only a handful of practitioners were licensed, all of whom were noble-born and employed directly by the Crown. Lady Delphine's leadership of these mages, as well as her rumored relationship with the widowed king, made her one of the most, if not *the* most, powerful women in the kingdom. Even my father, whose distrust of magic rivaled only his distrust of the opposite gender, refrained from insulting the sorceress directly.

"Crowds make me uneasy." My words weren't quite a lie. Large groups of people unfailingly reminded me of my various public executions.

Lady Delphine regarded me shrewdly. "I suspect that very little makes you nervous, Lady Vitrola. Still, I'm not surprised that you feel out of place. It's an expected consequence."

< Novel ideas



Sally aka Telltale, sees future and past but cant make heads or tails of it so goes around sounding cryptic and charges classmates for love fortunes
Real name Salome with fancy e

Likes to mess with people so they are as confused as she is

Superhero scifi/near future/alternate reality

Bff no superpowers (very uncommon, family all powerful)

20% population possesses powers

Sally's bff negates powers?--no powers in house rule because parents knew and were afraid of government learning

Training to be AMO, bff = MIV (man in van aka manager in vicinity lol)

Miv program implemented so no powers could go to school with powered siblings and family

Some test into program

SUPERHERO SCHOOL

Most powerful super has rivalry with Sally/
competitve (bff older bro? Love interest??)

Best superheros named for why they fight rather than how (ex. Unity, Turmoil, Fair Shot, Equality)

Superhero names called "face names"

Can I call the team The Ideals? Or is that too on the

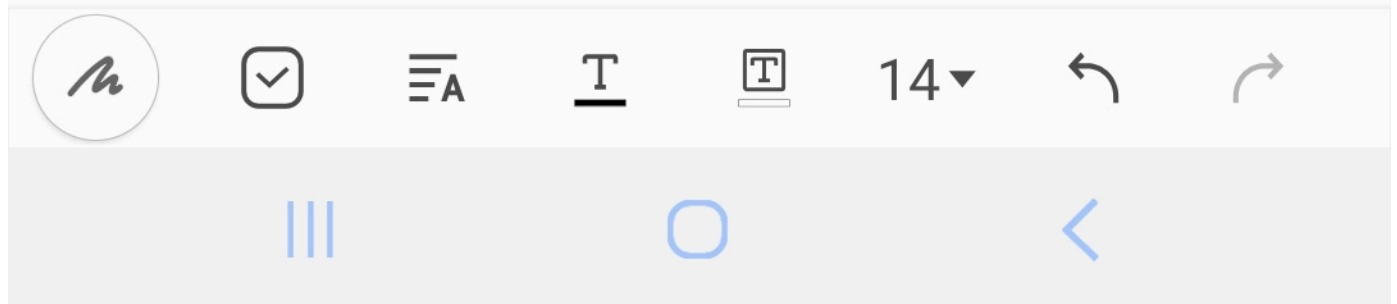
nose? Sounds like band from 70s.

Name change when rise up ranks

Super heroes as law enforcement? Resented by "the vests" (slang for regular cops)

Conflict of interest

Future chicago? Headquarters Willis/Sears Tower



[Mind Blind's Birth](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

I jot down story ideas in the notepad app of my phone whenever inspiration strikes. I recently found my original notes for the story that became *Mind Blind*--where Sally was the main character and Nick her romantic hero. A lot of things have changed since that original idea, and the format becoming interactive fiction is just the tip of the iceberg!

[Character of the Month Interview](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

Here, you can vote on which character from *Mind Blind* gets to be interviewed in an end-of-the-month post. (Questions can be asked via the Sanctum of Spoilers discord!)

For this month, Gray and K are being left off the poll since they already have short stories written about them, and I want to make sure all the ROs and characters get some love <3

(Also, I guarantee that people will have many, many *questions* for K after reading Chapter 6, so it's probably best to save them for February's interview.)

January's Character Interview will be with . . .

Sally

Glitch

Rosy

Nick

Clarence

John

Hope

. . . Noh! (Expect extremely cryptic answers if you select this jerk.)

165 votes total

[MB SAUCY SIDE #1: Kenna Version](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

Regency Period Romance (oh my!)

Featuring: Kenna and Button

Kenna Zarneki was not a lady.

Polite Society determined a lady by two things: her dowry and her ancestry. Kenna, as the daughter of Polish immigrants, lacked the latter and, as a “widow” whose husband no scandal sheet had successfully confirmed the prior existence of, had no need for the former. She was, thus, widely considered by the ton to be “an upstart,” new money earned not through inheritance, as was proper, but by (horror of horrors!) gambling. Being in possession of IOUs from half of London meant, however, that she was too powerful to snub and was thus invited to even Lady Cowper’s famously exclusive soirees.

But make no mistake: Kenna Zarneki was definitely not a lady.

And thank God for that.

After all, a lady would never have cornered you in Lady Cowper's library. A lady would certainly never have pinned your arms above your head against a bookshelf, thrust her leg between yours, and proceeded to take (very welcome) liberties upon your person. And no lady's lips could ever feel as hot as Kenna's as they trail down your neck.

"Sir Clarence noticed me sneak away," you manage to say. "If anyone saw you depart as well—" Your feeble protest cuts off in a gasp as Kenna migrates to the small, previously overlooked, divot above your left collarbone. You strain against her grasp, wanting your arms free to dig your fingers into her shoulders and pull her closer. Her tongue darts out, tasting and teasing, before she presses another kiss at the junction that is quickly becoming your new favorite body part.

When you'd first been introduced at Lady Keith's ball several months ago, you considered Kenna's eyes to be cold and distant. Never could you have imagined how her grey gaze darkened to navy, like storm-tossed ocean waves, or how her eyes could burn with desire. Desire for you.

Illicit desire, that would see you exiled to the countryside if anyone found out. Your status as child of a duke wouldn't protect you from society's censure of being caught in the embrace with the scandalous, *common* Kenna Zarneki.

You attempt to speak once more, but Kenna presses a thumb against your parted lips. "Clarence will keep quiet," she murmurs. "The baronet owes me four-hundred pounds."

You nip her thumb with your teeth, delighting in the way her breath catches and her other hand tightens around your wrists at your audacity. Kenna likes to be in control; it's not often that you succeed in turning the tables.

"Brat," she says. Her thumb strokes your bottom lip in a feather-light touch that nonetheless scorches and brands your very soul.

"Temptress," you whisper.

Her lips seal yours. Kissing Kenna Zarneki is like being caught in a cyclone—the world blurs in tumultuous colors, and you're positive at any moment you'll be lifted off the ground and carried away.

Kenna kisses you so deeply that she forgets about your captured wrists. Her grip loosens, and you're free. Free to press her closer, *demand* her closer, and encompass her in your own storm. Your fingers dig into her shoulders, and she moans low in her throat but doesn't withdraw.

"Brat," she groans against your cheek. "Impudent, reckless, irresistible brat."

"I'm not a—" you begin, but she cuts you off with another fierce kiss and you forget whatever it was you'd planned to say. After a breathless eternity, she pulls away, her teeth dragging your lower lip in her retreat.

"My carriage," she says. "Five minutes."

You blink, still dazed from the lack of oxygen. It takes a few moments for her words to register: Kenna is asking you to leave with her. To go back to her flat. Where you'll be alone.

She's asking for more than stolen kisses in a library.

She's asking for your ruin.

Kenna senses your hesitation. She steps back, dark eyes cooling like molten steel quenched by water. She straightens her rucked-up skirts without meeting your eyes. Her collar is missing a button. It wasn't when you first met her here.

"I own this town," she says, back turned and shoulders stiff. "But you—you owe me nothing. If you stay by my side, it will be of your own volition. Not—" her voice breaks then hardens. "Not by obligation."

You can't reply, uncertain even of whether your answer should begin with a simple "yes" or "no."

Kenna opens the door to the library, still not looking at you. "My carriage in five minutes," she repeats. "And then I leave."

The door closes, leaving you weak-kneed and disheveled. It's your choice, she said. To go with her, and risk society's ostracization and your family's disapproval. Or to remain at Lady Cowper's ball, safe and content in your current position as Duke Golightly's youngest child.

Your eyes dart to the nearby grandfather clock. Four minutes to decide.

[MB SAUCY SIDE #1: Kent Version](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

Regency Period Romance (oh my!)

Featuring: Kent and Button

Kent Zarneki was not a gentleman.

Polite Society determined a gentleman by two things: wealth and ancestry. And though Kent possessed the first in abundance, as the son of Polish immigrants, he was decidedly lacking in the latter. He was, thus, widely considered by the *ton* to be "an upstart," new money earned not through inheritance, as was proper, but in (horror of horrors!) gambling halls. Being in possession of IOUs from half of London meant that he was too powerful to snub and thus invited to even Lady Cowper's famously exclusive soirees.

But make no mistake: Kent Zarneki was definitely not a gentleman.

And thank God for that.

After all, a gentleman would never have cornered you in Lady Cowper's library. A gentleman would certainly never have pinned your arms above your head against a bookshelf, thrust his leg between yours, and proceeded to take (very welcome) liberties upon your person. And no gentleman's lips could ever feel as hot as Kent's as they trail down your neck.

"Sir Clarence noticed me sneak away," you manage to say. "If anyone saw you depart as well—" Your feeble protest cuts off in a gasp as Kent migrates to the small, previously overlooked, divot above your left collarbone. You strain against his grasp, wanting your arms free to dig your fingers into his shoulders and pull him closer. His tongue darts out, tasting and teasing, before he presses another kiss at the junction that is quickly becoming your new favorite body part.

When you'd first been introduced at Lady Keith's ball several months ago, you'd considered Kent's eyes to be cold and distant. Never could you have imagined how his grey gaze darkened to navy, like storm-tossed ocean waves, or how his eyes could burn with desire. Desire for you.

Illicit desire, that would see you exiled to the countryside if anyone found out. Your status as child of a duke wouldn't protect you from society's censure of being caught in the embrace with the scandalous, *common* Kent Zarneki.

You attempt to speak once more, but Kent presses a thumb against your parted lips. "Clarence will keep quiet," he murmurs. "The baronet owes me four-hundred pounds."

You nip his thumb with your teeth, delighting in the way his breath catches and his other hand tightens around your wrists at your audacity. Kent likes to be in control; it's not often that you succeed in turning the tables.

"Brat," he says. His thumb strokes your bottom lip in a feather-light touch that nonetheless scorches and brands your very soul.

"Devil," you whisper.

His lips seal yours. Kissing Kent Zarneki is like being caught in a cyclone—the world blurs in tumultuous colors, and you're positive at any moment you'll be lifted off the ground and carried away.

Kent kisses you so deeply that he forgets about your captured wrists. His grip loosens, and you're free. Free to press him closer, *demand* him closer, and encompass him in your own storm. Your fingers dig into his shoulders, and he moans low in his throat but doesn't withdraw.

"Brat," he groans against your cheek. "Impudent, reckless, irresistible brat."

"I'm not a—" you begin, but he cuts you off with another fierce kiss, and you forget whatever it was you'd planned to say. After a breathless eternity, he pulls away, his teeth dragging your lower lip in his retreat.

"My carriage," he says. "Five minutes."

You blink, still dazed from the lack of oxygen. It takes a few moments for his words to register: Kent is asking you to leave with him. To go back to his flat. Where you'll be alone.

He's asking for more than stolen kisses in a library.

He's asking for your ruin.

Kent reads your hesitation. He steps back, dark eyes cooling like molten steel quenched by water. He grabs his discarded cravat off a bookshelf, slinging it over his bared neck. His jacket's missing a button. It wasn't when you first met him here.

"I own this town," he says, back turned and shoulders stiff. "But you—you owe me nothing. If you stay by my side, it will be of your own volition. Not—" his voice breaks then hardens. "Not by obligation."

You can't reply, uncertain even of whether your answer should begin with a simple "yes" or "no."

Kent opens the door to the library, still not looking at you. "My carriage in five minutes," he repeats. "And then I leave."

The door closes, leaving you weak-kneed and disheveled. It's your choice, he said. To go with him, and risk society's ostracization and your family's disapproval. Or to remain at Lady Cowper's ball, safe and content in your current position as Duke Golightly's youngest child.

Your eyes dart to the nearby grandfather clock. Four minutes to decide.

[Thank you so much!!!](#)

[Jan 1, 2021](#)

I can't believe I met my first goal! I feel honored by your support (which sounds super formal and stiff, but I *am* honored--there's no better way to describe the warm, awed, squishy-happy buzz that you all have given me).

Because I met the first goal, I'll use one of the extra days that I can take off to work on a holiday story (either Valentine's or St. Patrick's Day). This story will be released to Patrons first, but then be released for everyone.

I've so deeply appreciated everyone's support over these last six months since *Mind Blind's* first baby demo toddled out onto the web. Now, your gifts not only allow me more time to work on *MB*, but you've

given me the opportunity to creatively recharge by working on a MB-adjacent project. Bonus, I get to give you something back as a gesture of my heartfelt gratitude!

[The First Interviewee is . . . Rosy!](#)

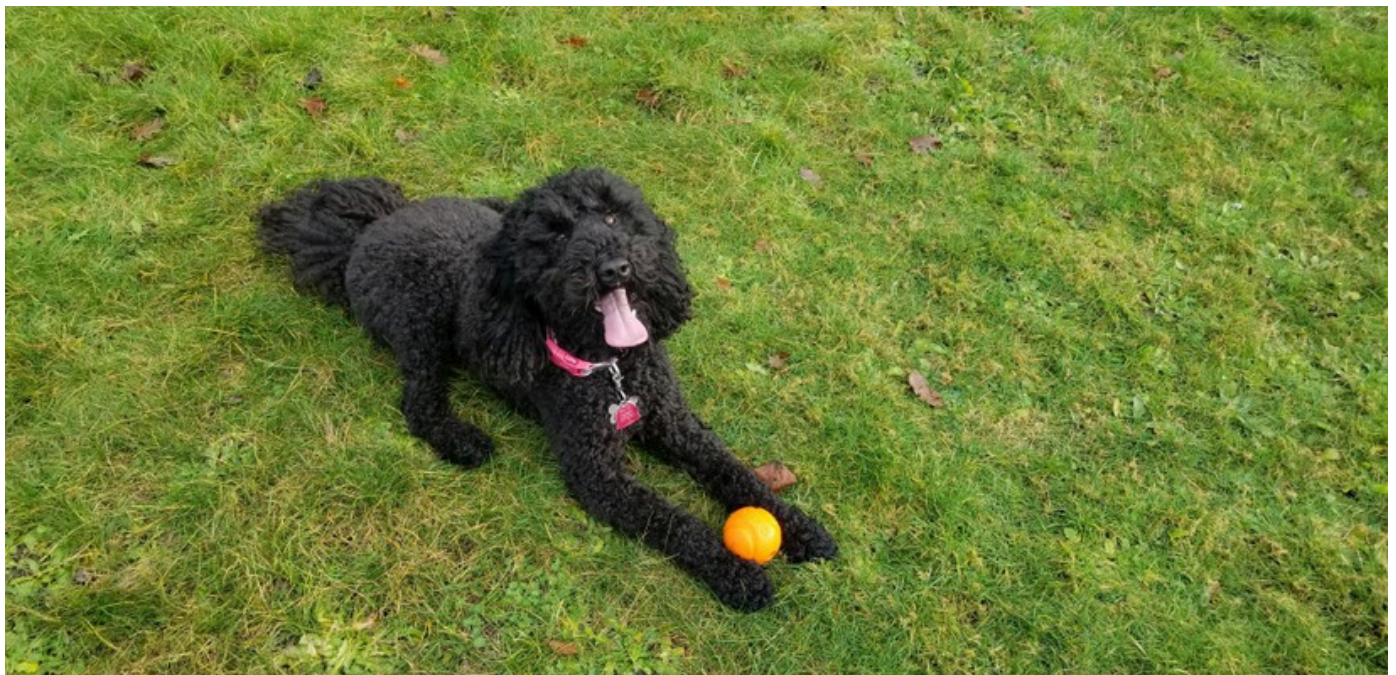
[Jan 3, 2021](#)

That's right, everyone's favorite(?) jerk teacher has dominated the poll, despite Nick-Nack's valiant effort and Glitch's sulky pouts.

Please address all questions to Ambrose/Ambrosia via the Sanctum of Spoilers Discord, on the mb-interview channel. (If you don't have discord, you can leave a comment on this post, but discord is better at notifying me so that I can write the questions down as they arrive!)

I'll post Rosy's answers at the end of the month (at least, for those questions that earn more than a glare--Rosy reserves the right to remain stonily silent).

Have a great day, everyone!



[Sometimes I Just Like To Play With Words](#)

[Jan 5, 2021](#)

Subtitle: Insults which Glitch has, on multiple occasions, hurled at K when both were drunk

You illogical corn cobbler

You illegitimate moldy shroom

You browbeaten weathervane

You mangled straw-dashed broom

You waterlogged, pockmarked crumpet

You gaseous bulbous newt

You marooned gouted mumblewit

You vedious filangled gahmute

You thripped nipples twirlywank

You cincancient oopsie-whoops

You puffacious buffed curlank

You grimilitous jurlled hurloop

(The thing I love most about English

And it's staccato drawl

Is its nonsensical rhythm

And words that aren't words at all)

[Of Ballrooms and Biscuits](#)

[Jan 5, 2021](#)

Regency Period Romance

Featuring: Gray, Nick, and Female Button

Grayson Black was not a rake.

This was, many of the *ton* considered, a regretful flaw in the Earl of Wacker's otherwise enticing personage. Reformed rakes were of course known to make the best husbands, and ambitious mamas despaired at his conspicuous absence from scandal sheets. If Lord Black kept a paramour, he did so discretely. If he drank to excess, it was never at balls. Gambling hell proprietors winced at his unprofitable presence, for Lord Black never gambled more than he could afford to lose, and he lost very rarely.

Grayson Black was, for lack of a more prestigious adjective, *dull*.

This trait which made him unremarkable, however, made him inimitably marriageable. Not for the most in-demand debutants, of course—those glittering, hardened diamonds hunted for aforementioned rakes, dashing and oh-so reformable. But to girls on their third or even (perish the thought!) fourth season? There was no more promising, if unexciting, potential suitor than the Earl of Wacker. Because, in addition to being dull, Grayson Black was *nice*.

He danced with wilting wallflowers, and escorted elderly dowagers to dinner with a patient smile. His conversation sometimes came across as stilted during dinners, but what more could one reasonably expect from a man who preferred (genuinely preferred, rather than being forced into seclusion by creditors) to live at his country estate instead of in London? Any wife would surely follow him to social exile, of course, which was another reason that Grayson Black fell somewhat low on the list of promising matches despite his admittedly fine features and Davidian jawline.

And if the word most commonly used in conjunction with Lord Black was "unobjectionable," well, there were far worse descriptors. Take the Earl's best friend, for instance, the rakish, reckless, hellish, disreputable, dastardly, and utterly charming Marquis of Hyacinth. Lord Nicholas Wiseman was the *ton*'s most dangerous darling, sought after by single, and oftentimes married, ladies as much for his wicked personality as for the dukedom he stood to inherit. Polite Society (where "polite" meant "rich and titled") failed to quite comprehend the friendship between the two men: one, a rake of first water; the other, a mild-mannered bumpkin. But then again, Polite Society never espied Lords Black and Wiseman when they were alone, as they were now, drinking brandy in Nicholas's study.

"You won't marry her, then?" Nick asked, morosely staring at the bottom of his empty glass yet too lethargic to refill it himself. "T'would make my life easier, y'know."

Grayson reached for the decanter, rolling his eyes at his friend's forlorn expression. "I'm not marrying your sister in order for you to avoid taking her to balls. God's blood, Nick, she's only eighteen!"

"Alas, old enough to wed." Nick thrust out his glass for Grayson to refill. "And it won't only be balls. My mother insists that I accompany them to Almack's. Almack's! Until Ellery snares a husband, my nights shall be filled with simpering misses and tepid lemonade."

"I hardly think either will kill you," Grayson noted dryly.

Nick glowered at his friend before throwing back his brandy. "My mother, however, might, should I attempt to 'neglect my duty' as escort."

“Regardless, you’ll need to find an alternative escape.”

Nick groaned. “We’d be brothers, if you and Ell married. Don’t you want to be my brother?”

“Not particularly.” In truth, Grayson already considered the Marquis to be family, and had ever since the two studied together at Oxford. Right now, he refused to admit as much, sensing that, in Nick’s inebriated state, any expression of fraternal affection would be taken as a request for his younger sister’s hand in marriage.

“You’d like her, Gray,” Nick insisted. “Ellery, that is. She’s smart. Doesn’t simmer.”

Implication: the chit was a bluestocking. While Gray personally found intellectual women to be enjoyable conversationalists, he possessed no desire to become betrothed to one whom he’d never met. He refilled his own brandy then Nick’s once-again empty glass.

“To your sister, may we never meet,” Gray said, raising his glass in the air.

“To my sister, may she quickly wed.”

Their cups clinked together in a salute to bachelordom, both too distracted and drunk to notice a concurrent *click* as the door to Nick’s study softly shut.

In the nearby hallway, Ellery clenched her fists. She hadn’t seen Nick’s friend, only overheard their conversation through the cracked-open door, but no doubt Lord Black’s face was as repugnant as his snobbish personality.

A nuisance, was she? To be hastily pawned off by her brother to another equally self-important man. Why, he’d offered her to Lord Black before she even officially debuted! As if she were a racehorse or a bloodhound, to be relinquished after losing a hand of piquet. Rage frothed inside her. Given Nick’s egregious behavior, she was half-determined to remain a spinster for life simply to spite him.

Part of her did want to marry, to have the kind of love shared by her father and mother. But she didn’t want to find a spouse right away, before she even had time to find herself. Now that she was finally in London, she wanted to experience the city. To visit the British Museum, and witness Edmund Kean preform on stage. If she chose to wed, it would on her own schedule, after she’d enjoyed her fill of society life.

One thing she swore: her future husband would most certainly *not* be Lord Grayson Black.

Six months later, Ellery had visited the British Museum and applauded Kean on stage multiple times. What she had not done, much to Nick’s chagrin, was wed. Nor had she ever been formally introduced to

Grayson, due to Grayson's determination to never attend a party where she was also present in order to discourage Nick's persistent flight of fancy about a match between his sister and best friend (which Nick became increasingly inclined to suggest the longer Ellery remained unwed), and due to Ellery's own contrivance to avoid the Earl whom had unknowingly insulted her. With the season concluding and no potential engagement in sight, Ellery and Grayson continued to doggedly avoid each other.

Their orbits would have never crossed, were it not for their shared love of biscuits.

Lady Cowper's ball was the final Grand Event of the season. There would continue to be smaller events in London, of course, but most families of note planned to retire back to their country estates for the summer. As one such, Grayson found himself obligated to attend lest he insult the *ton's* most powerful (and vindictive) hostess. Ellery attended because Nick insisted it was her last chance to find a beau and thus save him from needing escort her around next year, since their father, the Duke, eschewed London entirely in order to personally manage his lands and tenets.

So it was that Ellery Wiseman and Grayson Black, exhausted with having their toes trodden by their respective dance partners, each found themselves in Lady Cowper's kitchen, the ballroom refreshments having long since been reduced to crumbs scattered across silver platters. They both escaped after the Vienna Waltz, although Grayson, having the longer legs, arrived below stairs first.

Mrs. Branham, Lady Cowper's cook, wrung her hands, distraught that she had nothing remaining but shortbread to serve such a prestigious guest.

"I adore shortbread," Grayson assured the cook, which was true.

Ellery arrived soon after, only to discover that her plan to escape the sweaty ballroom for sweets had already been commandeered. She quickly ducked a curtsy, cheeks burning.

"Apologies!" she stuttered. "I wasn't aware—that is, I didn't expect to find—"

Gray couldn't help but take pity on the flustered girl (nor fail to note how fetching she looked in her green muslin dress). He held out his plate.

"Shortbread?" he offered.

Her face snapped up to meet his. A lush fringe of lashes framed wide eyes that twinkled with repressed mirth despite the impropriety of their meeting. Gray suddenly felt as though he had gone a round at Gentleman Jack's and had the wind knocked out of him.

"Thank you," the girl said.

"For what?" he asked dumbly, entranced by the way her eyes crinkled at the corners as she smiled.

"For the shortbread," she reminded him, selecting a piece off his plate. "As well as your silence, I hope. It's not very proper for a young lady to accept shortbread from strangers."

"You have my utmost discretion." Gray struggled to tear his gaze from her mouth as she bit into the shortbread. "It is, after all, superior shortbread."

"It truly is." The girl gave a small moan of bliss as she finished the biscuit. "I should return," she admitted reluctantly. "I didn't expect anyone else to be here, and without a chaperone—"

Gray looked around and realized that Mrs. Branham had indeed left, most likely to try and scrounge up other sustenance for the upstairs ballroom, seeing as noble guests were becoming so hungry that they intruded upon her realm. Distracted as he'd been by the girl's delight when consuming the biscuit, he hadn't noticed the cook leave.

"Of course," he said. Then, unable to think of anything else that would delay the girl's departure, which he realized he *did* wish to delay, he blurted out, "Do you dance?"

She laughed at him.

If gossip spread that Ellery fled ballrooms in search of snacks, she wouldn't be able to find a husband even when she decided that she finally wanted one. Prudence dictated that she should have departed the moment that she caught sight of the fair-haired man with piercing blue eyes and crumbs dusting his lower lip. But then he'd grinned and offered her a biscuit, and she'd always had a weakness for shortbread and handsome smiles.

Ellery hadn't *meant* to snicker when he asked if she could dance. It had been in the height of rudeness to do so. But his question was so asinine, yet so earnestly expressed, that she couldn't help but be in equal parts charmed and amused.

"We are attending a ball," she said. "It would be extremely irregular if I didn't know how to dance."

"Yet I met you in the kitchens," he noted, "which is already irregular. Is it so misguided that I might conclude that you wished to avoid trampling some poor suitor's feet? Or perhaps your betrothed's?"

Despite knowing that propriety required that she take offense at his forthrightness, Ellery only smiled. "I am not engaged," she said. "And I'm a marvelous dancer." The last sentence may have been a slight (or perhaps more than slight) exaggeration, but it was a lady's prerogative to advertise herself.

The stranger grinned. "Good."

She blinked. "Which part?"

Instead of answering, the man set aside his plate and stood. "We can't return together, obviously," he said. "Not without creating a scandal."

"A scandal over shortbread," Ellery mused. "How absurd."

His grin widened. "Would you object if I requested an introduction? Surely, we must have a mutual acquaintance, Miss . . ."

"Wiseman," she boldly provided. "Miss Ellery Wiseman."

His hand caught on the kitchen table as if to steady himself, and his breath audibly whooshed from his lungs. "Miss Ellery Wiseman," he repeated.

Ellery cocked her head to the side. "Is something the matter?"

"No. That is—no. Nothing is the matter. I'll stay down here and give you time to return."

"Oh." She tried not to be disappointed by his suddenly chill dismissal. "Alright."

He called out to her as she turned towards the stairs. "Don't forget! You promised me a dance."

Ellery bit her lip to keep from grinning as she cast a look back his way. "I didn't, actually," she teased. "After all, sir, we still haven't been formally introduced."

"An oversight on my part which will be swiftly rectified," he replied.

Back in Lady Cowper's ballroom, Nick struggled not to crow with victory. Instead, he kept his expression schooled to detached disinterest as Gray marched across the ballroom.

"I would like an introduction to your sister," Gray said grimly when he neared.

Nick dropped his jaw in feigned shock, as if it hadn't been his subtle suggestion whispered into two sets of ears that had sent his sister and best friend down to the kitchen. Then he smiled and clasped Gray on the back.

"About time," Nick said. "About damned time."

[Developer Blog #2](#)

[Jan 8, 2021](#)

"Of all the jerkface deceptions. Rosy Kim, I do believe I might be falling in love with you."

-Button (potentially)

I'm currently working on Rosy's route in Chapter 6 and may be enjoying it a bit too much. Curmudgeon teacher is a lot of fun to write, what can I say? In this upcoming chapter, people paying attention to affection meters may be surprised to discover that Rosy's fondness for Button occasionally goes up when challenged (although not always).

Rosy values evaluative skills in others--they'll respect a Button that looks deeper to figure out people's motives instead of jumping to conclusions. However, Chapter 6 also unveils a less tolerant side of Rosy, and Button's affection level can actually dip if Rosy thinks their attitude is too woe-is-me (Morbid-Resentful Combo Buttons may want to choose K's path instead). I remain convinced that, romance-wise, the most compatible love interest for Resentful Buttons in general is Glitch, but that's beside the point.

Speaking of K's path, I'm still in the process of coding reactions to certain developments that involve everyone's favorite dog aficionado. For those of you who had Sally peer into K's future, you'll soon find out Hemera's identity! I'm also (very, very tentatively) debating whether to lock K's route behind meeting them in Chapter 1. I'll post a poll here on Patreon before making any final decisions, but the romance is just so much *better* if you meet K in Chapter 1. We'll see how later chapters go, but it's something I'll need to ponder (I welcome any feedback on the topic!).

The biggest challenge I'm dealing with right now isn't K's romance, however.

It's Nick.

When writing, I use a lot of physical cues to convey character emotions. So much so, that a lot of the lip-twitching, brow-furrowing, and arms-crossing gets deleted when I edit. However, given that Nick is a disembodied voice in your head, it's tricky to subtly show his emotions. It's not an issue I've ever had before, and it presents a unique challenge for me. In my first draft, a lot of the passages with Nick have ended up looking like this:

*How is this the logical conclusion that you reach? Nick demands, ****_. Did I break your brain when I entered it?*

Where the underlined blank is for me to insert an emotional tone description once I figure out how to do so without being repetitive from earlier passages. Who knew that writing about having your brother in your brain could be so tricky!

Thanks to your incredible support, I took additional Saturdays off for the rest of January and now have two days per week to dedicate to writing Mind Blind! Thus, this update will be longer--around 30,000 words, which will bring up the grand total of the demo to 190k (I'm going to try to reach 200k in this next update, but we'll see).

Patreon Demo Update: January 22

Current Word Count: 172k

Goal For Update: 190k (200k stretch)

Final Notes:

Rosy's interview will be released January 31, so remember to leave any questions you have for Instructor Hardass on either the Sanctum of Spoilers Discord or on the Interview announcement post here.

I also hope you paid attention to descriptions of certain persons and artworks from previous chapters, as in Chapter 6 you'll have a chance to impress Rosy and to begin uncovering Mind Blind's main mystery.

[Thank you!!!!!!](#)

[Jan 11, 2021](#)

There aren't enough exclamation marks in the world to express my gratitude for hitting my second goal! Your support has really blown me away. I'm still in shock, but the good kind of shock that involves lots of blinking and happily repeating the phrase "I have the best readers" (so much so that my family has begun joking that I sound like a broken record--but it's true!).

I've officially let my work know that I'll be taking Saturdays off, which gives me a whole additional day a week to work on Mind Blind! I'd planned on my next interactive ficlet for Saint Patrick's Day (which is a big deal in Chicago), but meeting my second goal also means that I can afford to take additional days off and write one for Valentine's Day as well.

Below, you can vote which characters you'd most like to be featured in *Button and the Cupid Calamity*. I'd love to make routes for every RO if time allows, but the top two in this poll will definitely receive their own paths.

Sally

Grayson

K

Glitch

Rosy

282 votes total

[Live Q&A Time](#)

[Jan 11, 2021](#)

This month's live Q&A will be held on the last weekend of January--a week after the demo updates. This will give you guys a chance to ask questions on the latest developments, which is a good thing because Chapter 6 has *quite* a few new twists and turns in store (cue evil laughter).

The Q&A will be done via The Sanctum of Spoilers Discord, so please make sure that you have your microphones set up and access to the Q&A Voice Channel ahead of time (feel free to message me if you need help gaining access!).

I want to make sure that everyone is able to participate, so please indicate the best time slot for you below. I'll hold two sessions if need be to make sure everyone can make it. If you can't attend any of the slots, leave a message on this post and I'll see what we can do!

(Note that the times are in Pacific Standard)

January 29th, 3-4pm PST

January 29th, 6-7pm PST

January 30, 11am-12pm PST

January 30, 3-4pm PST

14 votes total

[Delivery for the Damned: Reggie](#)

[Jan 11, 2021](#)

Introducing Reginald (Reggie) Beenhouwer

Shaggy brown hair, intimidating size, and copious amounts of facial hair (but only during the full moon).

Your landlord and natural predator, Reggie is a champion of the Supernatural Self-Acceptance Movement, a great cause which you usually support. Alas, the distinction between freedom fighter and indiscriminate cannibal seems to have escaped Reggie's limited understanding.

Reggie takes "embracing his most authentic self" to murderous extremes. Unlike other werewolves, who fear losing control and accidentally killing someone, Reggie refuses to wear a silver band to prevent him from transforming into a ravenous beast every full moon.

Bad news? Reggie may eat you if you forget to deadbolt the door to your apartment.

Good news? Cheap rent.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 3](#)

[Jan 14, 2021](#)

"Consequence?" My voice emerged an embarrassingly high squeak. Did Lady Delphine know about my constant rebirths? Magic was certainly involved. If anyone could discover the secret behind my cycle of deaths, it would be the Court Sorceress. And if she knew *why* I kept repeating my life, perhaps she could help me prevent the current one from ending.

"A consequence of what, precisely?" I repeated.

"Why, of growing older, of course." Lady Delphine sounded amused by my obvious discomposure. "Maturity sits awkwardly for most at first. Although I've personally been impressed with how well you handle yourself." She arched a sleek auburn brow. "I overheard your conversation with your father earlier. Quite the adroit bit of negotiation."

My shoulders ached to droop in disappointment but I forced my posture ridged. "I get scolded quite frequently for being too willful."

"Welcome to womanhood," she said wryly. "You'll find such scoldings become ever more frequent."

"Lovely." Unbeknownst to her, I'd learned that lesson seven times over.

Lady Delphine's red lips curved into an almost-smile. She waved a languid hand towards the crowded ballroom, catlike in her grace and self-satisfaction. I suppressed a pang of envy as the jewels of

numerous rings sparkled with her gesture. Jewelry, like love, was an indulgence I'd been forced to sacrifice on the altar of self-preservation.

"Even as we speak, they try to read our lips so as to judge and condemn what we may be plotting," she said. "Power, Lady Vitrola, is as dangerous as it is intoxicating."

"Power is only intoxicating if you haven't tasted its repercussions," I murmured.

"Such wisdom for one so young!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I suspect you could become very powerful indeed." Her shrewd green eyes narrowed, again giving me the unnerving sensation that Lady Delphine possessed some unacknowledged insight into my situation.

The prospect simultaneously uplifted and terrified me. I shifted my weight to my left leg, so that the desk key dug even further into the bottom of my foot. The discomfort forced me to recall the devastating fallout of the last time anyone else had learned of my condition. Some horrors, not even the deletion of time could erase. As much as I craved answers, my caution had to trump curiosity. At least until I learned more about the enigmatic sorceress and whatever cryptic mind games she might be playing.

I gritted my teeth but kept my tone mild. "Loath though I am to disappoint, my lady, I fear you overestimate me."

She laughed, a crystalline burble that should have been charming but somehow rang hollow. "So jaded already! But then again, you *are* now old enough to be betrothed." Her smile faded and her stare grew even more hawkish. "Rumor is your mother possessed a similar practicality. His Majesty speaks fondly of her to this day. Her passing must have felt overwhelming, given you assumed most her responsibilities."

"I oversee our staff and occasionally assist my father with entertaining his guests," I said, "but do not believe that my actions worthy of note."

The sorceress rolled her eyes. "Humility is such a tiresome trait. Your reputation and rank give you options that other young ladies aren't as fortunate to possess."

She paused and took a fork and plate from the refreshment table. The attendant's hand on the knife trembled as he cut her a slice of cake. Even more so than the rest of Verdan, the people of Kothe distrusted mages, even those licensed by Royal Writ.

"You must embrace your fate, or you shall be consumed by it." She took a bite of cake, her tongue darting out to lick icing from the corner of her mouth. "Delicious."

I swallowed back a wave of nausea as my stomach cramped at the recollection of being poisoned. At least the guillotine had been quick.

"Thank you for your advice, my lady. I'll take your words under consideration." My statement was a mannered platitude drilled into me by a long line of governesses since birth. From Lady Delphine's

mocking grin, she was well aware the format.

“I hope you do.” For the first time, she sounded sincere. “I’ll remain in Kothe until Prince Loren concludes his business in your province.” Her smirk deepened. We both knew Loren had only made the two-week journey from the capital in order to propose.

“I hope my family’s hospitality has been adequate,” I responded automatically. My mind was already half-engaged brainstorming a list of potential people to interrogate in order to learn more about the sorceress. Theo, perhaps, though he was more likely to make up some rubbish fantasy than be a reliable source of information.

“It’s been a delight. Right now, however, I believe my esteemed host would prefer to converse with you privately.” She inclined her head towards my father, who was stalking towards us with a peevish expression. Bending down slightly, she whispered in my ear, “Should you wish to take control of your life, meet me in the rose garden at sunrise tomorrow.”

With that final utterance, she pivoted away, leaving the lingering scent of cinnamon in her wake. My father promptly engaged me between himself and the refreshment table after her departure.

“Daughter!” His voice was bright yet sharp, and his gray eyes glared above his politely curved lips. “It’s your own birthday ball, yet you are one of the few people not dancing! Let us find you a suitable partner.”

I sighed and took his arm. Ready or not, it was time to face Loren.

“Any other steed would’ve balked, I tell you! But Dragon never faltered—he comes from Argyl’s stables, you know—and he leapt right across the river. A lesser rider would’ve been thrown, no doubt, but I . . .” Loren caught sight of my father, and his voice trailed off in the middle of regaling a group of young lords with an embellished account of his latest fox hunt.

He pushed himself off the wall he had been slouching against and nodded stiffly. “Duke Rhys. I’m honored by your invitation this evening. I presume this is your lovely daughter?” His voice was higher and scratchier than I remembered, given that he was now three years younger than when last we’d met.

Father bowed deeply, side-eyeing me to make sure my curtsy passed muster. “Your Highness, the honor is mine. Allow me to present my daughter, Vitrula.”

“Lady Vitrula.” Loren perfunctorily raised my hand to his lips with a slight bow. “A pleasure to meet you.”

His greeting confirmed once more that, had his father not deemed me a suitable bride, Loren would never have noticed my existence. We’d already met last year when I’d made my debut at Bellcrest, albeit for no more than a minute. That minute had been one of many to Loren, just as I had been but one of the many faceless young noblewomen to whom he’d been introduced. Nothing about me stood

out: I was neither exceptionally plain nor exceptionally pretty, and at thirteen had been too awestruck by his mere presence to utter a single word.

However, my father's duchy controlled Kothe, the northernmost (and more importantly, wealthiest) of Verdan's twelve provinces. A century past, Kothe had led the entire northern half of Verdan in a failed rebellion against the Crown. To this day, ties between our province and the capital of Bellcrest remained fraught. Loren's marriage to the most eligible lady in the region (which was to say, me) would go a long way towards strengthening the Tivall family's control over the rest of the north.

What I lacked in beauty, I made up for in bloodline.

"Your Highness." I curtsied again, taking advantage of my head's dip to train my expression into one of manufactured delight.

"Congratulations on your birthday," he said.

"Being born is not a particularly impressive feat but I'll accept your praise nonetheless, Your Highness." Hopefully, my attempt at levity would distract him from the quiver in my voice.

Loren's brow furrowed. "I don't understand. Unless—" He realized that his friends were laughing, and the crease between his blue eyes smoothed. "Oh, you're joking! Most ladies don't have a sense of humor, so I was taken aback."

I barely refrained from rolling my eyes. Loren was handsome, charming, and known for his prowess with both steed and sword. But he had never been the quickest wit. King Eldin would need to appoint clever advisors to guide his son after he ascended to the throne. As Loren's intended, I'd dedicated countless hours studying politics in order to provide good counsel, only for death after death to prove how little he valued my presence.

My father gave Loren a meaningful look. The Prince complied with the unspoken request—he knew what was expected as well as I did.

"Lady Vitrola, may I have the pleasure of this next dance?" he asked politely.

"Of course, Your Highness," I replied politely.

It was all very polite.

I wanted to scream. *How could you order me killed? Did you not trust me even the slightest? Could you not have loved me but a little? How many times must I die because of you?*

Instead, I smiled (politely) and placed my hands on his broad shoulders. Loren would most likely be the death of me, but he was an excellent dancer.

The dance required that our bodies press together, breaking apart only to allow others through in an intricately coordinated weave of couples. Despite our proximity, the tingle of breathless awareness I'd once experienced in Loren's presence had long vanished. Instead, I noted the few spots marring his handsome features. Even princes were no match for puberty. It was fascinating, how much more I noticed about Loren now that I was no longer in love with him.

Once, I'd been convinced that Loren's deep blue eyes reflected hidden depths. Nothing successfully kills infatuation, however, more than being killed. My feelings towards the love of my life had numbed to pessimistic disdain by death three. That life, I'd refused Loren's proposal. Numerous ceramic statuettes had fallen victim to my father's rage over my "selfish" and "irresponsible" behavior. Less than a year later, the Duke of Kothe and the leaders of the two other northern provinces declared their independence from Verdan. If his daughter foolishly refused the throne, he would seize one for himself.

Mine had not been the only death in that cycle.

The key in my slipper dug deeper into my foot with every turn, a painful reminder that I had yet to record my most recent death. Loren was content to waltz in silence, which was a blessing because one, I wasn't ready to casually converse with someone who had so recently ordered me executed and two, it gave me time to strategize. If my past deaths had taught me anything, it was that the next three and a half years (give or take a season) would fly by with shocking speed.

Loren grinned down at me, no doubt interpreting my preoccupied stare for the enraptured idolatry to which he was accustomed. He either didn't notice or deliberately ignored the whispers of the dancers swirling past. I had never been able to tell whether Loren was a master at masking his emotions or simply oblivious.

My second attempt to escape matrimony had been more deliberate than the first: I'd graciously stepped aside when Loren's feelings for Letty became obvious, under the stipulation that Kothe and other northern provinces be granted increased autonomy and a tax reprieve on our lumber trade. The other northern nobles were thus appeased, had refused to humor my father's vainglorious aspirations, and a bloody civil war was averted.

Everyone had been content (or, in the case of Father, resigned). Everyone except Theo, who'd idiotically challenged Loren to a duel in order to avenge my so-called honor. I'd been killed by my own brother's misfired bullet.

Both incidents had led me to an irrefutable conclusion. If I wanted to break the continual cycle of deaths in which I was trapped, I needed to wed Loren. My family may have inadvertently caused my death twice, but it was the person behind the other five times that I needed to protect myself from. Once I became Queen (or at least, Crown Princess) the other, less coincidental, attempts on my life should stop as well—whoever was responsible for the majority of my deaths couldn't avert what had already happened. Since their goal seemed to be preventing my union with Loren, my demise would cease to serve a purpose so long as I could survive until my wedding day. Furthermore, once crowned, I'd finally

have enough resources to begin investigating *how* I continually went back in time instead of simply struggling to break free from the cycle.

All I had to do was figure out a way to not be murdered or framed for treason before my eighteenth birthday. But how?

Loren winced. I must have accidentally trod on his foot.

"Apologies, Your Highness." I gazed up at him coyly through my lashes, though I suspected my harsh features made the expression more akin to a glower. "I fear that being close to someone so handsome makes me a bit nervous."

Loren puffed out his chest at the compliment, his irritation forgotten as I knew it would be. "Your modesty is charming," he said condescendingly. "I assure you it didn't hurt at all."

We traded a few more inanities before the chimbet players strummed the final note of the dance. As he escorted me back to my father, Loren asked the question that I'd once longed to hear but now dreaded. He'd been tutored on what to say, and his phrasing was identical each time.

"Lady Vitrola, I find myself completely taken with your grace and charming conversation. May I call upon you tomorrow? I shall bring a sprig of goldenblooms."

Goldenblooms were considered sacred to Sen, the god of light who also oversaw harvests, families, and (though I cringed to think of it in association with Loren) fertility. They were the sole deity outside the Triad officially worshipped by the Crown, since to pray to the Silent Fourth was to pray for death. Sen's priesthood had gained influence during the early reign of Loren's grandparents, who had struggled to bear an heir. As a result, the gift of goldenblooms remained the traditional way for the nobility to declare matrimonial intentions. I'd been trained from birth to accept exactly such a courtship request.

"You will be warmly welcomed, and the blooms placed in sunlight," I recited.

Courtly discourse allowed us to pretend that a visit was just a visit and that flowers were just flowers. Even when we both knew that we were no more than pedigreed goods in a royal business transaction.

Loren bowed, having received verbatim the answer he'd anticipated. "I shall call upon you this midweek," he said, ostensibly to me but looking towards my father, who nodded in approval. Since etiquette prevented us from dancing twice in a row, Loren then left to find more friends with whom to share his foxhunt exploits.

Father beamed. "I knew you wouldn't disappoint me."

I hummed noncommittally. Thankfully, with Loren's courtship now guaranteed, Father was content to leave me alone. No doubt he went to boast about his daughter's conquest to the rest of his guests. *His* foxhunt had been for a prince, and he'd trapped his prey.

Still, the waltz with Loren had proved unexpectedly productive, though not for the reason my father believed. It had given me time to figure out my next step.

I needed a way to defend myself. It wasn't enough to try to remove Letty from the picture, especially when my last attempt had so spectacularly backfired. I needed to inspire fear, to make my ever-present murderer second guess their attacks on me. I lacked the coordination necessary for swordsmanship, and Theo's accidental assassination had left me wary of pistols. Firearms only dated to after the Uprising, when magic had been functionally outlawed and people decided they needed an alternative method to kill each other. Pistols were bulky, noisy, and more prone to misfiring than not. I needed a subtler, more reliable arsenal, but one which would nevertheless make anyone cautious of confronting me.

I'd been executed for using magic. Perhaps it was time I learned.

[Mind Blind Bloopers Reel #2](#)

[Jan 15, 2021](#)

"I'm not the mind reader in my family. That would be Nick, and he's tragically indisposed." I overexaggerate my shrug. "What are you trying to hint at?"

"Brilliant deduction, Watson. All we need now is a clown and two emus, and we'll have the entire circus."

"Why emus?" Sally asks.

You gaze at her seriously. "Why *not* emus?"

Are emus just discount ostriches? Nick ponders.

To kiss or to kill. That is the question.

Stop. Imagining. Him. Naked. Nick begs.

You add a speedo to your mental imagery.

Not better. Nick thinks. *In fact, it's somehow worse.*

Feeling powerless can't be resolved with platitudes. It seems like your brother is finally about to learn that lesson.

[Developer's Blog #3](#)

[Jan 15, 2021](#)

Current Word Count: 181k

Goal Word Count: 190k

Patreon Release Date: January 22nd (in a week!)

Writing has been going well! There's a lot of info that needs to be communicated in Chapter 6, and info dumps always make me a little nervous. But overall, I'm pretty pleased with what I have down. Of course, knowing me, I'll do a last-minute rewrite of at least one major scene the night before release, because there's nothing like a 24-hour countdown to kick my inspiration levels into overdrive.

I tweaked the plot oh-so-slightly as well. Now Glitch, Sally, and Gray have a bigger plot role in the next chapters, even though they don't appear at all in Chapter 6 (a new-ish, equally important character does, however). As I mentioned in other posts: this upcoming chapter is the Rosy and K show. (Rosy is *so much freaking fun*. They're so rude? I love it.)

Button's relationship with Nick also undergoes some strain in this upcoming chapter--Nick is *very* protective over his younger sibling, and may disagree with your choices. I've tried to build towards an inevitable(?) confrontation by showing Nick's tendency to hover, while also for the most part making the default relationship with him really positive. This way, when there's finally a confrontation with Nick in Chapter 7/8 over boundaries, readers will (hopefully) feel comfortable enough in the sibling relationship that they feel free to disagree (politely or forcefully) without worrying about it negatively impacting their affection level with Nick or end game.

People who love each other often fight, and sometimes their relationship can emerge stronger for it. Fiction thrives off conflict, but I felt it was important to first cement the relationship between Button and Nick as supportive and loving before letting Button really try to fix its weaknesses (no relationship is perfect, after all).

For players with a combative or resentful dynamic with Nick, you'll have the option to either begin repairing the relationship or to shatter it completely. Nick will respond differently to various options depending on your affection stat. Have a low score, for example, and he might assume that you're being sarcastic if you choose a option that expresses fraternal affection. Likewise, Nick will be more inclined to listen to a Button with a high relationship with him if they get upset and start yelling.

To summarize: Everyone will be given the same dialogue options, but how Nick responds will be very different.

In other news, I'm going to put up a poll tomorrow about *Button and the Cupid Calamity*, the Valentine's Day short that K and Gray seem to have won. I'm thinking that it might be fun to play with some classic fanfiction tropes: body switching, love potions, only-one-bed, etc. The winning tropes will be incorporated into the story.

I've also been working on some additional goodies for Patreon. Expect to see some Mind Blind personality quizzes in February, as well as some old poetry that I recently unearthed at my mom's house. (The short stories written in a unicorn diary from when I was a kid, however, I think I'll refrain from making public.)

[Button and the Cupid Calamity](#)

[Jan 16, 2021](#)

Thanks to all your support on Patreon, I have time to write another IF Holiday ficlet! K and Grayson won the poll for the initial routes (I'll add other RO routes later, but they won't be done in time for Valentine's day). Now it's time to vote on which tropey goodness you want to see in the story.

Since it's a Valentine's Day fic, I plan on making it unabashedly cheesy and romantic. And what better way to achieve peak squee than to utilize tried-and-true fanfiction mainstays? I listed a few of my personal favorites, but feel free to recommend more! I'll add any that I think could be made into stories to the poll.

There's only one bed (gasp!)

There's only one antidote (double gasp!)

Love potion. The obvious, yet not overrated, choice.

Soulmate AU! Give me mystical tattoos and colored strings and heartsongs and DESTINY.

Body swap. Mind Blind already has brain shuffling--let's take it up a notch.

383 votes total

[Mind Blind Personality Quiz](#)

[Jan 17, 2021](#)

It's short and superficial, but you can now find out which Mind Blind character you're most similar to! (At least, according to a handful of random questions and my nonexistent psychology degree.)

Take the quiz here: <https://uquiz.com/tPBDCI>

[Discord Q&A - January 30, 11am PST](#)

[Jan 18, 2021](#)

Before talking about the upcoming Q&A, I'd like to remind you to please check your Patreon message inbox. You should've all received messages requesting info for your rewards (which will be sent by the end of the month), but I'm aware that Patreon doesn't always let people know that they have new messages (the message can also appear cut-off midway if read on the mobile app). There's no rush to reply, of course, but I want to make sure everyone got the info!

If you did not receive a message from me, please let me know.

As for the live Q&A, it'll be held on **January 30, 11am-12pm PST** (since the most people voted for that timeslot in the poll). If you can't make it, please let me know in the comments, and I'll work to set up a second alternative slot.

The Q&A will be held over voice chat on the Sanctum of Spoilers, but I'll also be adding a separate text thread for anyone who doesn't have mic capabilities or simply isn't comfortable with live chat (as a former VIP of the Lurker Gang, I get that not everyone may like talking aloud). I'll have a separate window open to look at your written comments during the Q&A. That way, you can still participate without any additional hassle :)

[Developers Blog . . . And An Update!](#)

[Jan 22, 2021](#)

Chapter 6 ended up being really long, so it's now Chapter 6 and 7! All of 6 is up today, and the first part of Chapter 7 will be available exclusively to Patrons on the 31st (when Chapter 6 is released publicly.)

Here's the link for those who really, really, REALLY can't wait (that is, people like me):

<https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-armadillo/mygame/>

Demo Wordcount: 183k (not counting the bits moved to Chapter 7)

Average Playthrough Length: 48k, which means this recent chapter is 10,000 words longer per playthrough. Whoops. (For comparison, each chapter in *Lady Death's Diary* is around 2,500).

Things to be aware of:

- 1) Your save files will carry over to the Patreon demo.** I'm waiting until the public demo closes around Chapter 10 to update all the previous chapters and wipe saves. For Patrons, there will also be an optional where your file won't be wiped which you can choose to play instead--but going that route means that you won't benefit from the major reworks (I already have an additional 9,000 words and several new scenes in Chapter 5 that will added once the save-pocolypse happens).
- 2) However, playing from a post-chapter 5 save will have issues.** Variables for Sally's vision and the activities don't reset, so whoever you first chose for the vision will keep triggering no matter who you choose, and you'll only be able to pick one excursion. (Normal stat errors will occur as well, but those won't outright break anything except flavor text and dialogues and obviously the relationship/personality bars).
- 3) This chapter is kind of info-dumpy.** Maybe too info-dumpy (let me know if this is the case). Basically, this chapter starts the next "phase" of Mind Blind. The first movement was chapters 1-3, getting you introduced to Aeon and the world of Ments. The second segment is 4-5, where Nick ends up in your head and it becomes your new reality. With chapter 6, we *finally* start the James Bond arc. No, I'm not joking about this.
- 4) There is a section where the narrative railroads you into making a certain decision.** For which I apologize. But it's necessary. I could alternatively give people who say no a "The End" screen, but that seems cruel. I tried to alleviate any potential frustration of not being able to make a different choice for giving you around twelve reasons for *why* you made that choice, so hopefully it won't break role playing too much.
- 5) Rosy is really trying, okay? Being nice doesn't come naturally for them.**

Also, I'll be having a poll about whether or not to lock K's romance route after the demo has been up for a few days. You'll realize why once you play through this recent demo. (Which, despite my prior claims, is more the Rosy show than the K show since this chapter got cut in half. But K is still . . . well, you'll see.)

[Let's Talk About K](#)

[Jan 25, 2021](#)

First off, before reading this post, please make sure you've played Friday's demo update:

<https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-armadillo/mygame/>

No, seriously! You'll spoil a major twist for yourself if you read this post before playing Chapter 6. Don't worry. I'll wait.

...

...

Have you read it yet?

...

...

Well, if not, it's your choice to continue reading. But HERE BE SPOILERS. Proceed at your own risk.

...

...

This is your last chance to turn back!

...

...

If you're still reading this, then you're (hopefully) already aware that K is not a Ment. Which brings me to today's topic: whether or not to make meeting K in Chapter 1 a requirement to romance them. This won't mean that you're obligated to woo K if you go back for the dogs (Glitch's romance also has extra content if you meet K early), but it would functionally turn K's route into a semi-secret route.

The more I write with K, the more I realize how *delicious* the relationship trajectory is if Button meets them and begins to fall for K while thinking that K is a Lo-Po, has their delusions of Bali shattered upon

meeting K again in Chapter 2 and coming to believe that they're a Ment, and then finally discovers that K is, in fact, not psychic in Chapter 6. It lays a great groundwork for the romance that meeting K in Chapter 2 simply doesn't create.

Writing a Button who crushes on K without having met them in Chapter 1 has always felt awkward and unrealistic to me, but I really wanted to include as many choices for players as possible. But the route simply isn't as good.

Furthermore, in my mind, I firmly believe that it's Button doubling back for the dogs that makes K begin to fall in love. K opens the door to discover this stranger demanding that they take better care of their dogs, and K's mind instantly thinks: "this person is trustworthy and good, because they love dogs enough to take action rather than look the other way." I'm not certain how to duplicate that moment for K in a route where Button ignores Annie and Cass's barking, and I fear the romance would end up feeling inauthentic because, well, I'm not sure that K would fall in love with someone who *didn't* impractically risk their enrollment to check on an animal's wellbeing.

I hadn't initially planned on K's route being locked behind Chapter 1's meeting. But "hiding" the route *would* mean that I'm able to make K's route more personalized to Button's many emotional reactions (and Button has a lot to emotionally react to given all of K's reveals and fake-outs).

My point is: I really want to lock K's route.

This will involve some editing of prior chapters, but I'd only write the romance path going forward for Buttons who met K's dogs. However, I figured it was best to test the waters here before making a final decision. Because I definitely understand not liking how a seemingly arbitrary choice in the first chapter can lock you out of an entire romance route! If there weren't four other "main" ROs, I wouldn't even consider it.

If people overwhelmingly want K to remain an option for everyone, then I'll reevaluate my call. (I'd like to note that you'll still get the options to be friends with K should you meet them for the first time in Chapter 2! It's simply the delayed romance that I'm struggling to make come across as realistic.)

I'm setting up a pretty simple poll, but feel free to share your thoughts and takes on this issue either on this post or in the Sanctum Discord!

Make K a "hidden route" locked behind meeting them in Chapter 1 (will improve the amount of TLC put into this "main route")

K for all! K for all! K for all!!!!!!

346 votes total

[Delivery in . . . Dublin!](#)

[Jan 27, 2021](#)

As per the first *Delivery for the Damned* development poll, *Delivery* will be set in Dublin! Which is my personal favorite of the three choices, so I'm pleased as punch.

The concept behind *Delivery's* world is that universes (multiverses? alterverses?) have collided in an event oh-so-creatively dubbed "The End."

Suddenly the Irish Sea is no longer a sea, it's a small region of Hell-with-a-capital-H that shook loose when reality broke. Vampires have taken over Japan, and over half of Brazil is now cursed with lycanthropy. South Dakota has disappeared altogether, and folks who venture into the mist where it used to be never return (except, mysteriously, for cows, whom appear to be able to enter and return unharmed).

The End takes place two decades before *Delivery* begins.

Rather than attempt to explain the inexplicable (because magic!), I'll share a snippet that I wrote for a *Delivery-*adjacent side story set in the same world:

Even before The End, Ireland was a place of magic and wonder. Thus, while the rest of the European Union declared panicked sanctions against the supernatural arrivals, the Irish greeted their new neighbors with equanimity and a welcoming pint.

The sole break in their national composure occurred over the realization that Leprechauns, unlike most every other creature of myth, were still not real.

[Short Story: The Suit](#)

[Jan 27, 2021](#)

Before I became a teacher and realized that kids were way more fun to work with than adults because kids are still willing have pretend lightsaber battles, I spent a a year working HR (in Dublin, which was amazing, but still). A lot of my days were spent being bored out of my mind and chewing on pen tips, so I wrote short stories and poems that I would then save on the work computers under official-looking names.

Although the files were probably immediately deleted by the next user, it amused me to think of my writing being unearthed years later as someone freaked out: "What the hell is this file labeled *FudgedProfitMargins_DestroyB4Audit??*" (What can I say? I was always a troll.) At my mom's house over the holidays, I unearthed an old flash drive with a few of these ominously-titled stories saved on them.

I figured I'd post some of these works here. *The Suit* is stylistically very different from most my writing, written when I was still trying to find my voice as an author. But it very much encapsulates how I felt about adulthood right after graduating college (thus, my eventual migration to teaching, where lightsaber battles could still be part of my workday).

The Suit

His alarm goes off every morning at 6 am.

Then at 6:15 am.

And then again at 6:30, 6:40, and finally at 6:45 am, by which time Steven is annoyed enough to crumple out of bed and into the kitchen for coffee.

He doesn't like coffee and he harbors vague suspicions towards adults who claim to be aficionados of concentrated bitterness, but he drinks it black because that's the way hardboiled cops take it on his favorite crime shows. Steven is not a cop.

By 7 am, he's convinced himself that the caffeine has made him alert and he returns to his bedroom to put on The Suit.

It's an old garment, older than Steven himself, with traditional tailoring and an angled peak lapel that makes him look at least half an inch taller. The fit is stiff and the fabric itches, but he only has the one Suit so he brushes it out and cuts off a few stray threads, and is careful not to get shaving cream or toothpaste on it as he gets ready. He sticks his tongue out at the reflection of his father in the mirror.

7:25, he's out the door and headed to work. The gray Camry he drives matches the color of The Suit. But in his mind, he commutes to work behind the wheel of a life-size 1982 Red Rider. He doesn't know if that was ever a real car, but he got the Matchbox car from his uncle when he was younger and drove it around the living room coffee table until the plastic silver engine peeled and the black side pipes snapped off. If he could make money without the Suit, that's the car he would buy. He'd blast music out of open windows and accelerate at yellow lights.

The Suit has a threadbare knee, so Steven routinely takes the elevator up to his office on the third floor. Rick and Dan are already waiting for it on the first floor when Steven arrives.

"Monday," mutters Rick as a greeting. He takes a sip from his thermostat and winces.

"Monday, Steve," echoes Dan.

"Morning," says Steven, looking at the elevator button. It's already glowing. He clenches his fist in order to resist the urge to push it another dozen times. Dan notices.

"Knee acting up again?"

"Better than yesterday." Steven shrugs. "No real complaints."

This is a lie. Steven has hundreds of complaints, and they're certainly not imaginary ones. The fact that Dan always smells like blue cheese and rubbing alcohol. That Steven has a Camry instead of a Red Rider. Having to go an office every day instead of an arcade. The worn patch on the knee of the Suit.

I was supposed to be able to do whatever I wanted as an adult, Steven thinks as he edges away from Dan on the elevator. No one ever warned me that freedom was cost prohibitive.

No one ever warned him that adults weren't free.

[Insomnia-Inspired Poetry](#)

[Jan 28, 2021](#)

I'm going through my old laptop and finding so much stuff that I'd almost forgotten writing!

This was written for a poetry assignment in college--I misunderstood the assignment and thought that our poem had to be the image of an hourglass, when in actuality it only needed to include imagery *of* an hourglass.

Whoops.

[Delivery for the Damned: On Magic and Reality](#)

[Jan 28, 2021](#)

Our world did not always have magic.

Magic was brought into existence by one Mr. Jasper Smocke on the night of October 18th, 1987, at approximately 7:02 pm, Greenwich Time, four miles outside the town of Palnackie in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland.

Mr. Smocke, you see, was indecisive.

Whilst standing at a crossroad that divided in not two but three directions, Mr. Smocke was unable to decide which route was best. Faced with this impossible choice, his atoms simply split. Not in a nuclear way, but rather in a very polite English sort of way (for Mr. Smocke, despite being in Scotland, was a Manchester man by birth and breeding).

One version of Mr. Smocke went left, the second version went straight, the third version went right, and the fourth version of Mr. Smocke perished at the crossroad, unable to make up his mind.

And when Mr. Smocke split, reality shattered.

[Developer's Blog #4: Uncreatively Titled, Because It Covers A Lot of Topics](#)

[Jan 29, 2021](#)

Next Patreon Mini-Update: January 31! In two days!

Mini-Update Length: 190k words, includes the first bit of Chapter 7.

New Playthrough Length: Around 50k

The next update is significantly smaller, but I wanted to make sure Patrons still have something new to enjoy when Chapter 6 goes live for everyone else (otherwise, I think it would be kind of like watching others eat a candy bar when you already devoured yours). There won't be any new revelations or jaw-dropping moments in Chapter 7's intro, but you'll get to talk some with K (which has been a loooooong time coming, I know).

Speaking of K: it's official.

K's romance is now only pursuable if you turn back for the dogs in Chapter 1. It wasn't how I intended to initially implement their route, but I'm finding that the best laid plans in interactive fiction often need to be reworked. (To give people some idea of how my expectations didn't align with reality, Chapter 6 was supposed to happen in Chapter 4. And Nick being in Button's head was a last-minute addition, believe it or not.)

To the five people that wanted K's route to remain open: I truly apologize. It was very difficult for me to decide to give readers *less* freedom, because I aspire for *Mind Blind* to be a game that doesn't limit you for random choices. In the end, I didn't feel that K's romance would be very good if Button only meets them in Chapter 2. And if I don't feel that I can do something well, and that it might take time from me doing *other* things better (like K's "early-meeting" romance route), then I'd rather not do it than present something that's simply not that good.

Close friendship is still fully possible with K, however, as you'll be spending a lot of time together now that they're your partner! But I feel at this point, players should have some idea of which romance they want to pursue. Maybe the routes aren't locked in yet, but Button should at least be in the "intrigued" stage. (Even if you never openly flirt! Flirting is *not* necessary to initiate the romances.)

Deciding on an RO doesn't work, however, if it's possible that Button only met one of the love interests briefly in Chapter 2. Especially since it's not obvious that K will accompany Glitch to the hospital, and thus there's no way for players to intuit how to maximize their K exposure. Whereas if Button meets K in Chapter 1 and is interested in them, getting a ride with Glitch is the logical progression because it's a chance to interrogate Glitch about K's egregious behavior in pretending not to be a Ment (heh). Which ride offer triggers first reflects the romance you've been thus far aiming for (so Gray will call first if you have a crush on him, but Glitch's text will happen if you have a good relationship with Glitch OR you met K that morning).

(Early introductions of ROs doesn't apply to Noh, because Noh is a different beast altogether. In fact, I would strongly encourage people *not* to attempt to romance Noh on their first playthrough. Better yet, don't romance Noh at all. Noh is a jerk.)

Retroactively closing K's route presents complications, of course. Chapters 4 and 5 need to be re-written and coded so that non-dog-route Buttons don't develop a crush on K. Button can still find K attractive, but there's no emotional blossoming. I contemplated leaving Button's crush in-tact and having K simply not return it, but ultimately decided that doing so was unfair and misleading to players who could be confused as to why a character clearly meant to be an RO didn't return their affections. So, I've spent these last few days tweaking and deleting and rewriting, and hopefully the end result will be better than the original.

In non K-related news (K got a lot of news today, because K is Special like cereal):

Tomorrow, I'll be posting the final poll for *Button and The Cupid Calamity*. It'll include the two winning tropes of the prior poll (Only-One-Bed and Soulmate AU), as well as tropes you recommended in the comments! The winning trope will be used in a Valentine's Day IF Short (to be released in the middle of next month). Poll winners K and Gray (whoops, I guess this news *is* somewhat K-related) will have their routes of *Button and The Cupid Calamity* released for everyone initially, with Sally, Glitch, and Rosy having their routes added for Patrons over the coming months.

I reckon if I write enough Holiday IFs, I can eventually rewrite and release them as DLC for *Mind Blind* once the game gets published. I do love writing these side ficlets because:

1. They contribute to the main story's world building (see: the potential return of Mr. Snodgrass from *Button and The Santa Scam* in *Mind Blind's* latest chapter)
2. They reinforce character backstory and development, letting me experiment with how *Mind Blind's* cast respond in varied circumstances. Which, in turn, helps me deduce how they'll react to things in the main story.
3. They're just really fun to write. Ficlets let my brain take a break when needed by focusing on a different scenario, while still maintaining my creative momentum for *Mind Blind's* world.

I'm still hammering out February's Patreon Schedule, but it'll definitely include the rest of Chapter 7 and most likely part of Chapter 8. Tentatively: Chapter 7 will be released for Patrons in early February, followed by *Button and The Cupid Calamity*, and then the first part of Chapter 8 in late February (with Chapter 7 being released as part of the Public Demo at the same time).

It'll be a lot of writing, but Patreon has given me enough days off that I truly think I can do it (and still have time to sleep, don't worry!).

And on a final, more serious, note:

Thank you.

Thank you for your financial support, which is allowing me to spend time doing that which I love most in the world—write.

Thank you for enabling me to share my stories, for providing your feedback, and for caring about *Mind Blind's* world and characters.

Thank you for laughing at my corny jokes.

I never expected my Patreon to have over 300 supporters. Never imagined that I'd in a place where I could call into work the day before the demo drops and say "I'm taking today off, because I have a writing deadline, and Rosy and Nick need more banter!"

You are making my dreams possible. For that, there's not enough "thank you's" in the world.

But still . . . Thank you.

[PSA: Tonight and Tomorrow, We Spill Tea.](#)

[Jan 29, 2021](#)

Reminding UCRT Members and Hero Zeros that the first live Q&A is at **6PM PST tonight**, on the Sanctum of Spoilers Discord (**on The Monthly Q&A Voice Channel**).

The second Q&A will be tomorrow (Saturday) at 11am PST.

I'm holding two sessions this month, so that everyone who's signed up for those tiers can make participate!

Please make sure that your discord is connected via Patreon beforehand, and that you can access the Sanctum. For those who don't have working microphones, there will be a text channel (**#live-qa-qs**) on which you can ask questions that I'll answer live.

Also, while most of you have sent me the information for your matchups and other tier rewards, if you haven't yet do so, please do! I'm tweaking Sunday's update, but will be writing up all rewards not yet sent after Chapter 7's mini-update goes live on Patreon.

Finally, I'd like to talk about how rewards will work should you decide to maintain your tier through February. (And I 110% understand if doing so isn't feasible! I made the UCRT and Hero Zero tiers focused around custom rewards, as it's not the most sustainable option. That way, you won't lose access to any of the short stories or *Lady Death's Diary* should you drop down a tier.)

For UCRT Members: Instead of a romantic/friend matchup, you can choose to have a poem from Glitch about your Button and their chosen RO (normally this is a Hero Zero exclusive).

Alternatively, UCRT Members subscribed for two months in a row can receive a new matchup for a different OC *or* request an anti-matchup where I'll tell you which *Mind Blind* character would be your arch-nemesis and why.

For Hero Zeros: In addition to requesting a different type of matchup and a new poem, Hero Zeros who continue their tier level into February have the option of either receiving a new story from me *or* having their short story from January continued.

Regardless of whether you continue at your current tier, I want to thank you for your generous support in January! I can't wait to talk to you all live, either tonight or tomorrow morning J

[Mind Blind Interview: Rosy Kim](#)

[Jan 29, 2021](#)

(Note: I was going to post this tomorrow, but I was too amused to wait. Thanks to everyone who asked questions! I tried to make sure at least one got brought up by everyone who asked.)

A spotlight shines on Nicholas Wiseman, wearing a sequined gold vest and a top hat cocked at a jaunty angle. He sits in one of two cushioned chairs on an otherwise empty stage. A microphone is clutched in his hand.

Nick: Hello, hello! Welcome to the first-ever Unity Spotlight with your host, Nicholas Wiseman.

He winks in an over-exaggerated way into the camera and motions to himself.

Nick: Which would be yours truly. Our interrogation—I mean, interview—today is with none other than Aeon’s own Instructor Kim! Rosy, why don’t you take a seat.

Rosy walks onto stage and sits down in the empty chair.

Rosy: I ordered you not to call me that.

Nick: And I ignored you . . . Rosy. Our first question today comes from Bi-stander, who asks: “Rosy, what do you consider to be the bare minimum for someone to be a successful MIV or AMO?”

Rosy scowls.

Rosy: She did not refer to me as Rosy.

Nick: She really did. It seems to be what your fans call you.

Rosy begins to slowly smile to ominous effect. Nick shifts uncomfortably.

Rosy: You called me Rosy as well. Does that make you my fan, Justice?

Nick, sputtering: Absolutely not.

Rosy’s grin widens.

Rosy: As you say. For what makes a successful MIV or AMO . . . a functional brain. Which sadly few of my students possess.

Nick: Ouch. No wonder people say you’re a harsh grader. Fish wants to know if you’d ever consider using a kahoot for ethical training with your students.

Rosy: Anything called “a kahoot” doesn’t deserve to be used.

Nick: Nice that you’re so open-minded. Our next question comes from PKnight, who asks if your expectations of Button would have been different had they been a Ment or if they hadn’t been a Wiseman.

Nick leans forward in his seat, exuding a sudden air of intensity. He addresses Rosy in a warning tone under his breath.

Nick: Be careful what you say about my sibling, Kim.

Rosy, ignoring Nick: Wiseman's family and Pollard Score in no way alter my expectations. If they believe that either should earn them special treatment, they should look for a new vocation.

Nick glares at Rosy. Rosy continues to ignore Nick.

Nick: Speaking of Button, Mura wants to hear about your first impression of them.

Rosy: Student seated in the second seat to my left.

Nick waits for Rosy to elaborate.

Rosy: Next question.

Nick: Alright, then. Wynna asks: "If you were predatory and foolish enough to attempt to romance Nick's sibling who is ALSO YOUR STUDENT and take them on a trip to Korea, where would you two go and what would you do?"

Rosy: That was *not* their question.

Nick: I paraphrased. Your answer?

Rosy, heaving a sigh: The Kumgang Mountains are near where I was born. I believe the falls and Sinpyong Lagoon are both popular with tourists.

Nick: So, you would go back there?

Rosy: I suppose. It's . . . been a long time. There are memories.

Neither speak for a moment. Nick looks as if he wants to say something, but miraculously holds his tongue.

Nick: Cinnerman is curious if you have any friends with whom you keep in touch back in Korea.

Rosy: There's no one. Not anymore.

Nick: What about things? Rivering asks if there's any aspect of Korea that you miss.

Rosy: I miss the food. And the language. Sometimes the sea.

Nick: What do you like most about living in the USA?

Rosy: Bigger apartments.

Nick feigns a large yawn.

Nick: Such exciting answers you're giving me—it's almost like you're holding back. Let's try to dig a little deeper. Lahtays notes that you seem like an instructor unafraid of teaching hard lessons and truths to your students. Tell us, what's the hardest lesson that *you* ever had to learn?

Rosy: . . .

Nick starts humming the tune to Jeopardy.

Rosy: I'm thinking.

Nick: About your hardest lesson?

Rosy: About whether to tell the truth.

Rosy sighs and stares into the distance over Nick's shoulder. The action would come across as overly dramatic and indulgently broody if performed by anyone else, but Rosy pulls it off.

Rosy: . . .

Nick: . . .

Rosy: . . . Next question.

Nick: You can't refuse to answer!

Rosy: I can. It's in my contract with the author: I reserve the right to refuse any and all questions that might spoil my character arc.

Nick: Damnit, Jo. She's too lenient with you. Fine. Another question from Lahtays: "What is your opinion of Nick Wiseman?"

Rosy: A question about you? I'm surprised your ego didn't lead you to ask this one first.

Nick, grumbling: I'm not sure that I wanted to know the answer.

Rosy: You already know my answer.

Nick: Yes, that's what I'm afraid of.

Nick stares deadpan into the camera, à la The Office.

Rosy: Nick Wiseman possesses more power than sense.

Nick: Alright, next quest—

Rosy: He never should have been asked to lead UCRT at such a young age.

Nick: Now, see here, that's—

Rosy: He's reckless, foolhardy, and entitled.

Nick: I get it already.

Rosy: He refuses to take anything seriously despite the responsibility he's been bestowed.

Nick: You're just ignoring me, aren't you.

Rosy: But he has potential.

Nick: Wait, what?

Rosy: Just don't tell him that I said so.

The two stare at each other. Nick, in a shocking and uncharacteristic twist, appears to be at loss for words. Rosy smirks.

Rosy: Next question.

Nick clears his throat, rattled.

Nick: Uh . . . in a related topic, Deliquescere asks "What area does Nick shine in?"

Rosy: . . .

Nick: You have to reply.

Rosy: . . .

Nick: You can't claim that this answer will spoil your character arc. Answer. Inquiring minds want to know. *I* want to know.

Rosy: . . . I admire his dedication to his sibling. And, although he *frequently* fails, Justice does commit to things. He tries.

Nick: Rosy, I'm blushing. Let me wipe away a tear.

Rosy sighs.

Nick: What else. . . oh! Oh-ho-ho. Augusthead wants to know who which person you'd choose if you could spend a day in their body.

Nick leans in closer and bats his eyelashes.

Nick: It's me, isn't it? Because you admire my *dedication* and *commitment*.

Rosy growls.

Nick: It's okay, you don't have to admit it. We know. And it warms my heart, Rosy. It really does.

Rosy: Adsila.

Nick visibly deflates.

Nick: You'd chose Aeon's Dean over me?

Rosy, shrugging: She has access to information that I'd be curious to read.

Nick: Well, that's not at all cryptic. Moving on . . . Shwarmi wants to know what deal is between you and Clarence, noting that "you seem to dislike each other on a personal level. Is that a new development or has that irritation been there for a while?"

Rosy: Garfield is an idiot. He's always been an idiot.

Nick: Agreed.

Rosy: But I should've taken his accusation against Wiseman seriously. I let my . . .

Rosy avoids looking at Nick or into the camera.

Rosy: I let my judgement be compromised by emotion. It was a mistake.

Nick: I'm going to ignore the implications of your answer, for both our sakes. Mayhem asks if your first job was at Aeon, and, if not, where was it?

Rosy: I got my first "job" at eight. Once I was fifteen, I lied about my age and joined the Korean military.

Nick: What job could an eight-year-old do?

Rosy: Street musician and juggler.

Nick: Seriously?!

Rosy: No. I gutted squid for local fishermen.

Nick, looking disappointed: Oh. So, you can't juggle?

Rosy: I never said that.

Nick: Much as I would *love* to follow up on that line of questioning, we have more submitted questions. Other than maybe juggling, Indifilm asks: what are some skills that you've always wanted to learn? Also, if . . . No that can't be right.

Rosy: What?

Nick: Indifilm seems to be under the impression that you love puns. Which is ridiculous, because you clearly possess no sense of humor.

Rosy: Obviously.

Nick: I'm pretty sure that you don't even know how to laugh.

Rosy: Never learned.

Nick: . . . Right. To return to Indifilm's initial question: what skills have you always wanted to learn?

Rosy: Juggling. And skateboarding.

Nick: . . . You're joking. I think.

Rosy arches a single brow.

Nick: You're not joking?

Rosy's brow arches even higher.

Nick: You're . . . I hate you.

Rosy: Well, I'm having a ball.

Nick: Was that a juggling pun? Wait . . . no. Let's move on before my brain breaks.

Nick reaches into his jacket pocket and draws out some cue cards, shuffling through them distractedly. He's obviously still trying to figure out if Rosy made a pun. And, if so, how that alters his grasp of reality.

Nick: Here's a good one! Pleasepower says that you had a book in your office about the moral toll of lying, and asks: What lie have you told that took the greatest moral toll?

Rosy: I once told an idiot that I could juggle.

Nick glares at Rosy. Rosy glares back.

Neither speak.

They glare some more. This is getting ridiculous.

From the shadows at the far edge of the stage, Sally emerges. She claps her hands briskly.

Sally: Focus, please. Nicholas, stop antagonizing the interviewee. Instructor Kim, stop teasing him. He can't handle it.

She disappears back into the shadows. Nick pouts but continues the interview.

Nick: Electra-heart wants to know what you'd be doing if you weren't an instructor at Aeon.

Rosy begins to reply, but Nick interrupts.

Nick: Do NOT say juggler.

Rosy: Of course not. If I didn't work for Aeon, I suppose I'd still be working for my old company.

Nick: Care to elaborate?

Rosy: Not particularly.

Nick sighs and mutters something under his breath that's too profane to put into print.

Nick: Fine. Elaine^{hac123} asks: What were your thoughts about the book that Button took from your shelf?

Rosy's expression softens, which instantly puts Nick on edge. The grinding of his teeth is almost audible.

Rosy: I found Wiseman's accidental theft to be . . . amusing. Endearing, even.

Nick: Next question! Because I don't want to hear about this! Linh asks: "Rosy, are you aware that you're hot as hell?"

Nick groans upon realizing that this question is, from his perspective, even worse than the last.

Rosy: I am aware, yes.

Nick: You—you can't just—

Rosy: I did. Next question.

Nick emits a choked growl as he examines one of the two remaining question cards.

Nick: I'm not asking this.

Sally's voice echoes from somewhere backstage.

Sally, out of sight: Yes, you are!

Nick: I hate this. I hate this. I hate this.

Sally, still out of sight: The sooner you ask, the sooner this is over!

Nick, through gritted teeth: Kae . . . wants . . . to know.

His Adams apple bobs as he swallows, looking vaguely ill. When he speaks again, it's in a rushed single breath.

Nick: Kae-wants-to-know-if-you'd-engage-in-a-pillow-fight-with-Button-and-if-so-if you-think-you'd-win.

Nick grimaces, as if the query tasted physically bad on his tongue.

Rosy: Pillow fights are ridiculous. But I would win if ever one were unavoidable.

Nick, still looking sick: There you have it, folks! Rosy Kim, unagreeably forthcoming. Tune in next time

—

Rosy: There are, after all, better things to do in bed than fight.

Nick lunges at Rosy as the spotlight dims.

[Happy January 31st! Have a Poll.](#)

[Jan 31, 2021](#)

The mini-update will be in the cooker for another few hours, and released around 3pm PST. I added a bunch to Chapter 7 yesterday (the mini-update has an additional 2k words in variety), and am now combing over things to see that they all make sense.

Button's reaction to K can change based on how Button felt about (possibly) discovering that K was a Ment in Chapter 2. It's a lot of coding, and some of it is currently tangled.

Other factors that change Button's reaction include whether Button is romancing Glitch, and whether or not Button has been crushing on K. It's a lot of words for not a lot of additional length (around 1-2k, depending on choices), but I wanted to give the start of Chapter 7 to Patrons early anyway so you weren't left on Chapter 6's cliffhanger reveal.

In the meanwhile, I'm posting the final poll for *Button and The Cupid Calamity*, where you can chose which trope the Valentine's Day IF will be inspired by. Included are the two winners from the last poll, as

well as tropes recommended from its comment section.

There's only one bed (gasp!)

Soulmate AU! Give me mystical tattoos and colored strings and heartsongs and DESTINY.

Pretending to be married for undercover work (appropriate!)

In a frozen tundra, body warmth is everything.

413 votes total

[Mini-Update is Live!](#)

[Jan 31, 2021](#)

Despite upping the demo length by 11k words to a total of 194,000 . . . it only adds around 1,000 words per playthrough.

Play here: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-armadillo/mygame/>

Like I said, it's a mini update. It's the part of Chapter 6 that got moved to Chapter 7, and that I then rewrote to incorporate K's new romance restrictions. A teaser, for those of you who are hungry for K content and simply can't wait for February's full update that will have all of Chapter 7 :D

As a result of K's new lock-in point, I was able to dig deeper into Button's emotions about learning that K isn't a you-know-what (especially if they met K in Chapter 1--Buttons who *didn't* meet K early can very validly choose an "I give no flips" option).

Hopefully, it should feel like there's a lot of responsivity to your choices over past chapters. Please let me know if something triggers wrong or if anything hinky goes on with the choices. Because the chapter thrived on minute differences to convey emotions, I often found myself editing the wrong branch for slightly responses and then having to undo stuff. It was a *bear* to test, and I'm still not 100% certain that I caught everything.

Other minor things were fixed, such as Glitch no longer believing that you told them about Nick when you didn't in Chapter 5, and Sally-kissing Buttons no longer completely forgetting about Sally to drool over Rosy in Chapter 6. Plus some typos!

[Feb 1, 2021](#)

I found Lady Delphine in the gardens the next morning in accordance with her whispered invitation, though not before first unearthing every tidbit I could on the sorceress. Unfortunately, this amounted to a great deal of nothing.

Theo's eyes had sparkled wickedly before he'd launched into a tall-tale about mages who bathed in the blood of girls recently turned fourteen. Father had harrumphed and warned me not to bring up "that woman" in Loren's presence, causing me to conclude that the rumors about Lady Delphine and King Eldin's relationship were true.

While I'd never paid much attention to the servants' superstitions before, I now listened raptly. However, their testimonies, while less fantastical than that of my brother, ultimately proved too biased to be reliable. ("Why on Aelium has His Grace allowed that witch to stay *here*?" Cook had raged when I'd popped down to the kitchens for information and Theo's promised chocolate cake.) Kothens harbored a bone-deep animosity towards magic, mostly due to the repercussions they had suffered in the aftermath of the Northern Uprising. Whose fault was it if not the mages' that taxes had been so high these past three generations? If only the mages hadn't revolted, prices would be more reasonable, jobs would pay more, and it might even rain more frequently in summer. Or so the logic went.

Never mind that my own great-grandfather had employed the now-disbanded Sorcerers Guild to fight in his rebellion. Or that the abolishment of a substantial sector of magic-related jobs had done more harm to Kothe's economy than the Crown's increased taxation. Or that rising naval tensions between Anterdon and Fengal made the Drimalan Sea too perilous for our merchant fleet to trade with continents outside of Aelium. Magic was an easier scapegoat than the convoluted relations between foreign nations and their subsequent impact on the cost of grain. Resenting nobility invited trouble—safer to blame a group that could no longer retaliate.

These were issues that I could address—could fix—once I ascended the throne. For now, my focus needed to remain on staying alive, not on abolishing a century's worth of prejudice. I'd stayed up late last night writing down the transcripts of my first sixth deaths and adding the seventh. The squint-eyed guard with a pig-snout of a nose and heavy fists, I took vicious delight describing in particularly unflattering adjectives. The resultant journal wasn't thick but it contained enough clues about my past lives to help me avoid repeating their ends. Theoretically.

If I did die, at least it wouldn't be in the exact same way.

My sleep-deprived, dry eyes created a fuzzy halo around Lady Delphine's silhouette, making her seem even more otherworldly as she plucked the petals off rosebushes and pocketed them within the folds of

her robe. I cleared my throat to draw her attention.

She straightened and turned towards me. Her hands relaxed, and a fistful of petals fluttered to the ground.

I pointed at pink pile near her feet. "For a spell?"

She laughed, loud and hearty. Outside, away from the nobility's censure and the servants' suspicion, her smile no longer stopped at her eyes.

"Not at all," she said. "Rose petals are lovely in a hot bath, and these were nearly ready to fall off."

I would have to disabuse Theo of his fantasies involving mages and maiden's blood later. Lady Delphine flicked off a petal stuck to her sleeve before motioning me closer.

I complied warily, keeping an arm's length between us. The sorceress' promise that she could help me "take control of my destiny" rang increasingly ominous to my fatigued mind. Our encounter yesterday had been unprecedented: I'd never indulged my desire to avoid Loren before, and thus never given Lady Delphine opportunity to approach me in any previous lives. Now, however, my planned future hinged upon her response to my request. I took a deep breath to brace myself for the conversation ahead, but she spoke before I could begin.

"You wish me to explain what I meant last evening. About your destiny."

Her insight took me aback. Not that she had guessed the reason behind my curiosity (I was relatively sure that her cryptic demeanor was cultivated) but by the specificity of her statement. Had she used magic to read my mind? My suspicion must have registered on my face, because Lady Delphine laughed again.

"Logic, not sorcery, I assure you," she said. "Why else would you come to the gardens this early despite your obvious exhaustion? Ask your question."

Despite having practiced my proposition in front of my bedroom mirror, I felt tongue-tied under the weight of her full attention. I swallowed thickly. "You spoke of options. Of controlling my fate."

She nodded but remained vexingly silent. Lady Delphine obviously wasn't someone who could be finessed into accidental disclosure. Fine, then. I'd be blunt and observe her reaction. After all, I was only fourteen. She'd forgive some abruptness.

"Explain," I ordered.

Rather than seem offended by my audacity at issuing the command, the sorceress smirked. Her voice lowered to a purr. "Manners, now, Lady Vitrola. You came seeking a favor, did you not?"

I met her penetrating green gaze despite an overwhelming compulsion to stare abashedly at my own feet. Vestiges of the old me, the first me. Current me refused to be intimidated by someone who gleaned malicious pleasure from speaking in riddles.

"I want to learn magic," I said. "I want you to teach me."

Lady Delphine clapped her hands and let out a small squeal of delight. The tension between us broke at her open giddiness.

"Oh, I *knew* you had potential!" she exclaimed. "You must have sensed it too. Like calls to like, as they say."

I squinted, confused by her sudden switch in demeanor. "I am capable of learning then?"

"I said as much yesterday, didn't I?" She spoke slowly, as if explaining rudimentary mathematics to a child. "Ethereal threads absolutely *pour* from you. With proper training, you could become quite powerful."

My smile back was subdued. On the one hand, she'd agreed to my request. Learning magic would be an indispensable advantage in my quest to reach eighteen, especially if it turned out that I possessed an aptitude and Lady Delphine wasn't simply sensing magical residue from whatever curse caused me to relive my years. But somewhere deep inside, in an ignored hollow of my heart where I shoved all my unlikely dreams, a small hope shriveled and died. Nothing about Lady Delphine's reaction gave any indication that she knew about my condition. I squared my shoulders and firmly squelched the futile sorrow that arose over yet another dead end. The good news: Lady Delphine likely wasn't in league with my past and future murderer.

"You'll agree to take me on as a pupil?" I confirmed.

If the rest of my timeline remained consistent, Loren would propose within the next two weeks, after which I would return with him to Bellcrest. Lady Delphine resided at the palace, so arranging lessons would be a simple matter of scheduling.

"But of course. I'll see to it that His Majesty provides you an apprentice's permit." A crease formed between her auburn brows. "Provided Duke Rhys agrees."

"Leave my father to me." I brushed aside her concerns with a wave of my hand and more bravado than was warranted. "You're certain that King Eldin won't object? It could be controversial for you to tutor me in sorcery given . . ." I paused, reminding myself that my engagement to Loren had not yet been finalized, ". . . my close ties to the royal family."

She comprehended my meaning. "His Majesty has long wished that the people of Verdan might become more receptive of magic, as they were before the Uprising." She bit her lip as if conflicted, and refrained from saying more.

In my past lives, King Eldin and I had never discussed magic. Our conversations throughout the years had mostly consisted of him proposing hypothetical political conundrums for me to solve. He'd probably suspected that I would end up doing most of Verdan's governing on behalf of his son.

Regardless of how Lady Delphine intended to convince the King, the first step in my newest survival scheme was complete. I'd learn magic, defend myself against assassins, treachery, and the ineptitude of my family, and live contentedly ever after as Queen of Verdan.

"No."

It was Father's twelfth rejection in as many days. I'd reasoned, negotiated, and outright begged that he grant me permission to train under Lady Delphine. I'd promised to use my powers to advance his interests in Court, intimated that his refusal would make an enemy of the sorceress herself, and finally threatened to inform the local magistrate about a certain group of Fengali smugglers and their tariff-free brandy. I had followed him into the parlor as he retrieved one of said illegal bottles from his safe, my pestering having apparently driven him to drink.

"Do you know how long it took my grandfather to cleanse our family's reputation after his father's alliance with *mag*es?" He spat the last word as if it were a curse. I refrained from pointing out that the Crown had likely taken more exception to his great-grandfather's decision to lead an armed rebellion in the first place than his choice in magically gifted allies.

Both cajolery and blackmail had failed, but I had one last option. I took a deep breath, lifted my chin to a suitably haughty angle, and said in the most imperious tone I could muster, "If you don't allow me to study under Lady Delphine, I'll refuse to marry Prince Loren."

Father paused in front of the parlor door he'd intended to exit. His eyes narrowed to silver slits.

"Go to your chambers," he said, "and change into your new gown before His Highness arrives."

"No." Now it was my turn to refuse. "Either you agree to my apprenticeship, or I reject Prince Loren's proposal this evening."

It was a lie, of course. Every instinct I possessed screamed against the threat. I *needed* to marry Loren. My life depended upon it. Not just my own—to refuse the engagement was to guarantee Kothe's next uprising. My father and great-grandfather had that much in common. How many people would die if he called my bluff? If he decided, again, that it was easier to declare civil war to gain power than to corral a wayward daughter?

No. Regardless of Father's final verdict, I'd go through with the engagement. I only prayed that I was a practiced enough liar to convince him otherwise.

"I will disown you." Rather than rant or yell, Father lowered his voice. I felt suddenly grateful for this autumn's early cold snap, as my shawl concealed the hairs of dread that pricked my arms at his menacing whisper.

"You won't." Father had never ejected me from the house in any of my past lives, not even when he had believed me insane. Whether to avoid scandal or from his own warped sense of familial duty, the Duke of Kothe would not cut off his daughter. Abandon her to die, yes. Get her executed for treason, certainly. But he had never denied me my birthright.

"If you do disown me," I added, "I will go live with Uncle Alistair." I'd never met my uncle, who'd taken over my mother's position as a diplomat in Anterdon after her death. He couldn't be away from his work long enough to visit, but had offered both Theo and me a standing invitation to spend the summer with him. At very least, he might see me situated at a boarding school.

Father's nostrils flared, and his thin upper lip twitched as if longing to contort into a lion's snarl. But he was the Duke of Kothe. As such, he refrained from any and all unseemly displays of emotion, be it anger or affection.

"You would refuse Verdan's throne and flee to a desert backwater?" he asked. "All because you wish to become a witch? I thought you beyond such childish fancies."

"It's not a fancy," I snapped. "Nor childish. Need I remind you how Mother *really* died?"

He stiffened.

"As you pointed out, Anterdon is a desert. Yet you claimed that her carriage was forced off the road by a flood."

The apple of his throat jerked upwards, but he still didn't respond.

I barreled onwards, "That summer, Anterdon was in the middle of a seasons-long drought. I can show you our accounts—their merchants only stopped trading with us for fresh water two seasons after Mother's death, when the drought ended. So please, Father, explain how her horses lost their footing in a rainstorm."

He thumped down onto the nearby settee with an uncharacteristic lack of grace and wiped his hand across his face as if attempting to scrub it clean from emotion.

"How long have you known?"

"That politics are dangerous? Forever." I sat down beside him, unsure how to respond to his vulnerability. How did one go about consoling a stone statue? My hand stretched towards his shoulder before retreating to my lap. "The truth of Mother's death, I only realized after her funeral. I asked my governess to teach me everything about Anterdon, and the story you told Theo and me didn't make sense."

In reality, my own numerous assassinations had illuminated the circumstances behind my mother's "accident." Until my second death, I'd considered her passing to be a freak misfortune despite its illogical circumstance. Then I'd learned that the most malicious force in the world was not fate, but other people.

"Does your brother know?"

"I didn't think it would help to tell him."

When Father raised his face from his hands, his ducal mask had slid back into place. "You wish to learn magic in order to defend yourself."

I nodded. That much, at least, was true.

"If I allow you to study under the Court Sorceress, you will comply with the betrothal?"

"I swear."

"So be it." He stood and glanced at the clock on the mantle. "His Highness will return shortly." His silver gaze, as cold as the snow piling up against the window pane outside, scrutinized me from head to toe. My damask dress was cut with the empire waistline of last year's fashion but otherwise showed little wear. "You're presentable if not impressive. Wait here, and I'll send in Prince Loren when he arrives."

Father left, and Loren soon entered the parlor in his place. His color was high from having been outside. Most likely, he'd borrowed a horse from our stables and taken one last gallop as a free man before shackling his future to mine. A promise that I intended to make him keep this time. Perhaps Lady Delphine could teach me how to brew a love potion.

Then again, did I truly want Loren to love me? His constant presence was no longer something I craved—indeed, the very prospect of endless hours spent listening to him drone on about hunting gave me a migraine. Better to harden his heart against Letty, if magic could do such a thing. Most texts on sorcery had been banned from public ownership after the Uprising, so my knowledge was limited to accounts from history books and my own experience living under a curse.

Still, there was potential to somehow bewitching Loren. I filed the idea away to reexamine at a later time when my intended target wasn't kneeling before me, snow from his tailcoats melting into a puddle on the silk carpet.

"Lady Vitrola," said Loren, "over the course of these past two weeks, I have come to admire you immensely. Will you do me the honor of becoming my bride?"

We'd barely conversed for more than ten minutes during any of his daily visits, and I was seized by a reckless impulse to inquire exactly what it was about me that he admired so. My meek disposition? My elegant chin? My ability to balance six books upon my head whilst maintaining flawless posture? I suspected he would agree with whatever ridiculous virtue I put forth; such questions hadn't been

included in his script on how to propose. But this moment was too important to jeopardize. I smiled down at Loren serenely, the embodiment of the perfect lady.

“Nothing would please me more, Your Highness.”

[Happy February, Everyone!](#)

[Feb 1, 2021](#)

What To Expect This Month:

1. An update to the MB demo with the rest of Chapter 7,
2. The release of *Button and The Cupid Calamity*,
3. Another interview with a MB cast member decided by poll (vote below!),
4. A new *Mind Blind* side story (featuring Glitch and K),
5. A new "Saucy Side" (featuring Rosy, who vehemently objected to starring in a story which so fragrantly breaches Aeon's fraternization policy),
6. A few new *Delivery for the Damned* teasers (I'm introducing Balthasar, so I hope you all like cheese!),
7. And of course, blooper reels from sentences that I cut while writing.

It's a lot to fit into a mere 28 days! But, to paraphrase PBS, thanks to the support of readers like you, my writing time as increased by two days per week. I feel confident that February will be a productive month.

Hear that, February? We're going to be *productive*.

(I find it best to approach my deadlines with a threatening tone and duct tape, else time tends to run away from me.)

I'll be laying out a more in-depth roadmap of what to expect this Friday (after I get my month's teaching schedule), but for now I simply want to say thank you so much to everyone who stayed aboard from January, and extend the warmest welcome to any newcomers!

Vote on this month's interview character below:

(As last months interviewee, Rosy has been excluded)

Sally

Grayson

Glitch

Kent/Kenna

Nick

John

Hope

Clarence/Satan

. . . Noh (cryptic answers only)

385 votes total

[Mind Blind Saucy Side: Ambrose Version](#)

[Feb 3, 2021](#)

“Desk Job”

Featuring: Ambrose and Button

Your meeting with Ambrose begins with a kiss. It ends with the flagrant, torrid misuse and semi-destruction of Unity property.

Of course, the meeting wasn't supposed to start with a kiss. Ambrose called you to his office over an issue related to paperwork from your latest mission. Sally, it seemed, had yet again forgotten to sign her name on the dotted line (although she had decorated the margin of her report with a delicately-doodled daisy chain).

Daisy chains, Ambrose informs you with one of his signature (adorable) frowns, do not follow protocol.

You move his name plaque to the side and lean across his desk.

“Protocol, Instructor?” you say, using a title that you haven't called him in years. “Is protocol truly so important?”

His eyes thaws at your coy smile, although he attempts to conceal your effect on him by deepening his scowl.

"It's your job as Alavidze's MIV to make certain that she files reports in accordance with Unity guidelines," he says.

Your smile widens, and your voice lowers to a husky purr. "Oh, yes. I forgot how much you love *paperwork*." Your fingers creep up the length of his exposed forearm, and Ambrose's skin prickles beneath your teasing touch.

A mischievous impulse overtakes you. "Instructor Kim loves paperwork *so much*," you continue glibly, "that he wouldn't even agree to date me until it was filed in triplicate."

"You were my student." His breath catches as your fingers reach his elbow, dipping beneath the fabric where his rolled-up shirtsleeve ends.

You pretend to pout. "Rosy, sometimes I think that you love paperwork more than you love *me*."

Your words, as expected, snap what remains of Ambrose's self-control.

He grabs your collar and drags you the remaining few inches across his desk, his lips crashing into yours. You're hazily cognizant of a dull metal clang as his nameplate falls into the wastebin, knocked aside by either your torso or his elbow. Ambrose's fist twists the fabric of your shirt, making it slightly difficult to breathe. Yet lack of oxygen seems a petty reason to tear yourself away from his insistent kiss.

Sensing your discomfort, Ambrose loosens his grip on your collar. You gasp, before his other hand grips your chin firmly, keeping you in place and refusing to let you retreat for air.

Retreat isn't allowed when you're kissing Ambrose Kim.

Thus, you mount a strategic offense of your own. Your fingers bury in his short hair, disheveling its combed immaculacy, and your nails scrape against his scalp.

Ambrose groans brokenly.

Your lips curve into a smile as he buries his face into the crook of your neck. Victory is yours.

"Forget paperwork," Ambrose mutters, before he assaults the defensive formation of your grin. His tongue darts to the corner of your mouth like a lick of flame; his teeth nip your lower lip hard enough to make your nerve endings tingle. But his hand on your chin loosens, tenderly cradling your face as he watches you.

Ambrose often kisses you with his eyes open. It took some getting used to—at first, you'd felt self-conscious and vulnerable. He was so *aware* of you, attuned to your every uninhibited response and involuntary moan.

The awkwardness persisted until you'd managed to keep your eyes open long enough to look back. In Ambrose's stare, you'd seen awe. Adoration. Worship, even. Now, feeling him pressed against you is often no longer enough: you want to watch his eyes trail over your body in effort to memorize your form, see the sheen that forms upon his brow, and immortalize the tendons on the back of his hands. You want to witness how he occasionally pulls back simply to gaze at you in wonder.

"Forget protocol?" you manage to gasp out. You'll accept nothing less than his total surrender.

"Forget protocol."

Ambrose pushes you back and meets you at the desk's center, so that your neck no longer needs to awkwardly stretch. "Forget everything, except this." His lips capture yours once more. "Except us."

[Mind Blind Saucy Side: Ambrosia Version](#)

[Feb 3, 2021](#)

"Desk Job"

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“Forget paperwork,” Ambrosia mutters, before she assaults the defensive formation of your grin. Her tongue darts to the corner of your mouth like a lick of flame; her teeth nip your lower lip hard enough to make your nerve endings tingle. But her hand on your chin loosens, tenderly cradling your face as she watches you.

Ambrosia often kisses you with her eyes open. It took some getting used to—at first, you’d felt self-conscious and vulnerable. She was so *aware* of you, attuned to your every uninhibited response and involuntary moan.

The awkwardness persisted until you’d managed to keep your eyes open long enough to look back. In Ambrosia’s stare, you’d seen awe. Adoration. Worship, even. Now, feeling her pressed against you is often no longer enough: you want to watch her eyes trail over your body in effort to memorize your form, see the sheen that forms upon her brow, and immortalize the tendons on the back of her hands. You want to witness how she occasionally pulls back simply to *gaze* at you in wonder.

"Forget protocol?" you manage to gasp out. You'll accept nothing less than her total surrender.

"Forget protocol."

Ambrosia pushes you back and meets you at the desk's center, so that your neck no longer needs to awkwardly stretch. "Forget everything, except this." Her lips capture yours once more. "Except us."

Introducing Balthasar (Call him Balti, love)

Balthasar ~~appears to be~~ is a handsome human man of Persian descent in his late-thirties. He has a tall, slender physique and an immaculately groomed goatee. He lives in a relic-filled mansion located on the border between Leinster and Hell.

Despite his proximity to (and suspected summoning of) demons, Balti is an exemplary client. He behaves cordially, tips well, and always invites you in for tea and cheese during your deliveries. His butler, a former occupant of Hell's Ninth District, never threatens to devour your soul (or talks much at all, for that matter).

Balthasar's extreme love of cheese, in fact, may be his only flaw. He's near obsessed with the stuff, to the point where his mansion's interior smells of taleggio . . . and is that sulfur?

Balthasar is gender-locked male and the first of Delivery's ROs.

[Delivery for the Damned: Balthasar](#)

[Feb 3, 2021](#)

[February's Interviewee is . . . K!](#)

[Feb 5, 2021](#)

Everyone's favorite non-Ment has a big enough lead that I'm calling the February poll in K's favor.

Please address all questions to Kent/Kenna via the Sanctum of Spoilers Discord, on the **mb-interview channel**. Alternatively, you can leave your ask on this post.

Please submit all questions by **February 24th**.

As with Rosy's interview, I'll post K's answers at the end of the month. K reserves the right to remain awkwardly silent at any questions that delve too deeply into spoiler territory (although most of K's shocking "whaaaat?" moments have been revealed at this point).

There's not much for me to write in these interview announcement posts, but I want to make sure everyone sees them in order to be able to ask questions. So here's a picture to capture your attention: Baby Ziva, who did *not* like her inflatable cone that made her look like an Elizabethan-era poet.



[Developer's Blog: I Feel Pretty. Oh, So Pretty.](#)

[Feb 5, 2021](#)

One might even say that I feel *hot*. (Screenshot from Graphtreon.com, which tracks Patreon growth, and where I am apparently a "hot creator" which makes me feel like Cinderella as she majestically descends down a flight of stairs to the ballroom.)



The Bardic Type

Writing

★ Hot Creator Feb 2021

165th

(▲ 287)

Writing Rank

386

(+246)

Patrons

I also feel grateful, awed, thunderstruck, overjoyed, and slightly hungry (it's lunchtime). Thank you for giving my Patreon such a successful start! Being able to take days of teaching has been lifechanging: I have more time to write, and even get my editing done while it's still daylight (and subsequently no longer fall asleep at the keyboard).

Mind Blind's playable demo currently sits at 198k (I can almost taste that 200,000 word mark!). So far this week, I've added additional reactions to Chapter 7's initial discussion with K and reworked John's departure in Chapter 5 (before, this section was very much a "I'm-not-feeling-inspired-right-now-but-need-sentences-there-to-move-on-to-the-next-scene" placeholder). John's departure now fully reflects Button's earlier conversation with him about their feelings regarding Hope in Chapter 3, although this updated version may not be available until I do the Great Save Wipe before Chapter 10.

For now, I need to playtest this new version of John's departure with the saveplugin to see if it bumps saves backs to Chapter 3 since new variables were added. If it does, I'll hold off updating the file on dashingdon until the public demo closes and all the stats get updated and changed (in particular, the coding for attraction and crushes is undergoing a complete, more nuanced, reworking).

I've also begun coding Button's conversation with K, and anticipate uploading the rest of Chapter 7 on February 19th for Patrons. The chapter is sizeable enough, however, that I may need to break it into two separate updates. In Chapter 6, Rosy's "interrogation" was mostly unbranching, but Chapter 7 has multiple pathways depending on with whom you choose to walk and talk (K, Rosy, or Nick). Because of this narrative width, it's difficult for me to gauge length and set a definitive release date for the entire chapter. But the first Patreon update will be February 19th!

I'll probably be a little quieter on social media this upcoming week as I'm focusing on finishing the Valentine's IF with an ETA for Patrons of February 12th. The poll-winning trope of undercover work is fortuitous: I'm using *Button and The Cupid Calamity* as a means to test out the logistics behind undercover missions, as well as to experiment with how Button reacts to being a field operative. It's functionally a lighthearted trial run for when I write Chapter 9!

In *Cupid Calamity*, you'll be sent on a mission to investigate a nefarious organization known C.U.P.I.D. aka "Criminals Up To Positively Insidious Delinquency." And yes, Button can point out that their acronym should actually be "C.U.T.P.I.D." I'm halfway done with Gray's route, and there are deleted sections aplenty that will probably make up the next released blooper reel (including the melodramatic declaration: "I'd rather prance naked down The Mag Mile in winter than kiss you!").

I'm finding that these Holiday ficlets really help me delve into characterization. The fallout with Hope, for example, hits different when you experience how close the Wiseman family used to be in *Button and The Santa Scam*. It also lays the foundation for some of the tensions that Button can have with John and Nick down the road, in particular their overprotectiveness and desire to keep Button "innocent" about life's crueller realities . . . which will play a bigger role in future chapters.

Here's a more detailed look at what awaits this month!

February 10: *Lady Death's Diary* Chapter 4.5

February 12: *Button and The Cupid Calamity* releases for Patrons (Feb. 14 Public Release)

February 19: *Mind Blind* Demo Update for Patrons, tentatively to include all of Chapter 7 (Public Release - Feb. 28)

February 22: *Mind Blind* Short Story

February 24: *Lady Death's Diary* Chapter 5

February 27: K's interview

This schedule only includes the creative writing rewards, and some things may end up being released earlier than stated. Also planned: three more developer blogs, a new development poll for *Delivery*, blooper reels (both from *Cupid Calamity* and *Mind Blind*), and perhaps some poetry.

[February Live Q&A](#)

[Feb 7, 2021](#)

As with January, this month's Q&A will be taking place at the end of the month, a week after the demo gets updated.

It will be held via the Sanctum of Spoilers Discord--if anyone is having trouble linking your discord account with Patreon to join, send me your discord name and I can manually assign you the appropriate role (Patreon bot currently appears semi-broken in its assignation of roles, for which I'm investigating a solution).

Please indicate in the poll which times you can make. If none of these slots work for you, let me know in the comments and we can try to work something out! I want to make sure that everyone who desires to participate is able :)

EDIT: Thank you to Aeimon, who pointed out that the first poll option has a typo! The first option is February 27, 10-11**AM. Much as I would love to spend the whole day chatting, it's probably not feasible 😊**

February 27, 10am-11pm PST

February 27, 11am-12pm PST

February 28, 11am-12pm PST

February 28, 1pm-2pm PST

17 votes total

[A Courteous Kidnapping](#)

[Feb 7, 2021](#)

Note: *I have a book of writing prompts that I use for exercises. In this flash fiction, written almost exactly one year ago, I gave a slight fantasy twist (and role reversal) to the prompt "One person tries to convince another to commit a crime."*

"... in conclusion, I'd be ever so grateful if you would kidnap me."

The dragon blinked down at the speaker, his lids closing vertically over cat-slit pupils. Vinthraxilan, terror of the skies, razer of villages, and second-to-last of his kind, sighed. Twin puffs of smoke emitted from his flared nostrils, causing the human to wrinkle her own nose at the sudden stench of sulfur.

"You want me to kidnap you?" Vinthraxilan's deep voice, heavy with incredulity, echoed throughout the cave.

The princess nodded. "If you would be so kind."

"No," said the dragon. "Absolutely not."

He could tell that the princess was unhappy with his reply. She scowled at him, her displeasure causing her to forget that Vinthraxilan was capable of eating her in a single bite. He smiled, baring his sharp curved teeth in gentle reminder that she really ought to mind her manners. The princess appeared oblivious to his politely subtle threat, however, and continued to glare up at him.

"You're a dragon," she stated.

Vinthraxilan winced at the shrillness of her voice. How was something so tiny capable of being so obnoxiously loud? Perhaps he *would* eat her, if only to get some peace and quiet. Of course, her father, being a King, would no doubt seek retribution for her death by sending several dozen knights. And knights were even more annoying than princesses—the dragon's sensitive ears could hear their armor clanging from half a mile away. No, best to send the princess back home intact and avoid the indigestion that would undoubtedly follow his consumption of her metal-clad avengers.

"I fail to see what my species has to do with your expectations," said Vinthraxilan stiffly. He widened his smile, hoping that she would really take notice of his teeth and decide to leave.

"You're a dragon," repeated the princess. "Kidnapping princesses is what dragons *do*."

"Claims who?"

"Well . . ." The princess was momentarily lost for words. "It's common knowledge."

Vinthraxilan lowered his head so that it was level with hers. The princess's violet eyes widened, and he tried not to feel smug that she had *finally* noticed his impressive teeth.

"Seeing that I myself am a dragon," he said, "I therefore might be considered an expert on draconian behavior. And I do not abduct princesses. Or princes, for that matter."

"Sir Gilliad has killed six dragons," persisted the princess, "and he said they all kidnapped princesses."

"So, you choose to believe the testimony of a self-admitted murderer than an actual dragon?" asked Vinthraxilan in a deceptively mild voice. If Sir Gilliad had ever succeeded in killing his kin, he would have heard of it. No, the man was obviously a charlatan. No more than a pugnacious bard, spreading tall-
tales of beasts slain so that his fellow humans would buy him foul-smelling fluids at the tavern.

Vinthraxilan turned away, his cumbersome tail almost knocking the princess over with the movement. Perhaps if he ignored her, she would leave.

"I'll pay you."

Vinthraxilan paused. "In gold?"

A predatory gleam entered the princess's eye. She was not, as it turned out, completely misinformed about his kind.

"Two chests," she confirmed. "One now and one upon completion of my kidnapping."

The dragon was quiet for a moment. "Why?"

The princess grinned. "I thought you'd never ask."

[Bloopers from Cupid Calamity](#)

[Feb 8, 2021](#)

Subtitle: The Roast of Satan

(Sub-Subtitle: Sorry, Clarence.)

"You know, Clarence, it's quite a feat that your combover manages to hide both your bald spot and your horns."

"Clarence, you oily fustilarian, do shut up."

"Clarence, I want to marry you solely for how much I would enjoy our acrimonious divorce."

"Sorry. I didn't hear you over the tortured shrieks and agonized howls of my soul that started as soon as I saw you enter."

"Oh, dearest Clarebear. How I'm going to miss your silly little sadism once I graduate!"

Objectively speaking, Clarence Garfield is not an unattractive man.

His features are even, if narrow, and you suspect that he might have a nice smile if he ever stopped scowling. But his personality is so noxious, so petty and cruel towards those whom he perceives as weaker, that his otherwise pleasant visage curdles until all you can see is that his ears are lopsided and the pores on his nose overlarge. Minute flaws, which would on anyone else go unnoticed or even add charm, dominate and corrupt his entire face. Not because of the flaws themselves, but because Clarence's spiritual odiousness makes you focus on his physical imperfections.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 4.5](#)

[Feb 10, 2021](#)

From the Journal of Lady Vitruva Rhys: The First Death

The first time that Prince Loren asked for my hand in marriage, I'd felt so ecstatic that I could barely breathe in enough air to utter "yes". I had fallen desperately in love with the Prince on my fourteenth birthday when he'd politely kissed the back of my hand. The heat of his lips through my glove branded my heart in some indelible way that I had tried to explain to Theo later, but had only resulted in my brother poking fun.

I wasn't oblivious to the fact that Loren didn't reciprocate my feelings—in the years following our betrothal, I'd seen the way he looked at Letticia. Still, I wasn't jealous. Letty was beautiful, and most people gazed at her that way. I was the one Loren would marry. Even if his heart didn't yet belong to me, my fiancé was kind and patient. Whenever I rambled on about the Council's newest policies or fretted over the escalating war between Anterdon and Fengal, he would simply smile and squeeze my hand.

"How lucky Verdan is," he always said, "to have such a dedicated future queen."

That he never described himself as lucky as well only bothered me a little.

King Eldin himself claimed that Loren would grow to appreciate me, and that his son would rely upon my advice once we were crowned.

"You are more than your family ties," said my future father-in-law during a dinner that Loren had once again missed. "When my son ascends the throne, he'll realize that wisdom is a more valuable trait in a partner than beauty. He will need you, Vitrula."

I'd been both flattered and slightly insulted by the King's comment, as I considered myself passably pretty even if I was but a stern shadow next to Letty's summery good looks. Loren himself had once referred to my chin as "elegant." But King Eldin was, to risk being redundant, the King. He must be right. Loren needed me, and, in time, he would grow to love me as I loved him.

The night before our wedding, I lay in bed too excited to sleep. In the morning, I would turn eighteen, and Loren and I would be declared husband and wife. How could anyone be expected to slumber, when they were about to be eternally joined to the love of their life? Realty was so much more wonderful than any dream. I was pondering how to effectively convince Loren to join me for Council meetings, and whether or not he would mind if I called him "dearest," when the door to my bedroom opened and five of the palace guards entered.

"Has Fengal invaded?" I asked before mentally dismissing my own question. Emperor Irax had signed the new peace treaty. He wouldn't risk jeopardizing his alliance with Verdun, not with Anterdon pressing his borders. A fire, then. The extra guards must be a precaution due to the timing—tomorrow, I'd be Crown Princess. I continued to bombard the guards with questions as I got out of bed. "How are we evacuating the servants? Is Loren safe?"

One of the guards stopped me as I headed towards my closet for my cloak and boots. I glared at his hand, which clenched too tightly around my arm for comfort.

"Release me," I ordered.

His grip tightened further. He led me down the hallway, rendered ominous and shadowy by the glowstone sconces, his companions forming a silent funeral procession behind. All refused to answer my questions, and my mind went through a list of increasingly dark possibilities that all ended with me sobbing over Loren's casket. Instead of a graveyard, however, they brought me into the throne room still clad in my nightgown.

King Eldin sat on his throne, with Loren beside him on a less ornate version of the same seat. Both were fully dressed and wore formal half-capes despite the late hour, as did the several prominent members of the Royal Council flanking them, two Councilors on either side, standing stiff and tall as if greeting a foreign dignitary for the first time. But I knew these people. They had been my teachers, my mentors, instructing me on everything from Court etiquette to battalion formations.

My indignation over the guard's mishandling was replaced by equal measures of relief and concern as soon as I laid eyes on my future husband. A bandage, spotted rust with dried blood, wrapped around his left hand.

"You're safe!" I moved to embrace Loren. Other than his hand, he appeared uninjured. Praise Sen, the Triad, and whatever other kind spirits had watched over him. I even sent a brief thanks to the Silent

Fourth, who recorded deaths in their black book and had mercifully left off Loren's tonight.

The guard held me back. I couldn't see his face through his lowered helm, but the sudden vise-like squeeze of his hands on my shoulders was more aggressive than any glare. I glared back. Would the Councilors consider it too undignified if I kicked a castle guard in the shins? I glanced between my bare feet and his armored greaves before deciding such a course of action would hurt my toes more than their intended target.

Besides, I needed to remain calm for Loren. Whatever he'd gone through, his night would hardly improve if I started a brawl with one of his soldiers. I took a deep breath to steady my nerves.

"What happened?" I asked. "How were you hurt?"

"Are you surprised to see His Highness relatively unscathed?" said Councilor Wrenly. The old man was the highest-ranking official of those in attendance, and his deep-set eyes usually held the absent expression of a man either lost in thought or hungry. Now he looked neither and glared at me with uncustomary severity.

"Surprised, no," I replied. "Only relieved. I feared something terrible transpired."

"Lies!" Councilor Venuda was a retired general and still intimidating despite being half blind from cataracts. Only the week before, she had escorted me on a tour of the palace barracks and introduced me to some of the guards that had served under her command.

"Explain this, traitor," she hissed. Gone was the maternal woman who'd patiently explained Verdan's military structure and recounted some of her more famous battles for my education. She opened her hand to reveal a small silver band.

King Eldin leaned forwards. "Does this belong to you? Examine it closely."

I took the ring from Venuda. Her hand twitched as my fingers brushed against her palm, as if aching to reach for her sword.

"This was my mother's," I said. She'd been gifted the ring by the Anterdonian queen; the delicately laced silver leaves forming the band were too intricate to be duplicated by most Verdan artisans. "I didn't think I had lost it. Loren, what's going on?"

Loren's lips pressed together in a white line.

"I have misjudged you." King Eldin slumped back into his throne with a sigh. His posture made him appear tired and defeated, and his blond hair gleamed gray in the pale light cast by the glowstone chandelier above.

I studied the scene around me. Wrenly, Venuda, Timons, and Hargraves. All held seats at The Table of Law, the Council's judicial branch.

"Am I on trial?" It should have been a ridiculous question.

Timons bared his teeth in a humorless grin. "We always said you were clever, Lady Rhys."

"Not clever enough," said Venuda. "Did you really believe you could get away with killing the heir to the throne?"

"What?" My mouth may have fallen open in shock. Her question struck me numb, inside and out. Someone had tried to kill Loren? But why? My fingers curled into a fist around my mother's ring, until the pain of nails biting into my palm was the only sensation I could feel through shock. I would kill them myself before I allowed them to harm my beloved.

Loren stood up from his seat. He walked towards me but before descending the dais steps. "Why, Tru?" He reached out his hands beseechingly. Blood seeped through his bandage and stained his cuff crimson. I started towards him, but the guard once again held me back.

"I thought you were fond of me," he continued. "How could you try to kill me?"

"I didn't!" I cried. "I would never hurt you!"

My eyes begin to water. Don't you dare, I chastised myself. Remember what Father says: tears are for infants and idiots. You are neither, and this is all a dreadful misunderstanding.

"Then from whose finger did the Prince seize the ring?" demanded Hargraves. "Whose hand wielded the knife that almost pierced his heart? Had His Highness not woken and knocked aside the blade, he would be dead."

"I would never hurt Loren." Could never hurt him. Did the Councilors know me at all? At yesterday's Council meeting, they had praised my astuteness and complimented my dedication. Anger, fear, and hurt battled each other for dominance until I could no longer differentiate between emotions. I locked my knees to keep from crumpling onto the ground. "Someone must have stolen my ring. Is it so implausible that a murderer might also be a thief?"

The Councilors fell silent, but doubt remained etched upon their faces. On Loren's face.

"Wrenly, you said there was further evidence?" said King Eldin.

The old man nodded. "A witness, Your Majesty, identified Lady Vitrula's face in the moonlight during the attack."

"Where is this witness?"

"Father, the lady in question was in my bedchamber during the attempt." Loren grimaced. From the pain of his wound? Or shame from confessing that he'd been with another the eve before our wedding? I hoped for the latter explanation but suspected the first.

"Her reputation should not be tarnished by this affair," he continued. "I know her to be all that is honest and good—her word can be trusted."

His father sighed. "Lady Vitrula, I do not believe that your attack was premeditated. But your reaction to witnessing my son with another woman goes beyond what may be forgiven."

"I was asleep," I insisted. "Loren, how could you?" I had accepted that Loren didn't love me. I now realized that he didn't trust me either, not in the way he blindly believed his mysterious witness.

"The evidence is clear," said Wrenly, "as is the law. The Council will meet to discuss Lady Vitrula's fate in the morning. I doubt deliberations will take long."

"Such a precedent cannot go unpunished," added Timons, "lest other Northerners take her behavior as cue."

"Whatever the Table's decision, I shall abide by it." King Eldin's voice was grim. Final. "Nor shall I recommend leniency. I will not allow there to be a second Northern Uprising during my reign—my responsibility is to my son and my people."

Loren said nothing and steadfastly evaded my attempts to make eye contact, as if he were the one whose heart had just been shattered. Only Venuda met my gaze as the guards dragged me from the throne room. From that lone cold look, I realized why the soldiers called her "Lady Mercy."

It had been in irony.

I didn't protest as the guard led me down the stairs to the dungeon. I wanted to scream, to defend myself. But what could I say? This entire scene was a nightmare. A joke, but I'd forgotten how to laugh.

The guard threw me into the cell. No one had ever shoved me before, not even Theo when our playtime had grown overly rowdy as children. Father, as loud as he roared, had never raised a hand against either of his children. But now, someone, who was supposed to provide my protection, shoved me into the dark cell as if I were a criminal. My knees cracked as they hit the stone floor.

Bruises would mark my arms as well, come morning. I curled upon the straw pallet, tucking my bare legs beneath my nightgown in a futile attempt to ward off the damp chill. Surely, the Council would see reason by then. Surely, Loren would realize that no dalliance was worth trusting over his own bride-to-be. He would embrace me and apologize. Perhaps even shed a remorseful tear or two. I would be icy in return and let him suffer a bit, I decided, before magnanimously agreeing to take him back. Surely, in the morning, things would revert to normal.

Surely, everyone would realize that I was innocent.

Surely.

[Developer Blog: Cupid Calamity](#)

[Feb 12, 2021](#)

The Good News: K's route alone is twice as long as *Santa Scam*.

The Bad News: Only K's route is available.

The Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/button-and-the-cupid-calamity/mygame/>

The Warning: If the plot makes you uncomfortable (because it involves Button getting their mind read), you can nope out of it early on. This takes you to the very end, but you miss all the story.

The Reasoning for Gray's (Temporary) Exclusion: So, I wrote Gray's route as well. I coded it. I edited it. And . . . I disliked it. I love Gray to the moon and back, but I disliked him in this role. Especially since Button is still a Zero and writing this plot meant preempting a lot of great moments that I want to save for *Mind Blind*'s main story (like the first time Gray deliberately touches Button while being able to hear their thoughts).

Also, the undercover trope worked well for K. But the same beats didn't hit when Gray was the joint protagonist instead. Gray's character felt unnatural, Button didn't feel like Button, the story felt odd with those characters, and the whole thing just didn't feel right.

Thus, instead of having different "routes" in *Cupid Calamity*, I've instead decided to make *Cupid Calamity* an anthology of romantic AU ficlets with different plots. Each RO route will be completely unique and use a different trope that works for that RO, rather than me trying to make a story "one size fits all."

Unfortunately, this means that Gray's route needs to go back into the oven and will probably be released late February/early March. On the bright side, this means that Gray's route will be completely unique (there's only one aspect of these stories that will remain the same, and I'd rather not reveal what that is because it would spoil the ending).

The BEST News: *Mind Blind*'s playable demo is over 200,000 words! I have most of Chapter 7 now coded (and one really weird looping bug that makes K an amnesiac but I'll fix that).

. . . I'm writing more now that this is up--I wanted to get *Cupid Calamity*'s link posted asap, since it was delayed by my deletion of Gray's route. I'll probably go back tomorrow and polish some things up as well as add a few choices, since K's route was plenty when it was one of two routes being provided, but can feel kind of short since they're the only option.

February has been absurdly busy for me. It feels much later than the 12th? I think I spent too much time trying to make Gray's route fit into the undercover subplot in *Cupid Calamity*, rather than simply being

willing to readjust my plans. It can be difficult to lay out a schedule for writing. While I can guarantee that X-amount of words will get typed, there's no way to guarantee that those words will be at all *good*. Inspiration is a tricky business that I can often brute force if I just keep typing until something half-decent eventually emerges. Lack of inspiration does leave a mark, as seen in *Mind Blind*'s Chapter 5, but at least functional placeholders can be edited out later in larger works.

This isn't really the case with short stories and ficlets. If a small part of the short story doesn't work, then none of it works. K's route is around 8,000ish words, but there are parts I want to refine. Now that it's only K's story (and not Gray's), I feel like I can go back and add some reactivity without "unbalancing" K's route compared to Gray's. Because Gray will get his own mini-story (as will Sally, Glitch, and Rosy). I figure I'll add a route each month or so provided my schedule allows? Gray will be released for everyone (since that's what I initially promised), but the rest of the RO's will probably stay Patreon only until I release the whole shebang for the public next Valentine's Day.

Also, and maybe this is just me being super tired and thus even more easily amused than normal, but isn't "shebang" a great word? I just googled it and apparently the term is derived from coding. And is also an archaic term for "hut." The more you know, right?

[Delivery Development: Pain is Gain](#)

[Feb 13, 2021](#)

I don't like talking a huge amount about the themes and messages in my writing. Part of me feels that when an author overexplains a work's "intent," it traps that work into being interpreted a certain way. Especially in interactive fiction, where the resultant story is a collaboration by writer and reader. (As an IF player, I can also feel moralized to, and that makes the oppositional defiant five-year-old within me want to go out and graffiti walls even when I *agree* with the moral.)

That being said, I use stories to communicate how I've personally coped with things throughout my life. *Lady Death's Diary* is about my fear of death, which I acquired younger than a lot of people because of the death of my father. Like Tru, I started dreading birthdays as a teenager, irrationally convinced that each one brought me closer to an early demise. So I turned that terror into a story--for Tru, that same dread is logical.

Mind Blind, on the other hand, deals primarily with anxiety. It's about disability, of course, but more than that it's about the anxiety that living with a disability can create. How you learn to cope when everything is just a little bit harder for you than it is for most people, or when the world is scarier. And it's about recognizing your own strengths and talents to overcome that fear.

Delivery for the Damned, however, is about loneliness.

Every RO in *Delivery* is an island. Whereas in *Mind Blind*, characters are strongly shaped by their friendships (K with Glitch, Nick with Gray, Button with Sally), *Delivery*'s cast is a group of uniquely isolated individuals, lonely for different reasons. Ev is alone because their coven died, Luce is alone because no one trusts vampires, Hen is alone because of their difficult personalities, and Balti is alone because *spoilers*.

Likewise, Golightly (as I call *Delivery*'s MC) is an orphan. Button is defined by their relationships with their family members (good or bad), but Golightly is shaped by solitude. They're harder, older, and more guarded than Button. I've been thinking about how to best communicate that aspect of Golightly: that a large part of their soul is defined by *ache*, the unfulfilled need people have to *matter*. It's an unspoken part of Golightly's motivation for getting close to their clients (well, that and the murders).

Golightly has Lydia, but their mentor is a (literal) ghost of her former self. Which leads me to the question I propose to you, since I'm genuinely undecided about the direction:

Golightly is an orphan, and that shapes their character. But should the main character be brought to the orphanage as an infant with no memory of their parents? In that case, their loneliness would be a less definable aspect. Something about themselves they feel is missing, but couldn't accurately describe. Or should Golightly have fond memories of their parents, and their loneliness come from that having been ripped away? I only have my own experiences to go on, so am uncertain which type of loneliness would speak to readers more.

Alternatively, would it be best to let readers choose? The problem with this last option, which is at surface level the best solution, is that by letting readers decide Golightly's backstory, that impact of that backstory automatically lessens. I worry it will make the protagonist shallower. Certain constants about Button are always true (Hope's departure, childhood bullying, being raised by Nick) because it allows me to really dig into the different ways a character can react to set circumstances—to explore emotional breadth at the expense of background variation. And I like doing that.

But Golightly's past leaves me torn. Any input you guys have on this would be appreciated, so please feel free to comment either here or on the Delivery Development channel in the Sanctum! I realize this topic is somewhat heavy, but Golightly's past (and subsequent character development) will be one of the most important aspects of the book.

Golightly shouldn't remember their family.

Golightly should have fond memories of their family.

Let readers decide Golightly's past.

29 votes total

[A Courteous Kidnapping, Part 2](#)

[Feb 14, 2021](#)

The course of true love runs more smoothly when there's a dragon involved. Happy Valentine's Day, everyone!

Abraham Littlefoot Skullcrusher, Esquire, (known as Abe to his family and Crush to his friends) had long ago grown accustomed to the look of dismay that flashed across his clients' faces when they first saw him. In that regard, his most recent client was no different—dragon mannerisms were notoriously difficult to read but Abe had taken a course in cross-species relations during his junior year at university. He easily identified the emotion behind his client's narrowed gold pupils and the subtly clenched claws. Disappointment, disbelief, and (if he was correctly interpreting the dragon's crinkled snout) mild amusement.

He straightened himself up to his full height of three feet and two-and-a-half inches and locked his knees to prevent them from shaking.

"Greetings, Vinthraxilan." He tossed his briefcase up onto the table between them before bowing politely, his arms pressed across his chest in the traditional greeting of draconian petitioners of yore. Dragons didn't rule anymore, of course. But it never hurt to show proper deference to someone capable of eating you.

Vinthraxilan bared a set of impressively sharp teeth. "You're small for an orc."

Abe felt his left eye twitch. It was a joke he'd heard too many times to count. People did not, after all, hire an orcish firm expecting to get a halfling lawyer. Especially one with Abe's last name. But working at *Skullcrusher, Bloodworthy, and Jones* was family tradition and one that Abe had dedicated his life to upholding.

He took a deep breath, calling to mind his adopted father's recent hints that a partnership might be in the cards should Abe win this trial. National media was having a field day with the situation given that it involved royalty. Princess Irene's kidnapping had dominated headlines for the past two months, culminating in the news that she had been saved by a stable boy of all people. Since Vinthraxilan had inexplicably lived through the princess's rescue and not been slain, the King's council had decided to press charges.

Now, it was up to Abe to rescue the dragon.

The only stool available in the visiting room was nearly as tall as the lawyer, but he nonetheless hoisted himself onto it with practiced ease. He opened his briefcase and took out a stack of papers—some had to do with the trial but a good half were simply filler to make the firm look better informed than it actually was. He smoothed out the top sheet to calm his nerves.

"You'll want to know my motive, of course," said Vinthraxilan before Abe could begin. "Why I decided to come out of retirement and steal the girl."

Abe frowned at the dragon. "To be clear, your involvement in Princess Irene's disappearance is simply the council's conjecture. Both the princess and her now-fiancé have refused to testify against you."

Vinthraxilan snorted. "Self-preservation."

Rather than press for answers, Abe waited. Sometimes, it was best to let the client ramble so as not to steer the conversation. He didn't have to wait long.

"The girl and I came to an agreement," continued the dragon. "I took her from the castle and chased away any knights who tried to get her back until her childhood sweetheart came to save the day."

"The stable boy." Abe nodded as the pieces clicked together. "May I ask why you agreed to her proposition?"

"Gold."

"She paid you for services rendered?" Abe's mind whirled as he began to formulate a strategy. "And during the interval between her departure of the palace and her so-called rescue, she stayed with you?"

Vinthraxilan nodded.

Abe couldn't repress a grin. His father was going to make him a senior partner for sure. "Am I also correct in stating that the princess did not cook for herself?"

"I would bring back deer and she would cook bits of it," replied Vinthraxilan.

"I see." Abe's smile widened. "Well, Vinthraxilan, I have good news. Not only are we going to plead not-guilty, we're going to sue the Crown for Princess Irene's room and board."



[Developer Blog: Home Sweet Home](#)

[Feb 19, 2021](#)

I'm still editing and debugging this next update, but will do my best to post it before midnight PST. I realize this is down to the literal last second of my promised drop date, but this last week has been . . . not as productive as I would've wished.

(Explanation at the bottom of this post. But let's talk about the positive first! Because my life, and especially my writing life, has a *lot* of good!)

The Positive:

I've started keeping track of my words written, more for my own self-satisfaction than any logistical purpose. The tally made me realize how much this Patreon has helped me meet my writing goals. Seriously, thank you so much!!

Despite having encountered some personal setbacks in February, it's still been a really productive month. It's only the 19th, and I've already wrote over 36,000 words of fiction (and that's not even counting deleted content, like Gray's scratched *Cupid Calamity* route)!

I realize that wordcounts may not come across as all that exciting to everyone, but I find it's a helpful way to keep track of my progress when it comes to IF. In a regular novel, I'd set my goals in completed chapters . . . but a single chapter in *Mind Blind* can be over 40,000 words due to the divergent pathways and choices. Which is a lot of writing without feeling like I've really moved the plot forward. So I've taken a more mathy approach to measuring my progress.

Here's a rounded breakdown of what I've typed in February:

8,000 words: K's route in Cupid Calamity

4,000 words: Patreon side stories (saucy, and the upcoming short)

13,000 words: *Mind Blind* Chapter 7. This update will bring the total playable wordcount to 207,000 words—I'll post average playthrough length when I update the demo, since right now there's too many coding bugs for me to do Randomtest and get an estimate.

4,000 words: Commission stories for Hero Zeroes. (I'll be sending out everything out all at once sometime next week, to best keep track of fulfilled tier rewards).

7,000 words: *Mind Blind*'s intervention scenes for depressed Buttons, tentatively set to occur in Chapter 9. I wanted to have the scene laid out so I knew what Button's negative thoughts were building to (I do a lot of achronological writing).

If you play as a Button who is deeply depressed (constantly having thoughts of deep self-hatred, feelings of worthlessness, etc.) then there *will* be an intervention by the characters you have the highest stat scores with. This is unavoidable, for two reasons.

The first reason is that I believe it's important to have a support network when you go through a hard time. Button isn't less of a heroic protagonist if they have depression—not to trivialize something serious (although I'm irreverent towards everything), but the “tormented hero” is a trope for a reason. Someone who's able to deal with their own turmoil and still save the world is inspiring. But I think it's unrealistic to assume that people do it alone. Nick, Gray, Sally, K, Glitch . . . even Rosy are there to support Button and either provide them with or get them help.

Please note that this isn't saying that all dark thoughts = bad! Morbidity and Resentment level have nothing to do with triggering the depression stat. But *Mind Blind* lets you fall pretty far into the abyss.

The second reason for the intervention is pure pragmatism. *Mind Blind*'s plot places the main character in an extremely dangerous situation. Rosy and Gray (whoops, spoilers!) will *not* approve Button for risky undercover work if they continually demonstrate a disregard for their own life. That particular pathway would not end well, and I am a platinum-card member of The HEA Club.

And if your Button is the most emotionally stable human being in existence, then that's equally awesome! The emotional welfare arc is completely optional—Buttons not on that path will get alternate, more lighthearted scenes with Nick and the ROS.

Now, in regards to my semi-absence from social media . . .

Warning: Real World Shit Ahead

This week, I found out that my condo building will likely be deconverted. If, like me, you've never heard of this process before, it essentially amounts to this: In Chicago, investors can buy old condo buildings, without the permission of all the condo owners. Not to demolish the building, but to rent out the units as apartments and turn a profit. My building is from 1904, but it's in a great location (within walking distance of Harold Washington Library, The Art Institute, and "Aeon"/Willis). Only 85% of owners need to agree to sell for the deconversion to happen, and with the pandemic . . . well, a lot of people want to sell their condos right now.

I get it. People are working remote and moving away from cities. The building has a coin laundry because the pipes are too old for in-unit washers and driers. The freight elevator rattles at midnight. Everything creaks.

But I love my place, haunted pipes and all. It's my very first permanent home (having spent my twenties working abroad), and the prospect of losing it has me dejectedly doomscrolling through real estate sites looking at apartments instead of writing. Worst case scenario: I lose my home of under two years and move back with my mom until I can find a new place.

My brother's been without power in Texas for several days, however, which is helping me keep things in perspective because at least I still have a charged laptop to write on (any readers suffering through winter storms right, please take care)! Moving so much sooner than I planned will be disappointing, and the possibility has thrown me for an emotional loop which makes writing a little harder. But it's not, nor will it be, the end of the world. I'll be fine, and hopefully get another Patron mini-update for *Mind Blind* out on February 28!

[Demo Delay](#)

[Feb 19, 2021](#)

Given that I was up until 6am last night (this morning?) freaking out over getting a new apartment, I'm sleep-deprived enough that my editing is doing more harm than good to the game right now. I'm officially delaying the demo update until tomorrow (or Sunday at the latest, but only if I'm involved in a shark attack or something).

I feel awful for missing my deadline (my boss, who also happens to be me, is a workaholic with high expectations). As apology for the delay, I'm attaching files of the code for two of the branches in Chapter 7. I know not everyone is familiar with code diving via Dashingdon, which tends to mangle the code anyway, so I thought you guys might enjoy this as a sort of "behind the scenes" glimpse!

The first file is what happens if you choose to walk with Rosy from the office to the other office (the second office is actually pretty cool, but I'll let that be a surprise for in-game). You can peek at the

document to see how Rosy's affection stats change based on Button's answers. What gives the most points may surprise you!

The second file is one of the variation (there's like 9, depending on your relationship with Nick and who you're romancing) of when you walk alone. Although I'm still tweaking all the flavor text, this scene is a decent example of how dialogue changes based on your personality stats and relationship scores.

Apologies again for not updating on time! I'm going to take a Tylenol PM, go to sleep early, and attack the code with a fresh brain tomorrow.

(I know I'm tired, because I just laughed for two minutes straight over the mental image of me physically bludgeoning my laptop with a "fresh brain")

[DEMO UPDATE: Power Rangers, Assemble!](#)

[Feb 20, 2021](#)

A little late in the day, because I slept until 11am. I caught up on a week's worth of sleep and now feel rejuvenated and ready to keep writing! 💪

I still need to edit a bunch of things (which is what I'll be doing this weekend). But it's playable, without any major bugs!

Anyhow, rather than waste time trying to think of something amusing and clever to write, here's the link!

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-banshee/mygame/>

Word Count: 207,500 words

Average Playthrough: 50,000 words (We're halfway through!)

Postscript: This post title will make sense when you reach the demo's end. Hopefully, you'll be able to predict what's about to happen. Because every single character in *Mind Blind* is plot relevant.

Post-Postscript: I reserve the right to edit this post as soon as I think of something witty and clever,

[February Q&A](#)

[Feb 20, 2021](#)

This month's Q&A is set for **February 28, 11am-12pm PST**.

Please let me know in the comments if you can't make it (as well as what days might work instead), and I'll try my best to arrange a second time slot! I want to make sure as many people can make it as possible.

Tier rewards will be sent out this week--most are already written. Can I just say how much I enjoyed doing the romantic arch nemesis matchups? If you haven't sent me the info to get your rewards or done the matchup test, then please do so now (I'll also send out reminders).

Wonderful!

A J Jerry L

UNEDITED
Student Work

Think of your favorite flower.

Then write your own legend to explain how the flower came to be.

LEGEND TITLE: THE SECRET OF THE ROSE

by Jennifer O'Connor
(your name)

Long long ago when they did not have the rose there was a girl named Tiny One. Tiny One would not do work but go in montens and cry becus her Pa pa died. Her tear's would come togeter and make a litle pond. Her Ma would worry abot her. But one day when Tiny One was crying the litle pond that her tear's made some theg magcie happind! Out of her tears gerw a red flower that today we call the rose.

[A Rose of Thanks](#)

[Feb 21, 2021](#)

This weekend, my final Patreon goal was met. I thought long and hard about how to say "thank you" . . . but there aren't enough words to express my appreciation. Even that phrase "not enough words" feels trite when trying to communicate the immensity and depth of my gratitude.

Because I now make most my income as a writer.

Not through copywriting or technical writing or writing people's dating profiles (all of which I've done in the past), but by telling *stories*.

To explain the significance of this moment, just how much this means to me, a mere "thank you" falls short. This has been my dream for my entire life. **You** made it possible.

While I'll continue to teach part time for now (I have several students that I don't want to drop mid-year), I plan to only do so two days a week. Which leaves me five days to work on *Mind Blind*. The magnitude of that leaves me breathless.

I can't summarize a lifetime of dreams in a single post to communicate how much this means to me. What I can do, however, is share the first story that I ever wrote.

It's the story that made me realize I wanted to be an author. Because stories process pain to create hope and acceptance. It's how I coped with everything as a child, including my father's death. Now, it's how I try to reach out and help others cope as well.

I spent today digging through bins in the basement to find this story, which my mom saved because even back then she knew that writing was my passion. There's hardly any art from my childhood inside those bins, but they overflow with stories that I wrote.

I wrote "The Secret of the Rose" when I was in second grade and six years old (younger than the rest of my class, because I started school in Japan instead of America). So please forgive the spelling errors! My craft has (slightly) improved over the last two decades.

(And yes, I guess this means my birth name is out of the bag! I've gone by Jo since college though, since it's my initials . . . and because I've always felt an affinity for a certain *Little Women* character.)

[Touched By An Angel - Ferro Version](#)

[Feb 22, 2021](#)

Virginia Parker had been called many things over the course of her life. The “A’s” were her personal favorite: “arrogant,” “abrasive,” “aggressive.” She tucked these insults away in her purse and occasionally pulled them out to examine. Although it stung that to know that her behavior would be lauded as self-assurance if she were a man like her coworkers, she also felt proud because these adjectives indicated that she *scared* the men with whom she worked, and whom she eventually bypassed when she was granted tenure and they remained associate professors.

Virginia, the youngest child in a family of five older brothers, with a height of five-foot-one and a face described by her family as “cherubic,” rather liked the idea that she could be frightening.

Her husband had appealed to this vanity in order to convince her to marry him. “Ginny,” he’d proclaimed, flashing the irresistible gap-toothed grin that had first won her heart, “you’re the most terrifying woman I’ve ever known.”

So she’d said yes. Because, while it was one thing to find a man who loved you, a man who loved *and* respected you needed to held onto.

Adrian had recited Maya Angelou’s *Touched By An Angel* at their wedding, knowing that it was one of her favorite poems:

“We are weaned from our timidity

In the flush of love’s light

We dare be brave

And suddenly we see

That love costs all we are

And will ever be.

Yet it is only love

Which sets us free.”

Angelou, as always, got to the heart of the matter (the matter being hearts). Virginia, who’d spent her entire career striving to be taken seriously as “Professor Atkinson,” preeminent expert on African American poetry, could simply be “Ginny” with Adrian (he was the only person whom she allowed to call

her that). With Adrian, she smiled without feeling self-conscious over the way her round cheeks dimpled. She laughed, and she danced, and she let her hair reclaim its natural curl.

When their son was born, they named him “Taliaferro.” Not in honor of Virginia’s grandfather, as their families were led to believe, but because Adrian and Virginia had first met at a Shakespeare production in Crawfordville, Taliaferro County. The true origin of their child’s name was their own romantic secret, one which Adrian whispered into her lips and against the skin of her belly.

Ferro was born, and life was sweeter than a glass of iced tea on a sweltering summer day. Virginia became head of the Poetry department, and Adrian’s law firm made him a senior partner. Their son started talking at nine months of age and never stopped. The boy overflowed with questions about everything:

“Momma, why is the sky blue?”

“Mommy, how do birds fly?”

“Mom, how does the internet work?”

Virginia (who’d never been overfond of science) usually made up a silly little poem about the subject matter to buy herself time until Adrian came home:

“The sky is blue, that’s indeed true! But why not crimson or chartreuse?”

“Birds fly in the sky, and we wonder why! They climb so high!”

“Data travels very fast, but there was no Wifi in the past!”

Adrian, being a human encyclopedia, provided Ferro with more in-depth explanations:

“The sky is blue because of the scattering of electromagnetic radiation.”

“Birds have hollow bones which make them very light, and their feathers catch the wind.”

“The internet uses radio frequencies to send signals between devices.”

As a result of his parents’ combined education, Ferro grew up as enamored with wordplay as he was enthralled by science and technology. Virginia often returned from work to find Audrey, their nanny, at her wits end because Ferro, at seven years old, had decided to sharpie a sonnet onto his bedroom wall or had taken apart his laptop in order to “see how it worked.”

Virginia and Ferro were scrubbing his most recent poetic composition off the wall when she got the call.

“Mrs. Parker?” Caller ID showed the number as Adrian’s, but the voice belonged to a stranger. “Your husband has been a car collision. He’s been taken to Piedmont Hospital.”

By the time Virginia hung up the phone, hands shaking, Ferro was staring her with expectant eyes and a new question.

“Mom, what’s going on?”

She forced herself to smile, but it was a smile without dimples. “Audrey is going to stay with you tonight.”

“What’s going on?” Ferro asked again.

Virginia couldn’t answer. She hugged him tight and somehow managed not to cry. But she couldn’t think up a poem, because there was neither rhyme nor reason to the current situation.

“It’ll be okay, honeybean,” she lied.

* * * *

On February 12th, the day before Ferro turned eight, Adrian Parker died.

Virginia hadn’t been able to hold his hand at the hospital or to say “I love you” one last time. The brain aneurysm that had caused her husband to careen off the road hadn’t provided the privilege of time. The car was salvageable, having survived with nothing more than a bent fender. But her husband was gone forever.

Ferro stopped asking questions. For two entire months, he said nothing at all. Virginia couldn’t bring herself to encourage him to speak. What was there to say? His father was dead, and half of her heart gone with him. There could be no more silly little poems; now, it her responsibility to provide Ferro with factual explanations. But the world no longer made sense without Adrian in it, and she was at a loss how to explain “death” to her child when she could hardly grasp the concept herself.

She hid her curls, the curls that Adrian had so loved, under a black wrap. There was no time to take care of her hair, nor did she have the energy. Ferro still needed to be driven to school and her university students still needed to be taught. Three of Virginia’s brothers took turns staying with her, ensuring that she took at least a few bites of the meals that she prepped for Ferro.

And Virginia Parker, who had been called many things over the course of her life, discovered that “alone” was the most terrible adjective of all.

* * * *

When Ferro once again spoke, it was an evening after returning with Audrey from the park. At least, Virginia assumed that they had gone to the park. She hadn’t asked.

Instead of his usual coating of sawdust, however, Ferro carried a white bag. He grinned up at Audrey, and his nanny gently shoved him towards Virginia.

"Mom, we got you something!" he said.

Virginia blinked. She knew that she should feel relieved that her son was speaking, but instead felt only dread. Because now Ferro would once again start asking questions, none of which she was strong enough to answer.

"Ferro got you something," Audrey corrected. "He's been saving his allowance for this past month."

Ferro thrust out the bag towards his mother. His smile was wide and gap-toothed, and he looked so much like Adrian in his enthusiasm that it stole the breath from Virginia's lungs.

She averted her eyes and forced a smile, reaching into the bag. "You got me a present?"

Ferro nodded eagerly. "Open it!"

Virginia's fingers touched silk, liquid cool and light as a kiss in her hands as she unwrapped it from the tissue paper. It was a brilliant blue headwrap with white feathers printed on its surface.

"They're angel's feathers, Mom," Ferro explained. "Dad's feathers." He took the silk from her hands and held it up against her cheek. "It looks pretty on you. Dad liked when you looked pretty."

Virginia reached for her son. Her wonderful, inquisitive son who somehow had become the one with all the answers.

"I'll wear it tomorrow, honeybean," she said.

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[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 5](#)

[Feb 24, 2021](#)

"Do not dare enter my study wearing those muddy boots, Your Majesty," said Delphine. "King or not, this rug is new and I won't have you ruining it."

Not many people could get away with chiding a monarch. In the year since I had moved to Bellcrest, I'd realized just how much power Delphine actually wielded at Court. She was a sorceress, yes, but her personality was the true force.

King Eldin sheepishly stepped back at her stern warning. Once freed of his offending footwear, he left them in the hall and reentered the room. He eyed the fringed carpet warily before stepping around it.

"Each time I visit, it's a different room," he grumbled good-naturedly. "A new rug, and I'm certain the walls weren't red last time. Do you grow tired of everything?"

His eyes locked with Delphine's. After a moment's hesitation, she conceded, "No. Not everything."

The tacit intimacy between the two made me feel like a voyeur. I turned my back so as to give them some privacy, under the pretense of perusing Delphine's laden bookshelf. She owned an extensive collection of colorfully-dyed, leather-bound books that lacked any semblance of order, yet she somehow always managed to immediately locate whichever tome she needed. I suspected magic. She swore that her bookshelves *were* organized, but if so, it was by a system no one but she could comprehend.

King Eldin often stopped by during my lessons, allegedly to check on my progress. He would spend a few minutes asking me about what I had learned that day, and I would pretend not to notice the way his and Delphine's hands brushed against each other when they thought my attention diverted. Even if he was only using me as a pretense to see my instructor, I enjoyed conversing with His Majesty. He had a

political cunning similar to that of my own father, with the caveat that he also possessed a soul and cared for the wellbeing of Verdan's people over his own self-interest.

Although he'd also been complicit in several of my executions, I didn't begrudge his role. Someone had consistently orchestrated it so that I'd appeared a threat to both his child and his kingdom, and he'd done what he'd believed necessary to protect both. Ironically, I might have respected King Eldin less had he overruled the Table of Law's verdicts of guilt, even if his interference had saved my life. The Council existed for a reason, and a king who refused to abide by his own system of governance was no better than a tyrant.

King Eldin coughed, letting me know I could turn back around.

"What have you been learning today, Tru? Has Lady Delphine taught you how to calm a storm and level a mountain?" His tone was playful but conveyed genuine interest.

"Unfortunately, no, Your Majesty," I said. "Though not from lack of pleading on my part."

My lessons with Delphine remained frustratingly simple. I'd learned little beyond how to sense the magic woven between the spaces of things. Living things, like people and plants, teemed with it; things that were man-made, with the exception of ensorcelled objects such as glowstones, emitted hardly any magical energy at all. If I focused and ignored the resultant headache, I could see the blazing tendrils that emanated from Delphine, brighter by far than anyone else at Bellcrest. "Threads of potential," she called them. To cast a spell, you needed to know which thread to pull and which incantation would pull it.

Delphine frowned at the King. "Stop encouraging her," she chided. "Haste breeds mishap, and I have no desire to sweep the ashes of my apprentice off the floor."

"After all," deadpanned King Eldin, "it wouldn't do to ruin the carpet."

She snorted in apparent disgust but her lips curved upwards as she stalked past me towards the bookshelf. King Eldin winked at me behind her back.

"Now, I know you'll be returning to Kothe for the next several weeks." Delphine plucked a slim black volume off the shelf and handed it to me. "But that doesn't mean you can't keep up with our lessons."

I glanced down at the book with its ominously long title: *Twenty-Six Theories of Magical Manipulation by Vesper Firnum, with Additional Commentaries from Masters Haverse and Bree*. I groaned, not bothering to conceal my dismay. More theory. Only a few weeks remained until I turned fifteen and, much to my loudly advertised chagrin, Delphine had yet to permit me to cast a single spell. I didn't know when exactly my death would arrive, only that it always occurred sometime during my seventeenth year. At this rate, I'd be lucky if I learned enough sorcery by then to chase away a rat, let alone an assassin.

King Eldin misidentified the source of my displeasure. "It's understandable that you feel apprehensive about meeting your new stepmother, but I'm sure Duke Rhys has chosen his duchess wisely."

I suppressed a snort. Father's new wife wasn't the one I needed to worry about.

"You'll need to finish packing for your departure tomorrow," continued the King, "but Loren should be returning any moment from his hunt. Should you wish to bid him farewell."

His expression was depressingly hopeful. It was still the early days of my betrothal to his son, before Letty arrived and it became obvious that true affection would never exist between us. Despite the practical motivation for our engagement, King Eldin wanted his son to find the kind of love he shared with Delphine. He'd learn such hopes were futile soon enough; I didn't have the heart to prematurely enlighten him.

"Of course, Your Majesty," I said. "I would never leave without saying goodbye."

"Vitrula!" Loren sounded surprised by my presence in the stables. His blonde hair was tousled in charming disarray, and his wide smile said his recent hunt had been successful. Not that he'd brought back whatever pheasant or deer his hawk had taken down; hunting was pure sport for Loren and his peers. I made a mental note to tell Emilia to have her brothers check the Tinwoods for the abandoned carcass later. If my maid's three siblings had appetites at all comparable to Theo's, her family would appreciate the extra meat.

Armond, ever Loren's shadow, handed the reins of their horses to the awaiting olster before targeting me with his customary sneer. Our dislike for each other had been immediate, and my hatred had only amplified after learning of his behavior towards Emilia in my past life.

At least now she had my protection. No matter how deep Armond's animosity towards me, he wouldn't dare to assault someone under my direct employ. I'd convinced Steward Hamen to let Emilia be my lady's maid, claiming that I wanted a companion close to my own age. I hadn't directly mentioned Emilia, of course, but I'd dropped enough hints about the prestige and pay that came from serving a future princess that Hamen had made sure his daughter was the only candidate presented.

As was my habit, I glanced down at Armond's wrists. One was covered by an elbow-high falconry glove, but his cufflink on the other was the usual bronze shield imprinted with his family's oak insignia.

I possessed few clues as to the identity of Letty's accomplice and my likely future murderer. A ruby clasp, torn from an assailant's shirt right before he'd pushed me to my fifth death, was one. Most noblemen wore cufflinks engraved with their family crests—a subtle way of advertising their status to others at Court. One look at a lord's sleeve, and you knew exactly how deeply to curtsy or bow and whether his family owed yours money (or vice versa, necessitating lower prostration). To flaunt a gemstone in place of an insignia could be interpreted as the ultimate boast: either my killer's family was well-known enough to make self-identification redundant, or he possessed a fortune but not a title.

Neither theory fit Armond. He was the third-born of a minor baron with no expected inheritance, but his thinly veiled contempt and my rampant dislike of the leech made me reluctant to cross him off as a

suspect. He had ample motive. Without an inheritance, his future hinged upon Loren's continued favor. Having Letty, the replacement fiancée, in his debt would help secure that goal since I had proven unamenable. Still, some of the plots against me had been admirably complex. If Armond possessed mental agility enough to be their mastermind, he hid his brilliance well.

Armond jerked his head down in the bare minimum of required civility. "Lady Vitrola. How rare, to see you venture into sunlight."

"Lord Delos. Alas, my duties keep me busy. How freeing it must be, to be born without obligations." I smiled demurely, enjoying the way his narrow nostrils flared at my slight.

Despite his insinuation that I was a bookish shut-in, I longed for the day when I was able to go riding again. But between my duties as Loren's betrothed, attending daily Council meetings, and my lessons with Delphine, I barely had enough time to sleep. I was too busy hosting tea parties in the mornings, studying governance in the afternoon, learning magic in the evening, and obsessing over my next death every night. My gaze lingered longingly on Loren's horse, a black behemoth of sinew and speed with a lively tail and intelligent eyes, before I forced my attention to its owner.

"I leave for Kothe tomorrow, and wished to bid you farewell." More accurately, his father had wished it.

"Your father's wedding." Loren nodded absently as he handed his hunting rifle to Armond. "Have you already decided upon the guestlist for your birthday? I'll need it before you go."

I had lifetimes of practice keeping my expression neutral around Loren, yet he still managed to test the limits of my skill.

"The journey to my father's estate takes two weeks."

Loren nodded again.

"As does the journey back."

"I *know* how long the trip takes. I made it myself last year." He released an aggravated puff of air from between his front teeth. Their marginal crookedness, and the resultant gap, was his only physical flaw since Delphine had concocted a cream to clear his skin over the summer. Once, I'd been enamored by this subtle imperfection. It was, I'd believed, indicative of our relationship. Everyone recognized that Loren was handsome, but surely only I had observed him closely enough to be charmed by his teeth. Seven deaths later, the slight whistle it produced when he sighed annoyed me to no end.

"My birthday is in three weeks," I clarified.

Horror dawned on Loren's face as he did the math and realized that I would not, in fact, be at Bellcrest on my fifteenth birthday.

“But I’ve spent the last month telling everyone what a grand bash it’ll be,” he protested. “If you’re not here, we can’t throw the party. Armond even hired a Fengali firebreather.”

“They rarely perform outside their temples,” said Armond, ever eager to heighten Loren’s resentment of me. “More importantly, the entire Court is already expecting you and His Highness to host together. Your absence will reflect poorly upon Prince Loren when he’s forced to cancel the celebrations.”

I glared at him before turning back to Loren with an apologetic smile. “I’m sure you’ll find a worthier cause to celebrate. The new ambassador from Anterdon is scheduled to arrive a few weeks from now—hosting a celebration in his honor might make him more inclined to agree with the Table of Trade’s new proposal.”

“I can’t have a Fengali firebreather at a welcome party for Anterdonians!” Loren sounded scandalized by the very notion.

His point was, I conceded, surprisingly sound. Tensions between Fengal and Anterdon had risen to a new high in the past year, and the firebreathers might easily be taken as a deliberate insult by the Anterdonian envoy. I felt almost proud that Loren had realized this on his own.

“Then hopefully Armond’s father can receive back his deposit.” I was unable to resist one final dig. Armond’s grimace confirmed that it landed. No doubt he’d leveraged Loren’s gratitude for his family’s covering of the expenditure, and would get grief for falling short his side of the bargain. “But at least you’ll still get to have your party, as well as prove to your father that you can take lead on diplomatic issues.”

Loren waved his hand dismissively. “The Council is in charge of welcoming foreign guests. This ball was supposed to demonstrate our strength as a couple to the Court.” His voice trailed off in a note of doubt. Since coming back from my latest death, I hadn’t exactly treated Loren with the same starry-eyed reverence that he no doubt expected and that I’d once felt. No one shared my memories, so my demeanor probably came across as unduly frosty. Had my attitude made it easier for people to condemn me for crimes I didn’t commit?

Still, I’d been sweet and subdued my first several lives and died anyway. I might as well speak my mind.

“There will be other birthday celebrations,” I reassured Loren. Hopefully, I would even get more than two.

“True!” Loren’s expression brightened. “I turn seventeen in three months. Father promised to buy me a new stallion from Gefjun’s stable. We’ll have to hold races.” He turned towards Armond, excited to begin planning.

And just like that, my fiancé forgot me once more.

I spent the first day of the carriage ride back to Kothe briefly flipping through the text that Delphine had given me, then poring over the one that I had stolen. I'd snuck into the sorceress's study early that morning before my departure, knowing that she would be taking her customary walk in the palace gardens with the King. The lack of discernable order to her shelves, and my narrow time frame before Delphine returned, meant that I'd settled on grabbing the oldest-looking book I saw, with the logic that anything dated from before the Uprising would likely contain the most dangerous, and thus most useful, spells. Once in the carriage, Emilia had curled up on the seat across and instantly fallen asleep, leaving me free to read my contraband without the distraction of her usual chatter.

The purloined volume's embossed title had long ago faded to an illegible golden smudge, but the writing within looked as if it had been freshly inked, likely preserved by magic. Each chapter gave concise instructions on how to cast a different spell. Given the simplistic language used and the abundance of diagrams, the book appeared to be a primer for children apprenticed to the old Sorcerers Guild.

When we arrived at our inn for that evening, I locked the door of my room. Trying to conjure a small flame only summoned a migraine and a few blisters. A few days later, my attempt at turning invisible left an unsightly rash across my chest that caused Emilia to shriek in horror and insist I take milk baths every night thereafter.

After two weeks of unsuccessful experimentation, I began to worry that Delphine had been wrong. What if I didn't possess the ability to cast spells? Delphine claimed, before the Uprising, proctors from the Sorcerers Guild had gone from town to town testing schoolchildren for potential apprentices. Only one in ten of those tested had been able to sense magic, and only half of those were able to manipulate it. What if I were a member of the impotent percentage, able to look but not touch or control? If so, I had just wasted an entire year of my rapidly shortening lifespan studying a useless discipline. Better to have taken up fencing. My lack of dexterity could have been improved upon, whereas no records existed of anyone having ever overcome their natural inability to work magic.

Only one chapter remained in the book: a spell to slow an object's velocity. My stomach growled, resenting my decision to skip dinner yet again. I ignored the hunger cramps and locked the door with the key I'd quietly requested from the innkeeper while Emilia had been distracted flirting with his brawny son. She'd be annoyed when she discovered that I'd locked her out of the room, but it was better than the tongue thrashing she would give me if she learned I was experimenting without Delphine's supervision. Like most Verdans, she considered magic to be fundamentally wicked and dangerous.

I brought over a chair and tilted it beneath the handle so as to further bar entry to the room. The deeper north we traveled, the more hostile people would be to sorcery. My writ of permission from King Eldin would mean little in the face of an angry mob.

Having assured my solitude, I retrieved the book from the front of my dress. I'd tied it firmly to my middle using my bodice's laces, causing Emilia to frown at my increased girth and comment that, as seamstresses were in short supply at roadway inns, it might be best if I reduced my portion of rations. At least it kept her from arguing my decision to constantly skip dinner.

A slowing spell wasn't quite as useful as summoning a fireball or going unseen, but it was the only one remaining in the book that I hadn't already tried and failed to cast. The chapter began with a disclaimer that many beginners struggled to master the spell because it involved controlling man-made materials, followed by an encouraging note from the author that sedulous students would nonetheless prove successful. The steps themselves were relatively simple.

1) Begin by tossing and catching a handball, to a height not surpassing the learner's forehead, until a rhythmic pattern had been established.

I hadn't packed a ball. Unphased by this first obstacle, I grabbed one of my dancing slippers from my trunk. It was light enough not to make much noise if I dropped it. Good enough. I threw it. Up, and catch. Up, and catch. Pattern established.

2) Focus on seeing the threads of motion rather than of life.

Unhelpfully vague. I scowled, but closed my eyes in order to better sense the energy around me. Transparent strings of potential drifted downwards with each fall of the ball (or rather, shoe), and floated upwards with its rise. I reopened one eye to read the final step.

3) Bind the energy around the handball, so that its motion is impeded by its desire to move.

No wonder students had struggled to master this spell—the author's instructions were abysmal. My shoe didn't have desires, it moved because I threw it. I shut my eyes again and envisioned tying the luminescent strands around my slipper, knotting them so tight that it could barely move, and spoke the incantation.

"*Keyp*." I leaned backwards, just in case the shoe ignited or turned into a lizard at my whispered command. Though even that would be better than nothing at all.

The shoe froze mid-air.

No, it was still falling, but at a fraction of its original speed.

My slipper took almost an entire minute before landing on the floorboards with a muted thump, its decreased speed having lessened its impact. By the time I unlocked the door for Emilia and collapsed into bed exhausted, I had slowed its descent to two. The spell still wouldn't save me from poison or the guillotine, but with practice it might halt an assassin's blade or a bullet. Finally, I was making progress.

That night, for the first time in a year, I dreamed of something other than dying. My sense of victory lingered until the next morning, when I once again met Letty for the very first time.

[Mind Blind Blooper Reel](#)

[Feb 26, 2021](#)

Kent glares at you.

You glare back.

The glare-down continues until Rosy heaves an exasperated sigh. "Are you both quite done?"

[i]But first one to blink loses![/i] Nick protests.

"What do you have against being my sidekick?"

K ignores you.

"How about being my partner 'under the covers' as well?"

K ignores you.

"I now get why Glitch compared you to Batman," you say. "It's not just because you're loaded and have washboard abs."

K ignores you.

K ignores you, and you resort to muttering under your breath in passive-aggressive fashion. "Stupid Zarneki, with that stupid sexy smile and adorable dogs."

[i]Wow,[/i] Nick thinks dryly. [i]You really know how to make an insult sting.[/i]

Rosy holds open the door, ushering you and K through. "Welcome to my evil lair," he says with a diabolical cackle. "The author can't figure out how to describe this room because she hates describing environments and has thus decided to temporarily turn me into a super villain because it makes for more interesting writing."

You gasp in horror, for the first time noticing Rosy's elongated fangs. "What long teeth you have!" you cry, realizing that the author is suffering through writer's block and has thus also decided to turn Rosy into a vampire.

Rosy's grin widens into a wicked leer. "All the better to eat you with, my dear."

K ignores you both.

[Developer's Blog: Let's March Forth](#)

[Feb 26, 2021](#)

February is almost at its end! Other than K's interview this weekend (hosted by Glitch, because K has the audacity to pull the greatest "I don't know you" at Nick that I've ever written) and the Live Q&A for UCRT/Hero Zeroes, there's not a lot left!

The demo goes public on Sunday, and the next Patron demo is very tentatively scheduled for March 6. I'm returning to Chicago for the next three months, which means I'll have more uninterrupted time to write. I adore my mom, truly, but the acoustics in her house are that of an echoing well . . . and she wears orthopedic clogs around the house that *click-clank-clunk*. I find myself waiting for her to go grocery shopping in order to code, since that requires more intense concentration on my part.

I love my mom so, so very much. But it'll be nice to be back home--I'm already trying to figure out how to somehow smuggle Ziva to Chicago.

Here's my roadmap for next month:

1) Short Story featuring either K and Glitch, or Sally and Button, OR both (the one with K and Glitch is already written, but we'll see if I get *The Great Candy Caper* done as well)

2) Two Saucy Sides (one with Gray and the other Sally). That's right, *two* saucy sides. Having met my Patreon goal means more time off work and thus more rewards!

3) Two Mind Blind Demo Updates: March 6 is my goal for the first update, with the second dropping on March 26. These dates are subject to change.

4) Personal Goal: Create a physical story board to keep track of all the branching pathways. I've finally reached the point where doing it all in my head has become tricky. I need to (groan) get organized.

5) Personal Stretch Goal: Create a "fake save" quiz for Mind Blind to put readers at the correct chapter while allowing me to go back and change a bunch of variables. That way people will be able to keep on

playing from the correct chapter despite all the saves getting corrupted (realistically, this is probably an April project).

6) And, of course, more bloopers reels, a new character interview, and *Lady Death's Diary* chapters. (*Lady Death* has me extremely excited because next month both Letty and Xander are introduced. Who's Xander? Let's just say that he's related to several major characters already introduced.)

7) Also, Gray's Route in *Cupid Calamity* . . . is coming when it's ready! I wrote a lot for *Cupid Calamity* this month only to scrap Gray's route because I wasn't happy with it, and it adversely affected my overall progress on *Mind Blind*. I'm learning to balance fun side projects while still maintaining focus on *Mind Blind*. Thus, I've decided it's best to only work on *Cupid Calamity* when I'm genuinely not feeling inspired to write *Mind Blind*. It'll give me a creative reprieve without randomly transforming Rosy into a vampire (see: latest blooper reel for an example of what happens when I get a case of writer's block, and this line of writing actually went on for like 800 words). *Cupid Calamity* will still get released, but instead of committing to a drop date and then stressing over it, I'm going to keep my due dates (and subsequent last-minute panic) limited to *Mind Blind* proper. Gray's route will still be released (very likely in March!), as will all the other ROs eventually, but they'll drop at random . . . like surprise presents!

I realize this roadmap is more vague arrows scrawled on the back of a CVS receipt than a proper schedule, and I'll have some more concrete dates for you guys on my next blog post. February was a hard month for me for several reasons, and I've greatly appreciated everyone's support and patience! My teaching schedule for March is scheduled to be much lighter (Only three days a week! And one of those days only part time!), so that will make everything a whole lot easier as well.

I'm really excited to share everything with you guys!

[Character Interview: Kent](#)

[Feb 28, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines once again on Nicholas Wiseman, wearing the same sequined gold vest and a top hat cocked at an even jauntier angle. He sits in one of two cushioned chairs on an otherwise empty stage. A microphone is clutched in his hand.

Nick: Hello, hello! Welcome to the second Unity Spotlight. I'm your host, Nicholas Wiseman.

He winks while waiting for the sound of cheering to dissipate. The cheering is obviously a recording from a baseball game, given that the strains of "Take Me Out To The Ballgame" can be heard in its static.

Nick: Today's interview is with Kent Zarneki, NPO enrollee and only child of Chicago's own mayor! Can we get a round of applause for Kent?

The same recorded cheer plays again. Kent, however, does not emerge from behind the stage's curtain.

Nick, clearing his throat: I said, can we get a round of applause for Kent?

The recorded cheer plays again. Kent still doesn't appear.

Nick stalks off stage with a furrowed brow. Voices can be heard from behind the curtain: Nick's and Kent's.

Nick, hissing: That was your cue!

Kent: I never agreed to this interview.

Nick: You were voted in by the readers.

Kent: A vote which I didn't participate in.

Nick: You're making me look bad!

Kent: So? I don't know you.

Nick doesn't respond, at a loss for words.

Glitch: What if I asked the questions?

Kent: . . .

Glitch: I won't make you answer any you don't want to answer.

Kent: . . .

Glitch: Come on. You know me. You love me!

Kent: . . . Ferro. Don't.

Glitch, blithely: Kent agrees! Nick, I'll be taking those notecards from you.

Nick lets out a gargle of protest.

Sally: Let go of the question cards, Nicholas. Glitch is taking over.

Nick: But that's my job!

Sally: Not anymore. Both of you, go!

Kent and Glitch skid out onto the stage, having been pushed by a tiny yet mighty stage manager.

Glitch grins broadly and plops onto one of the chairs. Kent does the same, although with more grace and without the smile.

Glitch: Welcome to my interview with Kent Zarneki! I'm sure you all are eager to hear from my AMO, so let's begin with the questions!

Kent sighs, resigned.

Glitch: Let's start out with a few noninvasive easy-hitters. Ellie wants to know how the dogs are doing.

Kent's sour expression softens slightly, although it's still obvious that Kent is in no way pleased to be here.

Kent: Annie and Cass are good. Cass has learned to roll over on command.

Glitch: Will wonders never cease! I think that was a full two sentences that Ellie pulled out. A-shifty-looking-cow wonders if Annie and Cass have any favorite places to go on walks.

Kent snorts.

Kent: That's their username?

Glitch: It is indeed.

Kent snorts again.

Kent: Annie and Cass like the lakefront in the early morning. Having too many people around stresses Cass, although Annie is pretty friendly with strangers. There's also a husky in our neighborhood, Frost, that they like to play Chuck-it with.

Glitch, gasping theatrically: Three whole sentences! Can we get four next time? Let's shoot for four. Kent, let's talk about when you first met Button. Kitkat asks: what compelled you to answer the door wearing nothing but a towel?

Kent: I was just out of the shower.

Glitch, turning to the audience: I swear that Kent isn't being deliberately obtuse, y'all. This is answer enough for him. Now, Meggers says that the towel was understandable, but why bring the toothbrush with you?

Kent: I wasn't finished brushing my teeth.

Kent crosses his arms, frustrated with everyone's obsession over his personal hygiene. Glitch chuckles.

Glitch: And there you have it. Let's try for a few more easy questions before we send Kent fleeing to the exit. Jeremiah wants to know your opinion on cats.

Kent: Cats are good.

Glitch: A veritable font of eloquence, my best friend! Glen asks, what's your favorite animal?

Kent: Annie and Cass.

Glitch: That's not what the question was asking. It even says "not counting your dogs."

Kent: Annie and Cass are my final answer.

Glitch: I'm not going to try to budge you, because I know you cannot be budged. Morphine is curious if there's any animals that you dislike or are afraid of?

Kent: No.

Glitch: Seriously? Not even spiders?

Kent: Spiders are useful.

Glitch, shuddering: Let's move on. Shallandavar asks: if you were only to read one book for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Kent: . . .

Glitch leans back and begins whistling impatiently.

Kent: I'm thinking. Does this include all published translations of said book?

Glitch: Just pick a book, Kent.

Kent: No.

Glitch: You have to answer the questions. Pick a dang book. Or anthology.

Kent: No. It's an unnecessary theoretical.

Glitch: By which you mean that you can't decide. Do you have a favorite book, then?

Kent: No.

Glitch: Yes, you do. It's the *Odyssey*.

Kent: But I only like—

Glitch, rolling eyes: Lattimore's translation. Yeah, I know.

Kent: Fagles is okay.

Glitch, rolling eyes even harder: I've heard. Multiple times. Speaking of your interest in the *Odyssey*, mothermayhem wants to know your take on the Homeric Question. So, who is Homer? Is the *Iliad* written by the same person?

Kent: I'm not a classicist.

Glitch: You may as well be, given the amount of moldy texts that you read. You've read Cato and yet have never even picked up Tolkien. It's a travesty, Kent. A travesty.

Kent: Homer is the name ascribed to the people who bothered to write down oral traditions. He likely wasn't a real person.

Glitch, sarcastically: Thank you for that insightful glance into your personality. You really know how to answer questions in a fun way, don't you?

Kent: No.

Glitch: It was a rhetorical question. This one's not, though: Songbird wonders if there's a certain period of history that you gravitate to.

Kent: Fall of the Roman Republic.

Glitch: So basically, the decades preceding Julius Caesar being stabbed by his bestie.

Glitch clasps a hand over their heart and sighs dramatically.

Glitch, gasping as if near death: "Et tu . . . Brute?"

Kent: That's Shakespeare. Not historical record.

Glitch: Shakespeare makes history better. I will fight you on this.

Kent sighs. This is an argument the two have had many times, and it always ends in a temporary cease-fire.

Glitch: But now isn't the time for battle. It's time for more questions! Cinnerman asks, do you have a favorite museum to visit on museum dates?

Kent: The Field Museum.

Glitch: That's a natural history museum.

Kent doesn't reply, although he longingly glances towards the exit.

Glitch, prodding: And it's your favorite because . . .

Kent: It just is.

Glitch gives Kent a deadpan look that says "you can do better than that." Kent rubs the bridge of his nose as if fending off a migraine.

Kent: My mom used to take me there on weekends when I was a kid. To visit Sue.

Glitch: The T-Rex?

Kent nods and averts his gaze.

Kent: Every single weekend. Before she died.

Glitch: Well, I guess that answers Rachel's question about what your favorite memory with your mom was.

Again, Kent nods quietly. Glitch clears their throat, trying to maintain a professional façade when it's clear that they want to comfort their friend. Unable to resist, Glitch gives Kent's shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

Glitch: Brit wants to know what your favorite Greek myth is.

Despite Glitch's attempt to change the subject back to something that Kent is more comfortable discussing, a flicker of pain crosses Kent's features.

Kent: Orpheus.

Glitch: . . . Wish fulfillment?

Kent nods.

Glitch: I get that. I like to think that we'd be smart enough not to turn around, though.

Neither speak for a moment.

Glitch: Why the interest in Greek myths anyway? Aidan is curious.

Kent, shrugging: I grew up with them.

Glitch: Also, you're a morbid bastard who likes the idea of humans taking on the gods.

Kent: True.

Glitch: Mura and N. are both curious about your musician side. What instruments do you play?

Kent: Piano. Not well.

Glitch: And would you ever be comfortable letting Button hear you sing?

Kent: . . . Possibly.

Glitch recoils, feigning wounded shock.

Glitch: This, after refusing to talk for me an entire day after I heard him singing to Antigone and Cassandra.

Kent: Button is different.

Glitch, grumbling: Whatever. WorldofPyre wants to know if you can dance.

Kent: Yes.

Glitch waits for Kent to elaborate. Kent doesn't. Glitch sighs.

Glitch: New topic it is, then. Date night! Megan asks: cook in or dine out?

Kent: Order takeout. Cooking can be tedious.

Glitch: Only if you don't have someone to cook with! Speaking of romance—

Kent: When did we start speaking of romance?

Glitch: Speaking of romance, what are your thoughts on visiting a tropical area with a friend? M! suggests Bali.

Kent: Why Bali?

Glitch: Why not?

Kent: Uncrowded beaches are better. And only if the dogs can come.

Glitch: So you'd want Annie and Cass to attend a Bali wedding that bree claims is most definitely happening?

Kent: Wedding?

Glitch: That's what Bree claims.

Kent: Who's getting married?

Glitch: Dunno.

Offstage, Nick and Sally can be heard laughing uproariously at their confusion.

Glitch: Alright, we still have a lot of questions left. Most make more sense than that last one, thankfully! Fish wants to know: Did you feel guilty that Button was angry at you for 'being a Ment'?

Kent: I'm not a Ment.

Glitch: Well, yeah, they know that now. But they didn't. So, any guilt?

Kent: Why would I feel guilty?

Glitch: Because Button was upset.

Kent: I'm not responsible for their emotions.

Glitch: True, if insensitively worded. But it's not like you're to blame. Button didn't tell you about their Zero either.

Kent: Exactly.

Glitch: Although you could've been more transparent.

Kent: And gotten us both expelled?

Glitch: Point. Bi-stander wonders if it's been difficult to deceive you Ment classmates and coworkers.

Kent: No. People blindly believe things once it's in print.

Glitch: And ain't that the truth. Has anyone come close to discovering your ruse?

Kent: No. Again, people see what they expect to see.

Glitch: Indifilm asks which was more embarrassing: admitting to Button that you're not a Ment, or being sprayed in the eyes with hot sauce.

Kent: Why would either be embarrassing?

Glitch: It's true, folks. Kent is 90% embarrass-proof. Trust me, I've tried.

Kent: Repetitively. Obnoxiously.

Glitch: Frequently enough to know that it's not easy to make you blush. Kae wonders if you'd be okay with a significant other who cheers you on while you work out.

Kent: That sounds distracting.

Glitch: So, no?

Kent: They can stay with me. But I prefer to listen to music when working out.

Glitch: Stephanie Beth *is* curious about what type of music you listen to when you need cheering up.

Kent mutters something inaudible.

Glitch: Elvis. It's Elvis. And he sings along when he thinks no one is listening.

Kent scowls at Glitch.

Glitch, grinning unrepentantly: FlamingFlyingV wants to know what drew you towards the Mustang? Did you restore it?

Kent: That's two questions.

Glitch: Thanks, I can count.

Kent: Answer to the first one is "it's personal." Answer to the second one is "yes."

Glitch: And that's all you have to say about that?

Kent: It is.

Glitch: Fine. Be that way. Jerk.

Kent doesn't respond. Glitch sighs, then lights up as they read the last question.

Glitch: Ooh, looks like I've saved the best for last! Here's a question about yours truly. Rivering asks: What attracted you to become best friends with Glitch?

Kent: I didn't have much of a choice in the matter.

Glitch: It's true. He really didn't.

Kent: I was forced.

Glitch: Coerced.

Kent: Strongarmed.

Glitch: Blackmailed. And there you have it, everyone! This is Taliaferro Parker, forced best friend of Kent Zarneki, saying goodnight and sleep tight!

[Character Interview: Kenna](#)

[Feb 28, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines once again on Nicholas Wiseman, wearing the same sequined gold vest and a top hat cocked at an even jauntier angle. He sits in one of two cushioned chairs on an otherwise empty stage. A microphone is clutched in his hand.

Nick: Hello, hello! Welcome to the second Unity Spotlight. I'm your host, Nicholas Wiseman.

He winks while waiting for the sound of cheering to dissipate. The cheering is obviously a recording from a baseball game, given that the strains of "Take Me Out To The Ballgame" can be heard in its static.

Nick: Today's interview is with Kenna Zarneki, NPO enrollee and only child of Chicago's own mayor! Can we get a round of applause for Kenna?

The same recorded cheer plays again. Kenna, however, does not emerge from behind the stage's curtain.

Nick, clearing his throat: I said, can we get a round of applause for Kenna?

The recorded cheer plays again. Kenna still doesn't appear.

Nick stalks off stage with a furrowed brow. Voices can be heard from behind the curtain: Nick's and Kenna's.

Nick, hissing: That was your cue!

Kenna: I never agreed to this interview.

Nick: You were voted in by the readers.

Kenna: A vote which I didn't participate in.

Nick: You're making me look bad!

Kenna: So? I don't know you.

Nick doesn't respond, at a loss for words.

Glitch: What if I asked the questions?

Kenna: . . .

Glitch: I won't make you answer any that you don't want to answer.

Kenna: . . .

Glitch: Come on. You know me. You love me!

Kenna: . . . Talia. Don't.

Glitch, blithely: Kenna agrees! Nick, I'll be taking those notecards from you.

Nick lets out a gargle of protest.

Sally: Let go of the question cards, Nicholas. Glitch is taking over.

Nick: But that's my job!

Sally: Not anymore. Both of you, go!

Kenna and Glitch skid out onto the stage, having been pushed by a tiny yet mighty stage manager.

Glitch grins broadly and plops onto one of the chairs. Kenna does the same, although with more grace and without the smile.

Glitch: Welcome to my interview with Kenna Zarneki! I'm sure you all are eager to hear from my AMO, so let's begin with the questions!

Kenna sighs, resigned.

Glitch: Let's start out with a few noninvasive easy-hitters. Ellie wants to know how the dogs are doing.

Kenna's sour expression softens slightly, although it's still obvious that Kenna is in no way pleased to be here.

Kenna: Annie and Cass are good. Cass has learned to roll over on command.

Glitch: Will wonders never cease! I think that was a full two sentences that Ellie pulled out. A-shifty-looking-cow wonders if Annie and Cass have any favorite places to go on walks.

Kenna snorts.

Kenna: That's their username?

Glitch: It is indeed.

Kenna snorts again.

Kenna: Annie and Cass like the lakefront in the early morning. Having too many people around stresses Cass, although Annie is pretty friendly with strangers. There's also a husky in our neighborhood, Frost, that they like to play Chuck-it with.

Glitch, gasping theatrically: Three whole sentences! Can we get four next time? Let's shoot for four. Kenna, let's talk about when you first met Button. Kitkat wants to know, what compelled you to answer the door wearing nothing but a towel?

Kenna: I was just out of the shower.

Glitch, turning to the audience: I swear that Kenna isn't being deliberately obtuse, y'all. This is answer enough for him. Now, Meggers says that the towel was understandable, but why bring the toothbrush with you?

Kenna: I wasn't finished brushing my teeth.

Kenna crosses her arms, frustrated with everyone's obsession over her personal hygiene. Glitch chuckles.

Glitch: And there you have it. Let's try for a few more easy questions before we send Kenna fleeing to the exit. So, Kenna, Jeremiah wants to know your opinion on cats.

Kenna: Cats are good.

Glitch: A veritable font of eloquence, my best friend! Glen asks, what's your favorite animal?

Kenna: Annie and Cass.

Glitch: That's not what the question was asking. It even says "not counting your dogs."

Kenna: Annie and Cass are my final answer.

Glitch: I'm not going to try to budge you, because I know you cannot be budged. Morphine is curious if there's any animals that you dislike or are afraid of?

Kenna: No.

Glitch: Seriously? Not even spiders?

Kenna: Spiders are useful.

Glitch, shuddering: Let's move on. Shallandavar asks: if you were only to read one book for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Kenna: . . .

Glitch leans back and begins whistling impatiently.

Kenna: I'm thinking. Does this include all published translations of said book?

Glitch: Just pick a book, Kenna.

Kenna: No.

Glitch: You have to answer the questions. Pick a dang book. Or anthology.

Kenna: No. It's an unnecessary theoretical.

Glitch: By which you mean that you can't decide. Do you have a favorite book, then?

Kenna: No.

Glitch: Yes, you do. It's the *Odyssey*.

Kenna: But I only like—

Glitch, rolling eyes: Lattimore's translation. Yeah, I know.

Kenna: Fagles is okay.

Glitch, rolling eyes even harder: I've heard. Multiple times. Speaking of your interest in the *Odyssey*, mothermayhem wants to know your take on the Homeric Question. So, who is Homer? Is the *Iliad* written by the same person?

Kenna: I'm not a classicist.

Glitch: You may as well be, given the amount of moldy texts that you read. You've read Cato and yet have never even picked up Tolkien. It's a travesty, Kenna. A travesty.

Kenna: Homer is the name ascribed to the people who bothered to write down oral traditions. He likely wasn't a real person.

Glitch, sarcastically: Thank you for that insightful glance into your personality. You really know how to answer questions in a fun way, don't you?

Kenna: No.

Glitch: It was a rhetorical question. This one's not, though: Songbird wonders if there's a certain period of history that you gravitate to.

Kenna: Fall of the Roman Republic.

Glitch: So basically, the decades preceding Julius Caesar being stabbed by his bestie.

Glitch clasps a hand over their heart and sighs dramatically.

Glitch, gasping as if near death: "Et tu . . . Brute?"

Kenna: That's Shakespeare. Not historical record.

Glitch: Shakespeare makes history better. I will fight you on this.

Kenna sighs. This is an argument the two have had many times, and it always ends in a temporary cease-fire.

Glitch: But now isn't the time for battle. It's time for more questions! Cinnerman asks, do you have a favorite museum to visit on museum dates?

Kenna: The Field Museum.

Glitch: That's a natural history museum.

Kenna doesn't reply, although she longingly glances towards the exit.

Glitch, prodding: And it's your favorite because . . .

Kenna: It just is.

Glitch gives Kenna a deadpan look that says "you can do better than that." Kenna rubs the bridge of her nose as if fending off a migraine.

Kenna: My mom used to take me there on weekends when I was a kid. To visit Sue.

Glitch: The T-Rex?

Kenna nods and averts her gaze.

Kenna: Every single weekend. Before she died.

Glitch: Well, I guess that answers Rachel's question about what your favorite memory with your mom was.

Again, Kenna nods quietly. Glitch clears their throat, trying to maintain a professional façade when it's clear that they want to comfort their friend. Unable to resist, Glitch gives Kenna's shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

Glitch: Brit wants to know what your favorite Greek myth is.

Despite Glitch's attempt to change the subject back to something that Kenna is more comfortable discussing, a flicker of pain crosses Kenna's features.

Kenna: Orpheus.

Glitch: . . . Wish fulfillment?

Kenna: Wish fulfillment.

Glitch: I get that. I like to think that we'd be smart enough not to turn around, though.

Neither speak for a moment.

Glitch: Why the interest in Greek myths anyway? Aidan is curious.

Kenna, shrugging: I grew up with them.

Glitch: Also, you're a morbid bastard who likes the idea of humans taking on the gods.

Kenna: True.

Glitch: Mura and N. are both curious about your musician side. What instruments do you play?

Kenna: Piano. Not well.

Glitch: And would you ever be comfortable letting Button hear you sing?

Kenna: . . . Possibly.

Glitch recoils, feigning wounded shock.

Glitch: This, after refusing to talk for me an entire day after I heard him singing to Antigone and Cassandra.

Kenna: Button is different.

Glitch, grumbling: Whatever. WorldofPyre wants to know if you can dance.

Kenna: Yes.

Glitch waits for Kenna to elaborate. Kenna doesn't. Glitch sighs.

Glitch: New topic it is, then. Date night! Megan asks: cook in or dine out?

Kenna: Order takeout. Cooking can be tedious.

Glitch: Only if you don't have someone to cook with! Speaking of romance—

Kenna: When did we start speaking of romance?

Glitch: Speaking of romance, what are your thoughts on visiting a tropical area with a friend? M! suggests Bali.

Kenna: Why Bali?

Glitch: Why not?

Kenna: Uncrowded beaches are better. And only if the dogs can come.

Glitch: So you'd want Annie and Cass to attend a Bali wedding that bree claims is most definitely happening?

Kenna: Wedding?

Glitch: That's what Bree claims.

Kenna: Who's getting married?

Glitch: Dunno.

Offstage, Nick and Sally can be heard laughing uproariously at their confusion.

Glitch: Alright, we still have a lot of questions left. Most make more sense than that last one, thankfully! Fish wants to know: Did you feel guilty that Button was angry at you for 'being a Ment'?

Kenna: I'm not a Ment.

Glitch: Well, yeah, they know that now. But they didn't. So, any guilt?

Kenna: Why would I feel guilty?

Glitch: Because Button was upset.

Kenna: I'm not responsible for their emotions.

Glitch: True, if insensitively worded. But it's not like you're to blame. Button didn't tell you about their Zero either.

Kenna: Exactly.

Glitch: Although you could've been more transparent.

Kenna: And gotten us both expelled?

Glitch: Point. Bi-stander wonders if it's been difficult to deceive you Ment classmates and coworkers.

Kenna: No. People blindly believe things once it's in print.

Glitch: And ain't that the truth. Has anyone come close to discovering your ruse?

Kenna: No. Again, people see what they expect to see.

Glitch: Indifilm asks which was more embarrassing: admitting to Button that you're not a Ment, or being sprayed in the eyes with hot sauce.

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Glitch: It's true, folks. Kenna is 90% embarrass-proof. Trust me, I've tried.

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Kenna mutters something inaudible.

Glitch: Elvis. It's Elvis. And she sings along when she thinks no one is listening.

Kenna scowls at Glitch.

Glitch, grinning unrepentantly: FlamingFlyingV wants to know what drew you towards the Mustang? Did you restore it?

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Kenna doesn't respond. Glitch sighs, then lights up as they read the last question.

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Glitch: It's true. She really didn't.

Kenna: I was forced.

Glitch: Coerced.

Kenna: Strongarmed.

Glitch: Blackmailed. And there you have it, everyone! This is Taliaferro Parker, forced best friend of Kenna Zarneki, saying goodnight and sleep tight!

[Tea Time in T-minus One Hour](#)

[Feb 28, 2021](#)

Live Q&A on the Sanctum of Spoilers at 11am!

Be there or be square.

Fun Fact: The idiom "be there or be square" dates to the 1950's beatnik era when "square" was used to refer to someone who was uncool or out of touch. However, before this, the word "square" had been used to describe someone's good-natured personality or high quality of their work! When jazz became popular, "square" started being used to refer to people who didn't like jazz.

(Information taken from writingexplained.org/idiom-dictionary.)

I have a bunch of books on the origins of words back home in Chicago, since it's something that always fascinated me! I even did a project in 5th grade on American slang. Another fun fact: the first uniquely "United States" insult ever used was "egg-sucking, sheep-stealing, toad-eating, flop-eared groundhog." I

think it was taken from someone's letter, but I'm don't recall completely. I'll have to look it up when I return home and have access to my library. If you saw the picture of my condo, you'll see some of my books! And my bedroom has another three bookshelves, and I several boxes of books in storage. I just . . . really like books.

[March Elections Start Now!](#)

[Mar 1, 2021](#)

I'll be laying out a more detailed schedule of what drops when come this Friday, but for now here's the poll for March's character interview! It'll close on Saturday, so please make sure to vote who'd you would like to see interviewed before then.

Since Rosy and K have already been interviewed, they're excluded from the poll. Thanks everyone for your continued support! I can't wait to see which cast member has to tell all next . . . No, I'm not grinning evilly! I swear.

Vote for the character you'd like interviewed, and the winner will answer reader questions!

Nick

Gray

Sally

Glitch

Hope

John

Clarence

. . . Noh! (Expect extremely cryptic answers if you select this jerk.)

417 votes total

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 6](#)

[Mar 2, 2021](#)

Father summoned me to the east parlor as soon as I arrived. Madam Catherine, his bride-to-be, blended into the room's pastel palette, looking as if she'd been painted in watercolor with her near translucent skin and pale pink gown. Her blue eyes were narrow but observant, and her tight blonde bun streaked liberally with white. The widow of a wealthy trader, she had become even wealthier after taking over her husband's business upon his death. She was rich in pocket but not in status, and her marriage to my father was meant to correct that shortcoming. Father, for his part, had never been one to pass up a chance to augment the family fortune. But it was Catherine's daughter whom he was now introducing.

Letty curtsied low and peeped at me from beneath a lush fringe of lashes. Despite our similar age, she had already blossomed into her full beauty. I felt immediately self-conscious of my unwashed hair and drab brown travel frock with sweat stains forming under the arms, a consequence of having been trapped in an enclosed carriage on a warm day.

"It's such a pleasure to finally meet you!" Letty said. "Your—I mean, *our* father speaks of you so often that I feel as if we're already bosom friends. He says that you're very clever. Is it true that you're to marry the Prince?"

I arched a brow over the unlikely image of Father waxing poetic about my many virtues. Still, I appreciated her effort to compliment me. Letty was as compassionate as she was dishonest. Even as she'd helped arranged my murders, she'd never let a single unkind word pass her rosebud lips.

Once upon a time, I'd been overjoyed my father's marriage meant gaining a new sister. Despite the pecuniary nature of our parents' union, Letty and I had quickly become inseparable. With her sweet disposition and cherub features, she'd been everything I'd wanted in a little sister despite being two months my elder. Others saw me as prickly; she called me fierce. She may have gently chastised me for my sharp tongue, but she had done so with one hand covering an unwilling grin at my snarky observations. In return, I had made sure that no one took advantage of her generous nature. Once upon a time, I thought our friendship would last forever.

Until I realized she wanted me dead.

"It's true that Prince Loren and I are engaged," I said. "Whether or not we wed remains to be seen."

Letty's eyes, a captivating hue somewhere between purple and blue, grew round.

Father rolled his. "Don't make such ridiculous japes, Vitrola."

I shrugged, concealing my anxiety behind an apathetic facade. Once I controlled Verdan, anyone I suspected of plotting against me would be banished. Including Letty. For now, however, it was best not to give my new step-sister any reason to become intrigued by my fiancé.

"I hope you've found Rhys Manor to your liking, Madam Catherine," I said to redirect the conversation. "Has Father familiarized you with our family holdings? The tenants should meet their new duchess."

Catherine's pale brows almost disappeared into her hairline. "You're right," she said to my father. "She's quite precocious." She smiled at me indulgently. "Don't worry, dear child, I'll become knowledgeable about everything in due time. And please, do call me Mother!"

"Ah." Despite having met Catherine in seven other past lives, I never became accustomed to this request. My own mother may not have been the embodiment of maternal warmth, but something in my gut rebelled at the prospect of calling another by her title. "I'll try to remember."

She embraced me in a haze of lavender perfume that made my throat itch. "Such a serious child," she said upon releasing me from her cloying hold. "Losing a mother forces one to grow up far too quickly. Letticia has been more concerned with what color her dress will be for the wedding ceremony than expressing any interest in helping to run our family business."

She frowned at her daughter. "You would do well to be as diligent as Vitrola."

Letty flushed and became suddenly engrossed with the weave of the carpet. My protective instincts stirred before I could remind myself of the million reasons why she wasn't worth defending. "Your dress is absolutely beautiful," I told her. "Did you stitch the garlands around its hem by yourself?"

Letty dragged her gaze upwards and smiled at me appreciatively. "You noticed! Several spools of thread were crushed in one of our shipments and I begged Ma—Mother to let me keep them instead of sending them back. We didn't have a garden at our last house, not like here, but I adore flowers and thought it would be nice to at least wear them." She flushed as if embarrassed by her own enthusiasm and added, "Mother believes embroidery a waste of time."

I privately agreed but, confronted by Letty's shy smile, couldn't bring myself to vocalize the opinion. Letty had always adored sewing, even if the hobby wasn't considered to be precisely ladylike. That's what seamstresses were employed for, after all. Noblewomen at Bellcrest Court were expected to spend their time practicing archery or writing poems, not stitching pillowcases.

"You're very talented," I said.

Letty grasped my hands and squeezed. Her violet eyes met mine, luminous as they reflected light from the glowstone lamp nearby.

"I'm so thankful that we're to be sisters," she said. "I just know we shall be the best of friends."

"Mama, are you certain I can't help?" offered Letty. "Such long lace at your sleeves is sure to tear. If we were to trim some off, I would have enough left over to edge your train."

I repressed a sigh, knowing Letty's suggestion would lead to yet another lecture from her mother. I didn't want to be trapped in Catherine's dressing room, and wanted even less to be one of the handmaidens tasked with escorting the bride to our estate's chapel. Not with Letty walking aside me. But several servants had already come asking for reassurances that their families' rents wouldn't be raised once the new Duchess of Kothe took over my responsibilities. As I couldn't show them the section of my death diary that described the Catherine as an unexpectedly generous leader, my show of support was necessary to set people at ease.

The multi-tiered skirt of Catherine's wedding dress was so voluminous that its waves of silk flooded the entire dressing room. Letty and I were forced to stand with our backs pressed up against the wall so as not to crush its bustle. The watery blue washed out Catherine's complexion even more so than usual, and the sleeves completely covered her hands beneath a waterfall of cream lace. The style was traditional to Kothe, and my own mother had worn a similar gown twenty years ago. Nostalgia did not, alas, make the end result any less of an eyesore.

I disagreed with Letty's proposed alteration, however, since the sleeves' length successfully obscured the oathring on Catherine's thumb that Father had given her. As was customary, the bride had designed the ring herself. The center pink diamond was size of a sun coin, the largest and ironically least valuable of Anterdon's currency that Kothens used as well due to our shared border. Smaller cuts of the same stone embedded the band. Catherine's ring was the most ostentatious thing I'd ever seen, and I'd lived the past year in a castle. Tradition dictated that both couple's oathrings were buried with whichever spouse died first, symbolically leaving the other free to pursue a new love. If Catherine's last oathring had been of similar design, I pitied her departed husband his funeral goods.

"The dress design doesn't matter," lectured Catherine. "Only what it represents. At noon, we join one of the most powerful families in Verdan. Every detail of this ceremony must demonstrate my dedication to upholding that ancestral responsibility."

"Our tenets will be glad to see you honoring Kothe's customs," I lied. In truth, most cared more about her reputation for ruthless business dealings than the shape of her hemline.

Catherine smiled briefly at my flattery before frowning at her daughter. "Really, Letticia, sometimes I wonder how I raised such a hollow-headed child. You concern yourself overmuch with what's fashionable and not enough with what's important. Vitrula doesn't even wear jewelry."

Others failed to realize that the austerity of my garb had more to do with self-preservation than preference. No false witness would ever again identify me by a bauble or claim to recognize my sense of style in a dimly lit room. Instead, my wardrobe blandly mimicked whatever was currently in vogue at Bellcrest Court. Emilia had bemoaned my remarkably unremarkable fashion sense on more than one occasion.

Still, I recognized Catherine's intent. She meant to hold me up as an example for Letty, who (per her norm) withered under the criticism. My new stepsister's shoulders hunched forwards as if attempting to vanish inwards, and her small nose began its rabbit-like twitch that meant she was struggling not to cry.

I felt a surge of unwilling sympathy—it was difficult to fight against my own emotional habits. Especially with *this* Letty, who hadn't yet met Loren.

"Did you notice how Letty tied the bouquets decorating the chapel?" I asked before I could stop myself. "Her use of black and blue ribbons on the goldenblossoms was quite cunning—I never would have thought to tie in Rhys colors in such a way. She also recommended that Cook serve Kothen pastries for the wedding breakfast this morning."

Letty cast me a grateful look. "I thought guests might like to try some of the local fare."

"She's being too modest," I said. "Goodman Hesser approached me afterwards and expressed interest in buying wheat exclusively from Kothe's granaries, provided Cook is willing to share some of her recipes to sell at his bakeries in Bellcrest."

"I've been trying to convince that old goat to let me be his sole supplier for years," marveled Catherine. "Well done, Vitrola!"

I shrugged apologetically at Letty. *I tried.*

Letty's lips curved in a half smile. *I know.*

Catherine's head swiveled between us. A crinkle formed above her nose as she tried to discern the reason behind our quiet amusement, but a lifetime as a merchant had trained her to be more observant than self-aware. She must have eventually dismissed our inexplicable giggles as the vagaries of youth, because she smiled. I doubt her mood would have been as benevolent had she realized the nature of our joke.

"You two were meant to be sisters," she said. "This marriage must be fate."

Her words immediately reminded me of all the reasons why it was unwise to grow closer to my future stepsister. Perhaps it was fated that Letty and I become sisters—it had happened seven times so far. But fate, as I had discovered again and again, was more sadistic than kind.

Our procession from Catherine's chambers was silent. Traditionally, the walk from home to church was meant to be undertaken by the bride alone, so as to give her an opportunity to flee from an arranged marriage: to be married unwillingly by a priest of Sen was considered sacrilege. Catherine, however, had decided that Letty and I should accompany her in order to present a united front to the tenets. She marched towards the chapel with the resolve of a doll-sized army general. Despite my height advantage, I had to hasten my own pace to keep up with her.

Once we entered the chapel, Letty sat next to me on the front bench, her knees pressed primly together. She did her best to ignore the admiring gazes of the townsfolk behind us. "Is she a princess?" I overheard a little girl ask.

No, I wanted to reply. Not if I can prevent it.

Catherine continued onwards to the nave, where a gap in the ceiling allowed Sen's light to shine through and where my father awaited beneath an arched trellis of goldenbloom. He was already glaring at the priest, who seemed to be suffering from an allergy to the bouquets Letty had so artfully arranged. His muffled recital of our parents' marriage pledge was near impossible to understand, and culminated with a ginormous sneeze during his invocation of the Triad.

By time the priest concluded, Father's face was white from clenching his teeth and Catherine's sagging shoulders made it clear she regretted wearing a dress that weighed approximately the same as a bushel of wheat. The look they shared when finally pronounced husband and wife was less of true love and more one of mutual relief.

My placid expression didn't break until we exited the church and I saw my brother.

"Theo!" I rushed to embrace him as he alighted from his carriage. "I didn't think you could come!"

Theo's hug lifted me off the ground. "We hadn't planned on it," he said. "Then several others at the embassy decided to travel with the Anterdonian envoy to visit family in Bellcrest, and we figured we might as well tag along for half the trip. I'd hoped to arrive before the wedding."

"Be glad you didn't." My brother wouldn't have survived the priest's sniffing soliloquy without creating some mischief.

He laughed. The familiar sound washed over me and I permitted myself to smile, to *really* smile, for the first time since I had arrived back home.

Whereas I had moved to Bellcrest, Theo had spent the past year living with our uncle in Anterdon. Since Kothe bordered the country, our uncle had insisted it was important for its future Duke to gain firsthand knowledge of his neighbor. I assumed that Uncle Alistair was the robust figure currently struggling to squeeze himself out of the carriage.

"You've never come back before," I blurted, by which I meant he hadn't been present any of the other times Father and Catherine had wed in my past lives. Theo always stayed abroad for years (excepting the time he'd once returned to accidentally shoot me). With few exceptions, his first introduction Catherine and Letty would have probably been at my many funerals.

He ruffled my hair, though my tightly coiled braid mostly foiled his attempt at dishevelment. "Did you miss me?"

Uncle Alastair finally wedged himself out of the carriage. He was a bear of a man with ruddy cheeks and matching copper curls. Father greeted him with uncharacteristic warmth. They clasped hands; my father's looked skeletal compared to the other's massive paw. "Alastair! You managed to miss the tedious formalities as usual," said Father. "Allow me introduce my bride, Duchess Catherine."

My uncle's embrace lifted the new duchess slightly off the ground.

"I've met traders who've done business with you. They say you're merciless," he said once he'd deposited Catherine back on her feet. "My sister would've liked you."

She gaped at the large man. Before she could formulate a response, he pivoted away and approached me.

"Truly, you must be Tru!" he boomed. "I'd recognize those eyebrows anywhere!" He poked my forehead with a meaty finger. "So stern, little turtle! I can see your mother glaring at me through those gray eyes." He laughed and wrapped his arms around me in an embrace even more enthusiastic than the one he had given the new duchess.

I patted his back tentatively, my arms barely able to reach around his broad frame. The demonstration of affection felt strange but oddly comforting. I'd always considered Theo to be an abnormality in our family, warm and gregarious whereas Father and I were both reserved. Now, I realized where my brother had inherited his personality.

Uncle Alistair released me and stepped back, holding me at arm's length and looking me up and down. "You really are the mirror image of her," he said. "Julius, your letters never mentioned how uncanny the resemblance!"

My father chuckled. It was an unnerving sound, being entirely devoid of irony or malice. "Vitrula does look more like Marianne every passing day. Small wonder the Prince is eager to wed such a beauty!"

Considering Letty was standing less than six paces away for comparison, I grimaced at the false flattery. Then again, Father seemed half-genuine. Crinkles formed at the corners of his eyes that I had never seen before and his voice lacked its customary sarcastic undertone.

"Theodorus, your unexpected arrival is a delight!" said Catherine. She had recomposed herself from Alistair's assault, and her lips compressed with determination to regain control of the situation. "Very unexpected. But I'm so glad to meet you."

Theo's smile widened: he'd noticed the rebuke in her repetition. Shame, however, was no more than an academic theory to my brother. He loped up to Catherine until he was close enough that she grew visibly nervous that he might share our uncle's lack of propriety. But Theo left just enough space between them to dip in a perfectly executed bow.

"I see that Sen has blessed my father with a beautiful bride," he said, "and I with a lovely mother."

Catherine's shoulders softened at the compliment. My father harrumphed. "Stop flirting with my wife, boy, and meet your new sister."

Letty was hesitating near the chapel doorway, too timid to interject herself into the reunion. Theo strolled up to her with an easy smile on his face. His eyes widened fractionally upon observing her up close, but he managed to sweep another flawless bow.

"Welcome to the family," he said. "Tru hasn't been giving you too much trouble, I hope."

"Oh, no!" Letty's voice was uncharacteristically loud. "She's been perfect."

My brother arched a single black brow my direction. "High praise indeed, Tru." He took Letty's hand and pressed a slow kiss onto its back. "May I prove equally as deserving of your regard."

Catherine eyed her new stepson warily. Smart woman. Theo had always been an indiscriminate flirt, and judging by the glazed grin on Letty's face, the girl was already half besotted. They *did* make a picturesque pair. Whereas Letty and Loren were similar in coloring, Theo was her striking opposite. His features, like mine, were sharp where hers were soft, and the short queue at his nape as dark as her curls were fair.

The new development of their meeting made me nervous. I wasn't able to remember everything about my past lives, but I felt certain such a scene had never happened before. What had I inadvertently changed that had resulted in Theo's visit? Given her involvement in my deaths, Letty's interest in my brother chilled me to the bone.

Now, I had to protect Theo as well.

[MB Saucy Side: Counting Freckles](#)

[Mar 3, 2021](#)

Featuring Sally and Button

"One-hundred and seventeen," you declare confidently.

Sally props herself up on the pillow, her hair in a messy bun atop her head. She rolls her eyes at you, although her giggle undermines her projected exasperation. "You did *not* count all the freckles on my face."

"I did," you affirm. "Last night, while you were sleeping." Your thumb brushes against her left cheek, which you now know has thirty-eight freckles.

Her skin heats beneath your touch, her freckles all the more prominent due to the fact it's so early in the morning that she's yet to put on foundation. "Didn't you have anything better to do than stare at my face?" she says. "You should know my features well enough by now."

"I know your features by heart." You tilt her chin so that your lips can gently touch hers. "And now I know them every better."

"You're absurd," Sally whispers before you silence her with another kiss.

Perhaps you are absurd. By the time Sally and you break apart, you're also giddy and breathlessly blissful, and the comforter has been kicked onto the floor of your bedroom. You gaze into her hazel eyes, flecked with gold and greens. There, half-hidden by her eyelashes, is another, uncounted, freckle.

"One-hundred and eighteen," you say.

Sally's brow furrows as she tries to recall what you'd been conversing about before you'd kissed her senseless.

"Freckles," you remind her.

Sally giggles again. Her arms wrap around you, her hands clasping together at the nape of your neck. She presses a light kiss onto the corner of your mouth.

"Absurd," she reiterates. She kisses your cheek, your nose, and your eyelids. "Ridiculous, silly, foolish," she adds with each kiss.

Unable to remain passive under her whisper-soft onslaught, your hands wrap around her waist and pull her closer. The next kiss is different from the ones that came before—this one is filled with crackling electricity and blazing fire and the culmination of *years* spent silently, foolishly, longing for each other.

Sally kisses you back the same way she does everything: unreservedly and with her whole heart. Her curls tumble loose from her bun, spilling down her shoulders like a waterfall of flame. You twine a stray red lock around your finger.

"I should count your curls next," you tease.

Sally smacks your shoulder. "Less counting," she demands. "More kissing."

You oblige.

Eventually, you rise from the bed. "We have work in an hour," you remind her regretfully.

Sally juts out her lower lip in a pout that you assume is her attempt at looking seductive. And to you, it *is* seductive, despite the expression also making it look like she has a pronounced underbite.

"We're newlyweds," she argues. "We can be late."

You feign shock. "Mrs. Wiseman-Alavidze, what are you suggesting?"

"It's Mrs. Alavidze-Wiseman," Sally says tartly. "We agreed on our names being in alphabetical order."

"Wiseman-Alavidze still sounds better, though."

Sally chucks her pillow at you, which you manage to nimbly dodge. She throws your pillow as well. This one hits your head.

Once you both stop laughing, Sally grabs your wrist and pulls you back down onto the bed. She can be surprisingly strong when there's something—*someone*—that she really wants.

"The Alavidze-Wiseman family is going to be late to work today," she whispers. "Kim will just have to deal."

You flip her over onto her back, eliciting a surprised squeal from Sally. "The Wiseman-Alavidze family will be calling in sick today," you correct. "Because I have more freckles to count."

[March Live Q&A](#)

[Mar 3, 2021](#)

Me oh my, but how time flies! Now that I'm teaching less (only 3 days a week in March!), I have more flexibility to work around everyone's schedules. Please let me know if you can only make certain times, and I'll do my utmost to accommodate!

I'll be sending out messages on the 5th about claiming your March rewards, so please check your Patreon inbox! Final poems for the three people yet to receive them from February will be sent via email, so please check your inboxes as well. (I haven't forgotten, I promise! February's stresses drained my poetic font for romantic versification, but I just wrote one for Kent and am feeling back on rhyming form today!)

I'm headed back to Chicago on March 16th, but will keep times in PST since that's the timezone used by Patreon.

Vote for your preferred timeslot for the next Live Q&A, and let me know if you can't make any of the times! You can also request an alternate timeslot, and I'll add it to next week's finalizing poll if it's feasible for me to make.

March 27, 8am - 9am PST

March 27, 9am - 10am PST

March 27, 11am - 12pm PST

March 27, 6pm - 7pm PST

March 28, 9am - 10am PST

March 28, 10am - 11am PST

March 28, 11am - 12pm PST

March 28, 1pm - 2pm PST

12 votes total

[Developer's Blog: Ping-Pong Smoke Bombs and Suspicious Stats](#)

[Mar 5, 2021](#)

I hope everyone is having a wonderful March! For those in the same hemisphere as me: it's almost spring! For those in the Southern hemisphere: happy autumn!

I'm not British, so I won't be talk any more about the weather. Instead, I'd like to lay out the schedule for this month.

First things first, there's **a *Mind Blind* demo update dropping this weekend** for Patrons that includes the rest of Chapter 7 . . . and the anticipated return of a few characters that haven't been seen in a while. I'm not giving an exact date for this update because I have a few familial obligations that I need to work around, but it will uploaded before Sunday 12am PST.

Patrons will also receive Chapter 8 on **March 26**, when the public demo is updated with Chapter 7. Chapter 8 is what I consider a "betweenner" chapter, mostly consisting of prep work leading up to the undercover arc which launches in Chapter 9 (I'll talk more about the upcoming chapters below).

In regards to other Patreon content, here's my working timeline:

March 10: 1st *Mind Blind* Side Story

March 12: *Lady Death's Diary*, Chapter 6.5 (in which Tru recounts Death #2)

March 15: *Delivery for the Damned* Poll, regarding still more character customization dilemmas

March 17: 2nd *Mind Blind* Saucy Side, featuring Gray (and inspired by a certain Tumblr snippet about alternative applications of telekinesis)

March 19: *Lady Death's Diary*, Chapter 7 (in which things get even more complicated)

March 26: *Mind Blind* Demo Update

March 27 (TBD): Live Q&A for UCRT Members and Hero Zeros

March 30: Monthly character interview. I'm pretty much calling the election in Gray's favor (and will officially do so tomorrow), since he has an 80+ lead over Nick, who ranks second in the polls.

Goodies without dates: In addition to the usual *Delivery for the Damned* sneak peeks and *Mind Blind* bloopers, I hope to release a second MB side story, as well as Grayson's route for *Cupid Calamity*. These two are taking backseat to completing Chapter 8 in *Mind Blind*, however, since I really want to get the entire chapter out this month for you guys! (Chapter 8 has romance mini-scenes which I'm pretty excited about. Shirts come off; eye contact is maintained . . . it's all very scandalous.)

As stated earlier, Chapter 8 is mostly preparation for Button's inevitable plunge into the bowels of hell/Vengeance, and thus the mechanics of writing undercover work has been taking up a lot of my brainpower lately. Because you *will* all be going undercover—but with varying levels of success. I'm playing around with two ways to measure Button's espionage aptitude.

Way Number 1 is the simplest: it has certain answers set to be “convincing” towards ***NAME REDACTED*** and ***NAME ALSO REDACTED***. If Button picks these answers, then they don't gain suspicion. The suspicion meter will raise, however, if Button selects a less convincing answer and then fails to pass a stat check (which stat will vary depending on the answer).

Way Number 2 requires more investment and consideration to be put into Chapter 8, but I think it could be more fun for replay. In Chapter 8, Button will work with either Glitch or Sally to create a fake online “persona”, basically explaining their cover-story reasons for being anti-Unity. In following chapters, acting in accordance with this persona will make you believable, whereas forgetting or acting contrary to your established cover will raise the suspicion meter. Stat checks will again be used if you mess up.

Alternatively, I could implement choices which account for both methodologies, although that may be messier to code. The only real aspect set in stone so far is the *Suspicion Meter* (cue ominous music).

This Suspicion Meter will track how much Vengeance believes your cover story, and is similar to the meter I used to track Button's suspicion of K, except reversed. Vengeance's Suspicion count won't be on the stat screen (at least, I don't currently plan for it to be), but it will play a hugely important role in rest of the book. If your Suspicion Score reaches over a certain point, then you'll get a frantically-scramble-to-cover-your-butt-because-your-pants-are-on-fire-you-liar moment. This moment will be an entirely additional scene (yay!), but it will also bar you from certain solutions further down the line. Like with Rosy's assignment, failure and success both have their plot perks.

Of course, you're not going undercover alone. You may find your partner acting in ways that increase or decrease your Suspicion Stat as well, depending on your relationship with K.

One thing that I desperately want to add at some point is ping-pong ball smoke bombs. Originally, I'd planned to have Button and Sally go through a second assignment, before I realized that it would only slow down the already longer-than-expected plot. I came up with a lot of creative (devious? slightly evil?) solutions for Room 2, however, and want to use at least some of them. So be on the lookout for a seemingly random ping pong tables, because everything on it *can* be used as a weapon.

[Mar 6, 2021](#)

With a grand total of 165 votes, Grayson is the winner of March's Character Interview!

(Nick is both extremely proud of Gray for winning, and slightly disgruntled that he himself placed second. This is *The Buzzer's* "The Top 20 Ments We Wish Would Save Us from a Fire" List all over again.)

Please ask all questions you have for Gray via the Sanctum of Spoilers Discord channel "MB Cast Interviews" or on this post if you don't have Discord access.

One thing to keep in mind:

Questions asking about a character's reactions to specific actions taken by Button in-game (ex: "How did you feel when Button did XYZ?") will usually take last priority since not everyone's Button behaved in that exact fashion. The more specific your question is regarding Button's behavior (unless they're a generic feeling, like having a crush), the less likely that it will make it into the interview. That being said, feel free to ask whatever you like, and Gray will try to provide as many answers as possible.

[Demo Update: Chapter 7](#)

[Mar 7, 2021](#)

Here's the rest of *Mind Blind's* Chapter 7!

Average playthrough is now 52,000 words (214,000 total), but the new content can be either a lot longer or shorter based on which route you chose back in Chapter 1.

Demo Link:<https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-cactus/mygame/>

This update was mostly focused on finishing up Chapter 7 so that Chapter 8's varying scenes can begin right away--you'll be able to choose a scene with either Glitch or Sally, and then with Rosy or Gray. (Chapter 8 will be updated for Patreon March 26.)

The subway route finally begins paying off in this latest chapter, especially if you gathered all three clues about a certain piece of art. Those Buttons who went a different way to school might find that there's not

a whole lot new in this update (unless they're romancing Gray, in which case a certain action *finally* sets his romance route trigger).

Also: I did research all the high-tech gadgetry used in HQ, but let me know if anything is inaccurate! I'm very much not a scientist, so have spent hours reading journals and articles on tech over the last few weeks.

[Introducing: Snapdragon](#)

[Mar 10, 2021](#)

Snapdragon is a puckishly jovial girl, with moon-pale skin and night-dark eyes and an unnervingly sharp-toothed smile. Her appearance makes her out to be around eleven years of age. She delights in pranks, both harmless and otherwise.

Snapdragon is fae and thus your most dangerous client.

Excerpt from the THAB Employee Guide:

As a THAB delivery person, there are three essential regulations to follow when delivering a package to a fairy.

Rule #1: Never attempt to see past a fairy's glamour. Doing so is extremely rude, and the client will either kill you or choose to use a rival mail service (or both).

Rule #2: Always project the appearance of possessing a delightful secret. Fairies love secrets, and will not kill you until they've learned it. Whether this secret is real or imagined is left up to employee discretion.

Rule #3: If finding yourself in violation of either prior rule, do your utmost to amuse the fae in question. THAB reminds all employees that the tapdancing seminar is mandatory *for a reason*.

[Welcome Home - Kent and Talia Version](#)

[Mar 10, 2021](#)

Kent Zarneki was going to die.

He realized this the moment he stepped off the jet and onto the tarmac, which burned so hot under the Atlanta summer sun that Kent could swear he'd seen a sweat drop sizzle into smoke as it hit the ground.

Yes, Kent Zarneki was definitely going to die from either heat exhaustion or seventh-degree sunburn. And it was all Talia's fault.

The murderer in question stood a few meters away, dark shades over her eyes and a chauffeur's cap perched on her shaved head. Talia held up a large sign with Kent's name printed on it, waving it in the air enthusiastically.

"Mr. Zarneki!" she called out in a sing-song voice. "Your ride is this way, Mr. Zarneki!"

Kent swatted at Talia's sign as soon as he was close enough. "Put that down," he ordered.

"As you wish, sir," Talia chirped. "Allow me to escort you to your *limousine*."

Kent groaned. The downside of Talia picking him up at the airport? His friend would be the one driving them both back to Talia's house, where Kent had been invited (forcibly) to stay with Talia for the summer.

"It'll better than letting your dad drag you from press interview to interview," Talia had said pragmatically. "You know he's going to want you on *Good Morning, Chicago* now that you've completed your first year at Aeon."

So, Kent had agreed to visit Talia in Georgia. In the summer. When the humidity was so thick it could be scooped with a spoon. He'd never liked how hot it had got in Chicago during the summer, but this damp boiling was almost more than he could bear.

"You look like someone peed in your cereal," Talia said as she grabbed the smaller of Kent's bags. "Atlanta's great, I swear."

Kent arched a skeptical brow. Already, he could feel his skin prickling in anticipation of a million mosquito bites. The air was so *sticky* here; Chicago got hot, but at least a breeze could usually be relied on to make the heat tolerable.

"My mom's been cooking up a storm, ever since she heard that you agreed to come down," Talia said. "She's happy to have another meat eater in the house." She made a face, pulling a pair of car keys from her shorts.

"I'm fine eating vegan," Kent said.

A car nearby beeped. No, not a car—a pickup truck. Kent tried not let his appalment show as Talia tossed his bag into the back of a dilapidated GMC Canyon with a rusted exhaust pipe and a bumper sticker featuring a nude woman whose rump was censored by a ripe Georgian peach.

“You are such a car snob.” Talia laughed at Kent’s obvious distaste. “I borrowed the truck from my uncle.” She waited for Kent to put his other bag in the cargo bed. “And you may be fine eating vegan, but my mom’s been longing for someone to “correctly” appreciate her new barbeque sauce recipe. She claims that my tofu doesn’t do it justice.”

Kent didn’t say anything as they climbed into the truck. Best to preserve his energy, because this sun was going to kill him. He winced as Talia started the car, and the truck jolted backwards from its parking spot with a banshee screech.

If the sun didn’t kill him, Talia’s driving would.

* * * *

By the time the truck shuddered to a halt in a driveway, Kent’s already pale hands were even paler from their hour-long death grip on his seat, and he’d internally resolved *never* to let Talia drive his Mustang. Talia jumped from the truck, humming, and Kent took a moment to steady his breathing and take in the house before them. It was ranch-style, with a natural stone façade and a garden that stretched around into the backyard.

The garden was a rainbow of vibrancy, a far cry from the deliberately-chosen pale pink and yellow flowers that adorned his own father’s yard and were maintained by a surly gardener. Whoever took care of this garden loved doing so, and had added a little colorful chaos to its design. The entire scene was so warm and inviting that it put Kent on edge as he followed Talia into the house.

“Mama!” Talia hollered up the stairs. “We’re back from the airport.”

A woman came down the stairs. She was curvy where Talia was slender, and her russet brown skin was significantly lighter than Talia’s. Nevertheless, the family resemblance between the two was obvious, there in her heavy-lidded glance that immediately made Kent feel uncomfortably exposed. Talia looked at him in that same way—it was a look that saw too damn much.

“I brought szarlotka,” he said abruptly. “In my bag.” Anything to change the subject and make her stop looking at him like he was a shelter puppy in need of a home. Just what had Talia told her mother about the reason for Kent’s visit?

Virginia Parker’s eyebrows arched so high that they almost disappeared beneath her bright red-and-gold headwrap. “Polish apple pie,” she said.

Kent was surprised that she knew of it. Then again, Talia had told him that her mom had lived abroad in Prague for several years. Maybe she’d visited Poland?

Talia groaned. "Is this something that I won't be able to eat again?" she asked. "Because Polish apple pie sounds delicious."

"This one is made with almond milk and coconut butter." Kent pulled at his long shirtsleeve, instinctively hiding the band aid on his wrist. It had taken him several tries to amend his *busia's* recipe so that Talia would be able to eat it, and Kent was by no means a practiced baker.

Virginia's eyes followed the motion of his hand, and her eyes warmed as if she somehow was able to guess at Kent's bloody struggle with the food processor (why were those things so impossible to assemble, anyway?).

"Then we'll have it after supper," she announced. "Talia, go show Kent to his room. And Kent?"

Kent glanced at her, praying that his cheeks weren't as bright red as they felt. "Yes ma'am?"

"Welcome home," said Virginia.

[Welcome Home - Kenna and Talia Version](#)

[Mar 10, 2021](#)

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She realized this the moment she stepped off the jet and onto the tarmac, which burned so hot under the Atlanta summer sun that Kenna could swear she'd seen a sweat drop sizzle into smoke as it hit the ground.

Yes, Kenna Zarneki was definitely going to die from either heat exhaustion or seventh-degree sunburn. And it was all Talia's fault.

The murderer in question stood a few meters away, dark shades over her eyes and a chauffeur's cap perched on her shaved head. Talia held up a large sign with Kenna's name printed on it, waving it in the air enthusiastically.

"Ms. Zarneki!" she called out in a sing-song voice. "Your ride is this way, Ms. Zarneki!"

Kenna swatted at Talia's sign as soon as she was close enough. "Put that down," she ordered.

"As you wish, miss," Talia chirped. "Allow me to escort you to your *limousine*."

Kenna groaned. The downside of Talia picking her up at the airport? Her friend would be the one driving them both back to Talia's house, where Kenna had been invited (forcibly) to stay with Talia for the

summer.

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So, Kenna had agreed to visit Talia in Georgia. In the summer. When the humidity was so thick it could be scooped with a spoon. She’d never liked how hot it had got in Chicago during the summer, but this damp boiling was almost more than she could bear.

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Kenna arched a skeptical brow. Already, she could feel her skin prickling in anticipation of a million mosquito bites. The air was so *sticky* here; Chicago got hot, but at least a breeze could usually be relied on to make the heat tolerable.

“My mom’s been cooking up a storm, ever since she heard that you agreed to come down,” Talia said. “She’s happy to have another meat eater in the house.” She made a face, pulling a pair of car keys from her shorts.

“I’m fine eating vegan,” Kenna said.

A car nearby beeped. No, not a car—a pickup truck. Kenna tried not let her appalment show as Talia tossed her bag into the back of a dilapidated GMC Canyon with a rusted exhaust pipe and a bumper sticker featuring a nude woman whose rump was censored by a ripe Georgian peach.

“You are such a car snob,” Talia laughed at Kenna’s obvious distaste. “I borrowed the truck from my uncle.” She waited for Kenna to put her other bag in the cargo bed. “And you may be fine eating vegan, but my mom’s been longing for someone to “correctly” appreciate her new barbeque sauce recipe. She claims that my tofu doesn’t do it justice.”

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[Welcome Home - Kent and Ferro Version](#)

[Mar 10, 2021](#)

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If the sun didn’t kill him, Ferro’s driving would.

* * * *

By the time the truck shuddered to a halt in a driveway, Kent’s already pale hands were even paler from their hour-long death grip on his seat, and he’d internally resolved *never* to let Ferro drive his Mustang. Ferro jumped from the truck, humming, and Kent took a moment to steady his breathing and take in the house before them. It was ranch-style, with a natural stone façade and a garden that stretched around into the backyard.

The garden was a rainbow of vibrancy, a far cry from the deliberately-chosen pale pink and yellow flowers that adorned his own father’s yard and were maintained by a surly gardener. Whoever took care of this garden loved doing so, and had added a little colorful chaos to its design. The entire scene was so warm and inviting that it put Kent on edge as he followed Ferro into the house.

“Mama!” Ferro hollered up the stairs. “We’re back from the airport.”

A woman came down the stairs. She was curvy where Ferro was slender, and her russet brown skin was significantly lighter than Ferro’s. Nevertheless, the family resemblance between the two was obvious, there in her heavy-lidded glance that immediately made Kent feel uncomfortably exposed. Ferro looked at him in that same way—it was a look that saw too damn much.

“I brought szarlotka,” he said abruptly. “In my bag.” Anything to change the subject and make her stop looking at him like he was a shelter puppy in need of a home. Just what had Ferro told his mother about the reason for Kent’s visit?

Virginia Parker’s eyebrows arched so high that they almost disappeared beneath her bright red-and-gold headwrap. “Polish apple pie,” she said.

Kent was surprised that she knew of it. Then again, Ferro had told him that his mom had lived abroad in Prague for several years. Maybe she’d visited Poland?

Ferro groaned. "Is this something that I won't be able to eat again?" he asked. "Because Polish apple pie sounds delicious."

"This one is made with almond milk and coconut butter." Kent pulled at his long shirtsleeve, instinctively hiding the band aid on his wrist. It had taken him several tries to amend his *busia's* recipe so that Ferro would be able to eat it, and Kent was by no means a practiced baker.

Virginia's eyes followed the motion of his hand, and her eyes warmed as if she somehow was able to guess at Kent's bloody struggle with the food processor (why were those things so impossible to assemble, anyway?).

"Then we'll have it after supper," she announced. "Ferro, go show Kent to his room. And Kent?"

Kent glanced at her, praying that his cheeks weren't as bright red as they felt. "Yes ma'am?"

"Welcome home," said Virginia.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 6.5](#)

[Mar 12, 2021](#)

From the Journal of Lady Vitrola Rhys: The Second Death

I blame my second death on my own naivete. After the initial shock of my first execution and being cast back to my fourteenth birthday, I came to the conclusion that my new chance was a blessing. Legends spoke of fairies hidden in the Amberleen Hills, the abandoned children of lesser gods, who doled out equal doses of mischief and aide to mortals who caught their eye. Surely, some good spirit had undoubtedly been moved by the injustice of my demise and chosen to intercede.

I wrote down an account of my past life in my diary, and happily proceeded on with my new one. As my memories began to fade, I became increasingly convinced that the whole affair had been nothing but a dream. A dream of a terrible misunderstanding. One could even say my imagined conviction had been my fault. If I'd been less reserved around Loren, he would have trusted me enough to believe my innocence. If he had known how much I cared for him, he wouldn't have fallen for whatever lying hussy had obviously set me up. All I needed to do was make clear the depths of my devotion, and we would be married and live happily ever after.

I was an idiot back then.

Convinced that I could thwart my dire future (which had only been a dream, after all), I set about to completely change my personality. Gone was the girl of the past, who had awkwardly vacillated between

being too quiet and overly blunt. Instead of spending my evenings discussing trade and foreign relations with King Eldin over private dinners, I threw extravagant galas. My dedication to the decadence of these events was near militaristic: no detail was too small or insignificant for me to agonize over. I stayed a step ahead of everyone else in terms of fashion—oddly enough, I suddenly seemed to be blessed with an eye for what would soon be in trend. Not due to memories of a past life, oh no. But I conceded that perhaps my dream had been slightly prophetic. I pored over my record of it, memorized every detail about Loren and his friends that I'd written. As a result, the most popular nobles coveted my invitations. I had influence and more friends than names I could remember.

Letty ruled the social scene besides me. I'd been too insecure to attempt to take over Bellcrest alone, and had begged for her to accompany me back to the castle as soon as we met instead of waiting until her debut the following year. Who better than my best friend to help me navigate all the social pitfalls of Court? Letty mesmerized people with her natural charisma, so long as she could escape her mother's miasma of criticism. All I had to do was follow my stepsister's example and act the same way she did in order to come across as tolerably charming. I could also rely on her to take over as hostess when the press of courtiers became too overwhelming and I needed to escape to the library in order to avoid asphyxiating under their affections.

Loren attended each and every party that I threw. Granted, we didn't engage in soul-bearing conversations as I'd envisioned, but I could recite the pedigree of every steed in his stable. And I was almost certain he knew that my favorite color was purple. Our relationship, if not exactly what I'd once aspired, was at least better than the one I'd written about from a supposed past life.

Or so I thought up until guards forcibly escorted me into the throne room. This time, it was midafternoon instead of the dead of night. All four Councilors (Venuda, Timons, Hargraves, and Wrenly) were once again present, as dourly disapproving as they'd been in my suppressed recollection of what I now realized hadn't been a dream at all. It had been a nightmare, one from which I'd never awoken. I had died, and my history was repeating.

King Eldin himself didn't bother to attend. I hadn't been particularly close with my future father-in-law over the past three years, choosing instead to focus my time and efforts on winning over his son.

Loren looked as handsome as ever and was thankfully unharmed. But I barely glanced at him before focusing on the girl standing at his side. Letty's eyes were puffy, the skin above her upper lip chaffed. She clenched a crumpled linen handkerchief one hand; Loren held the other.

"I didn't know," she sobbed. "Oh, Tru, I swear I didn't!"

Wrenly grimaced. He stood on the dais, next to the King's vacant throne. "Your Highness, must the girl be present?"

Loren crossed his arms, using the action to cradle Letty's hand against his chest, so that her hand nestled over his heart. "This girl will be your future queen," he snapped. "She stays."

"Letty, what is this about?" I tried to laugh but there was a lemon stuck in my throat. There had to be a reasonable explanation for Loren's behavior. Letty knew I didn't enjoy pranks but perhaps Loren had persuaded her it would be funny to pretend that they were in love. Because she would never, never betray me. "Is this some sort of joke?"

Letty began to cry harder. Knowing her, she wouldn't be able to speak until the hiccups subsided. I looked at Loren, who had begun stroking her hair soothingly.

"What is this about?" I repeated.

Venuda waved a piece of parchment in my face. "How long have you been in league with the Anterdonians?"

"Were you intending to wait until His Highness ascended to the throne to commit regicide, or did you plan on disposing of King Eldin as well?" demanded Hargraves.

I snatched the paper from Venuda. A letter addressed to Theo, written in a hand eerily resembling my own, laid out a plot to have Anterdonian spies tamper with Loren's saddle before a hunt so that he met with a fatal accident. The letter proceeded to list all the things that its writer planned on purchasing after becoming the widowed Queen of Verdan, from a new carriage to a throne carved out of a single block of sunstone.

"You must be jesting." My voice shook with rage. "You're accusing me of writing this twaddle? Its author is an imbecile. For one, Loren is an experienced enough horseman to notice if his gear were sabotaged. For another, a stone throne would be terribly uncomfortable."

Timons' chuckle was silenced by a glare from Venuda. "How surprisingly pragmatic coming from the lady who ordered the palace fountains run with wine. Unfortunately, this 'twaddle' was found in your personal chambers, upon your desk, by Lady Letticia." He held up a stiffened square of parchment, its corners bright with inked color. An invite to one of my parties. I'd written the information, and Letty had drawn flowers around its edges.

"We have already confirmed that the penmanship is yours," he said.

"I see." I didn't see. Didn't want to. "Letty?"

"I didn't-hic-know," she half-wailed, half-hiccuffed. "But you-hic-said that Loren—"

"Letticia was concerned by opinions you shared with her regarding my supposed inability to govern," interrupted Loren smoothly. "When she found this letter, she feared that you'd deemed yourself better suited to the task. She came to me, as was her duty as a loyal citizen of Verdan."

I glared at their joined hands and didn't bother to soften the snarl in my voice. "Yes, I can see how deeply that loyalty runs."

Loren stiffened, and his knuckles whitened around Letty's hand.

"Such a precedent cannot go unpunished," said Timons, "lest other Northerners come to believe they too can defy the royal family."

A cold prickle of déjà vu ran down my neck at his words.

"His Highness recommended we grant you clemency, in light of your past relationship," said Wrenly. "Per his wishes, we shall be merciful."

He cleared his throat with a phlegmy gurgle before delivering the final nail on my (literal) future coffin. "Vitrula Marianne Rhys, you are hereby stripped of your former title and rank, and exiled from Verdan. You have five days to depart the realm, after which you will be condemned to fullest extent of the King's law for the crime of treason."

During my journey to Anterdon, where I planned to seek refuge with my uncle, I came to a harsh yet inescapable realization. Letty had forged the letter to steal Loren. My last life had ended due to her false testimony as well—no one else could have been the woman in Loren's bed. I didn't know who had worn my ring and attacked Loren, but they and Letty had worked together. If Letty had fooled me into believing she cared, how many other of my so-called "friends" had hidden their twisted intentions behind smiles and flattery? When I'd left the castle in disgrace, none of the people who'd once attended my parties had come to wish me farewell.

I had always been alone. I just hadn't realized it.

I was so preoccupied pitying myself that I didn't even notice the carriage had stopped until the door flew open. The driver's shout of protest was cut off by a muffled thud.

The man who had opened the carriage door leered at me. His hair fell in greasy clumps over mean eyes. My gut clenched in palpable fear.

"You're a pretty treasure," he cooed.

"Good evening, sir." Years of keeping my emotions concealed at Court paid off. "I hope you haven't harmed Horten. He's an excellent driver."

The man laughed and spoke to someone behind him. "You hear that? Our treasure's a funny one." His smile flattened, and he pointed a pistol at my chest. "Shame we can't keep you. But someone is willing to pay a king's ransom on your life."

"If it's money you're after," I said, "know that my uncle is quite wealthy and will be willing to pay handsomely for my safe return."

He had the audacity to look offended by my offer. "Now, see here. It's bad business to double deal. I have ethni—ethis—"

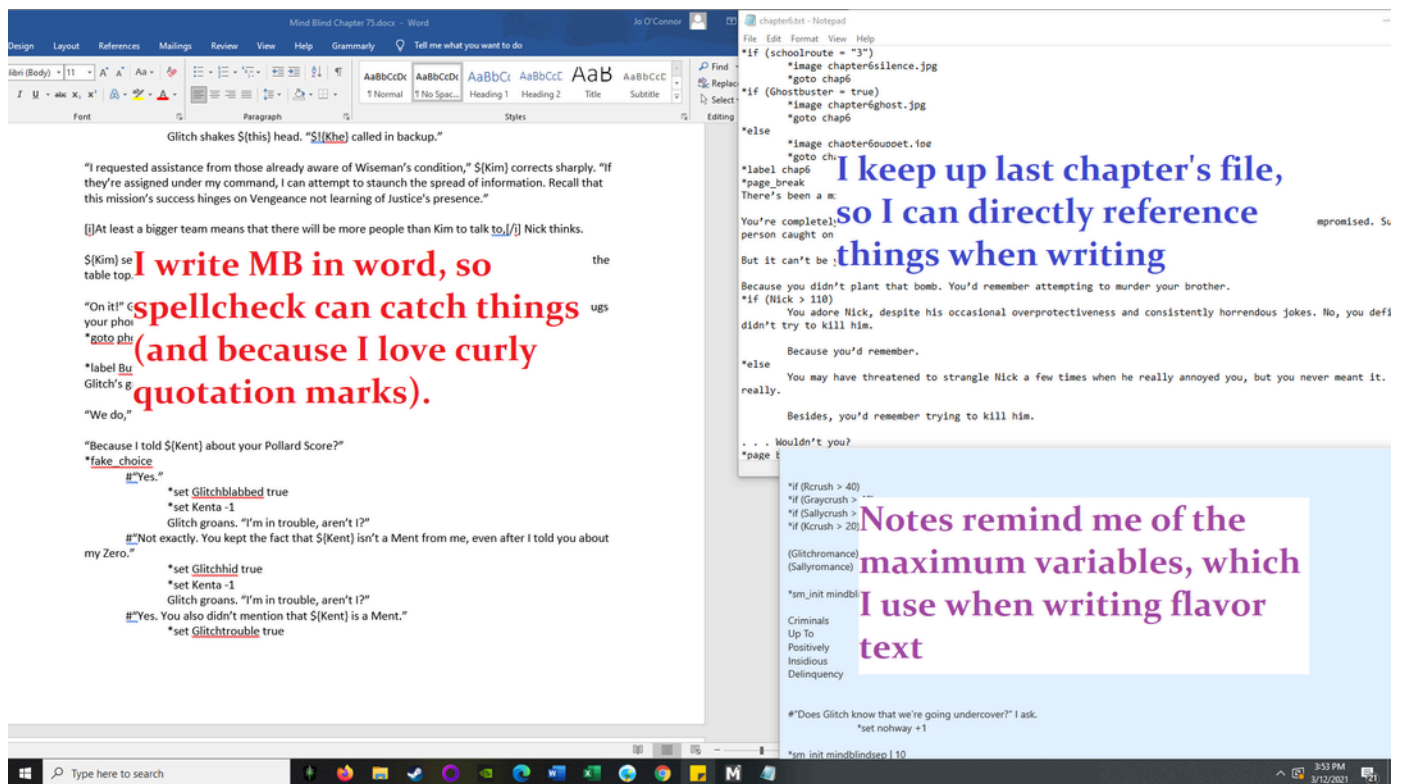
"Ethics?" I suggested.

He nodded eagerly. "I've ethics. Nothing personal, Treasure, but it's the job."

Of all the highwaymen potentially hired to assassinate me, I would be so unfortunate as to get the one who considered himself an honest business bandit. My mind raced to consider the various avenues available. I had no weapon, no money, and, under the pistol's unwavering barrel, no way of escaping the carriage.

I opened my mouth to beg for mercy.

He fired.



[Writer's Blog: My Love For You is Ultra-Wide](#)

[Mar 12, 2021](#)

The above picture is what my screen looks like when I'm working on *Mind Blind*. As you can see, it's crowded.

There's Microsoft Word, where I write and code the first draft. There's also a copy of the prior chapter up on screen, so I can easily reference the variables used in it and make sure that I'm not dropping any of the storyline continuities. Finally, there's my notes, which remind me of the variable numbers that I'll be using for flavor text and choice options (I used an old copy for this screenshot, so anyone enhancing

this image hoping for spoilers is out of luck, sorry!). And this isn't even showing the map of Chicago and the online poetry anthology used to write Glitch's dialogue that I keep open in my web browser. It's a lot to fit on a 17-inch laptop monitor, and my screen at home isn't that much bigger.

Thus, in order to preserve what dwindling eyesight I have left (-5.75, which means the world looks like a Monet painting without my contacts) . . . I'm buying a ultrawide monitor!

This is an indulgence that will make my writing life exponentially faster as well as squint-free, and which I can only afford because of this Patreon. So thank you! I'll share my new Chicago setup as soon as the monitor comes in. (I'd planned on finally getting a working microwave, since mine died in September, but will be holding off on any improvements to my condo until I learn whether or not my building's being converted.)

As far as *Mind Blind* progress goes:

Total Words: 222,000

Patreon Chapter 8 Update: March 26

Anticipated Total Wordcount: 250k

Eventual length depends upon how talkative Glitch and Sally feel like being. Their scenes (of which you'll be able to choose one) are being written last despite happening first in the chapter. The reason for this is that I'm still considering over how Button's cover story should be implemented, and how much control readers should have over it. You guys seemed to like the idea of Button having a say in last week's blog, and I think it would be more fun to let you choose as well, but it does make for more complicated narrative pathways down the line. Plus, there's the fact that I need to come up with different variations on the undercover identity for Button to select in the first place! This latter issue is more of a stumbling block for me than the former—there's limited reasons I can come up with for why Button would despise Unity and their family, given that Button can't reveal their mind blindness to Vengeance.

All this means that Sally and Glitch's scenes are being put on hold while I instead finish Gray's and Rosy's training montages. What I do know so far about Glitch's scene is that Button will be able to break up with them over the NPO Program/telling K about Button's Zero/Not telling Button about K/Just because . . . and Glitch can also break up with Button (but only if Button refuses to listen to Glitch's perspective).

For the training sessions: If you didn't activate Gray's romance in Chapter 7 (which has undergone a slight rewrite), Gray's scene in Chapter 8 will be your final chance to lock in his romance route . . . unless you're on the *didn't-have-a-crush-in-high-school-but-are-slowly-opening-up-to-possibilities* path, in which case you'll get another chance to think "*Maybe there could be something between us*" but the actual romance with Gray won't happen until near the end of the book.

This non-past-crush (crushless?) path is the ultimate slow burn with minimal romantic content with Gray, and it's more suggested if you first pursue someone else and then change your mind—like Glitch. In that

case, Gray will be your backup boy. (Sorry, Gray!) Having a positive relationship with Nick remains a requirement for Gray's romance in both cases.

As far as wooing Rosebud goes, you'll need to select their training scene instead of Gray's in order to be eligible to romance them. This doesn't lock in Rosy's romance route, but it will open up future dialogue options in later scenes that are essential in convincing Kim to fall in love with you (more than any RO, Rosy takes some persuading).

There won't be a huge amount of K in Chapter 8, since K trains and works with whomever you don't pick. K will be your only ally once you're inside Vengeance (or will they?), so they'll get plenty of quality Button time later. For now, I wanted to let the other ROs have one-on-one intimate scenes (well, as intimate as it can get with Nick in your head) before launching Button into danger and officially introducing the members of Vengeance. The in-game justification for this interlude of fluff? Button needs at least *some* training before being sent to their doom, and it will also take a day or two for Vengeance to take the bait and contact you and K.

. . . And if I keep on writing, I'm going to spoil the entire plot for Chapter 8.

Have a great weekend, everyone!

[Flash Fiction: Death Comes Knocking](#)

[Mar 15, 2021](#)

I always assumed Death wore hooded robes, rode a dark horse, and had a face made of shadows. The whole nine yards.

He doesn't. Death looks kinda like Jim from Accounting, except with more hair. Yet somehow, I know instantly who--or rather, what--he is.

It's the feeling you get when you go to the zoo and see a tiger yawn. That instinctive respect for their teeth, and the recognition that, yeah, this thing can eat me.

Death adjusts his glasses. "Are you going to keep me standing on the porch like a Mormon missionary, or are you going to invite me inside?"

I open my front door wider to let him into the kitchen. "Are the Mormons right?" I can't think of what else to ask. "Am I going to get my own planet or some shit?"

"Not what I'm here about," says Death. "Ezra Silus Hurst, it's time for you to die."

"I figured," I say.

Death sits down at my kitchen table and checks one of the boxes on his notepad with a #2 pencil. The whole page is just endless rows of boxes, no words. The pencil isn't even black.

"The problem, Ezra Silus Hurst, is that subsection 96b was left blank." He glares at me over the rim of his spectacles as if I were the one who screwed up. "I blame The Fates."

"The fates?"

"Capital F," Death corrects, "but yes. That's why I'm here."

"Because The Fates."

He nods approvingly. "Glad to see you catch on quick. So, which demise would you prefer?"

[Delivery Poll: Customization](#)

[Mar 15, 2021](#)

Because I have chronic restartitis when playing interactive fiction, I try to get through character creation as quickly as possible. As seen in *Mind Blind*, I prefer to have details given in limited clicks (Button's explicit physical customization is limited to eye and hair color, height, and she/he/they pronoun selection). However, *Delivery* will have less restrictions, since Golightly is less of a preset character than Button (they're a postal worker who was raised by Satanic nuns, but not limited by family and past relationships in the way that Button is).

My question: What's important to you when customizing an MC in IF? Note, this refers to actual choices that you want pick--I usually imagine most of these in head canon anyway when I'm a reader (as I assume many of you do as well), but want to know what selections you'd like to see in-game to increase your connection to your MC.

If there's other things that you'd like to customize, please let me know in the comments or the Delivery Development Channel in The Sanctum!

Body shape. Let me specify whether my MC is skinny/curvy/etc.

Ethnicity/Skin Color. I want people to recognize if my MC is of Asian descent (for example).

Fashion sense. I want to be able to pick what kind of clothes my MC wears.

Hobbies. I want to choose what my MC does in their spare time.

Living situation. Let me decide how my MC's apartment is decorated.

Armaments. Let me choose the sharp implement that my MC uses for that scene where they behead
REDACTED. (Don't worry, he gets better.)

75 votes total

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 7](#)

[Mar 17, 2021](#)

I remained in Kothe a few weeks longer in order to celebrate my fifteenth birthday with my family. The day passed without much incident, which was more to my preference than the party Loren had desired. Theo gifted me a few books he'd brought from Anterdon. He hadn't read any of them, of course, but claimed that all had been endorsed by a "booky" friend. Uncle Alistair gave a painted miniature of my mother from when she was my age, and Catherine generously signed over ownership to one of the trading vessels in her fleet (supposedly this gift was from my father as well). Letty shyly presented a framed piece of embroidery with Rhys and Tivall crests intertwined. I managed to accept it with a smile before immediately locking it away in my desk drawer so as to avoid the nauseous rage that arose whenever it caught my eye.

Uncle Alistair seemed intent on making up for lost time during his stay; he followed me (and, by proxy, Letty) around as I visited Rhys tenets. I couldn't help them much, once I returned to Bellcrest, but I did my best to put their minds at ease over their new Duchess and recorded of their various issues and a list of recommendations to present to Catherine. A loan for Goodwoman Blythe, since Arabeth had died and she needed a new cow to reopen her cheesemaking business. Goodman Willis needed a new farmhand, and Edgar Vint needed work—the two should meet.

In between houses, Alistair regaled me with stories about my mother from when she'd been young. I took the opportunity to learn all I could about the cause behind his unexpected arrival.

"My sister was always the smart one," he admitted one night. The rest of the household had long since gone to bed, but I had discovered him in the kitchens when I went down to fix a cup of my nightly chamomile tea to help me sleep. Given the astringent fumes coming from my uncle's cup, he'd poured himself something stronger. "We grew up in Bellcrest, you know. From too minor a family for anyone to care overmuch what we went or what we did, so we of course went everywhere and did everything." He grinned behind his beard. "Got up to all sorts of trouble."

"I can't imagine her as a rebel," I said. "She always seemed the perfect lady." Aloof, frigid. Indifferent to my existence. I'd tried to hug her, the last night before she left. She had pushed me away and chided that sticky fingers would ruin her dress.

Alistair caught my implication. "Mari was the most accomplished woman I knew but she never could deal with children. Even her own."

"I'm grieved to have been such an imposition." As always, I resorted to sarcasm to hide how deeply his words cut. Not only was I an inconvenience to Loren and Letty, my own mother hadn't wanted me underfoot either.

He set his teacup down on the kitchen table and took my hand. "She was proud of you, even if she didn't quite know how to show it. Described you as her little turtle; said that you were quiet but possessed a hard shell. That you were a survivor."

A survivor. I wasn't sure whether the description was accurate or inaccurate given my series of deaths. My eyes stung, and I decided to change the subject.

"Did you ever meet His Majesty when you lived at Bellcrest?"

"Eldin? We were friends, or as close to friends as anyone can be with their future king," he said. "Mari and I were both half in love with him, I think, as was most the Court. If the Prince resembles his father, you're quite a lucky girl."

He hadn't asked a question, and there was no indication in Uncle Alistair's pleasant expression that his words held deeper meaning. Yet I couldn't escape the feeling that I was somehow under interrogation, that he was trying to dig deeper into my feelings about the betrothal. As if my opinion were more important than the political alliance. I hid my frown behind my teacup; the tea was hot and bitter, but we'd run out of honey.

"Most ladies would consider themselves lucky to wed a prince," I said.

"But good looks don't hurt," he teased.

I shrugged. "I know my duty. But tell me, why come back to Verdan? I can't imagine you're not needed back at the embassy in Anterdon."

Alistair accepted the shift in topic with ease, as if sensing that my engagement was an uncomfortable subject. "A favor to a friend," he said. "She asked me to escort her son across the border into Verdan. Fengali raiding parties having been testing Anterdon's patience with increasing regularity, and she worried the boy might be caught in the cross fire."

"That's quite the favor for you to leave your post."

"She's quite the friend," he said. "Besides, I'll be returning in a few days once you head back to Bellcrest. No point in remaining here without my favorite niece!"

I appreciated the sentiment, but nevertheless had to consciously keep my brow from furrowing. His answer failed to explain why he at Rhys Manor *now*, when my diary had no records of him being present in any of my other seven lives. Even if I'd considered the detail too trivial to record and memorize (unlikely), I should still have some vague recollection of him had we ever met. But Alistair remained an unknown, even as my fondness for him had grown over the weeks past. It was impossible to dislike someone so similar in temperament to Theo.

"What is your friend's name?" I asked. "Perhaps I could pass on your regards."

His moustache twitch with a grin. "No need. Her son already bears a letter of complaint about how much she inconvenienced me." His gaze held an unfamiliar flintiness despite his smile. He knew that I had been prying and wanted that I should let the matter drop.

Since the warning was nonverbal, I decided to press my luck. "Was she friends with Mother as well? I would like to speak to others who knew her back then."

His eyes softened and I added, "It's hard to recall her sometimes, given how young I was when she died."

Or, more accurately, when she'd been murdered in an attempt to sabotage Anterdon's relationship with Verdan. Not that the attempt had worked, given that my uncle had promptly taken over her position as ambassador. But that was another matter, and one my uncle most likely believed I was still in the dark about. As curious as I was regarding my mother's death, my goal right now was to understand what I'd done that had resulted in his and Theo's unexpected presence. Perhaps it seemed narcissistic. But it stood to reason that if something differed in one of my timelines, it most likely *did* revolve around me.

Alistair wasn't moved by my confession. He stood and patted my head. "I'll tell you more stories about Marianne in the morning," he said. "For now, we should both get some sleep."

My uncle continued to dodge my questions over the next few days, meeting my queries with jokes and distracting me with more tales of his misadventures at Bellcrest, many of which had necessitated him being extricated by King Eldin himself. The two had been closer than I'd realized, and I resolved to ply the King himself for more information once I returned to Bellcrest. When it was finally time to leave Kothe, however, I surprised myself by tearing up as I bid my uncle farewell.

We would most likely not meet again if I died.

My uncharacteristic weepiness disoriented Theo, but he valiantly attempted to cheer me up.

"I'm returning with you to Bellcrest," he announced. "Uncle Al thought it'd be best if I spent some time in Court since I'm already in Verdan. The Anterdonians are so much more relaxed in their customs that I'd half-forgotten which fork to use during dinner."

"A scandal in the making," I said. "No wonder our uncle is alarmed."

Theo grinned. "He probably doesn't want me going full native the way he has."

I thought back to the way Uncle Alistair had lifted Catherine off the ground during their first meeting. He was more self-aware than I gave him credit. Despite their rough first impression, he and my brother had both managed to win over the new duchess during their visit: Uncle Alistair because he was impossible to dislike, and my brother because he'd wisely stopped flirting with Letty after I'd drawn his attention to our stepmother's suspicious glares. After that, Theo went out of his way to cater to Catherine's every whim—rightfully suspecting, I surmised, that the more she liked him, the longer she'd be willing to let him avoid taking on his responsibilities as heir (namely, getting married himself).

I was hesitantly gladdened that Theo would be coming with me. Yes, he would be safer in another country should I end up prematurely convicted of treason before my seventeenth birthday. But on the other hand, he would only be staying for a few months and I selfishly looked forward to his company.

I was less enthusiastic in regards to Catherine's decision that Letty join us as well, even though she had yet to make her official debut at Court. Catherine deemed that Theo's presence meant this trip would be the safest time Letty to travel, declaring that the presence of such strapping young man would give any potential bandit pause. I wanted to protest that the only time I'd ever met bandits, they'd been hired by her daughter.

Since I couldn't outwardly display my displeasure at Letty's inclusion without giving raise to questions that I was unable to answer, I settled for using my new spell to slow the hands of every clock in the manor until they all ran between two to five minutes behind. Perhaps not my most mature accomplishment, but the discrepancies between the timepieces and his pocket watch would annoy Father to no end.

And so, Theo, Letty, and I returned to Bellcrest together. Theo attempted to keep the mood light with jokes and songs, but tenseness nevertheless lingered in the air between Letty and me. In the end, I opted to ride on a mount, a timid if sweet-hearted gelding that I bought at one of the inns. Better to enjoy horseback and the wind in my hair than to suffer through my brother's inane chatter and Letty's deceitful giggles.

It was only when we reached the city that I returned to the carriage, Bellcrest's roads being too narrow for me to ride abreast the carriage. I squinted in the strong afternoon sun as we stepped outside, but Letty's eyes widened as she gazed at the castle.

"It's beautiful," she whispered in a reverent tone. She tugged at my sleeve. "Isn't it beautiful, Tru?"

The palace predated the rest of Bellcrest City, which had been rebuilt after the old capital had been devastated by magefire during the Uprising, and had somehow survived unscathed despite sitting at the heart of the capital. The white sunstone building reflected light and glowed slightly pink during dusk and dawn. No one was sure where the stones had originated: some scholars theorized they came from magic-infused quarries that were now depleted, while Delphine believed that its unique sheen was the mark of long-faded magical wards. Her conjecture always seemed more reasonable to me since, from a structural standpoint, the castle itself was defensively useless.

No high walls would protect against an invading army. Instead, six round towers encircled the main keep, connected by bridges that arched too high above the Courtyard to serve as any sort of blockade. Enormous brass bells, polished to gold, hung at the top of all the towers except the observatory. Rumor had it that the bells rang by themselves should Bellcrest ever be threatened, though no one alive had ever heard them toll.

“It’s nice enough.” I extricated my arm from Letty’s grasp. “Rhys family quarters are in the northeast tower. Emilia will make sure your luggage is delivered to your rooms. Follow me.”

My lady’s maid glowered at my offer of her services. Being responsible for baggage was a task she most likely considered beneath her. Emilia could be supercilious and self-important, and she possessed entirely too many opinions regarding how I should wear my hair, but she was loyal to a fault and as close to a friend as I had in my last life, although she herself wasn’t aware of our prior jailcell connection.

I made a mental note to give Emilia first pick from the pile of birthday presents that no doubt awaited in my rooms—disguised bribery from the usual Court sycophants angling for a mention to Loren.

Letty’s head whipped back and forth as we crossed the Courtyard. She kept pausing to stare upwards at the elongated stained-glass windows of the main keep, each immortalizing a king or queen who had once resided within. Her neck would be sore come morning. The windows *were* beautiful, though, especially from inside the castle, when sun shining through the colored glass transformed the throne room into a kaleidoscope of dancing colors. But if I were an enemy general, those windows would be my point of entry. Magically ringing bells or no, glass cannot stop a sword.

Patrolling guards were trained to avoid Letty’s zigzagging, but several passing nobles snickered at her slack-jawed wonder. My glare sent them scurrying off with ducked heads.

Once, I’d considered Letty enrapturement with Bellcrest to be charming. It came across less so after I’d discovered what drastic measures she would take in order to never leave.

“Will you be living with us?” Letty asked when we reached the northeast tower.

Theo answered for me. “As the Prince’s fiancée, Tru lives in the castle proper. She’s far too high and mighty to reside with the rest of us mangy northerners.” He heaved a theatric sigh and wiped away a false tear.

I elbowed his side. “*You* marry Loren then.”

Theo's face contorted in exaggerated repulsion, but Letty sighed dreamily. “It sounds wonderful,” she said. “To think, Tru! Someday, you'll be queen of such a beautiful castle. You'll be so majestic.”

“I'll be queen of the entire country,” I said, unable to keep the bite from my voice. “With a responsibility to provide for my people. Ruling means more than being the owner of a pretty home.”

Letty's pert nose wrinkled. “Yes, of course.”

“My sister takes duty very seriously,” said Theo. “Very, very, *very* seriously.”

I frowned at him. “I promised to attend to Lady Delphine as soon as I returned,” I fibbed. Anything to get away. “I'll see you both for dinner this evening.”

“Very!” Theo's voice chased me as I fled.

I ignored him. Fleeing hadn't been my most dignified option. But in Letty's presence, I was unable to keep my mind from looping through the same ominous thoughts. When would she stop simply admiring the castle and begin to covet it? In a year? Right away? Would Armond approach her? Would she approach him? Were they working together as I suspected, or were my conclusions off base? Even now, before Letty and Loren had even met, was she already planning to take my place?

A visit to Delphine would provide a necessary distraction. I could tell her about the slowing spell. Hopefully, her annoyance that I'd taken a tome without her permission would be short lived in light of my success. I hastened to a walking-jog just barely within the bounds of decorum.

I rapped once on the door to Delphine's study but didn't bother waiting for a reply before opening it. My eagerness dwindled into awkwardness when confronted with the tableau inside: Delphine embracing a man. I could only see the back of his head, but he was taller and had a different hair color than her usual guest.

King Eldin was not going to be pleased.

[MB Saucy Side: The Shattering \(of British Composure\)](#)

[Mar 19, 2021](#)

“What the *fuck* were you thinking?!”

Gray’s enraged bellow draws the attention of a janitor the hallway beyond your office. He marches to the door and slams it shut with echoing force before stomping back to you. The closed door means that the only source of light is the lamp on your desk, but it’s enough to clearly discern Gray’s thunderous glare.

You’ve never seen Gray this upset. In fact, you struggle to recall if you’ve ever witnessed him mad. Annoyed, yes. Distraught, on multiple occasions. Irked, peeved, chagrined, bothered . . . you’ve memorized the way each expression darkens Gray’s face. Memorizing Gray is all you can do, since he refuses to view you as more than his best friend’s kid sibling.

You thought you knew all there was to know about Grayson Black. But “Ferociously Irrate” Gray is new.

“A child’s life was in danger,” you retort, refusing to be cowed by his looming displeasure. You squarely meet his eyes, their sky blue darkened to the point of complete combustion. “I had no choice but to go in.”

“You could’ve called me!” Gray explodes. “Or Nick, or Sally. Even Zarneki. *Anyone* on the team would be better suited to face a Level 10 telepath.”

“Everyone else was busy!” Your fingers curl into fists. Why doesn’t Gray understand*?* Haven’t you proved yourself by now? Of course you assessed the risk of entering the building—the Ment you’d been sent to take into custody had a twenty-foot brainrange and a history of controlling Lo-Pos. And you would’ve stayed safe in the van, had not a kid wandered into UCRT’s active apprehension.

Gray sighs and turns away from you. He rests his forehead against the windowpane, contemplating the abandoned streets below—it’s 4 am, well past the time most reasonable people have gone to bed (and around the time other unreasonable people are just waking up).

After a moment’s silence, you go to stand beside him, ever careful to keep a foot of distance between you.

Your twentieth-sixth-story office view is respectable, although it doesn’t compare to the panoramic elevation of the main UCRT offices. It took you two years to work your way up to the highest MIV floor. Despite Gray’s disturbing lack of faith, you’re not about to squander that hard-earned window by behaving recklessly in the field.

“Alerting anyone on the team risked drawing Walker’s attention,” you explain. “I saw the kid enter, and your last report placed Walker at the opposite end of the building. I was well out of his brainrange.” Your fists clench tighter as you resist the urge to gently touch Gray’s arm. Given the futility of your feelings, one would think that you’d get over this all-too-familiar ache. Yet you can’t help but yearn to comfort the man you love . . . even if Gray’s constant withdrawal from your proximity has made it clear that he desires no such closeness.

"None of the intel suggested that Walker had an accomplice," you finish.

"But he did. When I saw you being controlled—" Gray's voice cracks. Reflected in the window's glass, misery and fear hardens his profile into that of a stranger. A stranger infinitely more vulnerable than the "Fortitude" mask you're accustomed to seeing at work.

Gray isn't angry. He's terrified.

This realization makes your pulse quicken to a frantic thrum. You always knew that Gray cared for you, even considered you family. But that grimace on his face now is the bleak wretchedness of a man who almost lost the person he loves. You know the look, because it's the same one you saw reflected in your mirror when Gray went dark for three weeks during a mission and Unity had declared him "Missing in Action."

Hope flutters. Weak and almost forgotten, but there. Hope, and something new:

Courage.

Gray's stubble prickles your palm. His breath exhales in shock against the back of your hand, before he stops breathing altogether.

I'm safe, you think. You saved me.

He leans into your touch. You two stare at each other's reflections, meeting eyes via glass in a way neither of you know how to do in person. Then his large hand covers yours, pressing it closer against his cheek.

"You made the right call," he says. "I know that. A kid is alive thanks to you. But when Walker threatened to use you against me . . . I would've let him. I would've done anything, sacrificed anyone, to make sure you came back to me."

All of a sudden, his hands are on your shoulders, turning you around so that the two of you are face-to-face. "I didn't know that I had that side," he say, anguish roughening his admission, "and it scared the hell out of me."

Fear is familiar to you. It's a second shadow, accompanying you each and every time you step foot outside your house: the dread that maybe today will be the day that a Ment uses you again against Nick, or that a telepathic child will accidentally cause your brain to shut down by trying to make you perform the Chicken Dance as a prank. You're accustomed to fear. And when you're used to something, it eventually stops being as scary.

Your greatest nightmare in this moment isn't being irreversibly taken over by a Ment. It's the possibility of not telling Grayson how you feel.

"Maybe we can be brave together," you say aloud, despite knowing that Grayson can hear your every thought. You take a deep breath, preparing to confess the next part as well.

Gray beats you to it.

"I love you," he admits. "More than I believed possible. Which sounds like a cliché, but it's true. It's so true that it hurts, and I didn't ever want to say it because you deserve someone so much better. Someone who's not a Ment, who—"

Your lips cut off his words.

Your first kiss with Grayson Black lacks the practiced finesse of a polite after-date peck. It's inelegant and abrupt, almost juvenile in its desperation. Teeth knock, tongues tangle, and his hands on your shoulders squeeze too tight. He pulls you close then closer still, until you can no longer discern between the tempo of your heartbeat and his.

None of this clumsiness matters. All you know is that Grayson Black is kissing you back, and thus it's perfect. Gray swallows your sighs and releases them back as throaty growls of his own. His hands pull you closer still, as if in an attempt to intermesh your very souls, and your shared moans crescendo until eventually neither of you possess enough oxygen to even whisper "more." Your lips break apart, but Gray doesn't release his hold around your waist.

Forgetting to breathe is an amateurish mistake to make when kissing. But kissing Gray, after years spent *longing* to kiss him, leaves you near delirious. You can barely recall your own name, let alone how lungs are supposed to function.

Gray answers your unspoken thought: "Your name is 'Beloved.'" Then his cheeks redden enough to be visible even in the office's dim light. "That was cheesy, wasn't it? I'm not trying to act like I'm from a Hallmark movie, I swear. And maybe it wasn't okay for me to read your thoughts. I almost lost you today, but that doesn't make it okay for me to—"

Your lips once again seal off his apologies. The upside of being mind blind is that you don't need to waste breath telling Grayson how you feel.

He knows.



[Writer's Blog: Back in Chicahhgo!](#)

[Mar 19, 2021](#)

I've been quiet on social media this week, in large part because I was relocating back to Chicago from Seattle. (My three-week stay turned into four months because I couldn't bear to say goodbye to my mom's dog. Although if my mom asks, I remained because I so enjoyed being with family.)

I've also been busy laying out a huge roadmap for *Mind Blind*'s future chapters . . . which I would share except it would spoil the entire plot. But it's (mostly) down on paper as a 27-page(!!!!) document.

I want to keep *Mind Blind* as a single book, but it's possible that it may take two in order for the plot to get resolved. Barring any last-minute changes, however, I do feel like I'm on track to finish by the end of 2021! The problem, of course, lies with the fact that I often incorporate what I call "eureka!" moments if I feel it makes the plot more cohesive (like Nick being in Button's head).

This week, I've been working on Sally's scenes and . . . I honestly adore her and Nick? So much?

Don't get me wrong: the romance between Sally and Button is adorable. I love the dynamic of friends-to-lovers; so much doesn't even need to be vocalized between them, because Sally and Button simply *get* each other on this soul-deep level that I think is super rare in real life. The amount of pure tender care in Sally's route, from both parties, makes my heart ache. Initiating Sally's romance was a little awkward to write, and I may go back and edit its start, but Sally and Button actively in the relationship feels super natural. I'm really happy with their scene together!

Nick and Sally were my OG protagonists, however, so I remain soft for them. (Fun fact: I based Button's relationship with Gray in large part of the dynamic shared between Sally and Nick in my original novel drafting—only Gray's route is sweeter and can have more pining/angsty given Gray's more serious personality).

If Button chooses to go with Sally in Chapter 8 and isn't romancing her herself, then she and Nick get some banter together and . . . well, since Sally and Nick are no longer the main characters, I'd forgotten how much I genuinely enjoy them being snarky and repressed about their feelings. It's not the perfect relationship; there's a combative streak in their dynamic, which makes it very different than the Sally/Button pairing which is more of the "other half" variety. But the amount of earnest trust that those two have in each other, even if Button doesn't encourage their romance, is really nice to write (especially when they're sniping at each other).

Basically, I love their dynamic. It's real and messy, and as sour as it is sweet. I try not to talk about it too much, since not everyone wants to matchmake them, but I wanted to gush at least a little.

Long story short: Sally is an excellent romance option, both for Button and Nick.

I'll probably continue to be a little quieter on tumblr/the COG forum/etc. this week, because I still have Glitch's scene to finish and all the in-between bits to write (which are always the hardest for me). Everyone's ideas in the Sanctum did help, which means there's a lot of variation to the scenes. There's even a K-romance exclusive path, although K doesn't get their own designated scene this time around! It's a lot to write and code, but I think Chapter 8 does a good job of giving you a bit of a breather before launching you into the hurricane that is Chapter 9.

Current Demo Length: 235k

Next Patreon Update: March 26

[Mind Blind Bloopers Reel](#)

[Mar 20, 2021](#)

Glitch's tendency to rap against the thin wall separating your offices to chat whenever boredom strikes (which amounts to roughly every six seconds for Glitch) means that you're forced to wear noise-cancelling earbuds to accomplish any actual work.

"I am not using that as a callsign!" you protest. "It's offensive."

"I think it's charming," Sally interjects.

You scowl at her. So much for solidarity from your fellow shorty.

"'Fun-size' is not an option," you state firmly.

. . . You scowl at her. Sally only thinks so because she doesn't dwarf over most people.

"'Jolly Green' is not an option," you state firmly.

. . . You scowl at her. Sally only thinks so she has hair.

"'Mr. Clean' is not an option," you state firmly.

. . . You scowl at her. Sally only thinks so she's an only child.

"'Thing Two' is not an option," you state firmly.

I thought you liked those sweaters I got us for Christmas!

You know without turning around that it's Gray.

Perhaps you and he are simply that attuned to each other's presence—him because he can read your mind, and you because . . . well, how could you not know when your heart enters the room?

Rosy slams their fist on the table.

"You like doing that, don't you?" you note. "The whole fisting thing."

Glitch snickers, and even K can't suppress a startled cough.

"I meant slamming your fist on the table," you hastily correct. "Not . . . you know." You illustrate your point with an awkward gesture.

Stop while you're behind, Button. There's no catching up on this one.

[March Q&A](#)

[Mar 25, 2021](#)

Sorry for not setting the times sooner! I've been remote proctoring tests this month (i.e. storyboarding *Mind Blind* out of Webcam view while my kids take their exams). My schedule has been all over the place, and I was only just able to confirm that I can take all of Saturday off.

Because I want to accommodate everyone's time zones, there will be two Q&A slots this weekend!

The first slot is: **March 27, 10-11am PST**

The second: **March 27, 6-7pm PST**

If you cannot make either of these times, please let me know! I'm willing to hold a 3rd Q&A on Sunday at 1-2pm if need be :)

[Short Story: Nose Job](#)

[Mar 25, 2021](#)

Note: *And now for something completely different!*

I wrote this last year, as part of a short series experimenting with characters of various ages, inspired from my realization that a lot of authors I read seem unable to pull off writing young children. I'm around kids all the time for my job, but figured that I might have a similar blind spot. Thus, I started practicing writing snippets about characters who were both older and younger than me. This one was my favorite.

* * *

I hadn't won the genetic lottery. Not that I could've afforded a ticket. Growing up, even my bras had been hand-me-downs from my older, cup-size-bigger, sister. Still, Daddy had been a mechanic and had stuck around just long enough to teach me the value of elbow grease and replacement parts. I hadn't been born beautiful. I'd worked damn hard to get there.

Jason never liked it when I got a new procedure. Not that my husband had ever liked much of anything that I did outside of our bedroom, and those activities had stopped years ago. But I argued that if he could afford to buy a vintage Lotus then I could afford a nose job. That damn car was insured for more than I was anyways, since I hadn't thought to demand a prenup back when we first got hitched—me the trashed trailer to his shiny new sedan. I always figured that, if one of us ever did make it big, it would be the MIT graduate. Not the girl from Mukilteo who'd dropped out of eleventh grade.

But it had been my idea to start DiviniTea. My recipe, my marketing, my dedication. My company.

My money.

Money that would go half to Jason in the case of a divorce. Which is why I was here: in our state-of-the-art kitchen instead of my boardroom, trying to ignore hellfire smoke spewing from our La Cornue oven where my roast was beyond redemption, and begging my husband of twenty-six years not to leave me for his twenty-two-year-old secretary.

Secretary. I would've snorted had Dr. Ellis not advised against it. Jason hadn't held a real job since DiviniTea went public, except to decide which of his college buddy's startups we should invest in. Not that I blamed Kelly for the affair. Idiot girl had won all the lotteries except that for brains, and Jason had taken full advantage of her naivete. She was the same age as our daughter, for frick's sake. A child.

"I love you," I lied. The gauze covering my new nose muffled my voice, and I had to overenunciate each word like a politician at a rally. "I love you so much."

A suppressed sneeze caused a dart of pain to jab my nasal cavities, and I didn't bother holding back the resultant tears. Maybe showing vulnerability would remind Jason of the early days, when I'd been filled with flaws and insecurities.

But he refused to meet my eyes. "I'm sorry," he said. A liar just like I was. "But I can't do this anymore. You don't understand . . ." He pinched the bridge of his nose, which was too long for the squatness of his face. He'd only laughed when I'd suggested getting it fixed, though. Laughed, and then ignored me for an entire weekend. "It's hard, being married to you."

"Because I've been successful?" I bit out. "Because I've worked my ass off to get ahead and refuse to play the part of Mrs. Beaver, fetching your slippers every evening and hiding myself in floral sackcloths that you think are age appropriate?"

"This has nothing to do with your clothes. Even if . . ." he trailed off and shook his head. "It's not about your clothes. Or the business. It's about who you've turned into. You're not the woman whom I married."

No, thank God, I wasn't.

[Demo Update: Chapter Eight \(Volume 1\)](#)

[Mar 26, 2021](#)

So, you may be aware that I lost my startup file this week due to accidentally overwriting the .txt file. This wouldn't usually be a huge deal, and I was able to reassemble most of it from Dashingdon's archive. But Chapter 8 has the most remembered variables of any chapter yet (around 60!), so I need a bit more time to recode the second half.

That being said, here's the promised update! (And I should be able to get the second half out done sometime this weekend.) It adds almost 3,000 words per playthrough, although variance happens based on which vision Sally held. (Please note that save files will mess with which vision Sally is recorded to have seen, and usually defaults to recognizing K's.)

Since this is only the first half of the chapter, it cuts off before the romance scenes (But never fear! I promise that shirtless Gray is incoming!).

Speaking of Gray, I also reworked his romance activation in Chapter 7 to allow for more variance in responses :)

Without further ado: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-cactus/mygame/>

Currently Included Wordcount: 224k (expect another 14k once I redo the startup file)

Average Playthrough: 55k words

This chapter was *hard*. The version that I updated today is, I kid you not, the fourth iteration of me trying to figure out how to have Button establish their cover story. Problems I ran into included:

1. Knowing nothing about internet hacking (thus hours spent researching for Glitch's dialogue, only to realize that I still have no clue if anything they say makes sense).
2. Striking the right balance between player memory and stat reliance. You'll see more of the stat reliance portion of the cover established in the second half of Chapter 8, but I also wanted portions where Button will be tested on how well they stick to the story of their meet-cute with K. (Are the two now fake dating? If so, you better act like it!)
3. Incorporating Sally's scenes. Sally wasn't originally intended to be part of Operation Hemera, but I wanted to pull her in for Sally-mancer fluff . . . and because my original role for her (staying guard over a *conscious* Nick in the hospital) got scrapped the moment that Nick entered Button's brain. I feel like the rational for her inclusion makes sense (precog = useful), but it's been tricky to rework

scenes so that she gets equal exposure to the other ROs, and I'm not 100% confident that the "don't worry about it, Glitch set things up" excuse really works as well as it should. Her scenes might be something to finesse later on.

4. Juggling dialogue with an entire team. I plan on going back and replaying a few COGs that I think got this dynamic right (like Wayhaven and The Superlatives) in order to examine how they navigate conversations with multiple characters. Because right now, I'm resorting to kicking out Rosy and Gray from the room so the kids can chat. Nick is an added complication (although a fun one!) because no one can hear his contributions to the conversation except Button. Players are often forced to conduct two different conversations at the same time, and I need to make sure that it's executed properly so as not to be confusing.
5. So. Much. Variation. Seriously, why do I do this too myself? (I know why. It's because I love replaying games and wanted to make sure that *Mind Blind* was super replayable!) But I've learned that interactive fiction very easily snowballs, and right now I'm in danger of being buried under an avalanche of options.
6. Resisting the urge to make Button's dialogue more generic. Which is odd, since I've always had a pretty strong sense of Button's personalities! But I often find myself tempted to write "vague" answers, thus cheating by removing the necessity of providing more than three options. I've always hated when games do that, but I'm now understanding why it happens. It can be really difficult to come up with specific conversation routes for every available Button combination! Choices will probably be one the main things that I go back and refine during the beta testing stage (right now, I'm still in the "get it done, don't slow down, because slowing down means creative deaaaaaath", which is usually true for me).

. . . I hope this post doesn't come across as complaining! I adore writing *Mind Blind*, but I want to be open about the aspects with which I struggle so that you guys can be attuned to pick up on any issues! Your feedback on what can be improved is absolutely essential to transform *Mind Blind* from it's current alpha build into the polished game that I aspire to. I'm not arrogant enough to believe I have all the answers, and my door (well, inbox) is always open to suggestions on how I can work through some of these issues.

Most importantly: Can someone who knows computer stuff verify whether Glitch makes any sense at all? I would say that they might as well be speaking Ancient Greek, but *that* is a language that I actually know.

[Mind Blind Bl**per Reel: Shut Your Mouth, Grayson Black](#)

[Mar 27, 2021](#)

Some of you were surprised when Gray dropped the f-bomb in last week's Saucy Side, and even more taken aback when I admitted on discord that Gray is the *Mind Blind* character who curses the most. (I

edit his dialogue.) For some reason, the man keeps cursing when I'm writing--I've had to curtail him back to a single "f***" in Chapter 3.

Anyway, I thought it would be fun to share how Gray's dialogue usually comes out naturally. I found my first drafts saved in my computer, so here's Gray's unedited dialogues (as well as a couple excerpts that didn't make the cut to the game):

* * * *

You almost collide into a barricade of muscle. Grayson, your brother's best friend, steps quickly backwards and points to his ear. You take out an earbud.

"Shit!" he exclaims. "Sorry for getting so close." Gray's always been considerate to not eavesdrop.

* * * *

The stream of profanity that poured from the British man's mouth was enough to make your eyes widen. Perhaps you should commit some his adjectives to memory, because using them would get you expelled from school for sure. Bullying problem, solved!

* * * *

Gray was silent for a long moment. "Bloody hell. That's devastating."

* * * *

"Fucking tired. But I'm more concerned about you two." Gray's gaze lingers, checking you from top to bottom in search of injury, before he turns to Sally. "What did the doctor say about your foot?"

* * * *

Gray swipes the cookie before you can take another bite. "Don't eat the goddamn thing!" he exclaims. "I know what they taste like. I'd hoped my efforts would give you something to laugh about. Not that you'd eat one!"

* * * *

"Screw Miss Marple," Gray scoffs. "She isn't even the best British TV detective. That honor goes to Sherlock Holmes."

"It's colder than a witch's tit," Gray grumbles. "Fuck Chicago, fuck the snow, and fuck America's Fahrenheit system for misleading me think it was warm enough to wear a T-shirt today."

P.S.

I hardly ever curse, so I have genuinely no idea why Gray insists on being like this. Please pardon his profanity--his natural instinct may be to cuss, but he's on his best behavior around Button.

[Mind Blind Chapter 8 Mini-Update \(Volume 1.5?\)](#)

[Mar 28, 2021](#)

I had a 'Eureka!' moment while rewriting Glitch's breakup scene, which (to make a long story short) made me realize that I wanted to add some new options during the cover story creation arc in Chapter 8. I'll be updating Chapter 8 over the course of the next week as this new route gets written, but for now here's a mini-update (around 2,500 words) that includes the first half of Sally's scene.

Playing it will bump you back to the beginning of Chapter 8, and this week's ongoing updates will continue to do so. Thus, you may want to wait until the end of this week when I get the whole chapter uploaded (which I'll do as quickly as I can write in the new path!). Since I'll be constantly updating Chapter 8 this week, please be careful using the saveplugin and make sure you have a save from Chapter 7.

For anyone curious about the new material being added: there will now be an option where Button becomes (for lack of a better word) *enamored* with Podium. I'm really hoping that most people don't choose to take this path (it gets dark), but realized that it needed to be included. It's an option exclusive to highly resentful Buttons, and leads to other choices that will impact your ultimate ending (a sort of "slippery slope" hidden route). To reinforce this, I've put in a new tracker which measures how sympathetic you are to either Vengeance or Unity (which I'll be incorporating into the already-written answers as well).

Note: I'm undecided whether or not I want to show the Unity/Vengeance bar in the stat screen or keep it hidden, so your input on this subject would be welcome!

If you're wondering what these new options will look like, and don't want to replay the chapter (or your Button isn't resentful), I've copied an excerpt below:

#. . . *I've finally found my people.*

Ments have made your life a living hell. Your anger has been building since third grade, when Alan Chung forced that pencil up your nose, but you were never allowed to give it voice. The users on Podium possess no such restraint. They openly, bitterly, shout their grievances over the world's unfairness.

It's intoxicating.

You joined Unity to prove that you were as good as any Ment, but the fact will always remain that most people will never see beyond your Zero. It's infuriating, and the comic of Nick eating an infant touches on that fury.

. . . Not that you would've agreed to blow up UCRT Headquarters. But you intuit that, unlike the Ment who controlled you, the members on this forum would've given you the choice.

* * *

If anyone wants to play the new material (which adds around 700 words per playthrough), the link is:

<https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-cactus/mygame/>

I admit, I'm super curious if anyone can figure out the reason behind K's Podium username.

[Character Interview: Grayson Black](#)

[Mar 30, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines on a stage with Nicholas Wiseman, this time wearing a black-and-white formal suit. He reclines on in one of two cushioned chairs, a microphone is clutched in his hand.

In the other chair sits Grayson Black, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. In contrast to Nick's formal garb, Gray wears a pair of jeans and his usual motorcycle jacket.

Nick: Hello, hello! Welcome to the third ever Unity Spotlight. I'm your host, Nicholas Wiseman, and our underdressed subject today is the one and only Grayson Wacker Black.

Gray sighs. Then, like a light switch being flipped to "on," he sits up straight in his chair and shoots the audience with his trademark charming smile.

Gray: Thanks for the introduction, Nick! Unfortunately, not all of us look so elegant in caterer chic. I went for comfort.

He gestures with a self-deprecating grin to his casual attire, then stares pointedly at Nick's bowtie.

Nick laughs.

Nick: I look like I work on a cruise ship, right?

Gray: A very classy cruise ship.

Nick: Yeah, Salome picked it.

Sally's voice echoes from behind the stage curtain.

Sally: There will be no more sequined vests on my show!

Gray: The lady has a point. You looked like a blackjack dealer during the last two interviews.

Nick: Caterer is a step up, then. At least the job includes travel.

Gray: Some cruise ships have casinos.

Nick: True enough. Now, lets get to the questions, because there are some *juicy* ones.

Gray, deadpan: Joy.

Nick: Since I can't help but notice that you're wearing your bike jacket instead of a super sexy suit like moi, let's get to one of the reader questions: Why drive a motorcycle? Aren't you usually the cautious type?

Gray: I don't see the correlation.

Nick, to the camera: He doesn't connect the dots, because he's invulnerable. To answer your question, Meggers, the usual crashes that motorcyclists have doesn't pose a threat to the Great and Powerful Fortitude.

Gray rolls his eyes.

Nick: He's telekinetic, right? It's like having a permanent forcefield of protection around his body. He can even—

Gray: We're not talking about that here.

Nick: Fine. I'm going to combine a few reader questions. What was your first impression of me, and what drew you to becoming my friend?

Gray: That's a tricky one.

Nick: It shouldn't be. Obviously your first impression was that I was equal parts handsome and awesome, and you wanted to be my friend because of my devastating charisma.

Gray: Not quite.

Nick: Admittedly, I paraphrased.

Gray: My first impression of you was that you were lonely.

Nick's smile falters. He opens his mouth to speak, but Gray holds out a silencing finger.

Gray: I saw you interacting with the rest of the team on my first day. Everyone clearly loved you.

Nick: I'm very lovable.

Gray: But you never stopped smiling. Not once, during our first ten-hour shift together, did your smile once falter. That's how I knew that it was fake.

Nick: Wait, so that's why you wanted to be my friend? Is this a pity friendship?

Gray: Of course not. You're also an amazing chef, and I can't cook.

Nick, sarcastically: I feel so loved.

Gray: You're also the most compassionate and generous human being I've ever met.

Nick attempts to look like he's not on the verge of tearing up, covering his snuffle with a cough.

Nick: Back at you, man.

Gray: You can also be a huge dumbass, but no one's perfect.

Nick: Annnnd the moment is ruined. New question, now that we've established that I'm awesome: How do you feel about A. Kim? (The A. is short for 'Asshole', right?)

Gray: You know that it's not. Kim is smart—they see more than most other people, and that isolates them. They're kind of like you that way.

Nick: Exceedingly intelligent?

Gray: Lonely.

Nick glances down at his stack of question cards, disconcerted.

Nick: Yeah, uh, that's not . . . it's . . .

He clears his throat.

****Nick:**** In a similar vein, how do you feel about the way Asshole Kim continues to sadistically antagonize your best friend?

Gray: I think my best friend needs to realize that it's okay if he's not perfect. Kim being assigned as UCRT's MIV wasn't a personal attack, Nick. We were in our early twenties.

Nick: That's not why . . .

Nick frantically flips through the question cards until he finds one that makes him smile wickedly.

Nick: So, Gray, remember that list that *Buzzer* did a few years back? “The Top 20 Ments We Wish Would Save Us from a Fire?”

Gray, groaning: I remember.

Nick, flexing his bicep: On which I placed second, by the way.

Gray, to the audience: He had a copy pinned over his desk at work.

Nick: Before my desk blew up, at least. I’ll need to reprint that—thanks for the reminder. Anyway, the question is: do you secretly feel a teeny-tiny bit proud that you ranked #1?

Gray, vehemently: Fuck, no.

Gray looks embarrassed. He scratches at his scar, but manages to smile confidently at the audience.

Gray: I mean, no. Not at all. Don’t get me wrong, I’m always happy when people recognize UCRT’s efforts. I just don’t really see what, uh . . .

Nick, quoting: Your “Looks of gold and abs of steel?”

Gray: Uh, yeah. I don’t see what that has to do with my work. You know?

Nick, once again flexing: Not really. But then again, your fan club is a little more . . . dedicated than mine.

Gray: That’s one way to describe it.

Nick: Which brings me to our next question. Any horror stories that you can to share about rabid fans?

Gray: I’m not sure that it would be appropriate. A temporary lapse of judgement shouldn’t define someone’s entire li—

Nick, interrupting: Gray has around eighty restraining orders.

Gray: Only sixty-three.

Nick: Sixty-three *in Chicago alone*. His popularity is on another level in the UK. It’s one of the reasons that he took the transfer to the USA—he came back to his penthouse to find this girl already sleeping in his bed, like she was freaking Goldilocks.

Gray: She wasn’t why I left.

Nick: Not the only reason, sure. There’s also your weird family stuff.

Gray: Yeah.

Nick: Which I promised not to talk about.

Gray: Yeah.

Nick: So, we won't. Although your mom is great!

Gray: She's fantastic, and definitely whom I miss most from London.

Nick: Which is ironic, because Mrs. Wacker-Black is born American. Is there anything else you miss about England?

Gray, laughing: Not having an accent!

Nick: Explain.

Gray: The weirdest thing about moving to Chicago was how everyone suddenly started asking me to say random words, like "aluminum" and "schedule." And then they'd giggle like mad when I did. No one does that back home.

Nick: Because most people there have a British accent of their own.

Gray: Rather, they don't have an American accent.

Nick, shrugging: You say potato, I say French fry. But that's really all you miss about the UK? Not the food or anything?

Gray: I've yet to find a place here that makes a decent Scotch egg. But no, I'm not particularly nostalgic for British cuisine. Except maybe fish and chips? Americans don't serve it with vinegar.

Nick: Because why would anyone want to dip their French fries in vinegar? Anyhow, I know that there's a few things about the USA that you prefer over England. Like the tea.

Gray: Okay, Arizona Iced Tea isn't really tea. We need to acknowledge that before continuing this discussion.

Nick: It's definitely tea.

Gray: No, it isn't.

Nick: Which do you like better? A cup of brewed Earl Grey . . . or Arizona Iced?

Gray: You can't compare the two, because Arizona Iced isn't tea.

Nick: "Tea" is literally in the name.

Gray: But it's not even hot.

Nick: Pick. A. Tea.

Gray mumbles something indiscernible. Nick leans forward, cupping his ear.

Nick: A little louder, for those in the back row.

Grayson, defeated: I like Arizona Iced Tea better.

Nick pretends that his hand is ringing, making his own "briinnng-briinnng" sounds. He raises his hand to his mouth, pretending to answer the phone.

Nick: Hello, British Consulate? . . . Uh-huh. Yup . . . No, I completely understand . . . I'll let him know.

Nick hangs up his hand and gazes at Gray seriously.

Nick: Your British citizenship has been revoked. Gray, I'm so sorry.

Gray, chuckling: You're an arse.

Nick: According to *Buzzer*, I'm the owner of the Number-one Ment arse in the American Midwest.

Gray: Just in the Midwest?

Nick: The leader of Unity's local New York team used to compete in swimsuit competitions.

Gray: Hard to compete with that.

Gray's brow furrows with thought.

Gray: Wait, isn't that Tamira? Didn't you two used to date before she transferred to New York?

Nick: I mean, *Buzzer* was right. Her butt was nicer than mine, and I don't admit that easily. But enough about my dating life—this is your interview!

Gray, wincing: I see where this is headed.

Nick: And here I thought that Salome was the only precog in Chicago! Tell me, been on any good dates lately?

Nick leans forward, all of a sudden extremely interested in Gray's answers.

Gray: I date.

Nick: That doesn't answer the question. What was the last good date you went on?

Gray: I went out for drinks with someone a few weeks ago.

Nick: And what was their name?

Gray: . . . I don't remember. They insisted on calling me "Fortitude" the entire time.

Nick: Sounds like true love.

Gray, defensively: There's nothing wrong with focusing on my career right now.

Nick: No, of course not.

Nick leans even further forward, the cards in his hands forgotten.

Nick: What do you look for in a partner?

Gray: Is this is a reader's question, or . . . ?

Nick: Just answer the question, Grayson. What do you find most attractive in a romantic partner? Eyes? Their smile? That they come with an amazing brother-in-law?

Gray: What?

Nick: What?

Gray looks confused. Nick tries, and fails, to look innocent.

Gray: . . . I'm drawn to a good heart. That's probably not the most exciting answer. But someone who cares deeply for others . . . that's the kind of person I'd look for.

Nick: What if they're constantly telling jokes? Or brooding? Or acting all cocky but secretly worried about their inner flaws?

Gray: It's more about finding someone with shared values.

Nick: Cool. Very cool. The coolest. What about Button?

Gray: What?

Nick: What?

Gray, faintly blushing: Maybe we should move on to the next question. I think I saw one about Jeopardy in your stack?

Nick: Fine. We'll talk later over beers.

Gray's eyes dart longingly to the emergency exit.

Gray: Sure.

Nick: Alright, so here's the Jeopardy question: Who's your favorite competitor from the GOAT Tournament - Ken, James, or Brad?

Nick frowns at the question card.

Nick: Who are these people? Why are they all named after Barbie's boyfriends?

Gray: They're some of Jeopardy's strongest competitors. But to answer the question, my favorite competitor is actually Alice Li—she beat Ken's record in 2026.

Nick: It's like you're speaking another language, and that language is "Nerd."

Gray, ignoring Nick: My mom's favorite is James, though. She's the one who introduced me to the show.

Nick: Didn't she introduce you to ABBA as well?

Gray: She did.

Nick: And what would you say is your favorite ABBA song?

Gray: *The Visitors*. It's not the most well-known, but it resonates with me.

Nick, looking directly into the camera: Psychoanalyze away, folks.

He turns back to Gray.

Nick: Most people don't realize you like ABBA and Jeopardy, but there's another fandom you're a part of: Disney.

Gray: "Fandom" seems like such a strong word.

Nick: Dude. You know the entire score to *Beauty and The Beast*.

Gray: Yeah, well, it's a good score.

Nick: And to *The Little Mermaid*. And to *Hercules*. And—

Gray: The audience gets it.

Nick: The reader question is: Why Disney? What about it appeals to you?

Gray: Other than the music being great?

Nick: Other than that.

Gray: I like . . . I don't know, I guess I like how simple things are in Disney movies. The real world isn't simple. Bad guys aren't like Cruella De Vil or Jafar, because real people are never totally evil.

Nick: But it's still UCRT's job to fight them.

Gray: If someone is abusing their Ment powers and doing something that hurts others, then yes. It's our job to stop that. But things are simpler, *easier* in Disney movies, because they're escapism.

Nick: Bad guys get defeated without any of the guilt.

Gray: Precisely.

Nick: Which leads into our final question for today: What's the hardest part about being in UCRT?

Gray: You know.

Nick: I do. They don't.

Gray sighs.

Gray: You grow up thinking "I'm going to save people." Because you're superpowered, and you're also that kid who always volunteers to hand back homework because you genuinely like helping the teacher.

Nick: You were an adorable child.

Gray: But then you grow up and start to save people, and you realize in order to save people, you need to stop other people. And stopping those people can be . . .

Nick: Messy?

Gray: Intense. That's the hardest part about being in UCRT, for me. Not the saving, but the stopping.

The two both fall silent, a somber mood settling over the stage.

Nick clears his throat and smiles a little too brightly.

Nick: That's all we have time for today, unfortunately! This is Nick Wiseman, owner of the second-greatest Ment ass in America, wishing you farewell and to have a marvelous April!

The lights dim, and the stage is enshrouded in total blackness. Nick's whisper breaks through the dark.

Nick: Ready for that beer?

Gray: Sure. But I'm still not answering those questions from earlier.

Nick: That's what you always say.

Gray: I mean it.

Nick: You always mean it, until halfway through the third beer. When are you finally going to tell Button that—

The audio cuts off.

[April Character Interview Poll](#)

[Apr 1, 2021](#)

It's April! Happy April Fools and may your younger brother not give you a heart attack by claiming that he's moving to New Zealand to marry a goat yoga instructor that he met while playing SWTOR (to give a totally random example which most definitely did not happen to me in real life today because I'm certainly not gullible enough to fall for such an obvious prank).

First of the month means that we have a new character interview poll. Please cast your vote for the next Chosen One . . . which means that Button is obviously not an option (*buuurn*). Cast members who have been interviewed for past months have been taken off the poll.

Sally

Glitch

Nick

Clarence

John

Hope

Noh (who will give cryptic answers only)

382 votes total

[Writer's Blog . . . And Another Mini Update](#)

[Apr 2, 2021](#)

First off, I'm so sorry for taking so long to get all of Chapter 8 out! The current build is now 232,000 words and includes all of Sally's scene (including the potential initiation of Nick and Sally's romance pathway). I kept second guessing the backstory creation portions, but I'm happy with what I've finally settled on because I feel it achieves that tenuous balance of player choice and plot cohesion. The rest of Chapter 8 will be uploaded as soon as I'm done fleshing out the remaining three scenes.

For now, the updated demo can be found here: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-dingo/mygame/>

Initially, Chapter 8 was going to bring the total wordcount up to 235k, but my rewrites have already added another 6,000 words. Your interaction on Podium now goes into much greater detail, with Button typing entire responses to old posts. (Did I use Reddit to investigate examples of what Podium rants might look like? Yes. Yes I did.)

For Sally's route, I also added a callback to how Button responded during the Chapter 3 explosion. You can double down on Button's initial reaction, or acknowledge if your feelings have changed. Please let me know if anyone feels like their relationship with Nick isn't accurately represented!

Some of the feedback I received in regards to Nick and Sally's subplot is that readers weren't feeling like Nick was romantically attached to Sally (which he isn't if Button has a crush on Sally, but is if Button and Sally are purely platonic friends). I rewrote the scene where Button can choose to begin encouraging their relationship, utilizing the odd overlap of Button's and Nick's emotions that's been starting to occur in order for Button to realize Nick's feelings. This *does* mean that Button will be aware that Nick has a crush on Sally even if the player doesn't desire to set the two up (this isn't an issue at all if Button is romancing Sally, of course).

That being said, I did my best to ensure that there's absolutely no guilt should you decide not to encourage their relationship. The timing *isn't* optimal, and unless you pick the "jubilant" option, their romance won't progress in-game. There will be one other chance to trigger the "Snickly" variable later on, but only if you go with Glitch as your MIV in this chapter and miss the first trigger moment completely. I'm trying to be careful not to force this relationship on players--it's very much intended to be a fun romantic subplot, initially conceived of for readers who prefer not to personally romance ROs themselves but still want a little romance in their story.

I admit to having a lot of anxiety about handling the Sally/Nick subplot since it's already been rewritten and moved from its initial location in Chapter 3. The delay was definitely the right decision, but it adds pressure to execute the scene *right* this time. So your feedback would be extremely helpful! For those romancing Sally, please let me know if you feel like there's not enough acknowledgement of your new relationship.

In addition to expanding upon Chapter 8, I've been redistributing the stats throughout the entire book, beginning from Chapter 1 (this version isn't up since it'll wipe everyone's saves). There are some issues that I recently became aware of, like the ability to achieve negative numbers in some personality stats

when the only stat that should break the 1-100 mold is Nick's affection. Retweaking these numbers has also let me add some more specific flavor texts throughout, which will be available when I eventually post *Mind Blind*'s entire rework for beta reading/testing. I keep changing my mind as to when, precisely, this will happen because it will wipe everyone's savefiles . . . but I'll give advance warning before it happens, and will be adding in a quick quiz that will let you start from one of the later chapters.

I'll be posting a monthly roadmap sometime next week (once Chapter 8 is fully published, I'll be able to better predict when Chapter 9 should release). That being said, Gray's route in Cupid Calamity will finally release this month! It's very time-travelly and "what happens to true love when it's not remembered??" and GUYS I LOVE IT.

[Announcement of Tier Reward Changes! Also, a Poll!](#)

[Apr 4, 2021](#)

By now everyone should have received their tier rewards from March, provided you messaged me the details of what you wanted. If you haven't yet received an email/message with your attached rewards, please let me know asap!

Over these past three months, I've realized that not everyone has the free time to respond for their Matchup rewards. I also often miss messaging UCRT Members who join in the middle of the month. (For those who joined the UCRT tier in mid-March, apologies for the delay, and I'll be sending messages out shortly about how to claim your matchups from last month.)

My goal going forth is that all upper-tier rewards be as hassle-free as possible to claim, and also that I be able to generate all rewards in a timely fashion during the month they're claimed. Thus, I'm changing the Matchup Benefit to . . . something else. Something currently unspecified, because you get to vote on it!

The end result will be that you'll receive more material for your pledge (each matchup averages 200 words, but each new story will be around 2,000). This change will also simplify life on my part, since my executive-level distribution skills are atrociously lackluster (I'm that cliched absent-minded writer with one foot in fantasyland). From now on, instead of sending out personalized matchups, I'll be posting a monthly additional fiction for UCRT Members and Hero Zeros.

Since I'm changing the rewards mid-month, you can still opt to receive an April matchup or poem should you want one of those instead. Just let me know! For now, it's time to vote on what kind of additional stories you'd like to have as the new rewards. I have a few ideas, but decided it was best to let you guys decide :)

Eventually, I may add Matchups back in. But for now, I present (*drumroll, please*) . . .

THE POLL: Instead of Matchups, there should be . . .

Another Perspective Retellings: scenes from Mind Blind are rewritten from other characters' viewpoints.

Nick Wiseman Has Opinions: Nick rants about various things, including fanclubs and why one should always buy spices from T. J. Maxx.

Once Upon a Time in Mind Blind: Mind Blind cast members reenact out scenes from famous fairy tales.

All three, please? (Story type will alternate on a monthly basis.)

Something else! (Please leave a comment explaining what you'd like to see instead.)

43 votes total

[The Man Of The Month Is . . .](#)

[Apr 4, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines upon a stage where Nicholas Wiseman is once again wearing a sequined jacket and top hat.

Nick: It's me!

Jo: . . . It's Nick.

Nick: I'm the host, and also the interviewee. Get ready for 100% more JUSTICE. Can you handle it? We'll prepare fainting couches just in case.

Jo: He won't be the host this time.

Nick: We'll see.

Jo: I'll have to figure out whom it'll be.

Nick: I'm impossible to replace, which is why I'll be interviewing myself!

Jo: He won't.

Nick, whispering: *I will.*

That's right, everyone! April's interviewee is Button's brother, who may or may not be interviewing himself in a one-man show/display of narcissism. Ask your questions on the **mb-cast-interviews** thread of the Sanctum of Spoilers discord, or on this post!

[Delivery for the Damned: Architectural Sneak Peek](#)

[Apr 5, 2021](#)

Introducing: Ev's Cottage (aka "The Cottage," aka "Miss Ginger")

That's right: Ev's house gets introduced before Evander/Evelyn does, even though Ev is an RO.

To an ignorant observer, Ev's "Cottage" is a decently-sized Victorian Manor (dubbed "Molbatten's Cottage" in irony by its original owner, one Lord Molbatten). Ivy embraces its white brick façade, rose bushes line the entry way, and its elegant herb gardens give Ev access to every ingredient needed for brewing potions.

In addition to its charming exterior, Ev's Cottage has a huge personality. In fact, Ev's Cottage has 167 personalities. Technically 168, but High Priestess Diana had hardly any personality to begin with, even before she became a literal shade of her past self.

What happened is this: when Ev's coven all, *ahem*, mysteriously died, their essences were absorbed by the nearest sentient being with a soul. Not by Ev (which is odd, since they were right there when the deaths happened), but rather by Ev's Cottage. This is because, as a young witch, Ev enchanted their house with the soul of their cat to create a sort of cursed, Middle-Ages-version of Alexa.

Since The Cottage (whom prefers to be called "Miss Ginger" in remembrance of her past life as a majestic orange calico) possessed a soul, and since ghosts tether onto souls in order to linger on earth . . . well, you can surmise the outcome.

But make no mistake: The Cottage isn't haunted. She's possessed.

[Chapter 8 Mini-Update: Glitch's Scenes Are Live!](#)

[Apr 6, 2021](#)

I realized that Glitch wasn't being completely honest with me when it came to their intentions, so we sat down and had a long talk (read: I glared at the computer screen for several hours while trying to figure

out what they had planned). The option to break up with Glitch now makes more sense . . . and nicely foreshadows a later in-game dilemma.

In addition, most of Glitch's backstory creation scene has been rewritten to align with how it was done with Sally. So a lot of the options you choose will be more or less the same as in Sally's route.

Demo Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-dingo/mygame/>

Eventually, I want to go back and add more reactivity from the other ROs if you're clearly interested in someone (ex: Glitch if you're into K, Sally if you're romancing Gray, etc.). There's some of this recognition in Chapter 8, but most of it is miss-able. But that's being put on my growing To-Do List, since right now my priority is releasing the rest of the chapter by this Friday.

Current Demo Length: 239k

Average Playthrough: 56k

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 8](#)

[Apr 7, 2021](#)

"I don't know why you're so shocked to learn about Xander." Delphine passed me a cup of tea. "It's not unheard of for a woman my age to have children."

"Although if you ask," interjected her son, "she'll claim to be not a day over thirty."

I took a sip of tea, hoping that they would attribute my reddening cheeks to the drink's steam. Though Delphine's brew was never too hot since she heated the kettle with a spell.

"It was simply unexpected." The stiff wooden armchair I sat on creaked disapprovingly under my shifting weight.

Xander smirked at me from where he was casually lounging in my usual seat, a worn leather chair which was the only piece in Delphine's study with legs sturdier than matchsticks . . . which I now realized was most likely *his* usual seat, explaining why Delphine kept it alone among her continually rotating assortment of furniture.

Up close, the relationship between the two was obvious. They shared the same well-shaped lips and straight nose, though his was dusted with a sprinkle of freckles that Delphine hid beneath a layer of powder. His hair was a brighter auburn and cut unfashionably short, and he dressed in a sober gray overcoat compared to her multihued robes. His amused honey-flecked green eyes, like those of his mother, were entirely too perceptive.

"I arrived from Anterdon a week ago." An upwards quirk of Xander's lips sent me the impression that he not only knew what scandalous conclusion I had jumped to upon my entrance, but that he found my current discomfort thoroughly amusing. "This was the first time I've been able to escape to see Mother."

I struggled to shift through my dim memories of past lives. I must have met with the Anterdonian ambassador at least once. Most likely I had been the one translating on behalf of King Eldin, since he'd given up on mastering the language for himself after accidentally referring to a diplomat's children as "slaughter-plump piglets." I had vague recollections of introducing myself to a bald, paunchy man—Leonidas or something similar. Yet I had never met Xander.

Delphine's son appeared around Theo's age, and was indisputably handsome if one could get past the red hair. His arrival at Court must have caused a commotion with noble ladies regardless of the timeline, illegitimate son of a sorceress or not. So why had I not heard of him?

At least I now knew the identity of Uncle Alistair's friend as well as the reason behind his discretion. Unmarried noblewomen didn't usually advertise if they had offspring, even if the scenario was far from uncommon.

"Are you a translator?" I guessed. Since my magic lessons took up time that I had otherwise spent studying languages, perhaps Xander's services had been required in my stead and his return had been requested. After all, how was King Eldin supposed to guess that I maintained fluency from past lives?

Xander shrugged. "My position is less . . . official. I volunteered to act as Ambassador Leonidas' guide during this trip. After all, I heard my mother had taken on an apprentice and had to meet any saint capable of putting up with her for myself."

At least I had correctly recalled the ambassador's name.

Delphine sniffed haughtily. "He came because I ordered him to return some books which I needed for your tutelage. One does not simply send sorcerous tomes via post."

"You're a sorcerer then?" That would explain Xander's elusive answer regarding his position with Anterdon as well as his keeping a low profile at Court. Anterdon had no problem with mages, but Verdans still tended to be suspicious despite Bellcrest being more tolerant than Kothe.

Xander shook his head. "No talent, much to my mother's dismay. Magical theory is fascinating to read about, but I couldn't spell my way out of a shoebox."

"The books are more theory?" Disappointment soured my voice.

"Do stop jutting out your lip like a petulant child, Tru," ordered Delphine. "Most the books are theoretical in nature. Two are introductory spellbooks."

"She used to pray to the Triad that the gift would spontaneously appear in me," said Xander, "but those books have been gathering dust for the better part of a year. I'll be glad for the space on my shelf."

"It's kind of you to come all this way to return them," I acknowledged.

"No trouble. A few friends came along—it'll do their spirits good to visit their families. As it was nice to visit mine, once she found an opening in her schedule." His cheek twitched with a suppressed grin.

Delphine frowned. "I tried to negotiate my way out of tonight's meeting with Councilor Venuda but the woman is a battering ram of agenda. She refused to let me reschedule."

"I tease, Mother," said Xander. "I'm aware of your importance. The kingdom would fall apart without your wisdom."

"To pieces," concurred Delphine. "Still, I do wish I could at least join you for dinner."

"My family would gladly host Xander this evening." I turned to him. "I suspect you already know my older brother." If Xander was one of the friends that Theo had mentioned, his presence might succeed in keeping my brother distracted from our new stepsister.

A crease formed between Xander's auburn brows. It smoothed out once he identified who I resembled. "Theo's sister."

"Don't hold the association against me, I implore you."

He tipped his chin towards his mother. "I never judge someone by their relations."

"I suspect I've just been insulted," said Delphine, "but fortunately for you both, I'm already late for my meeting with Venuda and thus choosing to ignore it."

Xander bent down to give her a dutiful kiss on the cheek. "I'll do my best to clear my schedule for tomorrow night like I promised. Try to stay out of trouble."

"I am the model of good behavior," she said.

After Delphine departed, Xander and I walked together to the northeast tower where Theo and Letty were staying. He became more formal without his mother present, calling me by my full title, and seemed content to go most the way without talking. But the silence wasn't awkward. Both of us were caught up with our own thoughts and, sensing the other similarly preoccupied, respectfully kept quiet so as not to interrupt our respective musings.

I was trying to calculate how Xander could be an asset in my campaign of keeping Theo separate from Letty. The last thing I needed was my brother falling victim to her lies when she and her accomplice inevitably framed me for something two years from now. Perhaps I could encourage him to assist Xander with his work? Theo was as fluent in Anteren as I was, if not more so given his recent year abroad.

But Theo also hated work, and I couldn't recall the last time he'd taken my advice. Not that he believed he knew better than me. He himself would be the first to acknowledge that I'd inherited both our shares of practicality. "Smart and fun so rarely collide," he often said. "Can you blame me for taking the riskier road?"

I could and did, ever since his recklessness had lodged a bullet in my heart.

Xander would be a good influence: he seemed to take his duties seriously. Too seriously, perhaps, if he'd been at Bellcrest a week and only now been able to make time to visit Delphine. Odd, since she had been the impetus for his return and they appeared fond of one another. Why had it taken him so long to visit? Couldn't he have asked the Ambassador for an evening off? Despite our tacit pact of mutual muteness, my curiosity defeated my manners.

"Did you grow up at Bellcrest?" I asked.

There weren't enough lamps in the Courtyard to illuminate Xander's expression, but his posture went rigid at my question. Since Delphine wasn't a widow, politeness should have prohibited me from inquiring about the circumstance surrounding his past, even if I had tried to broach it as inoffensively as possible.

"No," he said.

I waited a second to give him time to elaborate. He continued walking until a few feet ahead, when etiquette forced him to pause and wait for me to catch up. For the first time, the silence between us felt oppressive.

I felt more annoyed than apologetic. Perhaps it hadn't been the most considerate topic of conversation but at least my attempt to pry had been subtle. The same could not be said of the cold shoulder accompanying his terse reply. I deliberately slowed my pace until his long legs were forced to take comically small steps to match.

It took us several minutes longer than usual to cross the Courtyard due to my passive aggressive pace. Xander stopped abruptly outside the tower's entrance.

"You must think me ill-mannered," he said.

"I do."

My bluntness caught him off-guard, and he barked out a startled laugh. "In my defense, most people avoid the topic of my upbringing once they realize that I'm illegitimate."

"You must think *me* ill-mannered," I repeated back his words.

"Perhaps our mutual rudeness should cancel themselves out then, so that we neither take offense."

I couldn't help but chuckle at his tongue-in-cheek proposal. "Agreed."

Despite our newfound comradery, he made no move to open the tower.

"I would appreciate your discretion. Especially around your brother."

"Theo isn't known for his ability to keep secrets," I conceded.

He nodded. "My father wasn't noble born, and my mother's reputation is a mixed bag at best due to her sorcery. I doubt Ambassador Leonidas or Theo would care, but others working alongside me at the embassy may not prove as tolerant."

"I see. No one knows that Lady Delphine is your mother?"

"Brant was my grandfather's—her father's—title. Most don't make the connection. I enjoy my work for the Ambassador, and would hate to see it compromised due to the rumor that my mother can turn my coworkers into newts."

"You have my vow of silence, then," I said. "Though Theo will no doubt be curious as to how we came to meet."

"Theo will create his own distraction once I begin to lecture him on his responsibilities during our stay," said Xander. "Lord Errans made it clear that he expected me to put his nephew to work."

I nodded. It made sense that Xander was one of Uncle Alistair's subordinates at the embassy given his escort across the border. It also indicated my uncle's faith in his competence that he had been put in charge of corralling my brother.

Still, I needed to learn more about Delphine's son and his unexpected presence in this timeline. I'd learned an important lesson during my experimentation with poisons in my last life: unknown ingredients were often the most dangerous.

True to Xander's prediction, Theo readily accepted his excuse that we had met by chance in the castle library, and hastily changed the topic after Xander's pointed statement that he expected Theo to prove himself as studious as his younger sister.

"This is my sister as well, as of a month ago," said Theo. "Letty, this is Lord Xander Brant, Uncle Alistair's protégé, current drafted aide to the Anterdonian ambassador, and constant pain in my a—ah, thorn in my side." Theo amended his language as I stepped on his foot.

Free from her mother's critical eye and harsher words, Letty wore a dress that she'd obviously embellished herself. Embroidered bluebells covered the entirety of skirt and sparrows with tiny crystal flecks for eyes flew up her sleeves. My own frock was well tailored and immaculately pressed, but I'd

deliberately chosen the black satin for its nondescript style. Its drabness only emphasized the comparative loveliness of my stepsister's dress (and the wearer).

Xander bowed over Letty's hand. "Forgive my intrusion on your family dinner." Amused eyes met mine. "You must think me ill-mannered."

"Not at all!" Letty appeared genuinely distressed by his implication that she might be at all put out by his company. "I'm glad to meet a friend of my new family members." She smiled shyly at Theo.

"It's almost time for dinner." I stepped briskly between the two, taking Theo by the arm and leaving Letty to be escorted by Xander. "Shall we?"

Letty let out a small sigh of awe as we entered the dining room, its table long enough to seat twelve and illuminated by a glowstone chandelier above that cost more than most Rhys tenets made their entire lives. My father believed in sparing no expense when it came to impressing his peers, even on a dining room that languished unused for the majority of the year.

"It's almost as grand as the one Rhys Manor—I mean, at home," said Letty.

"Knowing Tru, she still probably takes most her meals in the kitchen," said Theo.

He was right, of course, though my habit had more to do with fear of being poisoned than any discomfort in formal settings. It wasn't in my brother's nature to question things, bless his pure heart. In his mind, I was still a five-year-old hooligan running after him to the watering hole only to fall down and scrape both knees. I blinked back an unexpected surge of emotion at the memory. I hadn't been that child in a very long time.

Two servants arrived and plated out a roast which Theo dug into like a starved hound. Letty's tongue darted out in concentration, and her hand hovered a moment over the cutlery before she finally selected the wrong fork.

"Will you be attending the festival tomorrow?" asked Xander. He had discretely switched forks, so as to use the same one as Letty. Had I still loved my stepsister, I would have been touched by his thoughtfulness.

"Festival?" echoed Letty.

"Don't expect to be welcomed," said Theo. "You're part of enemy forces now that you're a Rhys." His expression was serious but for a tightness around his lips—sure indication that he was biting his cheek in an attempt not to laugh.

"We can't go?" Letty, not yet familiar enough to recognize my brother's tells, sounded dismayed.

"The Festival of Bells celebrates the defeat of Kothen mages at Bellcrest during the Uprising." I pushed some food around my plate in order create the pretense of keeping pace with the other diners. "Mages

led by our ancestor.”

“Warren Rhys. They burn him in effigy,” said Theo. He leaned forward, placing his elbows on the table in total breach of good manners.

Letty paled. “Mama said that the Rhys family fought for the Crown during the war.”

“Tristian, his son and our great-grandfather, sided with King Corbin,” I said. “His loyalty was the only reason the dukedom survived instead of being parceled out among loyalists.” There was a reason so many lords in Kothe remained discontent with the monarchy; their holdings had been dramatically reduced in size and power following the war’s aftermath. Their relationship with the Crown had never fully recovered since so-called “Castigation of the North.” Thus, my betrothal to Loren: an act of intended appeasement by King Eldin that put one of their own on throne.

“Family legend has it that our great-grandfather beheaded his own father.” Theo sliced a finger across his own neck. “Some claim that their ghosts still haunt this very tower, locked in eternal battle. If you listen closely, you can hear the clashing of their blades.” He tapped his knife against the side of his goblet to illustrate their supposed clang.

Letty froze, a forkful of roast boar halfway between her dish and her mouth. She set it down with a visible swallow.

“The Battle for Bellcrest was fought outside the city limits,” said Xander reassuringly. “It’s improbable that the two ever met in the castle.”

She nodded but didn’t resume eating.

Theo, on the other hand, snickered and attacked his meal with renewed gusto. “The effigy bit is true though. I’ll take you to see it tomorrow,” he said through a mouthful of food. I’d have to discuss the bad habits he developed in Anterdon with him later.

Letty perked up at his promise, though her cheeks still lacked their usual flush of color. She looked at me. “You’ll come with us, won’t you, Tru? Theo will make up all sorts of tall tales if you’re not there.”

“You too, Xan,” said Theo. “Leonidas can spare you for a single day.”

“I’ve already agreed to escort the Ambassador,” said Xander. “But no doubt I’ll see you there. Consider it your final day of vacation before I put you to work.”

Theo pulled a face but didn’t argue.

“Please, Tru?” begged Letty.

Despite my resolution to stay as far away as possible from my stepsister, my resolve crumpled beneath her and Theo’s expectant gazes. At least by going I would be able to delay Letty’s meeting with Loren

by one more day.

"Of course," I said. "Someone needs to protect you from my brother."

[Writer's Blog: Telekinetic Strippers and Kidnappings](#)

[Apr 9, 2021](#)

Chapter 8 is now completely playable . . . albeit two weeks later than I'd hoped and missing Rosy's scenes. I also want to elaborate on the last bit of the chapter, but that's getting added to my To-Do List (which I should really post a picture of, because it's comically long).

Link to Demo: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-dingo/mygame/>

Demo Word Count: 245k

Average Playthrough: 59k

I've also put together this month's Patreon schedule!

What's Coming in April:

4/11: Rosy's scenes added to Chapter 8

4/12: *Mind Blind* Short Story #1 (inspired by a discussion on the Sanctum of Spoilers)

4/13: *Delivery* development poll on romance dynamics (ooh la la)

4/14: *Lady Death* Chapter 8.5

4/16: "Another Perspective" Side Story (I'll be sending out messages now that I know what I'm doing for the new UCRT/Hero Zero tier rewards!)

4/18: *Saucy Side* (featuring Glitch)

4/20: *Mind Blind* Short Story #2

4/21: *Lady Death* Chapter 9

4/24: Live Q&A (Times TBA)

4/28: Chapter 9 Update for Patreon Demo (don't worry, the link will remain accessible throughout May!)

4/29: Nick's Interview

And of course, *Mind Blind* blooper reels and maybe even another *Delivery* sneak peak of The Cottage's actual owner (Ev is very sexy and also very murderous).

Additional Goal for April: Release Gray's route for *Cupid Calamity* (drop date depending on how smoothly Chapter 9 goes).

I'm a little late getting started this month's schedule out due to focusing on finishing up Chapter 8's rewrites. I think I like the way that Gray's scene turned out? I need to replay it as low-relationship with Gray to see if things still work, but I'll do that once Rosy's route is out.

For now, I want to talk a little bit about *momentum*.

Basically, momentum ensures that the plot keeps going forward even when Button wants to curl up into a little buttonball and cry. Emotional resonance is something that's really important in *Mind Blind* (my goal is to make you empathize with your MC), but it's also essential that the narrative not become *too* introspective. First off, because written introspection always risks not echoing player perspective, and secondly because introspection doesn't actively progress the story. It's important in driving character development, but Button also needs to be proactive enough that stuff, well, *happens*. I want your characters to have agency. Total emotional paralyzation, although a realistic response for a person in real life coping with Button's situation, can't be an option for the game.

As we approach the point where depressed Buttons will be getting an intervention (which requires both a high depression stat and certain decisions that I can't yet elaborate on), I'm contemplating with how to balance player choice with the plot necessity that Button is at very least not going to *try* to get themselves killed in action. (I may have let Button get too dark, but I felt, and still feel, that those responses are authentic and necessary to include.) It's cheap and unrealistic for Button to say "well, I'm now pumped full of serotonin due to the Power of Friendship!" Yet, at the same time, it would be equally unfeasible that the other characters would allow a severely depressed individual to continue being involved in a potentially deadly operation.

Yes, I said "allow"! Since Operation Hemera is a government-adjacent mission, it's about more than personal autonomy. Letting someone serve who really shouldn't be serving would be irresponsible and harmful of Rosy. Already, that ethical line is being straddled by sending in an unqualified recruit . . . and not straddled in the good way, like Button on Grayson's chest in this last update.

The main dilemma, then, is this:

1. It's possible that Button may be extremely depressed and need support in order to get to a place where they're emotionally capable of fulfilling their mission.

2. My solution has been to have an intervention by other characters, calling Button out for devaluing their own life (and thus making reckless calls during their mission).

However

3. Forcing players to accept this help compromises player freedom and roleplay.

Yet

4. Allowing Button to completely implode isn't a pathway that I'm interested in writing (nor do I think the other characters would enable Button to continue working undercover if they were a risk to themselves).

My current compromise is to give Button a unilateral win in the story (let's be real, there's been too few wins in *Mind Blind*). Providing a glimpse of hope (the emotion, not the mother, although she may appear too) will thus set Button on a less despair-driven path (not a fix-all, but a fix-some). A secondary possibility is Rosy-mandated therapy, but that has the downside of, once again, slowing momentum and distracting from the overall plot.

It's a tangled emotionally web I've woven, but I'm hoping that it'll eventually be unknotted so that certain Buttons don't just . . . shut down. Because the plot bits are *really* good, guys. Seriously. I sometimes just vibrate with excitement, knowing what twists and turns lay ahead.

[All of Chapter 8 is Finally Up!](#)

[Apr 11, 2021](#)

Yes, Rosy is ethically dubious. It's part of their charm? Maybe? (Alternative: they should be fired from teaching.)

Rosy is also difficult to romance. This newest scene scene in Chapter 8 marks your first opportunity to genuinely engage their interest, and there will only be one other opportunity to do so. (You'll know whether or not you're on the right track depending on what Rosy calls you at the end of the chapter.)

Demo Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-dingo/mygame/>

Word Count: 249k

Average Playthrough: 59k

Suggestion: Clear your browser cache before playing, otherwise some continuity errors may occur.

[Mind Blind Short Story: "PSA"](#)

[Apr 12, 2021](#)

"PSA"

Featuring Nick Wiseman and Grayson Black

"Follow me, fresh meat!" Integrity's predatory smile sent a chill up Nick's spine.

Unlike Peace, who kept their identity hidden behind a darkened demi-visor, Integrity refused to wear a mask (which was, Nick thought, rather poetic given her facename). Her white hair was cropped short, and the blush lingering from her recent filming session was settling into the wrinkles of her dark tan skin. With seventeen years on UCRT, Integrity was the team's senior member, and has thus taken it upon herself to forcibly remind the newcomers of their civic duty.

"You may be Justice and Fortitude to *them*," she said, jerking her chin at a group of teenagers who were unconvincingly feigning disinterest as to why by three members of UCRT had shown up outside their high school on a Sunday. "But you're two kids younger than my sons to *me*. If you want my respect, you'll need to earn it."

Nick grinned at her. "Of course, Mrs. Rivera. Whatever you say."

Integrity smacked him on the back of the head. "Don't play the charmer, Nicky," she scolded. "I served over a decade with your father, and know all the Wiseman tricks."

"What was that about?" Gray whispered as they followed Integrity into the high school.

"Mia's a close friend of my folks," Nick replied. "Heads up: if she starts cursing in Spanish, *run*."

Bitterberry Prep School catered to a certain tax bracket, as evidenced by the polished marble pillars in its entrance way and a crimson tapestry reading "Go Berries!" that Nick swore was actual silk.

"Feeling homesick?" Nick asked Gray.

Gray cocked his head in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"We're at a fancy-pants boarding school with two-dozen Mercedes in the parking lot." Nick gestured to their surroundings. "Figured you'd probably feel right at home in this kind of place."

Gray's lips quirked upwards. "It's cute that you think this place is fancy."

"Less chatter," Integrity barked. "More making sure that you have your lines memorized."

"Yes, ma'am!" said Nick and Gray simultaneously.

* * * *

Although most of the camera crew had filmed enough Public Service Announcements with UCRT to be blasé about their celebrity, there was usually at least one newbie when it came to these types of things. Nick spotted her right away by the nervous way she kept peaking up at him and Gray from beneath the brim of her ballcap. She was pretty, and Nick liked the way her red ponytail reflected the sunlight.

He leaned over the snack table, offering the woman his hand. “Nick Wiseman,” he said, pulling out his most potent smile. “Pleasure to meet you.”

Her bashful smile back didn’t *quite* give him butterflies in his gut, but he liked it well enough.

“I’m Angie,” she said.

“Justice!” called the director. “You’re on!”

Nick flashed Angie one more grin before walking (slowly, so that she could appreciate the view) over to his designated chair.

“Your topic is anti-bullying,” said the director. “You’ve already read the script?”

Nick nodded.

“Anti-Bullying PSA, Take 1!” the director called out.

Nick allowed his smile to fade. He gazed seriously into the camera lens.

“As UCRT’s Justice, there’s no cause greater to my heart than making sure that people are treated fairly,” he said. “That’s why, today, I’d like to talk to you about bullying.”

Memories of Button, their lower lip bruised and eyes teary, assaulted him. Nick’s fists clenched in his lap.

“Bullying is wrong,” he continued. “But what is bullying? It’s not just trapping someone in a locker or sticking their head in the toilet. Violence is never acceptable, but not all violence is physical.”

Let me see your phone.

It’s nothing, Nick. I swear. Just some kids from school being dumbasses per the usual.

It was almost funny how his sibling kept trying to lie when they knew Nick could read their mind.

“Cyberbullying is when you . . .” Nick trailed off.

I’m fine, Nick.

I'm not crying, Nick.

Stop worrying about me, Nick.

Leave me alone, Nick! I already told you that I'm FINE.

"Cyberbullying is when you act like a shitstain," Nick spat out. "When you mistreat someone because you're too insecure to accept that they're smarter than your ameba-brained ass. It's when you lash out at someone who's different, pretending that your 'words' are harmless, and—"

"Cut!" hollered the director. "Cut, cut, cut!" He glared at Nick. "What the hell was that?"

Whoops.

"Sorry!" Nick tried to smile with his usual flippancy, but his face was stuck in a scowl. "I just . . ."

"Nick is deeply invested in Unity's anti-bullying campaign," Gray interrupted smoothly. "So much so, he sometimes gets carried away."

Nick nodded, relieved. "Exactly."

"Huzzah for you," the director grumbled. "But don't go off script. Justice, take five to cool down. Fortitude, you're on."

Gray's cheeks went bloodless. "Now?"

"No, yesterday," the director snapped. "You have the script memorized?"

Gray nodded jerkily.

"Then take a seat," the director said. "Sexual Health PSA, Take 1!"

* * * *

"Are you okay?" Integrity asked.

Nick glanced up. He'd been contemplating his feet while leaning into the wall's corner, trying not to reflect on why he'd become so emotional. Reflection wasn't helpful—it only made him feel more powerless. And sometimes it made him angry, when God knows he couldn't afford to feel that way.

Thankfully, Gray was screwing up his PSA almost as badly as had Nick, which gave Nick time to figure out how he was going to prevent a second outburst.

"I'm doing better than him." Nick motioned towards Gray, who's cheeks were now a flaming red as he tried to get through the sentence '*Condoms are the responsible way to prevent unplanned pregnancies*' without stuttering.

Integrity chuckled. “I didn’t expect Fortitude to be so . . .”

“Buttoned-up?” Nick finished.

“Prim.”

They quietly observed as the director pled with Gray to stop looking away from the camera.

“Are you a superhero?” he shouted at Gray. “Or a sheltered nun? Repeat after me: *‘You can avoid STDs with these simple steps.’*”

“About your PSA earlier,” Integrity said. “How is your sibling—”

Nick pushed himself off from the wall. “Angie!” he shouted, drawing her attention. “I don’t suppose I could get your digits? In case I need anyone to film my next mission.”

His wink was overexaggerated, but Angie didn’t seem to mind. She handed Nick a slip of paper on which she’d preemptively written down her cell number. Nick respected a girl that was prepared.

“Fine,” Integrity sighed after Angie left. “I won’t ask.”

“Appreciated,” Nick replied.

“Justice!” The director’s voice sounded hoarse from shouting. “You and Fortitude are switching topics. He’s on anti-bullying, you’re on sex-ed. Just read from the script as we film.”

Gray shrugged apologetically as he and Nick switched seats.

“No problem at all,” Nick said. “I have the sex-ed script memorized from back when my dad did the PSA. Hard to forget listening to *that* talk in a classroom full of my friends. It’s still the same script, right?”

The director nodded. “Sexual Health PSA, Take 1!”

Nick smiled brightly into the camera. “Our bodies are amazing,” he recited. “And as we grow older, we oftentimes find ourselves developing new and confusing urges. I’m UCRT’s Justice, and I’m here today to talk to you about sex.”

[Delivery Development: The ROs \(With KOs\)](#)

[Apr 13, 2021](#)

Romance is important to interactive fiction. It gives roleplaying depth, increases investment in characters, and is most importantly *fun*.

But boy oh boy do I regret including five main romance options in *Mind Blind*. Every scene with every main character needs to be written at least twice to account for romance, and that's not even including all the variations from having different friendship stats. Thus, in *Delivery for the Damned*, I'll be limiting the ROs to four. (I feel like four is a more manageable number while still providing a decent amount of choice.)

The problem is that all the planned ROs are, well, kinda-sorta evil. Or at very least morally gray enough that they should be bleached before worn out in public.

Balthasar is the only RO who's been formally introduced on Patreon, because he's crucial to the plot and the only RO whose role I'm certain. (Fun fact: a one-off imagined scene with Balti inspired *Delivery's* entire world.)

The other planned ROs are Ev (a murderous witch), Luce (a murderous vampire), and Henri (who only has one murderous personality, but still). None of them go around murdering babies for fun or anything, but they're all pretty questionable.

My question: Does there need to be at least one RO who leans stereotypically good?

I've been waffling on whether or not to make Henri the best friend character instead of an RO (You could choose which personality to be besties with. Romance, however, would require accepting all of their facets.) Alternatively, Luce could be turned into a more mentor-like figure. All of the characters would still remain as clients in-game, and the new RO would probably be the human detective investigating *SPOILERS* alongside the MC.

This topic doesn't fit super well into a simplified poll, so I'd really love to hear your feedback either here on this post or on the Delivery Development thread in the Sanctum Discord. Would you be willing to romance a character who, if real world standards applied, would belong in prison? Is it unwise for all of the ROs to have questionable morality? Would it be better to increase variety by including a more "typical" (but no less complex!) love interest? Based on what you know so far about the ROs, who would you be most willing to send to the chopping block in order to make room for this new "good" RO?

I wouldn't be interested in romancing an "evil" character.

I'd romance someone "evil," but the ROs should have greater moral variety.

Keep the ROs as currently planned. Moral ambiguity is sexy.

Other. (Please elaborate!)

50 votes total

[Apr 14, 2021](#)

From the Journal of Lady Vitrula Rhys: The Third Death

I sat in the east parlor of Rhys Manor with my hands folded primly atop my lap. My father had not responded well to my announcement that I planned on dissolving my engagement to Loren. His jaw clenched as he glared down his nose at me, a vein on his temple visibly throbbing.

“Do you mean to tell me,” he hissed, “that you intend to call off your betrothal due to some . . . ludicrous fantasy?”

I’d presented him with the truth in full: my last two deaths, Loren’s relationship with Letty, and my suspicions that my stepsister had been the one behind both my execution and my exile. She’d most likely hired the highwaymen in order to further guarantee I never returned to Bellcrest.

Admittedly, perhaps the day after Father’s wedding to Catherine had not been the best timing to reveal everything. Father clearly didn’t believe my story: he said as much. Repeatedly.

“She’s mad,” he muttered to himself. “I’ve raised a madwoman.”

I bristled at his words. “I’m not insane, I assure you. Being engaged to Prince Loren has resulted in my death twice over. It would be best for all involved if I were to step aside and allow him to be with Letticia.”

“He hasn’t met your stepsister!” Drops of his spittle landed on my cheek; I used my sleeve to wipe it away.

“But they will meet. Whether it’s a year from now or only a month, they’ll fall in love. Letty is a Rhys through adoption now—he’ll still be marrying into the family.”

My father dropped to the chair besides me and buried his face in hands. “Not only crazed but a nitwit as well. Of course, it’s not the same, Vitrula. Your bloodline represents all of northern nobility. Letticia is the birth daughter of a merchant.”

“But with your approval—” I began.

"Even with my blessing, the other northern lords won't be satisfied. You'll marry the Prince, and I'll not listen to another word of farfetched nonsense about reliving the past. I applaud your creativity, but next time make your excuse more believable."

My refusal to concede that I'd been lying vexed my father to no end. When I broached ending the betrothal again a year later, upon Letty's debut at Court, he called a doctor. When the first doctor failed to find anything ailing me, he summoned a second. Then a third and fourth. All the while, I insisted that my story was true.

Father made excuses to King Eldin and summoned me back home. If I were kept away from Court, he judged, then perhaps Loren wouldn't realize that I was insane until after the wedding. A nurse shadowed my every movement to ensure I didn't decide to jump off a cliff or terrorize the villagers in a fit of madness.

What Father didn't account for, despite my foresight, was that my absence and Letty's presence only served to hasten the development of her relationship with Loren. Less than six months after I departed Bellcrest, Father received a letter bearing the seal of the royal household. In it, King Eldin expressed his son's wish to transfer his engagement from me to Letty. Since this was precisely what I had suggested, I thoroughly endorsed the idea. Not that I felt delighted by the prospect of Letty winning, but I valued my continued existence over a need for retribution.

Father was not as receptive. He began divorce proceedings with Catherine immediately in order to once again render Letty a commoner and strongarm Loren into abiding by their original agreement. Long story short, the Duchess fled to Bellcrest where she pled her case to the royal Court. King Eldin issued a decree forbidding any priest from annulling her marriage to my father.

His Majesty's interference, complained lords across Verdan, was dictatorial and infringed upon their rights. If the King could not be trusted to refrain from meddling in their marriages, what faith could they have that he would allow them to continue governing their own territories? Their resulting coup lasted for a long and bloody year. I lost friends and long-time family retainers.

I lost Theo.

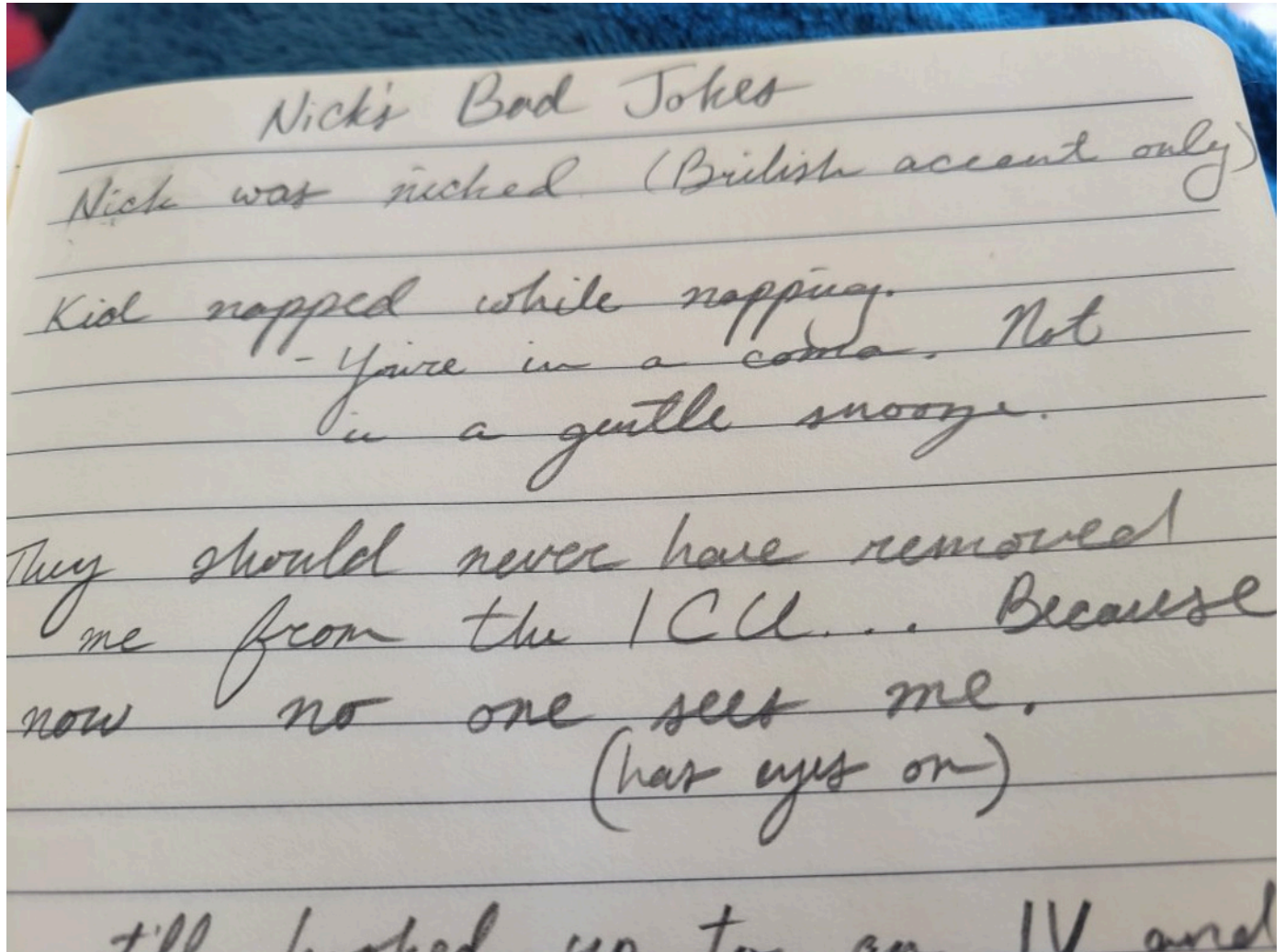
All the while, I remained imprisoned under a nurse. The Mad Princess's War, commoners called it when rumor of my unsound state of mind inevitably leaked. That I hadn't been a princess, and had desired fervently not to become one, was irrelevant when measured against the catchy bard songs composed at the time.

When Father's forces were finally defeated, both he and I were put on trial and declared traitors to the Crown. Our execution was scheduled for the week after Loren's marriage to Letty, who ironically stood to inherit all of Father's holdings as his sole surviving legal heir. After so much bloodshed, execution was almost a relief.

I fully expected being able to start over, younger and wiser, in order to try again. I needed to start over. For Theo. My unnatural calmness in the face of death convinced my father more than anything that I

was indeed a lunatic. I'd embraced death with a smile; he'd gone cursing the Triad for giving him a demented daughter.

Regardless, I'd learned an important lesson: no good came of telling others the truth. If I wished to end my engagement with Loren, I'd have to do so while managing to appease the Kothen nobility—and not get my family killed in the process.



[Why Nick Has The Best Lines](#)

[Apr 16, 2021](#)

Fun fact: Nick is the only character who has his own dedicated journal for bad jokes and puns.

(Photo contains joke conceptual versions only--oneliners undergo polishing before being included in-game.)

Best line not in image:

"If I survive this, I deserve a trophy."

"Atrophy? You probably already have that."

[Another Perspective: Minesweep or Weep \(Kent & Ferro Version\)](#)

[Apr 16, 2021](#)

Chapter 2: Glitch's Perspective

Kent and Ferro Version

"What did you do this time?"

Kent looked away. Most people would interpret his stony expression and seeming inattention as indifference (or maybe thinly-veiled guilt), but I knew Kent better. He was confused, maybe even a little hurt. Whatever he'd done to aggravate Wiseman (and, judging by the dark glances that Wiseman and their red-haired AMO kept sending our way, Kent had definitely done *something* to earn their enmity), Kent was clueless.

Kent was frequently clueless as to why he inadvertently frustrated people; it was one of the things I found so endearing about him. Normally, however, he didn't much *care* whether someone was upset by his cold demeanor. That he appeared to value Wiseman's opinion of him . . . it set off my inner "*Kent Zarneki Is Having A Confusing Emotion*" alarm. This alarm was infrequent despite Kent not being the most emotionally attuned person (ironic, given our ruse that he was an empath); he usually dismissed his feelings too quickly to ever become bewildered by them. That he wasn't able to shrug off this recent incident said something about his relationship with Wiseman.

I didn't know *what* it said. But I fully intended to learn.

"I knew they'd be taken aback by my participation in their first class," Kent said with another long look in Wiseman's direction. (Wiseman, it must be noted, returned his curious stare with a glare venomous enough to make me reevaluate my first impression of them as more a jokester than a threat.)

I studied Kent's face. There it was, shadowed between the downwards angle of his dark brows: disappointment. Whatever reaction that Kent had anticipated from Wiseman in regards to his early reappearance, they'd defied his expectations, and not for the better.

"You thought they'd be happy to see you again," I realized aloud.

Kent shrugged dismissively, but his cheeks pinkened enough to confirm my theory. Kent's tell-all pale complexion always revealed when he was flustered.

"You're adorable," I informed Kent.

He scowled. "Ferro?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Shut up."

My laughter faded as Kent's gaze once again gravitated towards Wiseman, who was now very deliberately ignoring us. I cleared my throat to regain Kent's attention.

"Seriously. What did you do?" I asked.

"I drove them to school," Kent replied.

"That's all?"

"Yes."

"You're *certain* that's all?"

"Yes?"

I frowned. "Wiseman was asking questions about your powers earlier. I thought that they were trying to gain an edge for the assignment, but it's possible that they dislike empaths."

"Why would someone who dislikes Ments join Aeon?" Kent sighed, his pained resignation enough to make my own heart ache on his behalf. "I must've done something wrong."

His unspoken 'again' hung in the air between us. Damn Tobias Zarneki to hell and back for the number he'd done on his son's self-esteem. The man was "loathsome as a toad, ugly and venomous." Admittedly, I was mixing my Shakespearean insults (from *Titus Andronicus* and *As You Like It*, to be exact), but I despised Kent's dad. Because of Mayor Z, Kent didn't allow himself to aim for to anything less than perfection. The problem? No human could be perfect all the time. Kent was trapped in a spiral of letting himself down, second-guessing his actions over every little mistake even when he'd done nothing wrong.

"There must've be a misunderstanding," I insisted. "Whatever is up, I'm sure that Wiseman will be willing to forgive and forget."

We both glanced over to where Wiseman and their AMO now shared the same disturbingly wicked smile. Were they planning for Rosy's assignment? Their expressions gave me the chills, and I kept my apartment air conditioning set at sixty degrees.

"They seem in the forgiving mood," Kent noted dryly.

"Time heals all?" I offered.

He snorted. "Is everything prepped for the assignment?"

I was tempted to ignore Kent's clumsy change of topic, but something in his grey eyes made me decide to leave things be (for now, at least). I puffed up my chest and assumed an air of over-the-top pride.

"Who are you talking to?" I demanded. "I pre-programmed the blackout ten minutes after Rosy asked for our help."

"So, before I agreed then."

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[Another Perspective: Minesweep or Weep \(Kent & Talia Version\)](#)

[Apr 16, 2021](#)

Chapter 2: Glitch's Perspective

Kent and Talia Version

"What did you do this time?"

Kent looked away. Most people would interpret his stony expression and seeming inattention as indifference (or maybe thinly-veiled guilt), but I knew Kent better. He was confused, maybe even a little hurt. Whatever he'd done to aggravate Wiseman (and, judging by the dark glances that Wiseman and their red-haired AMO kept sending our way, Kent had definitely done *something* to earn their enmity), Kent was clueless.

Kent was frequently clueless as to why he inadvertently frustrated people; it was one of the things I found so endearing about him. Normally, however, he didn't much *care* whether someone was upset by his cold demeanor. That he appeared to value Wiseman's opinion of him . . . it set off my inner "*Kent Zarneki Is Having A Confusing Emotion*" alarm. This alarm was infrequent despite Kent not being the most emotionally attuned person (ironic, given our ruse that he was an empath); he usually dismissed his feelings too quickly to ever become bewildered by them. That he wasn't able to shrug off this recent incident said something about his relationship with Wiseman.

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"I knew they'd be taken aback by my participation in their first class," Kent said with another long look in Wiseman's direction. (Wiseman, it must be noted, returned his curious stare with a glare venomous enough to make me reevaluate my first impression of them as more a jokester than a threat.)

I studied Kent's face. There it was, shadowed between the downwards angle of his dark brows: disappointment. Whatever reaction that Kent had anticipated from Wiseman in regards to his early reappearance, they'd defied his expectations, and not for the better.

"You thought they'd be happy to see you again," I realized aloud.

Kent shrugged dismissively, but his cheeks pinkened enough to confirm my theory. Kent's tell-all pale complexion always revealed when he was flustered.

"You're adorable," I informed Kent.

He scowled. "Talía?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Shut up."

My laughter faded as Kent's gaze once again gravitated towards Wiseman, who was now very deliberately ignoring us. I cleared my throat to regain Kent's attention.

"Seriously. What did you do?" I asked.

"I drove them to school," Kent replied.

"That's all?"

"Yes."

"You're *certain* that's all?"

"Yes?"

I frowned. "Wiseman was asking questions about your powers earlier. I thought that they were trying to gain an edge for the assignment, but it's possible that they dislike empaths."

"Why would someone who dislikes Ments join Aeon?" Kent sighed, his pained resignation enough to make my own heart ache on his behalf. "I must've done something wrong."

His unspoken 'again' hung in the air between us. Damn Tobias Zarneki to hell and back for the number he'd done on his son's self-esteem. The man was "loathsome as a toad, ugly and venomous."

Admittedly, I was mixing my Shakespearean insults (from *Titus Andronicus* and *As You Like It*, to be exact), but I despised Kent's dad. Because of Mayor Z, Kent didn't allow himself to aim for to anything

less than perfection. The problem? No human could be perfect all the time. Kent was trapped in a spiral of letting himself down, second-guessing his actions over every little mistake even when he'd done nothing wrong.

"There must've be a misunderstanding," I insisted. "Whatever is up, I'm sure that Wiseman will be willing to forgive and forget."

We both glanced over to where Wiseman and their AMO now shared the same disturbingly wicked smile. Were they planning for Rosy's assignment? Their expressions gave me the chills, and I kept my apartment air conditioning set at sixty degrees.

"They seem in the forgiving mood," Kent noted dryly.

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[Writer's Blog: The Last Public Chapter](#)

[Apr 16, 2021](#)

Next Patreon Chapter: Chapter 9 (coming 4/28)

Current Wordcount: 273k

Average Playthrough: 64k

As some of you may already have read on the Sanctum, Chapter 8 will mark the last update to the Public Demo. This was a decision I made recently, after realizing that Noh's scenes will require coding that will most likely give away their identity.

Chapter 9 will still be available for all Patrons as planned, but Chapter 10 will be exclusive to AMO Tiers and up. By limiting the second half of *Mind Blind*, I'm doing my best to staunch the inevitable leak of Noh's identity pre-publication.

Tiers with Sanctum Discord Access will have a space to discuss the future updates, and I'll be adding in a separate Sanctum channel for code divers that you'll be able to request an invite for. That way, those who *really really REALLY* need to try and identify Noh prematurely by digging through code (which I genuinely do not recommend for Chapter 10) will still be able to do so. But you won't accidentally stumble on the spoiler, unless people post about it on social media . . . which I earnestly plead that they don't.

I will never blame someone for wanting to know how a story ends. I'm a chronic back-page flipper myself. I understand the need to *know*. But *Mind Blind* is a mystery, which means that certain secrets won't make sense unless they're presented at the proper time. Even worse than not making sense, these reveals won't feel satisfying. Noh's identity is one such secret. If people confirm Noh's identity before Button does (100% confirm, not just suspect due to the clues left sprinkled throughout), it will ruin the story.

I'm serious: ***Prematurely learning Noh's identity will likely ruin your first playthrough experience.***

Not wanting to ruin the experience is the only reason I've been able to keep my mouth shut about Noh's real name and motivations. I'm *terrible* at keeping secrets (as in, cringe-comedy bad at it), but Noh's identity, revealed improperly, would so spoil the enjoyment of a first playthrough that, if I had accidentally announced it early-on and it became public knowledge, I would've changed the entire plot. But at a quarter-million words, it's too late to rewrite the main mystery. So all I can do is beg, if you have access to the demo going forth, that you not leak it outside the Sanctum and risk ruining the discovery for others.

I can't even fully explain *why* it's so important that Noh's identity be kept secret. Doing so would reveal their identity in retrospect; since there aren't all that many characters left to be formally introduced, the pool of suspects isn't vast.

Since the amount of demo readers is about to get significantly smaller, the input you provide on the upcoming chapters will be even more important. I'll be opening up slots for editors and test readers, but they won't be able to present the variety of opinions that come from having a public demo. Your feedback will matter more than ever, because starting Chapter 10 . . . Button's life is about to get a lot more complicated.

To Clarify: AMOs, MIVs, UCRT Members, and Hero Zeros will have access to *Mind Blind* in its entirety, from Chapter 10 to "*and they lived happily ever after.*" I'll rely on your feedback and responses to tell if things are working or not. Having the public demo has been IMMENSELY helpful in shaping *Mind Blind*, and if the story weren't a mystery, I'd probably keep the entire thing as a public demo.

[Saucy Side: Knave of Hearts \(Ferro Version\)](#)

[Apr 18, 2021](#)

Featuring: Ferro Parker

AU set in Georgia, 1946

You awake to the rustle of someone climbing in through your bedroom window.

He's back.

Georgia's most infamous thief promised that he would return to steal your heart. You laughed at the time—how could you trust the word of anyone, let alone a thief, who called himself “Glitch”? The only other place you'd heard that ridiculous word was on the radio, whenever announcers admitted to an on-air mistake over the static broadcast.

You teased Glitch about his moniker the first time you met him at one of your parents' galas. He claimed the word came from “glitsh,” the Yiddish word for “slippery place.”

“Because,” he said, brown eyes gleaming with amusement, “slippery places are my business.”

Missing his innuendo, you asked if that meant he worked at an ice rink. He laughed, the rich sound sending a tingle of warmth and awareness all the way down to your toes. Then he asked you to dance, and you said yes, and he slipped off his gloves and slowly removed yours so that your palms burned as your fingers interlocked in a way not required by the waltz. For the first time in your life, everything felt perfect. Glitch twirled you out the doors of your parents' ballroom and kissed you in a dark corner of the gardens next to a plot of overgrown verbenas. And that kiss, in the dark, to the far-off refrains of the orchestra indoors . . . that kiss was perfect as well.

Then he left, and you discovered that your mother's sapphire necklace had gone missing.

The next morning, a note was left on your silk pillowcase. Its envelope was filled with purple verbena petals. Inside was a poem, written in looping cursive, that promised Glitch would return.

Fool that you are, you waited. With the War over and Nick discharged from France, you finally dared to dream about escaping from the social expectations that came from being born a Wiseman. You fantasized of disappearing into the night with a dashing thief who had no need to return in order to steal your heart, because he'd already claimed it.

You continued to wait. Parties came and went. You waited, but he never returned. You only knew that he hadn't left the city because of other thefts; headlines burned with speculation on the mysterious thief who made a fool out of Savannah's elite by lifting their necklaces straight from their necks and their pocket watches from their pockets.

You spent two months waiting until resolving to give up. Your fall back to earth had been three months ago.

Now, almost half a year after that magical, world-shattering, foolish kiss . . . Glitch is back just as he promised.

After a moment's deliberation, you open your eyes. "Why are you here?" you ask.

Your mattress dips as he sits on the edge of your bed. "I didn't mean to *arouse* you . . ." he pauses playfully ". . . from your sleep. But I promised to return."

You turn your head towards him without getting up. In his dark suit and demi-mask, Glitch almost disappears into the night. But his wide, teasing smile gleams in the moonlight—the smile of a man with the soul of The Cheshire Cat.

"That promise was made six months ago," you say stiffly, praying that he can't hear the rapid thrum of your heartbeat over the outside cicadas. "You're late."

"Do promises have an expiration date?"

"You stole my mother's necklace."

"That doesn't mean I'm feckless."

"You never wrote."

"I left a note."

You sit up abruptly and glare at him. "Are you doing that deliberately?"

Glitch smirks at you, leaning closer until his nose almost touches yours. "Doing what?"

“The rhyming.”

He chuckles softly. “You found it endearing last time.”

“A lot has changed since then. I’ve matured.”

“Have you? I haven’t.” Glitch inches even closer. His lips brush against the shell of your ear as he whispers: “You still shiver at my voice.”

“I do *not*—”

Glitch seals your protest with a kiss. Unlike the first time when he kissed you in the garden, this kiss isn’t an instant explosion of want and need. His lips are as gentle as a benediction, moving against yours in a beseeching prayer for atonement. Then it deepens, his tongue twining with yours, and his hand grasping the back of your neck.

“Lord, how I’ve missed you,” he moans into your mouth. “I’ve missed you so much.”

You swallow his litany of apology, your fingers clenching the fabric of his suit as you pull him closer. But it’s not close enough. It will never be close enough—*can* never be close enough. This thief owns your heart, and you’re unable to reclaim it no matter the proximity.

Your chests press so closely together that you feel Glitch’s heartbeat pounding, its beat fluttering and accelerating as your hands explore his shoulders and down the dip of his back.

“I’ve missed you too,” you admit.

His moonlight grin widens. Then he’s pushing you back onto the bed, dexterous fingers undoing the top buttons of your nightshirt as you fall.

“I’ve decided to keep your heart,” he whispers into the crook of your neck.

You gasp as his lips trail downwards. “Only if you pay for it.”

Glitch pulls back, and he stares at you intently. “It’s not my usual method as a thief,” he says, “but for you I’ll make an exception.”

“Good.” Your arms reach around him, bringing him back down. “Because I’m taking your heart as payment.”

Glitch rests his head against where your heart—no, *his* heart—beats. “Careful. Or you just may make an honest man out of me yet.”

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[The Great Candy Caper](#)

[Apr 20, 2021](#)

Featuring Sally and Elliot (M!Button)

Set in high school, two years before game

“I didn’t want to go anyway.”

Sally’s kick sends an empty soda can skittering down the sidewalk until she walks close enough to kick it again.

"Litterbugs," she grumbles. "I bet you this came from Veronica. She probably chucks cigarette butts out of her car window, too."

Elliot holds back a smirk. Sally is more transparent than the window shield of Veronica's aforementioned car—and since said automobile is a Porsche, Veronica takes it through the car wash more times per week than most people wash their hair.

"Moronica has asthma," he reminds Sally, "and she's allergic to cigarette smoke. Remember that time she had an attack after Mr. Adams came to class right after smoking?"

Sally scowls at him. "Whose side are you on?"

"Yours, always and forever," he answers distractedly. The soda can is Diet Surge, which means it's been littering the street since at least before 2003 when the drink was discontinued; in other words, before Veronica was even born. Side bar: why does he even know the exact year that Surge was discontinued? And why doesn't his ability to retain useless information extend to calculus. Maybe Gray is right, and he should try out for *Jeopardy*.

Eventually, Elliot realizes that Sally is no longer beside him. He turns back; she's standing several paces away, arms crossed and staring at him with exasperated amusement.

"You disappeared again," she says. "What's going on in that head of yours?"

Given her aggravated reaction to his reminder that Moronica doesn't smoke, Elliot isn't about to explain that he's also deduced that Sally's hypothesis on the can's origin is incorrect. He loves his best friend, dearly and truly, but Sally isn't the most receptive to unemotional facts when she's upset. And, given how hard she's kicking that Surge can, she's definitely still upset about being one of the few people in their entire senior class *not* invited to Veronica Peterson's graduation party.

"You don't even like Moronica," Elliot says instead of getting into a dissertation on extinct carbonated beverages and the implications thereof. "Why are you so upset that she didn't invite us?"

"I'm not upset!" Sally snaps.

Elliot's brows rise skeptically.

"I know that we would've skipped her dumb party anyway." Sally keeps her eyes riveted on the soda can in order to not meet his gaze. "But we're practically the only two people in class not invited! We were ostracized! Exiled! Snubbed! How are you so unbothered by that?" She gives the can a particularly vicious kick, sending it clanging across the road.

"Being bothered takes too much energy," Elliot says, faking a yawn. "Besides, there were like eleven other people that didn't get invites."

Most of the other persona-non-grata were people that had annoyed Veronica in some way: Evan Futterman refused to do her chemistry homework, and Parth Ahuja asked Kelly Murphey to homecoming. Elliot and Sally never interacted with Veronica much, but neither had most of the other students in their class. Yet everyone else had been invited.

Elliot knows exactly why he and Sally hadn't received invites: Veronica Peterson is a Ment. Not a strong one, but a Ment nonetheless.

And Elliot gives her headaches.

In Veronica's defense, she never complains directly to *him* about the headaches. But her parents did ask Principal Davalos if Elliot could switch classes. Ment bullies were bad, but behind-the-scenes Ment complainers like Veronica Peterson were the reason that Elliot had to fight to attend his own graduation ceremony after Principal Davalos suggested that his "unfortunate condition" might distract "certain other students" from "the otherwise joyous occasion."

Go to Moronica's party? Elliot would rather chug twenty gallons of expired Surge.

Still, it sucked that Sally was being isolated by association. Not that Sally would ever stop being his friend (Elliot tried to pull away back in junior high for her own good, only to have her to abuse her position as yearbook editor and include a two-page spread dedicated to their friendship where the cheerleader team roster was supposed to go). Sally had been banned from yearbook staff ever since, but to this day she argued that the drastic measures had been worth it if it successfully disabused Elliot of the absurd notion that she would be better off without him.

His best friend deserves the world, or at least some cheering up. Maybe he can buy her a Milky Way at the corner store? Caramel and chocolate usually do the trick when it came to making Sally happy. He would've bought her one at school, when they first heard about the party that they weren't invited to, but the school convenience store only sells Stevia-sweetened protein bars that taste like stale bran and suffering.

After a quick stop at the corner store, Sally squeals as she unwraps the Milky Way.

"I *love* you," she moans.

Elliot doesn't respond, fully aware that she's addressing the chocolate bar.

"I wish everyone in the world could have an Elliot," Sally says through a mouthful of caramel. "The others who didn't get invited need to buy their own pity prizes."

Elliot begins to smile slowly.

"Oh, no." Sally groans, half because her chocolate bar is now finished and half because she recognizes that sly look on Elliot's face. "You have another plan."

“Kelly Murphey still runs the ASB store, right?”

Sally nods. “Until graduation.”

“You two are friends?”

“Ish. We used to be in the same ballet class.”

“The one that you got kicked out of?”

Sally smacks his shoulder. “I didn’t get kicked out. Ms. York simply thought my talents would be put to better use . . . on anything that didn’t involve dance. Or physical coordination in general, really.”

“Give Kelly a call,” Elliot says. “I have a plan.”

* * * *

The hallway of their high school is dark and empty—as it should be, given the time is 1am.

“I can’t believe where doing this,” Sally hisses. “When did you learn to pick a lock?”

“I wanted to break into Nick’s diary,” Elliot replies blandly.

Sally chokes on air. “Nicholas keeps a diary?”

No, but Elliot gets a devilish glee at the knowledge that Sally won’t be able to sleep tonight due to agonizing over what Nick may have written about her. Amusement aside, Elliot can’t help but wince as Sally’s rolling suitcase creates a thundering echo throughout the abandoned school.

“Couldn’t you have used your backpack instead?” he asks. “Someone is going to hear us.”

Sally glares at him. “Other than us, who’s going to be here in the dead of night? I bought all the candy bars that Costco had for sale, and buying bulk is *heavy*. Thankfully, my dads love me too much to interrogate me about why I spent my last nannying paycheck on sixty-five pounds of chocolate.”

Elliot slows his steps in order to boop her on the nose with his index finger. “You’re very lovable,” he confirms.

“I’m aware of my extreme lovability,” Sally says. “You printed out the invitations?”

“All two-hundred and seventeen.” Elliot pats his messenger bag. “One for every member of our senior class. Even Moronica.”

“She won’t attend since it’s the same day as her own party, thank God.” Sally’s giddy laugh becomes a nervous chuckle and ends as a disheartened sigh. “What if *no one* attends?”

"It's a party held by a mysterious host, at the Amphora Hotel, with invitations wrapped around free chocolate bars that are surreptitiously handed out by Kelly at the student store," Elliot points out. "Who *wouldn't* attend? Thankfully, Nick loves *me* enough to reserve the Amphora ballroom, because no amount of nannying would cover the fees that they charge."

In truth, Nick had been near tears of joy when Elliot informed him that he wanted to throw a last-minute graduation party. It'd been all Elliot could do to convince Nick that, no, a high school party did *not* require renting out the entire hotel, nor were acrobats necessary in addition to the DJ.

Sally's quiet. Elliot uses his phone as a flashlight to illuminate her conflicted expression.

"You don't have to do this for me, you know," Sally says. "Most of our classmates aren't exactly nice to you."

Ugh. Elliot hoped to avoid this talk.

"I don't take it personally," he says, praying that she doesn't note the uncertain quiver in his voice.

"Even so, why are you throwing a party for them?" Sally asks. "Why go through all this effort to create a buzz? Is it just to one-up Veronica Peterson when everyone comes to our party instead of hers?"

Elliot rolls his eyes. "Please. I plan to forget Moronica's name within a week of graduation."

"Then why?" Sally presses. "I probably should've asked sooner, but I went along because it sounds like fun."

"That's your answer," Elliot says. "It's fun."

"*To me*," Sally finishes. "It sounds like fun *to me*. Your idea of fun is taking out a one-person kayak or hiding in the library with a new book. So why the sudden urge to throw a graduation party?"

Maybe this gesture is too much, and he should've stuck with buying her the Milky Way. But if Sally could steal two pages in the yearbook for him in eighth grade, then Elliot could damn well make sure she got the big graduation bash of her dreams.

"I've decided to try becoming an extravert," he lies, knowing that Sally's future enjoyment of their party likely hinges on her belief that it's what he wants as well. Relief hits as they arrive at the cafeteria, providing him with a way to change the subject. "Did Kelly give you the key?"

Sally nods. Elliot puts out his palm, expecting her to give him the ASB store key. Instead, she instead yanks him down into a tight hug.

"What was that for?" he asks once she releases him.

"For being a bad liar," Sally replies, "but a really great friend."

Mind Blind Bloopers from Chapter 9

Apr 20, 2021

Nick's panic sets off your panic, which in turn increases his panic, which makes you panic some more, until both of you are panicking like a Rube Goldberg machine triggered by a marble of pure anxiety.

* * *

"You didn't like my essay?"

"That was not an essay."

"It had a topic sentence, well-argued main points, and a brilliant conclusion."

"Your topic sentence was 'We should date.'"

"We should."

"No."

"Please?"

* * *

Being in love with Grayson Black is like getting a root canal. Sometimes you tingle, but mostly you're in pain.

* * *

"Why Glitch? For real, this time."

Glitch looks away.

"You promised no more secrets."

She sighs. "I'll tell you after Operation Hemera is over. Until then, call me AI." She whips out a pair of sunglasses. "Because I'm your bodyguard."

* * *

Kent sets his hands against the wall, trapping you between his arms.

You look up into his silver eyes, breathless.

“Senpai.”

* * *

Their light touch makes you gasp. As much as you should hate this person . . . there's something compelling about their ruthless certainty.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 9](#)

[Apr 21, 2021](#)

Bellcrest's summers are as hot as its winters are icy. During the Festival of Bells, however, no one in the capital seemed bothered by the sweltering humidity. Businesses closed and makeshift wooden stalls opened, lining the streets and selling everything from patterned headscarves to sugar-spun bells. Bridges of brightly colored ribbons draped between lampposts to create a maze of color overhead. Actual bridges crossing the Afron River closed to carts and carriages to make room for a multitude of fair games, most of which cost only a half-moon to play but all of which were rigged.

While the children challenged each other to throw steel rings onto empty milk bottles, adults were more excited for the yearly contests. There were six competitions total, one for each of the castle bells, ranging from pie baking to horseshoe throwing. The winner walked away with a hefty prize purse and bragging rights (the latter being perhaps more important to contenders).

Theo had insisted that we attend my least favorite of the tournaments: The Tower Climb. Not that I held anything against the event itself. Tivall Tower just happened to stand right next to the square where I'd been repeatedly executed. Also, I hated heights. The very thought of willingly scaling a tower left me nauseous.

“I didn't expect it to be quite so tall,” fretted Letty. She squinted into the sun's glare to take in the full height of the solitary stone giant that dominated over the buildings encircling it. “What happens if one of the climbers slips and falls?”

“Someone cleans the cobblestones,” said Theo.

Letty took a step backwards and almost tripped over one of said cobblestones. I grabbed her shoulder to help stabilize her, making a mental note to talk with Councilor Venuda regarding potentially repaving the square. Venuda's parents had been cobblers and still lived in Bellcrest; I'd long since discovered that she was the most likely amongst the Councilors to agree to public works projects.

"Participants know what they're doing," I told Letty. "In the hundred-year history of The Climb, no one has ever died."

"Yet," said Theo.

"Still," protested Letty, "it's so dangerous."

I shrugged. "Climbers use picks to affix their harnesses to the tower after each floor. Even if they slip, they'd only fall a short distance."

"Their ropes could snap." Letty tapped the base of the tower with her lace parasol, newly purchased from a nearby vendor's wagon. "And the stones are so uneven."

"Uneven stones make it easier to get a handhold," came a voice from behind us. "Despite Lady Vitrula's claim, the harnesses are primarily for show. None of the climbers wants to take the time to affix their picks and risk losing the lead."

Xander contemplated the tower with a faint grin as if recalling a fond memory. His red hair plastered to his forehead in the heat, and his suit sleeves were rolled up to display surprisingly muscular forearms for a diplomat.

"Neglecting your duties, Lord Brant?" I asked lightly. "Yet you so eagerly scorned our invitation."

Xander gestured to a nearby stand, where a rotund man with a shaved head was perusing through a stack of second-hand books. "Ambassador Leonidas insisted on witnessing The Climb personally. He couldn't believe such a tradition really existed."

"Even though his own guide was crowned its champion two years ago?" said Theo.

"I may have mentioned my past victory. He called me a *moros*."

"You climbed Tivall Tower yourself?" asked Letty breathlessly. "Weren't you afraid?"

Xander bowed, causing Letty to color prettily at the attention and give him a wobbly curtsy back. "I was young and foolish, and someone said I couldn't do it." He rubbed the back of his neck. "At the time, I was more stubborn than scared."

I prepared to pointedly ask whether his family had approved of his participation when another newcomer joined our conversation. Someone whose unexpected presence caused all the air to rush from my lungs. I'd climb the tower myself to avoid this moment. This meeting wasn't supposed to meet yet.

It was too soon.

"There you are, Vitrula," said Loren. "I heard you'd returned to Bellcrest."

His voice fell flat and annoyed, probably due to the fact I hadn't bothered to visit him yesterday. For someone who so rarely had a second to spare for me between horse races and fox hunts, he certainly sulked whenever I was less than attentive. Normally his tone would have concerned me, given my vested interest in keeping him happy in order to avoid execution—but I was too preoccupied attempting to calm my breaths to care overmuch.

Curses. The only reason that I'd agreed to attend the festival was to keep him and Letty separate. My fists clutched at my sides, crumpling the lightweight skirt of my dress. I used my involuntary grip to raise lift a flawless curtsy.

"Loren," I spoke with manufactured cheer. "How delightful we cross paths! I was preoccupied yesterday seeing my family settled."

"You still should have stopped by." Absorbed with airing his grievances, he failed to notice Letty standing on the other side of Theo. I savored the additional seconds. "It reflects badly upon me when my fiancée disappears. Even Armond commented on your continued absence."

I barely restrained myself from grimacing. "It's hardly disappearing to attend my own father's marriage, and I only returned yesterday." I blinked a few times, the way I'd seen ladies at Court do when they wanted to appear charming.

"Something in your eye?" muttered Theo.

Xander arched a brow at me as if seconding the question. I ignored them both. The best method to appease Loren was to tell him whatever he wanted to hear. Xander could judge after *he* had died seven times. Now that Letty was at Bellcrest, maintaining Loren's good opinion was more my concern than the opinion of a relative stranger. Still, my cheeks felt hot. "I missed you ever so much," I added for good measure.

Loren opened his mouth to reply then froze.

I recognized the look; it was the same enthralled stare each time he first laid eyes on Letty. His eyes closed several times in rapid succession and his lips twitched upwards twice before finalizing on an overly toothy smile. He moved closer and bowed to her, lower than he ever had to me. Theo, who stood between us, he completely ignored.

"Prince Loren Eldin Tivall." Loren introduced himself and paused, awaiting Letty's response. As heir to the throne, he was accustomed to having people presented to him. I couldn't recall the last time he'd been bothered to state his own name.

Letty blushed and curtsied back. Given that she'd come to Bellcrest early, she hadn't yet been versed in proper Court etiquette. After a moment of awkward uncertainty, she bobbed a second curtsy. A choking sound emitted from Theo besides her, whose own face was becoming almost as red as Letty's in his effort not to laugh at the faux pas. It would fall upon me to make introductions. Fate had a cruel sense of irony.

"Your Highness, my stepsister, Lady Letticia," I said. "I believe you've already met my brother, Lord Theodorus."

Theo shot me an annoyed look at my use of his full name. "A pleasure to see you again, Your Highness," he said with a curt bow. "It's been too long."

"You must be glad to be back from Fengal." Loren acknowledged his presence with a brief flick of his eyes before returning them to Letty.

"Anterdon, Your Highness," corrected Xander. His hands were clasped tightly behind his back. For some reason, whereas Loren had barely acknowledged my brother's greeting, Xander's interjection caused him to tear his attention away from Letty.

"Lord Brant." Loren's face mirrored Xander's dour countenance. "How . . . unexpected to find you here. With my betrothed." His ice blue eyes lingered once more on Letty before landing on me. "I suppose you two met due to Vitrula's little hobby."

'Hobby' was how Loren referred to my apprenticeship with Delphine. Odd that he knew of Xander's parentage, given Xander's reluctance to disclose it. Worth investigating later; Emilia would take the case in return for a few evenings off. My lady's maid was by far my best weapon of espionage in this life, and I had no doubt that she'd handily unearth some satisfyingly scandalous revelation.

For now, however, I'd promised to keep Xander's secret.

"Lord Brant and my brother work together at the embassy in Anterdon." I ignored Loren's implied question on how we had met, widening my eyes in my best impression of Letty at her most innocent. "What a small world, that you're friends as well!"

Xander smiled at me, gratitude relaxing his stiff expression. "A small world indeed," he agreed. "But much as I'd love to continue our conversation, duty beckons." He nodded to where Ambassador Leonidas appeared to be animatedly haggling with a red-cheeked bookseller. "Theo, ladies. Your Highness. If you'll excuse me." He bowed briskly and left to go save his charge (or rather the bookseller, judging from the violent chopping motion that the Ambassador was making with his hands).

The tension between Loren and Xander dissipated with the latter's departure. The former immediately refocused on my stepsister. "How are you enjoying Bellcrest?" he asked. "Has Vitrula begun arrangements for your debut?"

"Oh, I couldn't—," began Letty.

I cut her off. "No doubt my stepmother will wish to oversee Letticia's debut herself."

"Nonsense," said Loren gallantly. "It's unfair to expect Lady Letticia to languish at Court without being able to attend the social scene. As Vitrula's sister, you're practically family and should be introduced immediately. Don't you agree, my dear?"

My insides recoiled at his casual, artificial, affection. In my first two lives, I'd been deeply touched by his dedication in looking out for my relations. No longer. "It's customary for the lady of the household to arrange all Court introductions," I demurred.

"As Tru says." Letty's slumped shoulders belied her agreement. "I'm supposed to be presented until after I turn sixteen."

"But you must wish to attend balls and go on picnics," insisted Loren. "It's my duty as prince to see you enjoy your time at Court." His smile was dazzling. Loren wielded his dimples the way knights mastered swords, and few women were capable of parrying his charm when he had his mind set on something.

"I don't wish to be an inconvenience." Letty nibbled her lower lip. Even her indecisiveness was obnoxiously charming.

"Well, *I* intend to enjoy my stay," announced Theo. "Would be a deuced shame if Letty was the only one left out. Between the three of us, arranging a debut will hardly be any work at all."

My teeth grit together until I worried my companions would overhear their scrape. This couldn't be happening. The love affair between Loren and Letty might be inevitable, but I'd bind myself in eternal servitude to the Silent Fourth before I helped to facilitate their relationship.

"Do you even realize how much work a lady's official introduction to Court entails?" An entire month before my own introduction had been taken up simply preparing an appropriate wardrobe, from ballgown fittings to half a dozen trips to the haberdasher. Letty would need dance lessons and etiquette tutoring as well. "Good" manners weren't sufficient at Court; perfect manners were expected. There existed a thousand and three ways to offend someone, from misordering their titles to tilting one's fan the wrong direction.

Not only was I disinclined to assist my stepsister spend more time with my fiancé, I had my apprenticeship to worry about. Delphine's tutelage would be wasted if I was too busy playing chaperone to practice.

"You went through it without Father or I present," said Theo. "How hard can it be with Prince Loren's sponsorship?"

"Which I'll gladly provide," agreed Loren readily.

Our debate dragged on well into the tournament. Only Letty ended up paying attention to The Climb itself; the rest of us were too busy arguing her fate. Her soft exclamations and sharp gasps as participants scaled Tivall Tower were but a backdrop to our increasingly heated dispute. By the time a gangly commoner collapsed into his sweetheart's arms after being declared the victor, the matter was all but resolved in the minds of Loren and Theo. My cogent objections had been, as too often the case when arguing with young men, vociferously overruled.

Letty would make her official debut one month hence at Loren's birthday ball. I was to arrange the entire affair.

[April Live Q&A](#)

[Apr 21, 2021](#)

Per usual, there will be two live Q&A sessions on the Sanctum of Spoilers (please message me if you need help linking your discord account with the discord). I think I've figured out everyone's time zones needs at this point, so have gone ahead and set the dates:

The first is this **Saturday, April 24, at 10am PST.**

The second session will be **Friday, April 30, at 6pm PST.**

Why have the Q&As spread over two weekends? Because the Patreon demo updates on the 28th (I'm excited!), and I wanted you guys to have an opportunity to ask questions about the new material if you so desired. This month ends on a Friday, however, which is why the time is set to then instead of the usual Saturday.

If neither of these time slots works for you, please leave a note on this post! I'm spending this weekend playtesting and editing (I went to the grocery store for chocolate in advance), so I have enough flexibility in my schedule to add a third slot if need be.

[To Read a Latin Love Poems](#)

[Apr 22, 2021](#)

Note: *Thinking about K inspired me to go back and read some Ovid in order to include references, only to realize that my Latin is rustier than . . . I can't actually think of something that's really rusty off the top of my head, but let's pretend I compared it to something clever. Anyhow, the result of my tackling Latin again is this poem. (Yes, I'm embarrassingly nerdy. But I rather liked how this turned out.)*

To Read a Latin Love Poem

Grammatically pick

and peel away

each clause; don't reach

for meaning, but gaze

at a participle

dangling

off the end of the top stanza

desperately seeking

the main subject.

Identify a meter

you can't pronounce:

hendecasyllabical

or

a version

of that count.

Forage through the dictionary

for words fallen

from memory.

Unearth the object

of a verb's affection.

Finally, impassioned

declarations neatly

parsed into translated

slices—

Interpret.

[Apr 23, 2021](#)

Next Patreon Chapter: Chapter 9 (coming 4/28)

Current Wordcount: 286k

Average Playthrough: Unknown (I need to fix all the coding bugs in order to run random test, which gives me the average playthrough length)

Chapter 9 is coming Wednesday! The entire chapter should be playable from beginning to end, although I'll probably hold off on including some of the alternative scenes. (Low-relationship Nick route, for example, needs tweaking.)

Warning: Spoilers from Chapter 8's cliffhanger ahead.

Chapter 9 is about Nick. More specifically, it's about Button and Nick, and what their relationship looks like going forward. How Button behaves in Chapter 9 (including but not limited to their immediate reaction to Rosy's revelation) will determine how Nick treats them going forth.

Other than Nick's overall relationship score, which will continue to impact flavor dialogue, there will be a new, invisible variable recorded. I don't want to say *too* much about this variable, because I'd rather let its impact on the story speak for itself. But I will warn those wanting to play out a reconciliation arc between low-relationship Button and Nick: this is the deciding point. Either jump on that plotline now, or you'll forever lose the opportunity.

I realize that I talk about Nick a lot in these blogs, but the relationship between him and Button, whether good or ill or six feet below, is central to *Mind Blind*. Yes, there are romances and those romances are also super important. But it's possible to play *Mind Blind* without romancing any of the ROs. Nick, however, is essential. Because at its core, *Mind Blind* is a game about family bonds, and whether those bonds are broken, reinforced, or reforged.

Whereas Chapter 8 was about establishing the logistics of Operation Hemera, Chapter 9 accomplishes two main tasks. First, it finally begins the Operation. Not much to detail about that, because it would require summarizing the plot when I'd rather you all read it and give feedback. The second task of Chapter 9 is equally important: it establishes Button's mental state. There have been hints of it so far, but in general things have been happening at too break neck a pace for Button to take a step back and simply *react*.

In Chapter 9, you get to react.

Button can scream or Button can pretend to be fine. Maybe Button compartmentalizes. Maybe they're excited by the risk. Or maybe they realize that they're trapped in a plotline so absurd that there's nothing left to do but laugh.

Currently, the intervention for “depressed Buttons” is coded to occur in this chapter, although I might bump it back to Chapter 10 depending on where my edits take me (it might be more impactful if this intervention happens after Button behaves recklessly in-mission). If your Button doesn't trigger the intervention, there are alternative scenes with either your chosen RO or Sally/K. The routes will be different, but of equal length and importance.

I admit, some of Chapter 9's scenes have wrung me emotionally dryer than a squeezed sponge. It's one of writing's most exquisite aches—pouring everything inside onto the page until I'm parched and hollow. Which sounds . . . at the very least pretentiously Byronian and at the worst ghoulish but is actually quite cathartic (albeit draining).

Thus, I've taken the night off teaching and am instead recharging with a book in bed (thank you Patreon so much for allowing me to do this!). Add a Tony's Chocolonely chocolate bar, and I'll be ready for more editing come morning.

[First Part of Chapter 9 is Up!](#)

[Apr 28, 2021](#)

As always, I adrenaline-rushed a bunch of rewrites over this past week (the intervention is now replaced by meeting a new character). These last-minute rearrangements are a super bad and stress-inducing habit, but hey, when a scene doesn't work, it doesn't work (or in this case, works better if moved).

Current Demo Wordcount: 265k

Average Playthrough: 64k (length varies a lot with choices, so I'd suggest taking the meeting!)

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-dingo/mygame/>

Release Notes:

1. No-relationship Buttons' meeting with the new character will play out the same way as a mid-range relationship. This will be fixed, after I wipe all the saves and add in more consistent variables early on. (Button's emotional reactions during this scene are very alpha in general due to this need for past chapter rewrites.)

2. Choosing *not* to have this meeting is an option, but until the alternate scene is written, doing so will make the update a lot shorter.
3. I'm still looking for good quotes, so the Chapter 9 covers haven't been implemented. Feel free to suggest quotes if you have any!
4. The rest of the chapter will be added sometime next week (same link, so everyone who can access it now will be able to access it then). There's only the dinner scene and **SPOILERS**, both which need to be edited to account for the intervention's pushback.
5. Also, I fully admit to sticking certain people onto a plane because the narrative subplots were spiraling out of my control, and I needed to refocus on the main storyline. The plane will return, don't worry, but it'll now return in a plot-relevant matter (that also has good character development).
6. You can break Nick.
7. Florida.

[April Interview: Nick Wiseman](#)

[Apr 30, 2021](#)

The stage is dark. It's impossible to determine who's awaiting the audience, but there's the scraping of a chair being moved across wooden boards.

A voice begins to speak—male, and theatrically deepened to a Morgan Freeman narration level in defiance of its natural baritone timbre.

Disembodied Voice: You've experienced the sequel.

A single spotlight turns on. It illuminates a chair where Nicholas Wiseman sits, wearing black jeans and a denim button-up that screams “effortless but expensive.” His smile is apprehensive but amused.

Disembodied Voice: Now, for his first reshowing in decades, experience the cinematic wonder of the original!

A second spotlight turns on. John Wiseman lounges on a chair opposite his son, smiling toothily at the cameras. He wears a red flannel shirt with a suit jacket thrown over it for the sake of formality. The look is lumberjack chic if one is being nice, and a hot mess if described honestly.

John, speaking in his normal voice: I'm John Wiseman, and welcomed to April's interview!

Nick: Seriously? You're my replacement?

John: One could argue that you're mine.

Nick: I think you mean “upgrade.”

John chuckles. The affection between the two men is obvious, their good-natured ribbing lacking any vitriol.

John: I can’t argue with that. Should we get to the questions?

Nick: You’re the interviewer this time. Your house, your rules.

John: Says the boy that used to sneak out of the house past his curfew to go watch R-rated movies with his friends.

Nick, surprised: You knew about that?

John: Of course we knew when you snuck out. Your mother used to arrange your shoelaces just-so before we went to bed. We could tell when they’d been moved the next morning.

Nick: You never said anything.

John, shrugging: Your mom and I knew what you were doing; you used to leave ticket stubs in your pockets that fell out whenever we did laundry. As far as teenage rebellions go, yours was harmless.

Nick: My entire life . . . has been a lie.

John: Okay, we really need to get on these questions.

John reaches below his chair and pulls out a binder filled with questions. Tabs organize the binder by topic. One additional tab is labeled “baby pictures.”

Nick: Mom’s handiwork?

John: She said that I needed to be prepared.

Nick: Didn’t she use to do this for all your UCRT speeches, too?

John: She never trusted me with the press after the whole “Just John” became “Justice” thing. Now, what topic should we cover first?

He thumbs through the binder.

John: Let’s see . . . food, family, sex . . .

His eyebrows raise.

John: Fans weren’t so forward back in my day.

Nick: Not according to Mom. Remember the time when she got mailed that—

John, hastily interrupting: Music! That's a good starting topic.

John's smile takes on an mischievous slant.

John: Why is Rainbow Connection your favorite song? When did you first hear it?

Nick, groaning: You know.

John: I certainly do, and it's the sweetest, cutest story ever. But I think that our audience would rather hear it straight from the horse's mouth.

Nick, groaning even louder: I had this frog, okay?

John: A stuffed frog. That your mom gave you for your very first Christmas. Named . . .

John trails off, looking at Nick expectantly. Nick sighs, defeated.

Nick: Named Mistletoad. She played Rainbow Connection whenever you pressed her back flipper.

John: He carted that frog around everywhere. Then he gave it to Button when he was seven.

Nick: And Button lost her at the playground. Yeah. Still not over that.

John: Let's *hop* onto another question. What's your go-to karaoke song?

Nick: Depends on who's singing with me and how many beers I've had. "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" never fails to get a girl's attention.

John: How *whamderful*. And your favorite song to play on guitar?

Nick: I don't have one, to be honest. I usually get bored halfway through one song and start playing a new one. I'll do that for a few hours when I want to relax.

John: You played full songs in that band of yours in high school.

Nick: Ment Hell Ice Slum?

John, wincing: That would be the band.

Nick: The name was a riff on Mental Asylum. Isaiah wrote most the lyrics—his parents were both conflict resolution councilors, so the dude had a lot of pent-up rage. Which worked for thrash metal.

John: Thrash metal? Is that what you called the noises coming from our garage?

Nick: That band got me my first three girlfriends.

John: Speaking of girlfriends . . .

He glances down at the open binder.

John: What's your ideal romance?

Nick: Huh?

John: That's the question. What is my future daughter-in-law going to be like?

Nick: She's . . . no, hold up. When did marriage get brought up?

John: You don't want to get married? Become a father? Give me grandkids.

Nick: I mean, sure. I want a wife and kids. Someday.

He laughs self-consciously.

Nick: If I ever have the time. My perfect romance would be someone who understands my life, I guess? We would need to have similar priorities. And she'd need to like food.

John, neutrally: Sally likes food.

Nick's expression shutters, but his eyes dart quickly to the curtain as if to check to make sure a certain stage manager hasn't stepped out.

Nick: I don't see how that's relevant.

John, even more neutrally: Of course.

Nick: I'm serious. Salome is family. She's Button's best friend. She's like . . .

Nick swallows, appearing vaguely ill.

Nick: She's like a little sister.

A crash echoes from behind the curtain. Nick winces; John smirks.

John: Why do you call her 'Salome'?

Nick: Because that's her name. Next topic.

John: What was your first impression of Sally?

Nick: She bit my ankle because I took Button's colored pencils. I thought she was rabid.

John: And now?

Nick: She's still rabid.

There's another crash from behind the curtain. This crash sounds more deliberate, angrier.

John: Continuing with the theme of names: Is there a reason you go by Nick and not Nicholas? Or Nicky, for that matter. We always called you Nicky when you were little.

John smiles fondly.

John: Little Picky Nicky, who wouldn't eat his veggies.

Nick: I guess because of Nicholas Henshaw in third grade? He went by Nicholas, and I became Nick.

John, slyly: Some people call you Nicholas.

Nick: Next. Topic.

Grinning, John looks back down at the binder.

John: There are a *lot* of questions here about your romantic life. Polygamy, yea or nay?

Nick: Uh, nay?

John: This question asks specifically whether you'd be open to having multiple wives, but what's your opinion on open relationships in general?

Nick: Great for others. Not for me. If sleeping with—

He coughs awkwardly as John arches an eyebrow.

Nick: If *dating* someone becomes a full-on relationship, then I want to give that person my all. Any adventures that I have, in bed or out of bed, I want to have with her.

John nods seriously.

John: I feel the same way about your mother.

Nick: I know. You two showed me what I want someday.

John: I guess that brings us to the topic of family, doesn't it?

Nick leans forward, placing a hand on his father's knee.

Nick, quietly: We don't have to do this, Dad.

John shakes his head resolutely. However, his eyes are bright with unshed tears as he opens up the section of the binder marked 'Family.' He peels a sticky note off the front page and holds it up to the

camera.

It reads, in appalling penmanship: 'Be brave.'

John: A reminder from my wife. This is the first time I've discussed our family in public since . . .

Nick: Since Button's diagnosis.

John nods jerkily.

John: But I guess everyone here already knows. First question: if you had a chance to switch places with Button, taking on their mind blindness, would you consider it?

Nick: Consider it? Wouldn't need to. I'd do it in a heartbeat.

John: What about giving them your powers?

Nick hesitates.

Nick: I would give up my powers for Button. There's no question of that. But would I give my abilities to them?

John: That's a more wrought question than readers know.

Nick: Exactly. Button would be taking on . . .

STATIC* TECHNICAL ISSUES: PLEASE WAIT. TECHNICAL ISSUES: PLEASE WAIT. TECHNICAL ISSUES: PLEASE WAIT. SPOILERS BEING SCRUBBED. *STATIC

Nick: . . . and that's why I'd make that decision, in the end.

John: It makes perfect sense. Next question: what was it like after your mother and I left? I understand if you resent us for leaving you to deal with everything.

Nick, sighing: Look, I feel like we might need to share the whole story at this point. It's not like Button is ever going to find out, but maybe readers should know.

John: I had a conversation with your mother about this before I came here. She gave her permission.

Nick turns to the camera. His usual smile is flat, his eyes serious.

Nick: My parents didn't ask me to stay behind. I volunteered.

He takes a deep breath. When he speaks again, his tone is brisk, factual, and almost successful at disguising his pain.

Nick: I volunteered to stay, because, after the incident, my mother overdosed on sleeping pills.

John: Hope wanted to make sure that she never hurt Button again. She thought that suicide was the only way to ensure that.

Nick: She needed professional help. Dad made sure that she got it. He couldn't have helped her if he stayed in Chicago, and Mom never would've allowed me to leave Unity to care for her. Button and Dad could've been the ones to move away from Chicago, but none of us wanted to further upend their life and take Button away from Sally after what happened.

He holds out his hands in a 'what-can-you-do' gesture.

Nick: Maybe we should've included Button in our decisions, but they were still a kid. We all wanted to protect them.

John: You were still a kid too, Nick.

Nick: I grew up.

John: Did you ever doubt your choice to become Button's guardian?

Nick: Every damn day. The situation was messed up. And my biggest talent was doing keg stands to pick up chicks. How was I supposed to make things okay? Things *weren't* okay. Button is the smart one in the family; they knew everything sucked.

John: What about that therapist? We paid for sessions for Button *and* you.

Nick: I went once. Look, therapy is great for a lot of people. It really helped Mom. But it's not a cure-all, and it's hard for therapy to work when most the stuff that stresses you out is classified. I guess I could've gone to a Unity shrink, but then everything would get back to Adsila.

John: Being a member of UCRT isn't easy.

John looks relieved by the chance to shift subject.

John: A lot of people were wondering: did you always want to take over from me as Justice?

Nick, laughing: I didn't even know what your job was until I was eight! And you didn't take me inside the Aeon building until I was, what, thirteen?

John: I wanted you to find your own childhood dream. UCRT is your mother's and my legacy, yes, but there's plenty of people that could carry it onward. We never wanted you to feel like your future was decided.

Nick: I never felt that way. I wanted to be—

John: —a fireman.

Nick: Technically, I wanted to be a fire*truck,*until I learned transformers weren't real. Then I moved on to fireman.

John: But you always wanted to save people.

Nick: Yeah. Realizing how strong my powers were, and then learning what you and Mom did for a living . . . UCRT was a natural fit. I wouldn't switch jobs.

John: What did you find to be the hardest part of UCRT training? Do they still make recruits do survival weeks in the Sahara?

Nick, groaning: Unfortunately. I had sand wedged up my ass for months after. Gray got so sunburned that he couldn't shave for a week after returning home. He went full caveman.

John: Grayson's a great kid.

Nick: Dad, he's twenty-six.

John: Like I said, a kid. He's different from those hooligans you used to hang out with. How'd you two become friends?

Nick: We met right after everything went down with Mom and Button. My old friends didn't really understand why I suddenly had all these new responsibilities and could no longer go on unplanned road trips to New York. Life was . . . different.

John nods quietly. Apologies are redundant between him and Nick at this point.

Nick: Then I get introduced to Gray, and he's the same age as me but like decades more mature. He was the kind of guy I wanted to be—grounded, patient, responsible. I think that when I first invited him over to the house, I wasn't looking so much for a best friend as much as role model.

John: That's a wonderful compliment.

Nick: Yeah, well, then I realized that the dude's also a freaking nerd who listens to ABBA and cries at Disney movies.

John, defensively: Some Disney movies are—

Nick: "Masterful narratives filled with emotional depth." I've heard, from both you *and* Gray. But the deer is a cartoon.

John: That deer represents the universal need for family and belonging.

Nick: Uh-huh.

John: *Bambi* is a cry to arms, compelling viewers to care about the hurt we unthinkingly inflict upon each other.

Nick: Sure.

John: You're a lost cause.

Nick: And you're not a vegetarian, so those tears stop at lunch.

John shakes his head, unable to keep from grinning. He and Nick have had this 'argument' more than once.

John: Lunch is a good next topic.

Nick: Oh, that was a smooth transition.

John: I'm smooth. It's why your mother married me.

Nick: Gross.

John: Food question #1: Sweet potato or strawberry rhubarb pie?

Nick: Neither. The correct answer is Mom's chocolate pecan.

John: I have a piece of that saved for you backstage, by the way. Question #2: Waffle, steak, shoestring, or crinkle cut fries?

Nick: Cottage fries.

John: Has anyone ever told you that you're terrible at multiple choice questions? Question #3: Shortening, lard, or butter for your pie crusts?

Nick: Good quality lard is hard to find, so I'm going to go with butter. So long as you're careful with the temperature, I think it gives the best results.

John: Follow-up to the pie crust question: do you use ice water or vodka for the crust?

Nick: Ice water. I know a lot of professional bakers prefer vodka since it can make the crust softer, but I started baking before I could legally drink.

John, sarcastically: And we both know that you never drank as a minor.

Nick, holding up four fingers: Scout's honor.

John: If you were in a baking show like Great British Bake Off, what would be your signature bake?

Nick: Choux pastry donuts with a mango-chili jam filling. I know choux pastry is a risk in a hot tent, but my “Chill Man”s are amazing.

John: I’m going to nod and pretend that I understand any of this. Is there anything you struggle to bake?

Nick scowls. When he speaks, his voice is heavy with hatred.

Nick: Baumkuchen.

John stares at Nick blankly.

Nick: You need to pour even layers around a rotating spit and wait for each to brown all while keeping the open flame at . . .

He breaks off, registering John’s glazed eyes.

Nick: It’s a cake. And now I’m hungry.

John: Same, to be honest. Want to grab dinner?

Nick: You need to end the show first. Amateur.

John: Oh, shucks. One sec!

John smiles dazzlingly at the camera.

John: I hope that we’ve satisfied your appetite for information, because now we’re off to appease our own for food! This has been Justice, both past and current version. One could even say that it’s been . . .

Nick groans preemptively.

John: Just-us.*

**Thank you to Fish for the end pun!*

[Writer's Blog: Noh Redemption Arc](#)

[Apr 30, 2021](#)

(Warning: the following post contains minor spoilers about Noh’s romance route)

Redemption is one of those words that you expect emblazoned on a pamphlet inviting you to attend a religious service, or in bright letters on the cover of a comic book. Usually, if I read the back of a romance book and the relationship is described as a “redemption arc,” I immediately reshelved it. Because redemption romances feel icky. At least, they do to me.

I don't want to write about loves that “save” someone from their worse self; I want to create love stories between two awesome people who are even more amazing when they're together. Because people can become anything when they're first falling in love—it's a rush of endorphins and PEA and all those other feel-good chemicals. But that personality change often doesn't last, and I'm always suspicious that the “tortured asshole love interest” is going to go right back to being a tortured asshole once the butterflies stop fluttering.

Most the romances in *Mind Blind* are written based on my preferred dynamic. Button can bring out the best in their RO, but they're all already pretty darn incredible. Love isn't a lifeline, it's a chocolate bar. Delicious and enjoyable, but ultimately none of the ROs will drown without it.

Which is why Noh presents such a dilemma.

Noh's romance both is and isn't a redemption arc. The villain doesn't atone for their sins, converted to the light by the protagonist's moral high ground. The only high ground Noh cares about is the kind that gives them a tactical advantage, like Obi-Wan. Maybe they want that tactical advantage for a noble goal (or ignoble, depending on Button's perspective), but Noh is conniving. Brainwashing Button wasn't a mistake, it was a strategic move.

However, Noh *can* become Button's ally. In fact, Button will probably need Noh's help if they want to . . . let's just say that they'll need Noh's help. These “good” actions don't excuse Noh from their past crimes, however. *Especially* when Noh isn't repentant over said crimes. Narratively, Noh doesn't earn their good ending.

None of this would be an issue if I was a fan of doomed romances. A doomed romance would be the literary, art-must-reflect-life approach. But I am resoundingly *not* okay with unavoidably sad endings. I want Happily Ever Afters to be available for all, gosh darn it, even the Ment psychopath. Reconciling this desire with reality, however, is tricky.

Thus, Noh ends up in a limbo of me wanting to assign them the Redemption Gold Platinum Card with all its benefits like not going to jail, but me refusing to fully redeem the character because that would break their entire personality. So, I'm handing off responsibility to readers. There are five different endings for Noh (and counting). Some of these endings are fair, some are tragic, and one is “*screw realism, we're in LOVE and everyone is going to quietly accept that because of XYZ.*”

It's a challenge, and I've yet to decide which ending is my favorite for Noh. All of them lack something, be it realism or a happy ending. The good news is, I have a few chapters to figure it out. Hopefully, by the time Button is ready to pry off Noh's mask and kiss their stupid evil face, I'll have found at least one ending that balances everything I'm aiming for.

Or maybe not. Who nohs?

[It's a May Poll! \(But not the kind you dance around.\)](#)

[May 1, 2021](#)

New month means a new character to be interviewed! Place your votes here on which *Mind Blind* cast member you'd like to question next.

New characters are going to be introduced in the second half of Chapter 9 (coming soon) and Chapter 10 (coming at the end of the month), so June will have new options. But for now, these are the characters who haven't yet been interrogated.

Sally

Glitch

Clarence

John

Hope

. . . Noh! (Expect extremely cryptic answers if you select this jerk.)

506 votes total

[May Roadmap](#)

[May 2, 2021](#)

I managed to get all my ducks in a row and set out a schedule for May! Yay!

Fun fact of the (May) day: A theory for the origin of the saying "to get one's ducks in a row" postulates that "ducks" actually refers to pool balls (called "sitting ducks"). Another has that "ducks" means bowling pins (called "duckpins"). I have yet to read a theory for the saying that mentions birds.

May 4th: *Delivery for the Damned* Development Poll

May 5th: *Lady Death* Chapter 9.5

May 7th: *Mind Blind* Demo Update (Chapter 9, Part 2)

May 9th: Patreon release of Gray's route in *Cupid Calamity* (I ran out of time last month, but this new date is set in stone)

May 11th: *Delivery for the Damned* Teaser

May 12th: *Lady Death* Chapter 10

May 14th: MB Short Story

May 16th: "Nick Wiseman Has Opinions" (New UCRT reward)

May 19th: *Lady Death* Chapter 10.5

May 23rd: MB Saucy Sides (featuring Kent & Kenna)

May 26th: *Lady Death* Chapter 11

May 28th: *Mind Blind* Demo Update (Chapter 10)

May 29th: Live Q&A (Times TBD)

May 30th: MB Cast Interview. (It looks like the winner will be either Glitch or Sally, but I'm going to wait until this Friday to announce the winner. Meander over to yesterday's poll if you haven't already voted!)

Bonus Goals (to do after making the other deadlines): A second MB short story, and a few reader feedback polls about MB (I'm rewriting some earlier scenes for Hope's meeting in Chapter 9, so knowing how you guys played through prior chapters would be helpful).

[Feedback Poll: Who's Your Chosen RO?](#)

[May 3, 2021](#)

I asked whom everyone's favorite RO was a while back on the COG Forum, but wanted to ask again now that most romances have the initial stage of their romance activated. I'm trying to understand which ROs are the most popular and why (so please leave comments if you feel comfortable sharing!).

Part of the reason for this poll is the most popular ROs have surprised me (except for Gray). I anticipated Gray, Sally, and Glitch being the contenders for first place when it came to romance choices, but instead Gray is battling it out with K "Stoic Sweetheart" Zarneki and Rosy "You Disappoint Me" Kim. My expectations have been overturned, and now that we're midway through the book, I'm curious to

learn by how much. Also, if I can pinpoint what appeals to people, it means I can take those aspects into consideration when writing each RO's full romance.

I'd appreciate hearing not only why you chose a particular RO, but why you avoid others as well (if there's any that you're not interested in). Noh has been left off the poll since Button has yet to meet them face-to-mask.

Sally

Gray

Kent/Kenna

Glitch

Rosy

750 votes total

[Delivery Development Poll: Magical Pets](#)

[May 4, 2021](#)

In *Mind Blind*, Button doesn't have a pet for the simple reason that Nick already fills in the "companion" function within the story. (Yes, he's narratively in the same role as a dog in one of those tear-jerker animal books.)

In *Delivery for the Damned*, readers will be able to select an animal (or animal-adjacent) companion. This "pet" will be customizable, although I haven't decided whether it will actually speak or simply communicate via body language (if you have opinions on that, let me know!).

I'm currently contemplating pet species. Since every pet will behave differently, I only want to have three options (four at the very most). But I've always wanted a magical pet, so deciding has been difficult. I've narrowed it down to these ten choices, and am now handing it over for you to decide the top three winners. The list is a combination of more well-known creatures, and less common ones from folklore.

Each pet will have it's own subplot. Depending on their abilities, they may also help or hinder you (for example: the mini-dragon can fly up to look in a window, but it's also a fire hazard if it happens to catch a cold).

Please vote below on the top three magical pets you'd most like to see in *Delivery*^{}.**^{**}

Miniature Dragon

Phoenix

Simargl (winged dog)

Basilisk

Cockatrice

Chimera

Jackalope

Bakeneko (Japanese demon Cat)

Lavellan (Poisonous water shrew from Scottish lore, not the elf inquisitor from DAI)

Cù-sìth (Irish hellhound)

109 votes total

[Lady Death's Diary: The Fourth Death](#)

[May 5, 2021](#)

From the Journal of Lady Vitrula Rhys

"Theo did what?"

I'd been unaware of my brother's return from Anterdon until Letty came to me. She was barely able to gasp out her words due to have running all the way to the northeast tower from her (formerly my) quarters in castle.

"He challenged Loren . . . to a duel," she managed to pant. "Because of the engagement."

I unleashed a stream of curses that drew knowledge from all three of my previous lives. Letty reddened, a combination of shock and affront visible on her face, but I felt too annoyed to care. I'd surrendered the Crown. My manners no longer mattered.

The danger was supposed to be over. Three years spent studying Verdan's law, of becoming adept in navigating politically charged situations. All so I could play a direct role in negotiating the annulment of my own engagement and the subsequent betrothal between my fiancé and stepsister. Long reflection had led me to understand what had gone wrong my last life. Relations between Kothe and Bellcrest was like a boiling pot of water—the slightest increase in temperature and everything went bubbling over. In order to break my engagement, I had to turn off the stove.

I didn't possess enough hubris to believe that my actions alone had caused the northern provinces to rebel. The so-called Mad Princess's War had never been about me: it had been about over a century's worth of resentment. So, after the guillotine had once again returned me to age fourteen, I'd insisted on accompanying Father to every meeting he had with nobles in Vintrid and Atlan, the provinces that had joined his rebellion. To better prepare me to rule, I'd claimed. Father had agreed, on the condition that I remain silent.

This arrangement suited me fine: I wasn't there to speak. I wanted to listen.

Meeting after meeting, I heard the same complaints. Taxes were too high, trade was being stifled, imported bamboo from Fengal was hurting our lumber profits. I listened, and I remembered.

As soon as Loren's wayward affection for my stepsister became noticeable, I went directly to King Eldin.

"Neither I nor your son will be happy if we wed," I said, "and the northern nobility will be displeased if we don't. I believe there's a way to appease everyone while still allowing your son to marry who he wants."

King Eldin had pressed back against parts of my proposal, and I was unable to get him to budge in regard to raising import fees on Fengali shipments or granting Kothe exclusive trade rights on luxury goods from Anterdon. His concessions to lower tariffs on exports and allow lords to broker independent trade agreements with their neighboring provinces, however, were enough to satisfy most malcontents. The engagement between Loren and I ended, with the only grumbling being from my father. I moved to our family quarters in the northeast tower. A month later, Letty took over my old rooms when Loren announced they would wed. Everyone was happy, or at least appeased.

Everyone, except my idiot brother and his misguided sense of honor. I didn't need to be defended or protected. I needed my family to stay alive and out of my way.

I cursed again.

"Ready a carriage," I ordered a servant.

Letty insisted on coming with me to the duel's location. Everblue Field was a secluded grove just outside Bellcrest's city limits, known for being perfect for trysts due to the dreamroot that bloomed year-round. It had also gained a reputation as the ideal staging grounds for illegal duels. Five lords had perished there in as many years, earning Everblue Field the significantly less romantic epithet of "Death's Garden."

I would not let my brother be the next victim.

We arrived just as the two men began taking their paces—each walking fifteen steps from Armond, who was serving as referee, in opposite directions.

Theo's voice carried through the carriage window. "You can't treat her this way. Being a prince doesn't give you the right to trample over her wishes."

Idiot, moron, dullard, halfwit, clod. My only wish was for both of us to survive. Too many people had died in my last life. I refused to let there be any more casualties. Especially not Theo.

I flung open the carriage door even as it still moved and half-stepped, half-tumbled out onto the field.

"Theo, stop!" I screamed. "Stop this right now."

"Draw," cried Armond at same time.

The sound of my voice caused Theo to swivel my direction. A loud crack echoed through the grove.

Theo hissed in pain as his shot backfired, scorching his hand in a shower of sparks that caused him to drop the smoking pistol.

"Damn it, Tru," he exclaimed. "Why are you here?"

But I was already falling to the ground. Buds just beginning to bloom cushioned my body, their lives ending prematurely as stems snapped beneath my weight. I struggled to inhale over an unbearable pressure in my chest. Instead, I choked on blood.

The honeyed scent of dreamroot blossoms sweetened the metallic taste. I heard my brother yell my name, heard the carriage door slamming and Letty shriek.

At least Theo was safe. The jackass.

[Chapter 9, Part 2 \(and Writer's Blog!\)](#)

[May 7, 2021](#)

Demo Length: 275k

Average Playthrough: 67k

Things To Be Aware Of:

Chapter length varies pretty drastically based on whether you talk with Hope and if Sally is staying at the house. I might eventually add alternate scenes, but for now the scenes without characters are simply shorter (a natural consequence of avoiding people, although I still want to add some flavor bits about what Button does alone so there's at least some roleplay value). Hope's "haven't seen in years" scene is still missing.

Also, K's first romance lock is very much a WIP until I go back and redo all the "crush" stats because it turns out coding by the seat of my pants isn't sustainable and it's coming back to nip me.

Finally, Chapter 9 is the last opportunity to encourage Nick and Sally's romance (but only if Sally is staying with Button). If you choose not to support their relationship, then the variable doesn't activate and it's never again mentioned in-game.

Demo Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-dingo/mygame/>

Additional (Slightly Spoilerific) Musings:

I read everyone's comments from Monday's polling of ROs, and really appreciate all the feedback! Your response gave me some valuable insight into why people pursue or avoid certain routes. The good news (for me, at least) is that many of your comments confirmed that the characters come across as I intended: Glitch as fast, K as soft, Gray as nice (possibly *toonice*), and Rosy as, well, Rosy (mature and self-confident, but also an ass). I'm going to repeat my ever-standard disclaimer here: do not woo your teacher in real life, and maybe think twice about pursuing that jerk (whom I adore, but is still a jerk) in *Mind Blind*.

Another takeaway for me is that any matchmaking plots in future IFs won't involve any of the ROs. Bonus: this reinforces my decision to cut down on the overall number of love interests in *Delivery for the Damned*, because I was decidedly *not* prepared for all the work that goes into writing five(ish) main romance paths.

Romance are tricky for me to write, especially since my goal is to make each route feel completely different. If people are able to find even one character whose romantic plotline they're interested in pursuing, then I'm happy! Variety is the spice of life (although Nick would probably claim it's fennel or something). It's why the ROs all vary in personality, age, and, perhaps most importantly, narrative pacing.

K's romance is a particularly interesting case of pacing, because it alternates between "fast" and "slow." On the one hand, Button and K can develop mutual crushes on each other as early as Chapter 1. On the other, K's having feelings doesn't make them any better at being vulnerable and opening up (it might even make them *worse*, to be honest), so their romance will be one of the last to fully activate (vs. Glitch and Sally already being started, and Gray's just waiting for Nick to exit the room). I was happy to be able to show more of K's actor side in this last chapter, as readers knowing just how good K is at hiding their emotions can make rereading prior chapters more interesting (or at least, that's part of my goal for K's development).

There is a “Kromance” variable that currently gauges the sincerity of your interest (in a very primitively-implemented way that will be redone), but that’s more to cut off certain other pathways than to lock you in to a future lip-lock with Nox. And although Chapter 9 can technically mark your first “date” with Kenzie dearest, there are extenuating factors. The selections you make during the date aren’t about bonding, they’re about how convincing you come across to Vengeance (who very much *is* watching you like the super-creeps that they are, so your performance at Sofia’s will impact later chapters). If Button forgets the purpose of the dinner, they do so at their future peril.

And finally, a hot tip: If it feels like certain information is being repeated again and again (aka “this is how you and K met”), then it might bode well for you to remember it.

[How To Access The Sanctum of Spoilers](#)

[May 8, 2021](#)

With Chapter 10 looming on the horizon for AMO tiers and up, I want to go over how to gain access to the Sanctum of Spoilers discord. Ideally, we’ll be able to keep all the big spoilery discussions contained within so that readers without access to the closed demo won’t have the mystery accidentally spoiled :)

To connect discord with Patreon, go to your Patreon profile and select the “Apps” tab.

Click the “Connect” button next to the Discord icon, then log into your discord account via the resultant pop-up window. Patreonbot will automatically assign you a tier role on the Sanctum discord (this may take a day or two in my experience). If it’s been 48 hours since you linked accounts and you still haven’t been granted Sanctum access, please direct message me, and I’ll assign you manually.

This is what it looks like on my page:

My profile settings

These are your user settings. If you are looking for creator settings, [click here](#).

My user profile

Apps

Email notifications

App Integrations

Applications that you've granted access to some of your Patreon data in order to receive benefits from your memberships.



Discord

Logged in as mindblindbard#3694

Disconnect

If you've already connected your discord and Patreon accounts, great! But I personally had resort to google to figure out how to use Patreon, so I figured a summary of Patreon's official guide might help others.

I tried to simplify the process as much as possible, but you can find Patreon's longer article about Discord-Patreon connectivity at:

<https://support.patreon.com/hc/en-us/articles/212052266-Get-my-Discord-role>

[Cupid Calamity: Grayson's Route](#)

[May 9, 2021](#)

It's finally here! Pick Gray's name to play through his route.

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/cupid-calamity/mygame/>

Given that the average playthrough of Gray's route is only around 3,000 words, it may be hard to believe that this took me so long to finish 😅

The big issue is that Gray's route in *Mind Blind* is filled with these singular moments (the first time he hears Button's thoughts, the moment he finally admits to reciprocating their feelings, etc.). His route is

dedicated to overcoming the barrier of that forced mental intimacy, so I didn't want to diminish those moments by having them happen somewhere other than the main story. Nor do I want to spoil certain details about their relationship by setting the story post-gettogether (plus, writing mid-relationship is always a tangle, since different Buttons want different things from their relationships).

It took some creativity to make a plot and cut things off at right moments, and I had to withhold a lot of the good stuff so that it's not anticlimactic when it finally occurs in *Mind Blind* proper. I thoroughly had fun despite the limitations, though!

The good news (for me, at least!) is that in writing Gray's *Cupid Calamity* route, I finished writing almost all the variations of Gray's future romance scenes for *Mind Blind* (a total of 26,000 words).

[Delivery Teaser: Introducing Evander/Evelyn](#)

[May 11, 2021](#)

Evander/Evelyn Corey is a witch, the owner of a sentient cottage, an accidental(?) mass murderer, and the second officially introduced RO*.* They have white-blond hair, hazel eyes, and a permanent scowl that causes children to avoid their house when trick-or-treating.

Like most of the ROs, Ev will be a client of *Delivery for the Damned*'s MC. But don't worry: Ev's orders are relatively mundane compared to other customers, mostly limited to questionably-sourced alchemical ingredients. Ev is also one of the few ROs who is actually from Ireland/Earth (*Delivery* being set in Dublin) and who has a tax-reportable day job writing astrological forecasts for local newspapers (these forecasts are faked and often used by Ev to target individual people whom they dislike).

Although Ev claims that their coven was killed by a spell gone awry, witches gain power by consuming the souls of other witches . . . and history is written by the victor. That being said, Ev seems (keyword: *seems*) genuinely saddened by the demise of their coven. They're also really, really powerful. Who knows the truth? (You will, should you play through Ev's storyline.)

Personality-wise, Ev is self-absorbed, haughty, and condescending--what a catch! Dig deeper, however, and you might be surprised to discover that a large part of their personality is deliberately designed to push people away. Not all of their unpleasantness is a façade, though. Ev thinks that they're better than you, and they have a body count to make one think twice before arguing.

[Baking Tips, Please!](#)

[May 11, 2021](#)

I'm working on a scene with Nick and am having some trouble because I am decidedly *not* a baker (I can cook okayish, but baking requires an actual attention span). I've tried resorting to websearches for Nick's baking-ese, but feel like this makes his dialogue too generic as I have no way to differentiate between what is common trivia versus what would actually be impressive for Nick to know.

Soooo . . . If any of you are accomplished bakers and feel like helping an author out, please share some less commonly known baking tips or hacks! What pro knowledge should Nick possess that your average baker wouldn't?

Bonus cookies if these tips involve literal cookies, since that would best fit the scene's current version.



[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 10](#)

[May 12, 2021](#)

Weeks passed in a flurry of preparations for Letty's presentation to Court. When I finally found the time to return the spellbook that I had illicitly borrowed and tell Delphine of my attempts with the tome, her reaction was the opposite of what I'd hoped. Her series of censorious lectures on the perils of unsupervised experimentation lasted for the rest of the month. Before I knew it, the day of Loren's birthday and Letty's debut arrived, and I was no closer to learning a spell to defend myself. My modicum of success at mastering the slowing spell had failed to win Delphine's forgiveness, and in fact only infuriated her further.

"Do you even begin to comprehend the dangers?" she demanded.

I'd reclaimed my favorite seat in Delphine's study from Xander, who was busy alongside my brother making travel arrangements for their imminent return to Anterdon. The chair's pillows failed to cushion me from the sting of my mentor's condemnation.

Delphine paced back and forth across her newest carpet. Her bootheels stabbed the indigo silk as she stomped, leaving a trail of puncture wounds in her wake. "Had your focus slipped for the merest moment, you could have slowed your own heart to a stop. How many times must I warn you that magic

is not a game? If you are unable to grasp this simple rule, Vitruva, then you are unfit to become a sorceress. I expect better from you.”

I ached to defend my actions. To explain the motivation behind my ceaseless urgency to master magic. During each of her lectures, I contemplated Delphine’s reaction should I reveal the truth of my situation. *“I’m destined to die in less than three years,”* I’d say. *“It’s happened seven times thus far and I’m rather anxious to not repeat the experience. I know it’s unwise to rush but I quite literally don’t have the time for patience.”*

Or perhaps I’d state it casually, to emphasize how normal my situation had become to me over the course of my eight lives. *“Oh yes, I’ve died quite frequently. Do you think it will rain tomorrow?”*

Perhaps Delphine would understand my plight. Maybe she’d assist me in deciphering the nature behind my cursed cycle of death and, well, not quite rebirth but re-life. She was, bar none, the most knowledgeable person in Verdan when it came to magic and its mysteries. King Eldin employed a handful of other mages at Court of whom I was aware: scholarly looking men and women with uniformly pasty skin, clad in high-collared black robes and heavy silver pendants stamped with the royal seal. Still more mages, I suspected, were anonymously deployed across the provinces in the homes of King Eldin’s political enemies and allies alike. The ones I’d managed to corner at Court gatherings happily blathered on about their divine responsibility to serve the Crown and their newest theory regarding the motivations of the Mages Guild for siding with the northern provinces during the Uprising. Most shimmered with faded threads of energy if I focused, and a few possessed no glow at all. None radiated magical energy even half as intense as Delphine’s, and none seemed capable of casting a spell great enough in magnitude that it caused time itself to rewind. Emilia reported they even ordered tea service brought to them, rather than magically heating the water like my mentor.

But I only needed to consult my journal, transcribed anew after each of my deaths, to recollect why confiding in anyone was a bad idea. Memories of my past life faded in the same way a dream does after waking; my journal ensured that I retained the most relevant information. I reread each entry until the events portrayed were completely committed to mind. Every new cycle since my third death had begun with me frantically rewriting the entire thing and adding an account of my most recent demise. I hid the resultant journal inside a hollowed-out copy of Baron Yainharrow’s notoriously dry treatise on Fengali architecture, after an awkward confrontation with Emilia during my fourth life taught me that she would read anything she discovered under my mattress.

No, the potential consequences of telling others were too dire for a confession to be worth contemplating. I ruthlessly squashed down any lingering regret: second guessing my decisions was a waste a time, and time was the one resource I was short on. Better to stay silent and act contrite.

“I shouldn’t have taken the book.” I kept my eyes downcast in order to appear guilt-ridden as well as to avoid meeting my teacher’s keenly aware gaze. “I won’t make excuses. What I did was dangerous and ill-advised. I apologize.”

Delphine sighed heavily and sat upon the edge of her desk. She crossed her legs and jogged one heel in the air. “I don’t know how to get through to you, Tru. Despite your fine words, I cannot help but suspect that you will keep attempting spells by yourself.”

I remained silent. I couldn’t deny the accusation, and Delphine knew me well enough to detect the lie.

“Part of me believes that I should ask His Majesty to rescind your learning permit.”

I bit down a cry of protest. Any wrong word would result in the termination of my apprenticeship—something I could ill afford to lose, given Letty and Loren’s recent introduction.

“Another part of me,” continued Delphine, “a foolishly soft part, wonders if it would be better to perhaps accelerate our lessons so that I might at least supervise your overly enthusiastic attempt to Court disaster.”

She rubbed her fingers against her temples, her painted nails flashing gold from beneath wavy strands escaping from her updo. Her pale lashes were bare of their normal kohl, causing her to look tired and frail. Delphine’s mannerisms and energy usually gave the illusion of eternal youth. Seeing her so concerned, I became suddenly aware that she was most likely the same age as Catherine. I had braced myself for her to chide me about taking the tome, but her weary resignation was making me feel guiltier than her lectures.

“I cannot deal with this right now,” she muttered. She stood and opened the door, motioning for me to leave. “Go prepare for the ball tonight. Our new curriculum begins tomorrow.”

I paused at the threshold. “Thank you.”

She shook her head. “Thank me if you survive,” she said.

Letty’s grasp cut off circulation of my arm as we entered Bellcrest’s ballroom. Strands of hair-thin gold wire beaded through with tiny glowstones billowed above, connecting at the chandelier in the center making the ceiling appear starlit. It felt deceptively cozy. But feeling relaxed amongst Bellcrest’s elite was never a wise idea.

Laughter and conversation drifted through music played by two chimbet players, their stringed instruments twice as tall as most harps. They’d performed on a raised platform in the middle of the dance floor, so that music permeated even the most secluded balcony corners. Mages on each of these baloneys kept a breeze flowing into the crowded ballroom, although they themselves sweated under the exertion of the spell that Delphine would’ve no doubt found trivial to cast. Not one I had any interest in learning, since the wind generated wasn’t enough to be defensively useful. Unless spells could be amplified? I resolved to ask Delphine when she’d fully forgiven me.

"I have butterflies in my stomach," whispered Letty. "I just know I'm going to trip or tip over the punch bowl. Or both. What if I tip *into* the punch bowl?"

Theo yanked at his freshly starched neckcloth. "How long do we have to stay? If Letty's nervous, might as well make it quick." His eyes darted about the ballroom as if calculating potential escape routes.

I glared. It had been his idea to have Letty make her debut tonight in the first place. "Loren will expect us to be present for the entire party. With luck, we'll be out by dawn."

"And without luck?"

I ignored him. There was enough for me to deal with other than Theo's discontent. Keeping Letty and Loren apart, if only I could figure out how. I'd spent this life so far studying magic and attending Council meetings rather than cultivating social connections: it wasn't as if I could simply ask an acquaintance to keep my stepsister distracted.

Loren straightened as he saw us approach, his smile widening as he took in Letty. Emilia's careful hand had applied the faintest dusting of makeup to her lips and lashes, and the rose of her ballgown matched the natural tint of her cheeks. An hour with the hot iron had transformed her tumble of curls into a structured halo of ringlets. Around her neck, she wore small citrine heart on a gold chain. The piece was inexpensive, given Theo had purchased it with the small subsidy he made working for Uncle Alistair (Father had long since cut off his allowance due to some perceived infraction or another), but on Letty it sparkled like the crown jewels.

I fancied that my new ballgown of navy silk made my gray eyes appear almost blue, and that my let down hair somewhat softened my angular features. But my fiancé's attention never wavered from my stepsister.

"Your Highness, I present my sister, Lady Letticia Rhys. She is new to Court and wishes to serve," I recited the formal introduction as Letty knelt in a deep curtsy. Two months of intensive training under Emilia and me had transformed her wobble into a graceful dip. Several of Loren's cronies craned their necks to better admire her figure, and Armond outright leered at her exposed cleavage. He wore the same bronze cufflink as always. No indication that he was my killer, much as I would have loved to find him deserving of exile for reasons besides than his personality.

Letty, as always, was oblivious. She dimpled charmingly at Loren. "Happy birthday, Your Highness," she said.

"I hope that you find Bellcrest to your liking, Lady Letticia." Loren nodded for her to rise. "As you are new to Court, might I have the honor of your first dance?"

Letty glanced at me. Technically, Letty was expected to dance her first turn with Theo, given he was a member of her family. The Prince *should* have asked his fiancée for the opening waltz. I flattened my face to a mask of indifference even as I seethed internally. Despite having foreseen his rude request, I

found myself humiliated by Loren's public slight—especially after catching the smirk on Armond's weasel face.

Despite Loren's lack of propriety, one didn't refuse when the heir to the throne asked you to dance. Especially if you were conspiring to steal said heir from your sister. Letty gave her consent and Loren led her into the crowd of dancers. As they passed, Loren signaled the musicians, who interrupted their current song to begin a slow waltz. He'd no doubt instructed them beforehand.

"Loren must've figured dancing the first turn with Letty would help ease her into Court's good graces," said Theo. "Care to join, sis?"

I ignored his doubtful lilt and stoically took his arm. As we danced, I caught glimpses of Loren and Letty over Theo's shoulder. Loren leaned low to whisper something in her ear; his hand on her back pulled her closer. A strict dance instructor as a child meant that I managed to keep up with the steps, but Theo could read my obvious distress. His eyes followed my gaze as we turned.

"You're too good for him, you know." He spoke in a low voice so as not to be overheard by couples dancing nearby.

"You venture scandalously close to independent thinking," I said. "Father would be appalled by such behavior."

"Can't share my opinion with him, of course." His grin was half-hearted. "But you deserve better."

"Have I told you recently that you're my favorite brother?" I appreciated his sentiment, even if it changed nothing. People very rarely received what they deserved.

Theo gasped in mock shock. "You've finally forgiven me for the frogs in your bed?"

His joke pulled a reluctant laugh from me. My concern over Letty and Loren couldn't be entirely vanquished but I attempted to enjoy the rest of our dance. Midway through, someone tapped Theo's shoulder.

"May I cut in?" asked Xander. Delphine had obviously played a hand in choosing his attire, a tailored forest green suit that matched his eyes. Lace rimmed the cuffs and carved horn buttons ran up the doublet. It was more flamboyant than his usual dark attire, but suited him.

Theo handed him my hand. "I'll go find the food."

"He'll be fleeing to the kitchens now," I said as Xander pulled me closer. Our palms pressed flat against each other; his felt pleasantly cool.

He tilted his head in the direction of Theo's retreat. "He left before I could tell him that we depart tomorrow morning."

“So soon?”

“The Ambassador was called back early due to a family matter, and we’re to be his escort. Not that roads in Verdan are overly dangerous.”

They had been, for my mother. And for me. I squashed the memory of my second death and instead thought back to Ambassador Leonidas’ impassioned dispute with the bookseller during the Festival of Bells. “You’ll help arrange things at inns and make sure he doesn’t cause a diplomatic incident.”

Xander chuckled. “More or less.” He hesitated. “We haven’t had much opportunity to converse much during my stay at Bellcrest.”

“We’ve both been busy,” I said. “I with my family and you with work.”

“It was kind of you to guide your sister through an early debut.”

Kindness? Hardly. Loren and Theo hadn’t given me much of a choice. They’d intended to introduce Letty to Court regardless of my agreement—all I could do was oversee her debut to minimize her alone time with Loren. Although I currently faced away, I could hear my fiancé’s overloud laugh and Letty’s respondent giggle.

Not that my involvement had helped much. I repressed a snort and inclined my head at Xander’s intended compliment.

“I’m glad to have this opportunity,” he said. “I wanted to thank you.”

“Whatever for?”

Again, he seemed to mule over his words. “For keeping your promise. Court gossip can be a vicious thing.”

I wanted to shrug but risked our hands separating if I did so. “I fail to see how your past is anyone’s business but your own.”

No need to mention that I’d asked Emilia to dig into his parentage. He’d most likely consider it a breach of trust, when in reality my only concern was learning about an unknown variable. I had no interest in most people outside of their usefulness to my survival. Why should Xander be any different?

He wasn’t, I told myself.

“Regardless, you have my thanks,” he said.

Xander’s resemblance to Delphine was so strong that it was almost impossible to see traces of his father. But it was there, evident in the angle of his cheekbones and his square jaw. Even more evident when I had seen him and Loren standing side by side that day of the festival, though I hadn’t pieced it together until a week ago upon hearing Emilia’s report.

Xander hadn't lied to me, but he'd been deliberately misleading. His father wasn't a nobleman.

It was the King.

[May Interviewee: Glitch](#)

[May 13, 2021](#)

The race between Glitch and Sally was neck and neck, but everyone's favorite yet ethically dubious vegan has emerged the winner! Please ask any questions for Taliaferro on the Sanctum interview channel or in a comment on this post.

Nick is looking to reclaim his post as host, but Rosy may take point this time (K refused).

[Goodbye to Good \(Ambrosia Version\)](#)

[May 14, 2021](#)

When Grayson received the memo that Ambrosia Kim would be joining UCRT as an "interim strategical supervisor," his first instinct was that Nick would *not* be pleased. He warned Ambrosia of this as they took the elevator up to UCRT headquarters.

"It's nothing personal," Gray explained. "Justice has been under a lot of stress since Vancouver. He feels like Unity's decision to send you means that they no longer trust our team."

"Unity doesn't trust your team," Ambrosia replied coolly. "With Integrity's and Equality's recently announced retirements, UCRT lacks experienced senior members. Until Justice proves himself capable, I'll be providing guidance."

Despite her no-nonsense attitude and wrinkle-free dress shirt, Ambrosia didn't look much more "experienced" than the remaining members of UCRT—Gray estimated the woman to be only three or four years older than himself and Nick. But Ambrosia's rigid stance declared a military background, and her flinty expression, along with faint crow's feet near her dark eyes, reflected a premature world weariness that Gray had noticed in others who entered military service too young. Ambrosia Kim was the hardened result of a life lived in accordance to rules and bylaws and regulations, whereas Nick relied more on his instincts during missions than by-the-book strategies. Nick's impulsive willingness to

throw himself into harm's way had saved numerous lives . . . and, on several occasions, also almost cost his own. Gray had a hunch how this introduction between Ambrosia and Nick would play out, and he wasn't looking forward to his inevitable role as intermediary.

The elevator chimed open to UCRT Headquarters. Nick sat atop his desk, his feet propped up on the nearby chair, and wearing Aeon-issued sweats that indicated he'd recently returned from training. He finished his cookie, licking melted chocolate from his thumb, and hopped off the desk to greet the newcomers. The contrast between his sweat-drenched, cookie-crumb-covered tee-shirt and Ambrosia's starched professionalism was stark; Ambrosia's lips tightened as she stared at Nick's outthrust hand, thumb still smudged with chocolate.

Realizing that Ambrosia had no intention of accepting his handshake, Nick's hand dropped slowly back down to his side, and his smile faded. "You must be Kim."

Ambrosia set her briefcase down on Equality's old desk, causing Nick to wince—he was still sore that Hopper had resigned UCRT. Gray empathized, but he also understood Hopper's decision: Nick had made the wrong call, sending the man to deal with that cult alone. Had he and Gray been more experienced, they might have more accurately assessed the threat and assigned Equality backup. Unity's decision to transfer a strategic supervisor was the right one; some things, UCRT's newest Justice and Fortitude would only learn through experience. Until then, Ambrosia was meant to help.

"I'll need comments before you go home tonight," Ambrosia instructed as she handed Nick a thick folder. "Our first priority is to find replacements for Equality and Integrity; I've narrowed down the pool of applications to candidates whose powers will be assets. Your former teammates' departures present an opportunity to diversify UCRT's ability pool."

"Their retirement is a *loss*," Nick objected heatedly. "Not an opportunity."

Ambrosia continued to arrange her belongings, varied files and pens, into the desk shelves. "UCRT is down two members," she said. "Failure to fill those positions immediately isn't just a vulnerability of deficient manpower; it'll be viewed as an opportunity to every big player Ment in the underworld hoping to shake things up while UCRT is understaffed. Have the applications back to me within an hour, and consider accepting a precog."

"UCRT members are not just some meatsacks for psychic abilities!" Nick protested "Equality and Integrity were . . ." He broke off at Gray's warning headshake.

"The sooner we go over the applicants, the sooner we can schedule interviews," Gray said soothingly. "Starting the process as soon as possible ensures that we won't make a hasty decision. We'll find someone who fits with the team."

"You'll need to make a decision by Friday," Ambrosia stated.

The wail of UCRT's emergency siren prevented Nick's angry retort, much to Gray's somewhat guilt-ridden relief. Sure, he was dismayed that there was a crisis—that siren and flashing red light almost

always meant that people's lives were in immediate danger—but he'd almost rather run straight into a gunfight than keep playing mediator between Nick and Ambrosia. At least bullets, he could deflect.

Nick cursed as he checked his tablet. "Berlusconi just posted a bounty on Integrity," he relayed. "We need to suit up and—"

Ambrosia pressed a button beneath her new desk, causing the siren to stutter into silence. "Another AMO team can handle the threat," she said calmly. "UCRT has better things to do than react to threats from a low-level Ment mob boss."

Nick's fists clenched, his knuckles audibly cracking, and even Gray had to bite his tongue to keep from letting loose a stream of profanities at Ambrosia's declaration.

"With due respect," Gray said, "Integrity served on UCRT for over two decades. We should be the ones to protect her."

"Exactly!" Nick cast Gray a thankful look. "We can't stand by while Berlusconi threatens one of our own."

Ambrosia crossed her arms. "Berlusconi posted the bounty online, which means that he's more concerned with making a public statement than Integrity's death. Otherwise, he would've quietly sent his own men to do the job. Freelancers usually don't have a Pollard Score over 7, and most are aware that going against upper-level Unity employees will end their career."

"I won't abandon Mia," Nick bit out.

Ambrosia continued on as if he hadn't spoken. "Assuming any assassin is stupid enough to accept Berlusconi's bounty, Integrity is still more than capable of protecting herself. I'll request an AMO to keep a watch on her daughter's house just in case, but UCRT should only accept missions no others can handle."

Gray blew out a frustrated breath. "He's right, Nick. Protecting Mia is the kind of job that we would've taken on before joining UCRT—and we would've been able to handle it."

"Kim's more concerned with replacing Mia than protecting her," Nick hissed.

"My priority is that UCRT be able to immediately respond to high priority threats," Ambrosia said. "Which this is not."

"What if Vengeance attempts a second bombing and we're unable to respond in time?" Gray asked softly. He hated having to bring up a wound that was still so raw, but Nick needed to realize that Ambrosia had a point. "What would Mia have told us to do?"

"Mia would've claimed that she could damn well take care of herself," Nick conceded. "But Gray . . . she's like family."

“And Ambrosia will guarantee a protective detail for Mia until we neutralize Berlusconi, in addition to offering her family usage of a Unity safehouse,” Gray said in a voice that didn’t allow for negotiation. He stared at Ambrosia in silent challenge. “Won’t you?”

Ambrosia looked between Nick and Gray. Upon correctly judging that neither would budge unless this demand was met, she sighed. “Fine. But until UCRT is fully staffed, Berlusconi will be assigned to a secondary team.”

Nick’s grip tightened on the folder of applications. “Deal.”

* * * *

Ambrosia Kim’s second day as UCRT’s strategist went even more poorly than her first. Her third day, more poorly still. In fact, her entire first week was filled with enough conflict and clashing egos that by time the weekend arrived, Gray desired nothing more than to jump on his motorcycle and keep driving until he reached Grand Canyon National Park—a location which had been on his travel list, but that he now wanted to visit in order to yell out his frustrations into a giant crevasse.

Despite his friendship with Nick, Gray had to admit that the tense relationship between him and Ambrosia was more Nick’s fault than the latter’s. Not that Ambrosia made cooperation easy; the woman found getting a rise from Nick to be genuinely amusing, if the constant twitching of Ambrosia’s cheek muscle was indeed repressed laughter like Gray suspected. Still, Nick’s reaction to Ambrosia’s demand that he redo his past year of mission reports for “clarity and precision” while leaving out “unnecessary opinion which clouded mission evaluations” . . . well, suffice to say that Gray had spent the rest of that day running interference, lest UCRT’s Justice punch their new strategist in the nose. Gray had never considered his friend to be particularly violent, but Ambrosia had a talent in bringing out Nick’s worst.

Thus, when Nick showed up the next Monday with a fresh baked tray of cookies that he proceeded to plop onto Ambrosia’s desk, his peace offering came as much a surprise to Gray as it did to the rest of UCRT.

“Thank you.” Nick’s muttered words were filled with more embarrassment than gratitude, but he managed to choke them out. “Mia called me about Berlusconi.”

Ambrosia tipped her head in acknowledgement. “He’ll be a valuable informant in bringing down other mob targets.”

“I’m still not crazy over the fact that we’re cooperating with this guy,” Nick said. “But he’s called off the bounty on Mia. So . . . thanks.”

“Berlusconi is cooperating with *us*,” Ambrosia corrected. She glanced at the cookies, her expression turning exasperated. “I did my job, Justice, as I expect you to do yours. UCRT would benefit if you spent less time baking and more time correcting those reports that I asked for.”

“Fine.” With a bitter scowl, Nick reclaimed the plate he’d just set atop Ambrosia’s desk. “No cookies for you.”

Ambrosia shrugged. “I’d prefer the redone mission reports.”

Gray delicately extracted the plate from Nick’s hands before it was chucked at Ambrosia’s head. After all, Nick had baked his favorite cookies and there was no need to waste perfectly delicious brain fuel. (Also good: preventing an all-out battle between Nick and Ambrosia.)

“Nick will have those reports done by today.” Gray registered Nick’s headshake. “By tomorrow?”

Nick nodded reluctantly.

“Nick will have the reports done by tomorrow,” Gray finalized.

“Late, but I’ve learned to expect as much,” Ambrosia said. Gray shot her a disapproving glare, and she sighed. “Tomorrow is fine.”

Nick’s shoulders stiffened. He turned away, and Ambrosia shrugged at Gray as if to say ‘I tried.’

“I’ll be on the roof,” Nick said gruffly. He paused by his desk to grab a large pile of papers. “Rewriting paperwork.”

As his best friend exited headquarters, Gray could only groan. He offered Ambrosia a cookie, which Ambrosia accepted after a quick glance to check that Nick had completely departed.

“You’re too harsh on him,” Gray said. “I realize that Vancouver didn’t go as planned, but that doesn’t change Nick’s past mission success rate. He’s a good leader.”

Ambrosia reached for another cookie. “I don’t disagree that Justice is a good leader.”

“Then why—”

“Because, with more grounding and less impulsivity, he could be great,” Ambrosia interrupted. “UCRT is meant to be the best of the best: the ultimate protection against renegade Ments and an ideal to which other AMOs aspire. ‘Good’ isn’t enough. ‘Good’ gets people killed.” She caught Gray’s gaze and held it. “As in Vancouver.”

Gray wanted to argue. Wanted to protest that they had saved as many as possible, and that Nick had done everything in his power to prevent that bomb from going off. But he couldn’t, because guilt still ate away at him, digging its teeth deeper for every life they’d lost. It was true: Nick needed to be better, and so did he.

Ambrosia observed Grayson quietly. “You understand.”

Gray nodded. ‘Good’ would never be enough in UCRT. They had to be the best.

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"I'll need comments before you go home tonight," Ambrose instructed as he handed Nick a thick folder. "Our first priority is to find replacements for Equality and Integrity; I've narrowed down the pool of applications to candidates whose powers will be assets. Your former teammates' departures present an opportunity to diversify UCRT's ability pool."

"Their retirement is a *loss*," Nick objected heatedly. "Not an opportunity."

Ambrose continued to arrange his belongings, varied files and pens, into the desk shelves. "UCRT is down two members," he said. "Failure to fill those positions immediately isn't just a vulnerability of deficient manpower; it'll be viewed as an opportunity to every big player Ment in the underworld hoping to shake things up while UCRT is understaffed. Have the applications back to me within an hour, and consider accepting a precog."

"UCRT members are not just some meatsacks for psychic abilities!" Nick protested "Equality and Integrity were . . ." He broke off at Gray's warning headshake.

"The sooner we go over the applicants, the sooner we can schedule interviews," Gray said soothingly. "Starting the process as soon as possible ensures that we won't make a hasty decision. We'll find someone who fits with the team."

"You'll need to make a decision by Friday," Ambrose stated.

The wail of UCRT's emergency siren prevented Nick's angry retort, much to Gray's somewhat guilt-ridden relief. Sure, he was dismayed that there was a crisis—that siren and flashing red light almost always meant that people's lives were in immediate danger—but he'd almost rather run straight into a gunfight than keep playing mediator between Nick and Ambrose. At least bullets, he could deflect.

Nick cursed as he checked his tablet. "Berlusconi just posted a bounty on Integrity," he relayed. "We need to suit up and—"

Ambrose pressed a button beneath his new desk, causing the siren to stutter into silence. "Another AMO team can handle the threat," he said calmly. "UCRT has better things to do than react to threats from a low-level Ment mob boss."

Nick's fists clenched, his knuckles audibly cracking, and even Gray had to bite his tongue to keep from letting loose a stream of profanities at Ambrose's declaration.

"With due respect," Gray said, "Integrity served on UCRT for over two decades. We should be the ones to protect her."

"Exactly!" Nick cast Gray a thankful look. "We can't stand by while Berlusconi threatens one of our own."

Ambrose crossed his arms. “Berlusconi posted the bounty online, which means that he’s more concerned with making a public statement than Integrity’s death. Otherwise, he would’ve quietly sent his own men to do the job. Freelancers usually don’t have a Pollard Score over 7, and most are aware that going against upper-level Unity employees will end their career.”

“I won’t abandon Mia,” Nick bit out.

Ambrose continued on as if he hadn’t spoken. “Assuming any assassin is stupid enough to accept Berlusconi’s bounty, Integrity is still more than capable of protecting herself. I’ll request an AMO to keep a watch on her daughter’s house just in case, but UCRT should only accept missions no others can handle.”

Gray blew out a frustrated breath. “He’s right, Nick. Guarding Mia is the kind of job that we would’ve taken on before joining UCRT—and we would’ve been able to handle it.”

“Kim’s more concerned with replacing Mia than protecting her,” Nick hissed.

“My priority is that UCRT be able to immediately respond to high priority threats,” Ambrose said. “Which this is not.”

“What if Vengeance attempts a second bombing and we’re unable to respond in time?” Gray asked softly. He hated having to bring up a wound that was still so raw, but Nick needed to realize that Ambrose had a point. “What would Mia have told us to do?”

“Mia would’ve claimed that she could damn well take care of herself,” Nick conceded. “But Gray . . . she’s like family.”

“And Ambrose will guarantee a protective detail for Mia until we neutralize Berlusconi, in addition to offering her family usage of a Unity safehouse,” Gray said in a voice that didn’t allow for negotiation. He stared at Ambrose in silent challenge. “Won’t you?”

Ambrose looked between Nick and Gray. Upon correctly judging that neither would budge unless this demand was met, he sighed. “Fine. But until UCRT is fully staffed, Berlusconi will be assigned to a secondary team.”

Nick’s grip tightened on the folder of applications. “Deal.”

* * * *

Ambrose Kim’s second day as UCRT’s strategist went even more poorly than his first. His third day, more poorly still. In fact, his entire first week was filled with enough conflict and clashing egos that by time the weekend arrived, Gray desired nothing more than to jump on his motorcycle and keep driving until he reached Grand Canyon National Park—a location which had been on his travel list, but that he now wanted to visit in order to yell out his frustrations into a giant crevasse.

Despite his friendship with Nick, Gray had to admit that the tense relationship between him and Ambrose was more Nick's fault than the latter's. Not that Ambrose made cooperation easy; the man found getting a rise from Nick to be genuinely amusing, if the constant twitching of Ambrose's cheek muscle was indeed repressed laughter like Gray suspected. Still, Nick's reaction to Ambrose's demand that he redo his past year of mission reports for "clarity and precision" while leaving out "unnecessary opinion which clouded mission evaluations" . . . well, suffice to say that Gray had spent the rest of that day running interference, lest UCRT's Justice punch their new strategist in the nose. Gray had never considered his friend to be particularly violent, but Ambrose possessed a talent for bringing out Nick's worst.

Thus, when Nick showed up the next Monday with a fresh baked tray of cookies that he proceeded to plop onto Ambrose's desk, his peace offering came as much a surprise to Gray as it did to the rest of UCRT.

"Thank you." Nick's muttered words were filled with more embarrassment than gratitude, but he managed to choke them out. "Mia called me about Berlusconi."

Ambrose tipped his head in acknowledgement. "He'll be a valuable informant in bringing down other mob targets."

"I'm still not crazy over the fact that we're cooperating with this guy," Nick said. "But he's called off the bounty on Mia. So . . . thanks."

"Berlusconi is cooperating with *us*," Ambrose corrected. He glanced at the cookies, his expression turning exasperated. "I did my job, Justice, as I expect you to do yours. UCRT would benefit if you spent less time baking and more time correcting those reports that I asked for."

"Fine." With a bitter scowl, Nick reclaimed the plate he'd just set atop Ambrose's desk. "No cookies for you."

Ambrose shrugged. "I'd prefer the redone mission reports."

Gray delicately extracted the plate from Nick's hands before it was chucked at Ambrose's head. After all, Nick had baked his favorite cookies and there was no need to waste perfectly delicious brain fuel. (Also good: preventing an all-out battle between Nick and Ambrose.)

"Nick will have those reports done by today." Gray registered Nick's headshake. "By tomorrow?"

Nick nodded reluctantly.

"Nick will have the reports done by tomorrow," Gray finalized.

"Late, but I've learned to expect as much," Ambrose said. Gray shot him a disapproving glare, and he sighed. "Tomorrow is fine."

Nick's shoulders stiffened. He turned away, and Ambrose shrugged at Gray as if to say 'I tried.'

"I'll be on the roof," Nick said gruffly. He paused by his desk to grab a large pile of papers. "Rewriting paperwork."

As his best friend exited headquarters, Gray could only groan. He offered Ambrose a cookie, which Ambrose accepted after a quick glance to check that Nick had completely departed.

"You're too harsh on him," Gray said. "I realize that Vancouver didn't go as planned, but that doesn't change Nick's past mission success rate. He's a good leader."

Ambrose reached for another cookie. "I don't disagree that Justice is a good leader."

"Then why—"

"Because, with more grounding and less impulsivity, he could be great," Ambrose interrupted. "UCRT is meant to be the best of the best: the ultimate protection against renegade Ments and an ideal to which other AMOs aspire. 'Good' isn't enough. 'Good' gets people killed." He caught and held Gray's gaze. "As in Vancouver."

Gray wanted to argue. Wanted to protest that they had saved as many as possible, and that Nick had done everything in his power to prevent that bomb from going off. But he couldn't, because guilt still ate away at him, digging its teeth deeper for every life they'd lost. It was true: Nick needed to be better, and so did he.

Ambrose observed Grayson quietly. "You understand."

Gray nodded. 'Good' would never be enough on UCRT. They had to be the best.

[Writer's Blog: The Flipside of Secrecy](#)

[May 14, 2021](#)

Coded Demo Length: 291k

Average Playthrough: 70k

Next Demo Update: May 28th (Chapter 10, beginning the closed demo)

Late May will be *Mind Blind*'s one year anniversary, which officially makes this the longest that I've ever worked on a single project without pause! My goal is to pass the 300,000 word mark by month's end, which should be doable since the current (coded!) demo is just over 290k. End game remains to have

Mind Blind's first draft completed by December, and then it'll be onto editing (and starting a new project, since I must be creating at all times or else I start talking to imaginary friends in public). I'm 95% sure that I'm on track for *Mind Blind* to be a single, self-contained book, but I'll keep you guys informed if the plot decides to do something twisty and that changes. All my villains are in a row, and now all that remains is for Button to shoot them off their pedestals (or join them up there, your choice).

Writing Interactive Fiction takes . . . a very long time. Certainly longer than I anticipated when I first started learning to code, and I admit that there's been times lately when I'm eager to have *Mind Blind* finished so I can jump into my next world. Middles are always the hardest and slowest for me to write, as I'm neither enamored with the newness of a project, nor swept away by the anticipation of its end. *Mind Blind's* world and cast has been a marvelous adventure, and I can't wait for all of the story's secrets to be shared! Keeping a lid on all past and future plot twists (and worse, fearing that I won't execute them properly) has been exhausting. But at least in this point of the demo, all the major players have had their first names revealed.

Mind Blind is a game about secrets, which is ironic because the main character is in large part defined by their inability to keep any. (Frustrating? Often. Useful? Perhaps.) Every character in *Mind Blind* must be examined not only by how they've interacted with Button thus far, but also by these hidden traits which drive them. For some, like Sally, these secrets are relatively easy to uncover: she has conflicted feelings of self-worth, a crush on a Wiseman, and a genuine fear of her own powers. For other characters like K, their secrets take time to unravel and have yet to be fully addressed.

For a few characters, these secrets are relatively harmless in the grand scheme of things: Percy steals candy from his mother's purse. Others secrets are more ominous, like the fact that Dr. Amari is on Unity's payroll, and thus doesn't abide by patient-doctor confidentiality. And then there are some that might make you question a character's entire ethical code, like the fact that John is willing to put aside decades of qualms over brainrange suppressors and Ment rights if a BRS might save his family.

My point: each and every character in *Mind Blind* has their own secrets.

Even Button's family.

Especially Button's family.

Although this post is about secrets, it's also about my relief. Because after a year spent carefully guarding all these secrets like a dragon atop a hoard and writing them into *Mind Blind's* subtext . . . I finally get to begin spilling the beans. And my oh my but it is *nice* to be on that flipside. I missed blurting, and now at long last I get to blurt all over the pages.

Warning: the line between heroes and villains is about to get blurry. Proceed with caution.

[May 16, 2021](#)

AU where Kent is a genie/djinn

Your first wish is made in a moment of desperation, clutching the antique locket that Sally gave you for your birthday as you huddle behind an overturned table to avoid gunfire.

I wish that this was over, you think.

Suddenly . . . it is. The roar of bullets quiets, and UCRT arrests the two-dozen confused Ments whom had, just moments before, been shooting at you.

“All’s well that ends well,” Nick says breezily, but a hint of unease lingers on the team. What’s the likelihood of twenty-four guns jamming simultaneously? It’s like magic.

(Spoiler alert: it’s magic.)

The djinn waits until you’re at home alone to appear. He informs you of his contract, brusquely indifferent to both your initial shock at his sudden appearance and your gratitude over having your life saved: you have one wish remaining, he tells you. The legends, it seems, were overgenerous. Perhaps natural-born genies, mystical beings composed of magic and stardust, might grant three wishes. But *your* djinn—Kent—was human once. Cursed into immortal servitude, he can grant two wishes to whomever owns his locket. No more and no less, and you’ve already squandered your first wish on self-preservation instead of a flying pony.

Which leaves you with only one wish remaining. Should you be selfless and wish for world peace? (Kent disabuses you of that notion, claiming that he would only be able to guarantee such a wonder for a nanosecond before mankind declared a new war.) Maybe it would be wise to save the wish for another emergency? (Kent points out there’s no guarantee you’d be able to make a wish in time of crisis.) Kent suggests that you wish for a talking pet.

There’s also the tantalizing possibility of wishing for a higher Pollard Score.

Sensing that you’re not going to decide on your second wish any time soon, Kent agrees to wait. The locket is cramped, however, so you tell him that he can sleep on your couch, if djinns sleep. (They do, Kent confirms.)

A week passes, and you become increasingly reluctant to decide upon a wish. Once you decide, Kent’s locket will be passed onto someone else . . . which means no more debating the pros and cons of

wishing for a dragon (Kent in favor, you wary of the fire hazard), and no more shopping trips to buy Kent modern clothing (he was cursed in 1903). No more watching television together, or teaching Kent the concept of “memes,” and no more Kent telling you about what his life had been like before he became a djinn (his father had been a politician who double-crossed a witch).

Making a wish means losing Kent.

There's only one answer: you'll wish for his curse to end. You have no way of knowing what will happen to Kent once he's freed, and part of you is terrified that he'll be transported back to his own time. When you tell him that you've decided upon a wish, however, Kent's face goes blank. Not that Kent is ever that expressive, but he's slowly thawed over the past week. Now, his stony expression is reminiscent of when he first solidified in your bedroom.

“Call me when you're ready,” he says in a dull tone and without giving you time to explain. He blinks away, leaving only smoke where he once stood.

* * * *

You selfishly postpone wishing until the next morning, wanting just one more night of Kent with you (even if he refuses to leave his locket). As sunlight breaks through your bedroom window, you realize that any more delay will only challenge your decision.

And it *is* the right decision.

The gold heart of the locket seems to pulsate as if with a heartbeat, the metal warming beneath your shaking fingertips as you open the hinge one last time. Inside is Kent's picture from back when he was human, black and white and faded at the edges but more handsome than any man you've seen (Sally bought the locket as a gift, after all, because “the dead dude inside is so your type”). You have only a moment to gaze at the picture before the real thing appears.

Tendrils of smoke fill your room, then clear to reveal Kent. He's wearing one of the outfits you bought him: jeans and a fitted black tee that make him look deceptively unmagical.

“Hello, Master,” he says. Despite his polite smile, there's an audible acidity to the title that he gives you—a name he's never called you before. “My presence must mean that you're ready to make a wish.”

Your heart clenches. His voice is brittle and formal, in painful contrast to the teasing warmth with which you've become familiar.

“I wish for—”

‘—*your freedom*,’ you intend to finish, but Kent presses the pad of his thumb over your lips, cutting off your words. His hand is cold, the result of being constructed from magic instead of flesh.

"As soon as your wish is fulfilled, you'll no longer be able to summon me," he says in a low voice. His grey eyes meet yours, his lashes lowered.

Again, you attempt to explain that your wish will let him hopefully stay, should he so desire. But his thumb still presses against your mouth, pushing gently inwards until you can taste the salt of his skin.

"Before I grant your wish," he murmurs, "grant *mine*."

He holds you spellbound with his stare, his touch, his intensity—you're captivated by the undivided force of his attention. Your pulse quickens, and he smirks as if he can hear it (and maybe he can). The walls of your bedroom seem to disappear: there is only you and Kent, frozen in anticipation.

His other hand goes to the small of your back, pulling you close. His lips dip to your neck, whispering your name. It's almost but not quite a kiss, his mouth moving against your skin in words you can't fully hear. He pushes you down onto the bed in a controlled fall, his thumb never leaving your lips.

You nip his finger.

Instead of becoming angry, he chuckles. Then he kisses you, truly and deeply, as if *you're* his wish. Not the person capable of granting it as his words implied, but the actual wish itself. Intentions are lost in a tangle of tongues; you barely recall your own name, let alone what you'd planned to do. There's only Kent, and his mouth, and his infinitely clever hands.

As you both pause to catch your breaths, reality forces its way through the blissful haze. You need to make your wish. Now more than ever, before desire completely strips your resolve.

Kent's hand cusps your cheek. "You're crying," he says, sounding bewildered. "I thought you wanted this, too."

"*I wish for you to be human again.*" You rush the words, afraid that delay would only cause you to turn back.

. . . Nothing happens.

Kent stares down at you, his body suspended over yours. The moment lingers, lengthens, and finally breaks as his head drops onto your shoulder.

"I didn't return to the locket," he whispers. "Am I still with you?"

You tilt his face up. His eyes squeeze tightly shut, as if afraid to reopen. His cheeks are warm now, and flushed. Magic doesn't blush—only mortals.

You kiss his brow, his cheekbones, his chin, and finally his lips. All warm. All human.

"Can I get a third wish?" you ask.

[May 16, 2021](#)

AU where Kenna is a genie/djinn

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"Can I get a third wish?" you ask.

[Lady Death's Diary: A Letter](#)

[May 19, 2021](#)

From the Personal Correspondence of Lady Vitrula Rhys

Dear Lady Vitrula,

I was gladdened to read that you found the books I sent to be enlightening. Anterdonian writers have a way of making you question things previously taken for granted, as they're culturally uncomfortable with outright "yes" or "no" answers. Even their word for "yes" is more literally translated as "strongly, maybe." They consider committing completely one way or the other to be hubris—man's irreverent attempt to claim control over Fate, which they worship as their only deity. Your uncle claims that half his job here consists of persuading the Anterdonians to agree with his proposals, and the other half is interpreting their replies.

Not that Bellcrest is much different, in my experience.

In regards to your argument on Coreson's paper, I must continue to respectfully disagree. My insistence on wearing pants has not once hindered my diplomatic negotiations. Unlike others in the embassy (including your brother) who have taken to the native kilts, I can continue to cross my legs with impunity. There was a somewhat scandalous incident, the details of which I've been sworn to secrecy, involving someone we both know and an ill-timed fidget. To summarize, Ambassador Leonidas' daughter was quite upset by the unwelcome revelation. The whole affair further persuaded me that it is wisest for foreign representatives to remain clothed in the manner which they are accustomed.

With regards,

Xander Brant

[Aeon Student Guide: Pollard's Scale of Mental Agility](#)

[May 19, 2021](#)

Note: The "Aeon Student Guide" will be included in Mind Blind's stat pages upon final release. There will also be a glossary of terms. The reason these aren't part of the demo is two-fold: first, because I wanted to make sure that the story still makes sense even if readers skip the lore-building material; and second, because I'm not done writing it all. That being said, I'm going to start posting pages from the Aeon Student Guide on Patreon since I think some of the entries will answer a lot of questions (and maybe give rise to new ones).

This is from the handbook that Valero didn't read. (It also mainly discusses the USA since Aeon is Unity's American branch. Different countries would get different manuals.)

Pollard's Scale of Mental Agility

Pollard's Scale of Mental Agility, created by Maximus Pollard in 1952, measures of the strength of extrasensory abilities ("Pollard Score") with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest. This score is calculated using Maximus Pollard's own technology, which measures the amount of "Z-waves" produced by an individual's brain.

First recorded by James Achebe in 1920, Z-waves are responsible for both psychic powers and mental resiliency. Pollard quantified people's Z-waves, with those scoring 6 and above on his Pollard Scale classifying as Ments. Levels 1-5 do not possess enough Z-waves to manifest powers, but rather indicate increasing levels of mental resilience (the amount of Z-waves "shielding" a brain and thus making it more difficult for telepaths and empaths to influence).

A Ment's score on the Pollard Scale originally took only two factors into account: the strength of a Ment's Z-waves (how powerful their abilities were), and the distance which those Z-waves travelled (the range that their abilities affected, known as "brainrange"). In 1987, several Ments were born who demonstrated multiple psychic abilities. This required the Pollard Scale to adopt one more metric; any Ment with more than two abilities qualifies as a 10. For reasons still unknown, scientists have registered a direct correlation between number of psychic powers and the strength of their Z-waves.

Pollard's Scale of Mental Agility ushered in a new age of Ment acceptance. Although people had already begun to speculate that Ments' powers were dwindling as early as the eighteenth century, Maximus Pollard confirmed the opposite: Ments showed a generational increase in Z-wave production, but powerless people were now producing limited amounts of Z-waves that dampened Ments' psychic hold. By the mid-1960's, legislation passed allowing Ments to vote in the USA. In 2002, following the end of the Korean Reunification and the United Nation's establishment of Unity, the Supreme Court rescinded prior restrictions which prevented Ments from running for political office and taking jobs working with children, who were erroneously considered by many to possess "more malleable" minds.

[Mind Blind Blooper Scenes \(Chapter 10 Intro\)](#)

[May 20, 2021](#)

I often write the "fun" scenes first, which then leaves me to agonize over the expositional bridges. The final scene usually combines aspects/sentences/phrasing from all the different drafts. Chapter 10 has been a record breaker, however, as I'm now on Version 13 with still no final version.

Below, I've copied three (shortened for spoilers) versions of Chapter 10's intro (Versions 1, 5, and 12). You can see how the scenes tend to lean more and more ridiculous, until eventually I stumble upon something half-decent and slam back down to reality.

(Side note: writing atrociously silly and bad can be a great way to get into the writing groove when you're really not feeling it.)

Take 1

"An invitation from Rudzite himself? This is great news!"

*if (Glitchromance)

Despite Glitch's projected cheer, `the` hasn't let go of your hand all morning—not since you arrived in underground HQ with `Kim` to find `thim` and `Kent` already waiting.

*elseif (Glitchbreakup)

Despite Glitch's projected cheer, `the` hasn't met your gaze all morning— not since you arrived in underground HQ with `Kim` to find `thim` and `Kent` already waiting. Perhaps `the`'s still upset about your decision to end things.

*else

Despite Glitch's projected cheer, `the` hasn't stopped pacing nervously from holomonitor to holomonitor—and has been doing so all morning, since you arrived in underground HQ with `Kim` to find `thim` and `Kent` already waiting.

It's 8am, an hour before your classes. `Kim` insisted that you and `Kent` continue to attend classes, claiming to have arranged things so that you'll be able to train for Operation Hemera in plain view.

*if (Rosygym)

[i]Think Kim plans on shooting you again? It seemed to me like `khe` enjoyed doing so a little too much.[/i] Nick gives a mental snort. [i]Perverved sadist.[/i]

*elseif (Nover = false)

[i]Care to bet on what torture Kim's planned next?[/i] Nick thinks. [i]My money's on thumbscrews and the rack.[/i]

*else

[i]Care to bet on what . . .[/i] Nick falls silent. [i]Nevermind.[/i]

"Viktors Rudzite died over two decades ago," \${Kim} says. "Whomever this 'Reese Rudzite' is or claims to be, they're not Vengeance's founder."

Take 5

"Again."

You and \${Kent} exchange exhausted looks at \${Kim}'s barked order. You two have been training since early this morning, under the pretense of being in the NPO Program together but in reality for tonight's dinner.

"I said, [i]again[/i]." \${Kim} doesn't look happy to repeat \${khim}self.

With a sigh, you reach for your bo staff. \${Kim} refused to let you use anything sharp or explosive, and it was decided that Nick's chosen weapon was best since he could give you tips in combat. You cast an envious gaze at \${Kent}'s daggers, currently sheathed across \${khis} lower back. Now [i]those[/i] could do some damage.

*if (Nover = false)

[i]So can a bo staff,[/i] Nick argues. [i]Or a pool cue. Most evil overlords have a pool table in their lair . . . Also a chessboard. For ambiance, I guess.[/i]

*else

[i]So can a bo staff,[/i] Nick argues, sounding resigned. [i]Although Kim is being overly optimistic if \${khe} thinks you'll listen to my advice.[/i]

"Who is this Reese Rudzite, anyway?" \${Kent} asks as \${khe} raises \${khis} fists defensively. You try not to take offense at the fact that \${khe} doesn't even consider your incoming attack worth arming \${khim}self against.

Take 12

[i]By Captain Crunch's toasted knickers,[/i] Nick thinks. [i]I hate that we have to be in expositional scenes before all the fun stuff happens![/i]

[i]Why are you talking like a 1920's cartoon character?[/i] you demand.

Nick projects a mental shrug. [i]Because the intro to Chapter 10 still needs to be written and our author has run out of cuss words. Writer's block and whatnot.[/i]

"At least the party scenes are finished," \${Kent} interjects, magically appearing because describing people exiting elevators quickly becomes tedious. "Which is the bulk of this chapter."

"Yes, but you and Rosy were supposed to get a moment to shine!" Glitch also interjects, having magically appeared as well. "Or at least sparkle. Twinkle? It's meant to be a fun little expositional flirting before everything goes all Highway to the Danger Zone." (\$!{The} sings the last words.)

\${Kim} exits the nearby elevator, because \${khe} refuses to defy the laws of physics and "poof" into a room. \$!{Khe} takes one look at your clown costume, realizes that \${khe}'s entered a nonsensical scene, and leaves in disgust.

[Writer's Blog: Why Things Get Written The Way That They Get Written](#)

[May 21, 2021](#)

Coded Demo Length: 294k

Average Playthrough: 71k

Next Demo Update: May 28th (Chapter 10, beginning the closed demo)

With one week until the closed demo update, I've been finalizing and editing Chapter 10's scenes (as well as writing the smaller interval scenes). Among the parts still being tweaked is the scene that I posted about yesterday, which begins Chapter 10. I settled upon a semi-finalized version this morning, and in this post will be going over what changed and why. Hopefully, it'll give a little insight into why I'm always rewriting things!

(This post contains minor spoilers for Chapters 9 and 10, so you may want to hold off reading if you haven't yet read the latest demo or want to go into Chapter 10 completely blind.)

In earlier versions of Chapter 10's intro scene, I struggled to balance exposition with maintaining dramatic tension. Button just received an ominous letter! Cue the musical *dun-dun-dunnnns*! And yet . . . Button's reaction to this letter, and the first discussion about it with the rest of Operation Hemera's team isn't really important to story. In fact, it risks being tedious since it would only rehash information which readers already know (the invite is pretty succinct about who/what/where). It's not a good opportunity for flirty bits either, because learning about the invitation requires immediate preparation.

Thus, there's a time skip to tomorrow morning. This gives readers a chance to learn what Button will be doing at during the day at Aeon, how Rosy prepares them and K for the mission, and also makes sure that you didn't skip over the important bits: the location and Reese's last name.

After a million and two (well, sixteen) versions, this is the current draft to Chapter 10's intro scene:

Despite its serene street name of East Placid Court, the location specified by the invitation turns out to be an alleyway behind a Taco Bell. \${Kim}'s surveillance drone reveals two overflowing garbage carts and an aggressive family of rats, but no terrorists.

Right away, it's obvious that there's been a jump in narrative. Rosy knows about the invite and has done reconnaissance on it's information. What this opening paragraph doesn't specify, however, is Button's current location. So that needs to get revealed next:

Glitch seems unsurprised as \${Kim} discloses \${khis} findings on the holomap at Sublevel HQ's central table.

(Sidebar: if anyone can think of a catchier way to specify that they're at Unity's sublevels like last time, suggestions would be appreciated!) It's now clear that Glitch and Rosy are in the room with Button, but not how much time has passed. So that also needs to be addressed:

"Even Vengeance isn't stupid enough to advertise its location to untested newcomers," Glitch says. "Most likely, a contact will escort \${Name} and \${Kent} to the real meeting place." \${The} lowers \${this} voice to a throaty growl. "Put on this blindfold and get into the car if you want to live." \${The} chuckles, tone returning to normal. "You know, all the standard intimidation tactics."

**if (Glitchromance)*

Despite \${this} easygoing jokes, Glitch hasn't let go of your hand all morning.

**elseif (Glitchbreakup)*

Despite \${this} jokes, Glitch hasn't met your gaze all morning, obviously still upset about your decision to end things.

**else*

Despite \${this} jokes, Glitch has been fidgeting with nervous energy all morning.

I used an edited version of Glitch's reactivity from my first draft, but I instead chose to focus on new information (location). Reese's last name will be addressed further into the conversation in a more subtle, less *remember-this-detail-or-else* way. Most importantly, however, readers now know that it's the morning after Button and K's dinner (the specific time is clarified more in a bit, but this is enough so that the progression doesn't feel disorienting due to lack of detail).

At this point, the scene is around 150 words. Which means it's time for an interjection by Button! I'm not including that part here, but it gives Button a chance to vocalize their feelings about the invitation (or sigh morbidly). There's various flavor dialogue following Button's reaction and how well (or badly) they did at staying in character last night, and then the text reunifies to let readers know that K is also at HQ and that it's 8am . . .

"Parker and I will follow behind in one of Unity's surveillance vans," \${Kim} assures you. "We won't let you and \${Kent} out of our sight."

"No need," Glitch gives a performative yawn (\${the}'s spent the entire morning passive aggressively protesting \${Kim}'s mandate that you, \${the}, and \${Kent} meet an entire hour before class begins).

"Relying on tracking signals alone is too risky," \${Kim} says. "If something scrambles the signal from their shoe monitors—"

"[i]Fancy-dancy inserts,[/i]" Glitch corrects. "Also, not what I meant. I know where Vengeance will take \${Kent} and \${Name}."

\${Kim}'s brows snap together. "Elaborate."

. . . before once again branching off into completely different scenes depending on your past choices:

**if (photo)*

**goto paintedmap*

**elseif ((photo = false) and (schoolroute = "3"))*

**goto policemap*

**elseif (Desperado = true)*

**goto cvsmap*

**else*

**goto nomap*

Now that I've established where, when, who, and what, I can finally focus on progressing the conversation and having everyone speculate on Reese's identity! The fun parts.

The reason that I'm sharing this post is because I realize that, well, I complain about the "in between" sections of *Mind Blind* quite a lot! But this is why. The middle and end of scenes, or heavy-drama snippets that I've imagined in my head for months, usually fly onto the page as fast as my fingers can type. But establishing setting is hard, especially when the additional requirements of IF are factored in

(X amount of words until a choice). For these smaller sections, it takes a lot of rewrites for me to find something that reads smoothly.

In future works, I may consider using the cheat of having Location and Time right-aligned and bolded at the top of the page 😊

[Nick Wiseman Has Opinions On . . . Glitch! \(Ferro Version\)](#)

[May 24, 2021](#)

The first Nick Wiseman Has Opinions piece was inspired by an old tumblr post I made about what Nick thinks of each RO. I'll be dropping Nick's speeches for the other ROs over this week (K's is tomorrow!), but here's the speech that Nick would give at Ferro and Button's wedding.

Ferro, I still remember our first kiss.

Alright, alright, the wedding guests can stop gasping now! It's no big scandal. Maybe you haven't heard the story of Ferro and Button's first date, in which case I'm more than willing to share all the juicy details over dinner in exchange for your compliments on that five-tiered cake that I baked. For now, suffice to say that I was the chaperone whom neither wanted.

Their first date was at a café, which seems super mundane given everything that they went through together after. Ferro ordered some slushy abomination, although I don't remember what drink Button ordered—at the time, my senses were limited to sight and sound, which means I lied for dramatic effect when I claimed to remember anything about that kiss after Button's eyelids fluttered closed. (Yeah, they fluttered Disney-style. Own it, kiddo, and stop acting all embarrassed.)

So, yeah, I didn't experience the specific sensations of Button and Ferro's first kiss (and thank God for that!). But I *do* recall how Ferro acted that day.

He reminded my sibling that it was okay not to be okay. It seems like such an obvious notion, but I think that Button needed to hear that more than I realized at the time. I was in their head, and yet somehow it was Ferro who sensed what needed to be said. His unconditional acceptance shocked me—any other person would've bombarded Button with questions after the revelation that I was a psychic tagalong, but Ferro only took Button's hand and asked how they were holding up. I didn't need working telepathy at the time to realize then what I still know now: this person would be good for the person whom I loved most in the world. (Yeah, Button, that's you. I repeat: own it!)

Button, ever since you and Ferro got together, I've watched you become . . . more. More confident in yourself, more honest with your feelings, and most importantly happier with life than I've ever seen you.

Every time I watch the two of you together, I know without a shadow of doubt that you've found your forever person.

You've always deserved someone who would appreciate your spirit, help shoulder your burdens, and also make you laugh. Ferro does all of the above, plus he writes you those love poems that make your smile light up like candles on a birthday cake. My heart feels like it's about to burst with joy, which I always thought was just another corny expression until today. I've never met a couple who's more firmly on each other's side, and who are partners in the truest sense of the word. Whatever comes next and wherever life takes you, I know that you two will continue to be there for each other.

Speeches like this usually conclude with the toast-giver's well wishes for the happy couple. But I don't have any more wishes for your future, Button, because the only thing I've ever wanted was for you to find happiness. And with Ferro, you have.

Raises glass.

Here's to the happy couple.

[Nick Wiseman Has Opinions On . . . Glitch! \(Talía Version\)](#)

[May 24, 2021](#)

The first Nick Wiseman Has Opinions piece was inspired by an old tumblr post I made about what Nick thinks of each RO. I'll be dropping Nick's speeches for the other ROs over this week (K's is tomorrow!), but here's the speech that Nick would give at Talía and Button's wedding.

Talía, I still remember our first kiss.

Alright, alright, the wedding guests can stop gasping now! It's no big scandal. Maybe you haven't heard the story of Talía and Button's first date, in which case I'm more than willing to share all the juicy details over dinner in exchange for your compliments on that five-tiered cake that I baked. For now, suffice to say that I was the chaperone whom neither wanted.

Their first date was at a café, which seems super mundane given everything that they went through together after. Talía ordered some slushy abomination, although I don't remember what drink Button ordered—at the time, my senses were limited to sight and sound, which means I lied for dramatic effect when I claimed to remember anything about that kiss after Button's eyelids fluttered closed. (Yeah, they fluttered Disney-style. Own it, kiddo, and stop acting all embarrassed.)

So, yeah, I didn't experience the specific sensations of Button and Talía's first kiss (and thank God for that!). But I *do* recall how Talía acted that day.

She reminded my sibling that it was okay not to be okay. It seems like such an obvious notion, but I think that Button needed to hear that more than I realized at the time. I was in their head, and yet somehow it was Talia who sensed what needed to be said. Her unconditional acceptance shocked me—any other person would've bombarded Button with questions after the revelation that I was a psychic tagalong, but Talia only took Button's hand and asked how they were holding up. I didn't need working telepathy at the time to realize then what I still know now: this person would be good for the person whom I loved most in the world. (Yeah, Button, that's you. I repeat: own it!)

Button, ever since you and Talia got together, I've watched you become . . . more. More confident in yourself, more honest with your feelings, and most importantly happier with life than I've ever seen you. Every time I watch the two of you together, I know without a shadow of doubt that you've found your forever person.

You've always deserved someone who would appreciate your spirit, help shoulder your burdens, and also make you laugh. Talia does all of the above, plus she writes you those love poems that make your smile light up like candles on a birthday cake. My heart feels like it's about to burst with joy, which I always thought was just another corny expression until today. I've never met a couple who's more firmly on each other's side, and who are partners in the truest sense of the word. Whatever comes next and wherever life takes you, I know that you two will continue to be there for each other.

Speeches like this usually conclude with the toast-giver's well wishes for the happy couple. But I don't have any more wishes for your future, Button, because the only thing I've ever wanted was for you to find happiness. And with Talia, you have.

Raises glass.

Here's to the happy couple.

[Delivery Teaser: Artie and Lyn](#)

[May 24, 2021](#)

Introducing Artie and Lyn, an elderly man and woman who may or may not be harmless, and are clients of Delivery's MC.

Artie and Lyn must be grandparents (although you've never met their children, and neither ever steps outside the threshold of their stunning lake house). But you imagine they're what grandparents are like for people who have families: Lyn always presses strawberry hard candies into your hands after each of your deliveries, and Artie wears a plaid cap that makes it look like he should be chasing down leads with Sherlock Holmes.

You don't know much else about the couple, except that they've been married "forever" and are still head-over-heels in love despite being in their late eighties. At least, you think they're octogenarians. You also think that Artie and Lyn human, but if they're as innocent as they seem, then why are they using *THAB* (a delivery service that specializes in delivering the undeliverable to undesirables)? Why does your head always go fuzzy as you pull up their driveway, and why does that garden gnome sometimes look like a stone with a sword in it?

Artie and Lyn have a chihuahua named Lancelot.

[Nick Wiseman Has Opinions On . . . Kent!](#)

[May 25, 2021](#)

Continuing Nick's wedding speeches, here's the speech that Nick would give at Kent and Button's (Bali?) wedding. Minor spoilers for the game are hinted at, but nothing big.

The best thing about Button and Kent finally tying the knot is that I'm now the proud uncle to two adorably fluffy girls. Although I suppose that being Kent's brother-in-law isn't the worst thing, either, since he's a pretty incredible person—not only because he wisely realized that my younger sibling is the ultimate catch, but because of how much he cares not only about Button, but about other people (and dogs) in general. The guy has an almost unmatched capacity for caring.

Is my new brother-in-law blushing right now? It's been years, and it's still hard for me to figure out Kent's emotions; I admit to having suspected him of being an android at first. Jokes aside, Kent, I hope you know that now that you and Button are officially hitched, you're a part of our family. And I, for one, couldn't be happier with the addition.

I wasn't paying close attention the first time that Kent and Button met. Yes, it happened within my brainrange, but I was playing Madden at the time. And when Kent answered his front door wearing nothing but a towel, I *really* did my best to tune out Button's stream of consciousness. Later, of course, I had a front-row seat in Button's noggin to observe how their relationship developed while the two risked their lives to save, well, *me*.

And daaamn.

Seeing you two in action together, working as partners . . . I got it. The way you looked out for each other and played off each other's cues made me realize that, okay, here was something undeniably special. And when Kent volunteered to take Button's place, any doubts I had about his feelings for my sibling vanished. Button's feelings, of course, I was already certain of. To the point of mild annoyance, because Kent was somehow occupied even more of their brain than I did, and I was literally living inside their head at the time.

Button, I've always worried about not being strong enough to protect you. It never occurred to me that you were strong enough to not only protect yourself, but also protect others. I apologize for not seeing that sooner: let's chalk it up to an older brother's overprotective blindness. You and Kent protect each other; you make each other stronger, and you bring out each other's best. Kent, you somehow always manage to bring a smile to my sibling's face without saying a single word. And Button, you're able to interpret Kent's emotions to the point where I half wonder if you're secretly an empath. Either that, or Kent's eyebrows twitch in Morse code to communicate his feelings. But it's more likely that you two simply *get* each other, on a level that leaves me both awed and bewildered.

Now, I'll never claim to be an expert on romance, but the dynamic that you two possess is special, and I hope that you continue to cherish it. The experiences that you've gone through together have forged an unbreakable bond, and us all gathering here today for your wedding is really nothing more than a celebratory formality. Your marriage makes official what everyone should already know: you two belong together, and always have.

You always will.

Raises glass.

Here's to the happy couple and their dogs.

[Nick Wiseman Has Opinions On . . . Kenna!](#)

[May 25, 2021](#)

Continuing Nick's wedding speeches, here's the speech that Nick would give at Kenna and Button's (Bali?) wedding. Minor spoilers for the game are hinted at, but nothing big.

The best thing about Button and Kenna finally tying the knot is that I'm now the proud uncle to two adorably fluffy girls. Although I suppose that being Kenna's brother-in-law isn't the worst thing, either, since she's a pretty incredible person—not only because she wisely realized that my younger sibling is the ultimate catch, but because of how much she cares not only about Button, but about other people (and dogs) in general. This girl has an almost unmatched capacity for caring.

Is my new sister-in-law blushing right now? It's been years, and it's still hard for me to figure out Kenna's emotions; I admit to having suspected her of being an android at first. Jokes aside, Kenna, I hope you know that now that you and Button are officially hitched, you're a part of our family. And I, for one, couldn't be happier with the addition.

I wasn't paying close attention the first time that Kenna and Button met. Yes, it happened within my brainrange, but I was playing Madden at the time. And when Kenna answered her front door wearing nothing but a towel, I *really* did my best to tune out Button's stream of consciousness. Later, of course, I had a front-row seat in Button's noggin to observe how their relationship developed while the two risked their lives to save, well, *me*.

And daaamn.

Seeing you two in action together, working as partners . . . I got it. The way you looked out for each other and played off each other's cues made me realize that, okay, here was something undeniably special. And when Kenna volunteered to take Button's place, any doubts I had about her feelings for my sibling vanished. Button's feelings, of course, I was already certain of. To the point of mild annoyance, because Kenna was somehow occupied even more of their brain than I did, and I was literally living inside their head at the time.

Button, I've always worried about not being strong enough to protect you. It never occurred to me that you were strong enough to not only protect yourself, but also protect others. I apologize for not seeing that sooner: let's chalk it up to an older brother's overprotective blindness. You and Kenna protect each other; you make each other stronger, and you bring out each other's best. Kenna, you somehow always manage to bring a smile to my sibling's face without saying a single word. And Button, you're able to interpret Kenna's emotions to the point where I half wonder if you're secretly an empath. Either that, or Kenna's eyebrows twitch in Morse code to communicate her feelings. But it's more likely that you two simply *get* each other, on a level that leaves me both awed and bewildered.

Now, I'll never claim to be an expert on romance, but the dynamic that you two possess is special, and I hope that you continue to cherish it. The experiences that you've gone through together have forged an unbreakable bond, and us all gathering here today for your wedding is really nothing more than a celebratory formality. Your marriage makes official what everyone should already know: you two belong together, and always have.

You always will.

Raises glass.

Here's to the happy couple and their dogs.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 11](#)

[May 26, 2021](#)

Dragon whinnied and tossed his head. The stable enclosure didn't give him enough room to rear, but he stomped his hoof warningly as I approached.

"I've another apple for you." I grinned as the stallion eyed me warily. "Don't give me that look: I've reformed. It's not poisoned."

Dragon's lips tickled my outstretched palm as he delicately accepted my offering. His panicked breaths slowed as he chewed. I patted the side of his neck. If only everyone were this easy to win over.

Since Letty's debut, Loren made no attempt to conceal his interest in my stepsister. Armond hadn't been the only one to notice their increasing intimacy over the past year. His jibes had been less subtle than those from other courtiers, but no less frequent. Most everyone seemed convinced that Letty was all but set to take my place. Her status as a commoner was unfortunate, of course, but the general consensus was that the star-crossed romance between handsome prince and pretty peasant was dreadfully romantic and it really would be best if I stepped aside. That Letty was more interested in fashion than politics was considered appealing rather than a detriment. Nobles fought to keep their power from the hands of the Council; in turn, the Council hoarded every ounce of authority they gained. Both were too occupied with petty squabbles to care overmuch for the people of Verdan. Neither wanted a queen who actually sought to govern.

Dragon huffed through his nose but nevertheless allowed me to lift up his foreleg and examine it. He'd belonged to Loren until an overambitious leap had landed poorly. Loren had escaped unscathed, but the horse was permanently maimed. Loren had adopted a new younger gray as his main mount. I, however, had begged him to gift me Dragon. He'd only acquiesced after I'd begrudgingly recruited Letty to help plead my cause.

"Better to sell him back to Argyl as a stud," Loren had warned. "He'll never race again." I'd muttered something that sounded akin to agreement before promptly requesting Delphine to teach me healing magic. Practice, I justified internally, in case I got injured in the next assassination attempt. In truth, I couldn't help but feel a sense of kinship with the animal: we were both the Prince's castoffs.

Loren's invitations to me now always included my stepsister. His present on my sixteenth birthday had been a book on Tivall family history; on Letty's birthday, he'd gifted her a bracelet that had belonged to his mother. I did my best to ignore their flirtation—one would think that I'd become immune to a wounded ego, having lived through the blossoming of their relationship seven times already. But repetition only made me more keenly aware of just how unwelcome my presence was. I picked up on cues that had eluded me in my past lives: the way Loren's eyes brightened whenever Letty walked into the room, Letty's constant blushes, her obvious discomfort whenever I walked in on the two of them conversing in private. With Theo still in Anterdon, I felt overwhelmingly alone.

I had tried to distract myself by devoting more energy to my lessons with Delphine. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that ability to work sorcery did not correlate to natural talent. Nearly every spell left me with a splitting headache, with the exception of the slowing spell that I first mastered. Being able to heat your own tea was markedly less useful when your entire head throbbed for two hours afterwards.

Delphine said such suffering was more or less typical in mages—most considered it fair payoff for being able to work wonders. It explained why so few mages at Court openly used their powers the way she did.

“It’s not fair. You never seem to have any headaches,” I’d whined after a particularly grueling session of learning to fade bruises.

Delphine had laughed. “There’s a reason I’m the Court Sorceress, darling. It’s not only because His Majesty would be constantly sleep deprived without my tinctures. Now, try to recall the last diagram you examined. You must be aware of how the body first works in order to restore it.”

It had taken months of migraine-inducing lessons, but I’d finally become proficient enough at knitting flesh to attempt fixing Dragon’s old injury. I ran my fingers over his scarred forelock.

“Us rejects have to look out for one another,” I informed him quietly.

He nuzzled at my shoulder before lowering his head to my skirt pocket in search of another apple. After his accident, Dragon had lashed out to any who dared approached. Bushels of fruit had been forfeited before he’d even allowed me inside his stall.

I slowed down my breathing to match his heavy huffs, using my mind’s eye to pull up an image of a horse’s foreleg from the veterinary journals I’d spent the past months studying. The way the tendons and joints interlocked in order move. Were supposed to connect. My fingers tingled from the dissonance between what I was seeing and the way Dragon’s tendons warped beneath them.

“*Pastos*.” I braced myself for the expected onslaught of agony.

The prickling in my hands intensified to a pulse-throbbing buzz as energy poured out of my fingertips and set to fix Dragon’s leg. The high-strung horse remained blessedly still—one move, one distraction, and the joint would heal askew. Delphine had healed me once after I’d sprained my wrist falling off a ladder in the library, so I’d personally experienced healing magic’s soothing warmth.

If only it felt as pleasant to work. By the time Dragon’s leg was completely mended, my head throbbed as if legions of soldiers banged their shields and bellowed war cries. I smiled wearily at Dragon.

“Good as new,” I said. “Or it will be, once you strengthen it up.”

Dragon set his hoof gingerly back on the stable floor. When the pain he expected didn’t come, he pranced experimentally. His black mane shook wildly in what I assumed was the equine equivalent of a happy dance.

Relief washed over me, almost making me forget my headache. It had *worked*. “I know you probably want go for a run right now. I, however. . .” I winced, my vision beginning to blur around the edges. “I need a nap.”

After a few hours rest, the battalion marching through my head had decreased enough in manpower that I felt able to join Delphine for our evening lessons. I shut the door to her study carefully behind me. No need for loud noises. Healing had by far been the largest magic I'd ever worked, and the migraine afterwards corresponded in severity.

"You'll have to follow up with him in a few weeks' time," instructed Delphine after I'd told her of my success. "By then the leg should have settled and he may be able to bear a rider. In the meantime, you have another letter."

I accepted the thick envelope eagerly and tucked it into my skirt to read later. Letty had recruited Emilia to help her alter some of my day dresses with pockets for after I'd complained about my difficulty keeping track of my lesson notes. I had to admit that the modification made life easier, even given its source.

"Your envelope weighs twice mine," Delphine groused good naturedly. "You and Xander must discuss topics other than my strictness."

"We're debating Goodman Coreson's newest paper," I said. "Xander disagrees with him and claims it's better to represent one's home country by wearing one's native costume. I suspect he'd seize any excuse not to wear an Anterdonain kilt, though. He says they're quite short."

The correspondence between Xander and me had begun almost a month after his departure from Bellcrest, when I'd included a missive to him with one of my letters to Theo. He'd accidentally left one of his own books, *On the Fair Usage of Taxes* by Lord Ulysses Evaron, in the group returned to Delphine. I'd included a note that a commoner might have a better grasp of what constituted as fair usage of their taxes than a nobleman known more for his dalliances than political astuteness, and recommended the works of Madam Beatrice Canterburn. He had asked me to send a copy as Verdian authors were difficult to get a hold of in Anterdon. I'd complied, and Xander had sent back a treatise written by Ambassador Leonidas himself in return. We'd continued to trade books, and our oftentimes conflicting opinions on them, back and forth over the course of this past year.

I appreciated his unexpected friendship. Given my numerous deaths, I found it difficult to form connections when I was half certain my demise would render the relationship pointless or that anyone new would either end up betraying me like Letty. It was easier to trust someone too physically far away to do any harm.

Delphine commented, "It's wonderful to see my son and my apprentice bonding over their shared love of arguing. I admit to feeling almost left out."

"I have a copy of Coreson's work in my room that I'd be happy to get for you," I offered.

"That's quite all right." Delphine showed an almost criminal disinterest in politics given her high position in Court, not to mention her relationship with His Majesty. I wondered briefly what King Eldin and her

talked about, given she was so unconcerned by the facets of his job. Perhaps that was why he liked her—because she genuinely didn't care that he ruled.

"Now that you've mastered healing, I thought we might move on to illusions," she said, changing the subject before I could suggest an alternative text. "These are spells meant to deceive the senses. To make people hear, see, and even smell something not there."

"Will I learn how to turn invisible?" I'd long desired the ability to mask my presence. People couldn't kill what they couldn't find.

"Eventually, though such a spell is taxing even for me. We'll begin small." She pulled off one of her many rings and held it up near the open window. "Illusionary magic works upon the mind of the viewer rather than the object itself. Now, convince me that this stone is blue."

I examined the oval gem set in a braided ring of gold. The topaz winked at me mockingly in the sunlight. "It's yellow."

Delphine tossed me the ring. My fumble sent it sliding down the front of my dress, where my body's new developments left an exposed gap between my breasts. I bent down to pick the ring up off the carpet, blushing as Delphine cackled.

"I know it's yellow, and you know it's yellow. *Tell* me that it's blue. Lie to me," she commanded, "with conviction."

Lying was a practice I'd become adept with over the course of my many lives. Pretending to eat at Lady Geneva's monthly dinners. My reasons for learning sorcery. No one knew true me. Convincing someone that a stone was blue? Child's play.

I stared directly into Delphine's green eyes and offered her back the ring. My other hand grabbed hers as she reached to take it, holding it firmly in place so that it completely covered the ring. Both of us could feel the stone digging into our palms but neither could see it.

"What a beautiful piece of jewelry!" I injected every ounce of enthusiasm I possessed into my voice. I thought of books, Dragon, of Xander's letter. Of surviving. Everything that brought me joy. Imagined the ring was among them. "Tell me, is it a sapphire? Such a deep blue hue—like the ocean or a stormy sky. Why, I've never seen such a strikingly dark gem. You must usually wear it with your indigo satin—the colors match so well!"

Delphine bit her lip to keep from smiling at my over-the-top cheer. "The stone is yellow, I believe."

I scrunched up my nose as if confused and kept a firm hold on her hand. "One might say it has a greenish glint in the right lighting, but no, it's definitely as blue as the petals of an iris or dreamroot in winter. Why, it's almost exactly the same color as that vase over there," I gestured to a royal blue glass on the windowsill, "or the cover of that book on the table."

"That was somewhat disturbingly well done, Tru," said Delphine. "Certainly better than I expected. Now, let us see the ring once more."

I released my grip. Delphine held the up once more to the sunlight.

It was still yellow.

"*Mejno*." At Delphine's spell, the stone darkened to the exact shade of blue I'd been imagining. She chuckled at my gasp. "To cast an illusion, you must first convince *yourself* that what you see is different than what actually exists. Once you view the stone as blue, it's easy enough to transfer that belief to another."

I frowned. "The illusion won't take effect unless I'm aware of its target?" That was less useful than I'd hoped. "It can't be cast on the ring itself?"

She slipped the still blue-colored gem back on her finger. "Different incantations work upon the object itself, but those are much more complex. Only a handful of mages are even capable of casting those spells."

"You among them."

She inclined her head, acknowledging her exceptionality as if it were a given. "But given how even small spells seem to tax you, alteration magic may prove beyond your reach." She rubbed her chin thoughtfully. "You have a vast amount of magical potential. However, you're even more susceptible to negative side effects than the average spellcaster. I wonder why. It's like someone who can drink their weight in wine without passing out but is prone to horrible hangovers the next morning. Only you can decide if the party is worth it."

I arched a brow at her metaphor. "I can't say I know what a hangover feels like."

She brushed aside my comment with a wave of her hand. "Similar enough to the aftermath of your healing Dragon, I imagine. But you miss my point. Deliberately, I think." Her eyes narrowed. "What drives you to learn sorcery, Tru? To fight through your pain?"

Delphine had never pried into my motivations before. I felt like a mouse corned beneath her catlike scrutiny. Best to keep as close to the truth as possible to avoid her suspicion, since I couldn't very well confess that a headache felt trivial after you'd actually been beheaded.

"My station is such that I could easily be a target." I swallowed down nerves that tasted like ash. "I refuse to be a victim." *Not ever again.*

"Why not take up swordplay then? Or hire a bodyguard?"

"Were I to carry a weapon, I could easily be disarmed and that same weapon turned against me. A bodyguard could be bribed or injured in my defense. No," my voice strengthened with resolve, "I need to

be able to protect myself. Magic can't be taken away from me, nor is it likely someone would use it against me given how few licensed mages exist. And if people know I can cast spells, they might think twice before seeing me as a potential target." At least, I hoped that my proficiency would give Letty pause.

I curtsied to Delphine before turning to leave. Loren expected Letty and I to join him at the opera tonight. I needed to change, and to escape this conversation before I revealed any more of myself.

Delphine called after me. "Someday, I hope that you'll trust me enough to tell me the truth. Lying may be useful when casting an illusion. It's a terribly lonely way to live."

[The Day of May Q&A](#)

[May 27, 2021](#)

Hey, I like rhyming post titles 😊

My teaching schedule has in flux this month (with the school year almost at it's end, most of my students have signed up for extra classes to prep for ESL level exams), but I've finally carved out slots for this month's Q&As!

The first May Q&A will be set for **Sunday, May 30th at 10am PST**.

This session will be recorded by Carlbot via discord . . . with my computer playing backup since Carlbot often struggles to record more than 5 second bursts. Carlbot, if working, will provide a link, whereas you can message me for the sound file if not and I'll email it to you. This recording is intended for people who can't make it, but if you're not comfortable having your questions recorded please let me know and I'll only release the version with my voice :)

For the second Q&A, I have four free time slots for you guys to vote on. Since I know some people work weekends, I'm up to doing up to 3 Q&As total so long as they're during one of these times. Thus, if you can't make it to Sunday's Q&A, please vote on an alternate time below:

10am PST, Saturday, May 29th

6pm PST, Saturday, May 29th

6:30pm PST, Monday, May 31st

8pm PST, Monday, May 31st

14 votes total

[Writer's Blog: Demo Update Moved To This Weekend](#)

[May 28, 2021](#)

Sorry for the delay, everyone! I'm covering lessons for a coworker this evening, and will need another day to finish. (I usually take release days off work in order to make the deadlines, but remain on the substitute call list so as not to burn bridges with my employer.)

I need another few hours to finish up the demo release. Since I don't get off teaching until 2am, this will be done tomorrow morning.

To compensate for this delay, I'm sharing the *reason* . . . which is that the first scene still needs work. But that's not what I meant by "sharing" the reason. I'm actually sharing it: attached to this post is the first ten pages of Chapter 10 in all it's ugly unedited glory (the rest of the chapter is complete, but can't be put on dashington until this first scene is coded in).

I would strongly recommend not reading this first draft abomination unless you're curious about how the hotdog gets made, since it'll be much more enjoyable once I have a few more hours to add in the missing dialogue/choices and finish editing. But it's here if you absolutely can't wait, because I feel truly sorry for the delay and figured that giving you insight into what I still need to finish is only fair. I'd have shared the other scenes that are fully polished instead, but they don't make sense if read out of order, and I didn't want to spoil some of the best moments in this chapter.

A lot of *Mind Blind* isn't written sequentially. This isn't an issue when I work on a project independently--I simply write whatever scenes I most feel attuned to at the moment. A coded demo, however, complicates things (and I feel that IF needs to be shared as it's created, because there's simply too many variables for me to check are working independently). I continue to write things out of order, yet I can't skip critical scenes in the demo, since the coded part is reliant upon what came before. This hasn't presented too big a problem, since I've been using the "Under Construction" picture whenever a branching scene isn't ready.

Since it took me so long to decide on an opening scene, I haven't had the time to imagine all of the various responses Button can give, which is why a lot of the answers are reduced to general notes that say "HUMOROUS" or "MORBID."

Again, I apologize for the time bump! I do my best to keep deadlines, not only because I consider being on time something that I owe to you guys as Patreons, but also because setting release dates helps me continue writing through periods where I feel less inspired. I'd call it writer's block, but I'm always capable of at least writing *badly* so the phrase doesn't really apply. More like "writer's blah"? I go

through periods where nothing I write meets my standards, but deadlines force me to forge through (the great inspiration/perspiration division of creative work).

Please accept this pre-*pre-*alpha version as my apology for the delay, and know that my decision to share it is akin to me streaking down main street in total creative nakedness. (No author likes being seen without their adjectives on and sentences fully written.) It does give some insight into how I write, however, which is hopping between paragraphs like a caffeinated squirrel.

CHAPTER 10

You're alone and you're scared
But the banquet's all prepared
No one's gloomy or complaining
While the flatware's entertaining

-“Be Our Guest”
from Beauty and the Beast

CHAPTER 10

Congratulations, you're invited to the masquerade
I'd like to know what lies behind the mask you've made
It's such a shame, the game you play

-“Masquerade”
by Reality Check

CHAPTER 10

I think I'm gonna dine with the devil
Dine, dine, dine with the devil
I think I'm gonna dine with the devil
Pour poison in his wine

-“Dine With The Devil”
by Moksha

[Chapter 10 Covers](#)

[May 28, 2021](#)

Although Chapter 10 won't be playable until Saturday (Sunday morning at the very latest), I can at least share the changeable covers that you'll encounter.

[Link to Closed Beta! \(Glitch's interview is on the way.\)](#)

[May 30, 2021](#)

As stated previously, the demo is now only available tiers with Discord access (in order to contain spoilers, please keep talk about any super major reveals contained there instead of on public social media).

This only includes the first scene of Chapter 10, as I had an epiphany while fixing the first scene and decided that K needs a romance scene before Vengeance's party (in part because I noticed people worrying about them not getting enough alone time that was genuinely romantic, and I felt that this was a reasonable concern that needed to be addressed!). Of course, adding that scene also means that I need to write a version for K's friendship, which includes both variations where Button has and hasn't met the dogs.

. . . Annnnd then I decided that the other ROs should have mini texting scenes just in case Button dislikes K and/or wants to be antisocial (except for Rosy, unfortunately, because their romance is akin to walking uphill in six-foot snow). Thus, the second half will be released sometime this week. I'm learning it's easier for me to do two half-chapter updates per month instead of one full chapter update, so I may end up keeping that schedule from now on.

The new demo is mainly the completed version of Friday's document, although there are a couple new revelations like why K didn't fall for Button's potential tripwire back in Chapter 2, and the true purpose of that broom back in Chapter 1.

Demo Length: 282

Average Playthrough: 70k

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-elevator/mygame/>

[May Interview: Glitch Parker](#)

[May 31, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines on Glitch Parker, who wears an immaculately tailored formal suit . . . in a tropical print of neon blue, green, and yellow. They wave enthusiastically at the audience, then take a running leap onto the nearby chair, landing bridal-style with their legs thrown over the arm rest.

Glitch taps the microphone attached to their lapel.

Glitch: 'It is a dark time for the Rebellion. Although the Death Star has been destroyed, Imperial troops have driven the Rebel forces from their hidden base—'

Sally stomps out onto the stage.

Sally: For the last time, Parker, this is an interview. You are *not* performing a theatrical reenactment of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

****Glitch:** '**There is a great disturbance in the force.'

Sally: I mean it, Glitch!

Glitch: 'So certain, are you? Always with you, it cannot be done.'

Sally: Glitch, please. This show is important to me.

Glitch takes in Sally's beseeching expression and her puppy-dog eyes. They sigh, defeated.

Glitch: Fine. But when you said that Nick was on vacation in Cabo, I thought you wanted me to fill in as the host.

Sally: You're our interviewee of the month.

Glitch: Who's interviewing me then?

Sally, grimly: The only person you'd take seriously.

As she returns to behind the curtain, her voice drifts through to the stage.

Sally: Kim, you're up.

Glitch's legs quickly whip off the armrest into almost-but-not-quite proper seating position.

“Rosy” Kim strides onto the stage and takes the seat across from Glitch.

Glitch, shouting out to Sally: I’d have listened to Kenzie!

Sally, shouting back: No, you wouldn’t!

Kim: If you’re finished whining, Parker, I’d appreciate getting this over with as quickly as possible.

Glitch: Rosy! I’m offended. I thought you enjoyed my company.

Kim’s dead-eyed stare is all the response that Glitch receives, but it speaks volumes.

Glitch: Alright, then. Time for Q&A. Chop, chop, Rosy, time’s a-wasting.

Kim heaves a long-suffering sigh.

Kim: We’ll start with questions regarding your literary pursuits.

Glitch: Figures that you’d lead with books.

Kim: Do you believe that Shakespeare wrote all his own plays?

Glitch: Yes.

Kim: Truly? But Edward de Vere—

Glitch: Yes. In fact, I think the reason that people doubt that Will wrote everything is elitism.

Kim: There’s no documented evidence that Shakespeare wrote—

Glitch: Yeah, you disagree, I know. We’ve had this debate. But ever since the question was first raised in, what, the 1800’s? I think it was the 1800’s. Ever since the question was first raised, the main argument has been that Will wasn’t educated enough and didn’t travel enough to have this great insight into the human condition. Basically, that he was too middle-class to write these extremely intelligent works.

Kim: That’s a gross oversimplification. ‘Shakespeare’s’ works were politically provocative; it makes sense for—

Glitch: Snob.

Kim: I’m only stating that it’s unlikely that the knowledge displayed within Shakespeare’s collected works was possessed by the son of a glovemaker from Stratford-upon-Avon.

Glitch: *Snob.*

Kim: You're being childish.

Glitch, singing: Snobby-snob. Snobbity-snoobish snob.

Kim, in resignation: Do you agree with Tolstoy that Shakespeare (if really the author) was a poor writer?

Glitch: I agree with Chekov, who thought Tolstoy was intimidated by Shakespeare's genius.

Kim: An interesting take.

Kim frowns slightly. Kim isn't carrying notecards, having memorized the questions, but they seem to just now be realizing something.

Kim: There's quite a few questions about Shakespeare. Almost as if the audience thinks you're an expert.

Glitch: We should invite them to join our book club!

Kim: There is no book club. Between the two, do you prefer Molière or Shakespeare?

Glitch: Shakespeare, but that may just be because I don't speak French. Poetry is never going to be as good translated as it is in its original language. Also, what do you call our lunches with Kenzie if not book club meetings?

Kim: NPO Assessment Sessions . . . where literature is occasionally discussed. Are there any contemporary poets whom you enjoy?

Glitch: Hmmm. I'm not sure whether she still counts as 'contemporary' but lately I've been reading Gwendolyn Brooks. She was from Chicago, and I feel like she's kind of been my guide to the city's history since I moved here for Aeon.

Kim: As poetry is one of your passions, which sonnet do you feel best describes you?

Glitch: Sonnets 64 and 65, which were definitely written by one William Shakespeare.

Kim: That's two.

Glitch: I'm a complex creature. But those sonnets were meant as to be read together.

Kim: And are those sonnets your favorite poem?

Glitch: No. My favorite poem changes on a daily basis with my mood. It's currently *Frozen Dream* by Shel Silverstein.

Kim: You write poetry as well. What inspires you?

Glitch: People. Birds. The stars. Car commercials. Anything and everything and sometimes nothing.

Kim rolls their eyes, having no use for poetic vagueness.

Kim: Have you ever considered becoming a professional poet?

Glitch: Nope! I already get paid to do something I love. Poetry is my retreat from work, not work itself. Speaking of getting paid, is there ever going to be a bonus for being in the NPO Program?

Kim: No. However, the NPO Program *is* our next topic.

Glitch: You learned about this interview, what, yesterday? Yet you already planned it all out.

Kim: I'm organized.

Glitch lets loose a dismissive 'pffffbbbt' that cannot be accurately conveyed via written transcript.

Kim: What made you decide to apply for Aeon?

Glitch: Okay, that's actually a funny story. I did it on a dare from my cousin Jayla.

Kim: I see. Next question . . .

Glitch, interrupting: I mentioned being interested in working for Unity to Jayla at one of our family shindigs, and she pointed out that life was too short not to at least *try*. Then she said that she'd let me drive her car if I took the acceptance test, and she drives this sweet little . . .

Kim: Limit yourself to the pertinent points.

Glitch: . . . sweet little Mazda 3X, and I needed wheels when I was down visiting my mom. So, I signed up to take the ASE.

Kim: How did you feel about being invited into the NPO Program?

Glitch: Honestly, if I'd been accepted the "normal" way, I don't know whether I would've even agreed to join Aeon. I've always had problems with how MIVs seemed do most the work yet got none of the credit.

Kim: Your psych eval indicated as much.

Glitch: Sheesh, Rosy, could you *get* anymore Big Brother? Anyway, the NPO Program was a chance for me to work with another Lo-Po to prove that being a Ment isn't synonymous with being effective.

Kim: Slightly tangential, but it is a common audience question. Just to confirm, you're *not* a Ment.

Glitch: Of course not.

Kim: Now, in regards to—

Glitch: Although, if I *were* a Ment, I'd probably claim to not be one during this interview. I mean, if I'm hiding my "real" Pollard Score then it's probably for good reason.

Kim: Moving on—

Glitch: I'm not, however. Hiding my real Pollard Score. Or lying about not being a Ment.

Glitch gives the camera an over-exaggerated wink.

Kim, with a glare that dares Glitch to interrupt again: How did you first feel about Zarneki as your partner?

Glitch: Kenzie is the best. It took a while to crack 'em, but I managed.

Kim: When did the two of you become friends?

Glitch: Look, I'm not naïve. I know that Kenzie was chosen for the NPO Program because of Mayor Z's political clout, and that I was chosen because my personality test indicated that I'd be a good match.

Kim: Along with your expressed ideals and talent for invention.

Glitch: Rosy, was that a compliment? Compliment adjacent? I'd hug you if I weren't certain that you'd immediately choke me in a sleeper hold.

Kim: Good call.

Glitch: My point is that Kenzie and I had complimentary personalities and similar beliefs from day one. It would've been more shocking if we *hadn't* become friends.

Kim: What was your first impression of Zarneki?

Glitch: That they were good starting material. Nox is athletic, intelligent, and determined as hell to prove themselves. I knew that together we'd be the best team at Aeon, Pollard Scores be damned.

Kim: As I recall, you weren't thrilled by my supervision of the program.

Glitch: Rosy, no one is *ever* thrilled by your supervision—just ask Nick Wiseman. You're an unpleasant hard-ass.

Kim smirks, looking oddly proud of the insult.

Glitch: After a couple of weeks, I realized that you were part of the NPO Program for a reason. You believe in the cause as much as Kenzie and I do.

Kim: It's not a "cause." It's a more efficient way . . .

Glitch: ". . . to optimize Unity's teams by expanding the perimeters by which AMOs are qualified." Yeah, yeah, I know the spiel.

Kim: It's not a "spiel."

Glitch: Don't worry. It's a good spiel.

Kim: Do you ever feel like it's taxing to have a job where you're required to keep so many secrets? Potentially even from people you care about?

Glitch: Not really. Truth isn't something that people automatically deserve, especially if withholding it is necessary to protect others. Also, it can be kinda fun to dance around topics like Kenzie's "empathy" while also trying not lie outright.

Kim, arching a brow: You object to lying? I admit to finding that a surprise.

Glitch: Oh, I don't object to lying one bit. I just think it's more fun to keep things truth-adjacent. Plus, plausible deniability and all that.

Kim: You left halfway through your college engineering program to join the NPO Program. What type of engineering were you studying?

Glitch: This is one of the reasons that I left, actually. I started in Computer Engineering, but then wanted to switch to Biochemical. Then I found out about this Mechatronic Engineering program, and . . .

Kim: You were a dabbler.

Glitch: A jack of all trades. Master of all trades as well, because, yes, I *am* that good. But my school wasn't keen on letting me graduate with five different undergrad degrees for the price of one.

Kim: Are there any engineering projects of which you're particularly proud?

Glitch: My very first creation is probably the one which I'm most proud . . . although it was also my greatest disaster.

Kim glances at their wristwatch, obviously eager to escape yet cognizant of their duty to remain until the interview's end.

Kim, reluctantly: That sounds like a story.

Glitch: I was terrified of lightening storms as a kid. My window at night would light up, illuminating shadows throughout my bedroom that I was convinced were monsters. There'd be this ominous *crack* of thunder—the monster's roar—and by the end of the night, I was cowering so much that it took a carjack to extract me from my blankets come morning.

Kim: You came up with a solution?

Glitch: I did. I was nine years old, when I realized that the shadows only happened because my bedroom was dark at night. If the room was lit, then the “monsters” couldn’t get me. A nightlight wasn’t bright enough, so I rigged up a pretty simple switch that measured electrical charge in the air. When it sensed a nearby lightning strike about to occur, it turned on the lights in my bedroom, even if I was asleep. Add in a pair of earplugs, and my nighttime monsters were defeated.

Kim: You also claimed this was your greatest invention disaster. Why?

Glitch: Turns out, constantly flicking lights on and off during a thunderstorm can cause the breaker to go. I ended up grounded for a week for unsafely messing up our house’s wiring, and then enrolled in science camp that summer.

Kim: Then your interest in hacking and technology has been a lifelong affair.

Glitch: I always wanted to know how and why things worked, especially technology. My mom hadn’t a clue about anything even math-adjacent, so it was on me to take things apart and figure it out.

Kim: Couldn’t you have just researched your questions online?

Glitch: Taking things apart was more fun. Oh! I thought of another invention disaster.

Kim, wincing: Let me guess. Your smart fingertips?

Glitch: In my defense, the idea itself was genius. Microscopic implants embedded beneath the nail beds, capable of transmitting information via the smallest of finger wiggles. AMOs wouldn’t have needed telepaths to communicate on missions—their hands would do the talking. I got the idea from how Lo-Po Military Units coordinate in field.

Kim: Zarneki almost lost a hand!

Glitch, shrugging: I mean, it’s experimental tech. We removed the implants before they did any permanent nerve damage. But I’m telling you: technology, not telepathy, is the way of the future.

Kim: Unless that technology puts an end to the idea of Unity having Lo-Po Agents before you two damn idiots even graduate the NPO Program.

Glitch: You swear because you care.

Kim, with a frigid smile that almost causes the camera lens to ice over: Our last batch of questions are randomly selected.

Glitch: Ooh, you mean they don’t all follow a theme? That must kill you.

Kim: Have you had a lot of relationships?

*Kim's eyelids close, and movement beneath indicate their eyes are being rolled. Asking this type of question is **not** what they signed up for when they agreed to be hired by Unity.*

Glitch: Here and there. Most my loves have been quick-burning and ultimately uninteresting. A lot of people get boring after a week or so. It's not their fault, it just takes a special sort of someone to keep me interested.

Kim: You admit to being a philanderer?

Glitch: I resent that! I'd never lead on anyone to think that I was serious about them unless I genuinely was serious. But when you finally meet the right person . . .

Glitch's expression takes on a dreamy cast, and they shrug helplessly.

Glitch: I'm a firm believer of the idiom "when you know, you know." Life's too short to dawdle when it comes to love.

Kim: An idealistic and irrational viewpoint, although it's true that inaction serves no one. One final question: what's the hardest life lesson that you've had to learn thus far?

Glitch: Life isn't fair. Although, I feel like part of me has always known that—or at least, I've known it since my dad died. Some people get upset about being dealt a raw hand, which I get.

Kim: I'm hearing a 'but.'

Glitch: But I'd rather change things than complain about them. Words have the power to change our perspective on life: it's why I love poetry. But innovation and technology . . . they can change the very cards we've been dealt. And that's why I'm an MIV instead of a poet.

[Mind Blind - The Novel That Never Was](#)

[May 31, 2021](#)

The novel behind Mind Blind's inspiration will forever remain an unfinished draft, and I've been reluctant to share anything since it diverges so much from the IF's canon. (Sally is the main protagonist and in the MIV Program, Nick is her love interest, and Aeon is a high school.)

However, with Mind Blind's demo having met it's one year anniversary this month (!!!), I thought it might be fun to provide at least a glimpse into the original story's setting.

So, here it is . . .

Set in an alternate galaxy far, far away . . .

"You don't belong here, Sally."

I glared across the cafeteria table at Ellery, my lifelong best friend and current annoyance. "Better here than there." I gestured to the AMO table, where a group of telepaths were trying to see who could levitate glasses filled to the brim with milk without spilling a single drop. None were particularly successful.

Ellery shook their head. "You're psychic. And Ments belong in . . ."

"I *belong* in the *MIV program*," I retorted. "My aptitude scores were high enough, and even you have to admit that I'm a natural born strategist."

"Because you're—"

"Immensely intelligent."

"No, you're—"

"Breathtakingly beautiful."

"Precognitive," Ellery finished. "It's easy to come up with a plan when you can see the future."

I tried to kick Ellery under the table, only to have them smirk when my leg proved too short to reach their calf. Thankfully, a quick look around the lunchroom confirmed that the other students were too busy with their own petty high school dramas to pay attention to mine.

"Shut up," I hissed at Ellery. "I told you, I'm *done* with everyone knowing about my supposed 'gift'."

And I was done. Done being asked for the winning lotto numbers, or whether or not someone would be successful in asking out their crush. Done trying to explain that my visions didn't work that way, and that I was more likely to foresee their untimely and brutal death in a motorcycle collision than them living out a happily ever after with the love of their life.

People never seemed to get that there was a reason that seers were almost universally tragic figures in literature and mythology.

"Hey, Salami."

I groaned internally. Another thing that I was done with?

Nicholas Wiseman.

[New Month, New Interview Poll!](#)

[Jun 1, 2021](#)

Just an FYI: Noh has been taken off the poll for June. Trust me when I say that you guys will have more questions for them after the end of Chapter 10 and first half of Chapter 11! Thus, I figured it was best to save their interview for next month.

Once all of the ROs have had at least one interview, I'll re-add them to the poll (likely starting in August). Secondary interviews will feature new interviewee/interviewer combinations to give insight into all the varying dynamics (as well as answer any questions not caught the first time).

Below, please vote for the person you'd most like to have interrogated in June!

Sally

Hope

John

Hope AND John (they're doing the talk show circuit together as of the recent demo, after all)

Clarence

376 votes total

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 12](#)

[Jun 2, 2021](#)

Bellcrest Opera House had been constructed under Loren's grandfather, King Ignatius. Ornate arches lined the Opera's exterior façade to the effect of making the building appear taller than its actual five stories. Two oversized marble statues, both bearing King Ignatius' likeness and consequentially looking a great deal like Loren, flanked the driveway leading up to large golden gilt doors, which were thrown open each performance night.

Letty gasped as we entered. On the vaulted ceiling, a sea of swirling color depicted The Battle for Bellcrest. The first time I'd ever attended the opera as a child, Theo had delighted in pointing to the fresco's far-right corner, where a man bearing the Rhys family crest on his shield was in the process of being bloodily beheaded by a soldier in Tivall colors who, like the statues out front, bore a disturbing

resemblance to my fiancé. I hadn't realized at the time that my ancestor wouldn't be the last Rhys executed thusly.

I felt momentarily tempted to draw Letty's attention to the scene, as I knew she would be appalled by its brutality. Witnessing her wholehearted delight over the Opera House interior, however, I decided that such petty revenge was beneath me.

Letty practically pranced up the steps towards the auditorium, where Loren awaited us in the Royal theater box. In her excitement, she dropped her newest creation. The hand-beaded lace fan tumbled down the grand stairwell, its clacks as it hit each step echoing throughout the domed chamber. She picked it up with a blush. I glared at a passing nobleman, old enough to be our grandfather, who had taken the opportunity to leer at her posterior.

"Be more aware of yourself, Letty," I snapped as he hurried away.

Her lips parted slightly; I was usually more patient with her clumsiness. "I'm sorry," she said, though her furrowed brow showed her cluelessness over why she ought to be contrite.

I sighed. She might eventually try to kill me, but it had been unfair to chastise her simply for bending over. Yet if I informed her of the man's stare, she would be unable to relax for the rest of the evening . . . which would in turn agitate Loren. My head still throbbed from Dragon's healing and Delphine's interrogation, and I lacked the forbearance to deal with a malcontent princeling.

I wanted nothing more than to lock myself in my room with my journals and see if I could puzzle out just what the sorceress knew about my condition. Had I accidentally given something away? Inadvertently alluded to my past lives? It rankled that, instead of addressing the matter, I was stuck attending the opera with my fiancé and his future lover.

"Let's get this over with." I took Letty's arm. "Loren will be annoyed if we're late."

"I don't understand why you're not more excited, Tru," she said. I half-dragged her up the steps, as she kept wanting to pause and admire the art overhead. "We're going to see a real opera! Lady Gwendolyn claimed 'Desire's Folly' was the most romantic show she'd ever seen, and you know how often she attends performances."

"We're here." I pulled back the velvet tapestry covering the opening to royal theater box. Loren stood from his seat, his bored mien instantly transforming into a smile as Letty entered behind me.

"I'm thrilled that you ladies could join me tonight," he said with a bow in her direction. "Imagine my astonishment to learn you've never been to the Opera before, Lady Letticia."

Letty fiddled with her fan, once again nearly dropping it. "There's much of Bellcrest that I've yet to experience. Though coming here has been high on my list." Her large violet eyes flicked towards me, and I bristled at the silent implication that I had been negligent in my unwanted duty as chaperone.

We took our seats on either side of Loren as the horn played, marking five minutes until the performance began. Letty leaned over the railing of the box with her mouth ajar. "It's so crowded down there." She pointed to the ground floor three tiers below, where commoners paid two half-suns each for a standing ticket.

"The theatre fits over two thousand," Loren informed her. "Half of those tickets are for standing spaces. Lucky for you, I have the best seats in the house." He dimpled mischievously. "It would be a lark to go down there though, wouldn't it?"

"If you don't mind being trampled," I said. "Two women were killed last month when an understudy took over for Lapernce and the crowds rioted. I attempted to bring up new safety measures with Councilor Venuda but she claimed the matter is outside her jurisdiction."

"How awful!" exclaimed Letty.

Loren folded his arms. "I was only jesting," he said crossly. "No need to get so serious about everything, Tru."

"Two people died, Loren," I retorted. Even Letty's mouth twisted in distaste over his comment. "*Your* people. If the government won't step in to ensure people's safety, I fail to see the point of the Council's existence."

No one spoke. I held my breath: vocalizing such thoughts could easily be construed as seditious. I hadn't intended to go that far, yet one of the victims had been only sixteen. My age. Unlike me, she wouldn't have a chance to redo her life.

Loren broke the tense silence. "I'll discuss the matter with my father." He placed a hand on my knee reassuringly, looking even more handsome than usual in his formal black coat and crisp white neckcloth. "Perhaps he can order Wrenly to lower the occupancy limits or some such."

I smiled back at him. Loren was thoughtless, yes, and inarguably self-absorbed. Occasionally, however, I was reminded why I'd once adored him.

I glanced towards Letty. Perhaps she felt the same now as I had then, seven lifetimes ago.

"Loren, would you mind switching chairs with me?" I asked. "I can't see center stage from my current seat." It was a blatant lie—the box belonged to the King, after all. My view was unobstructed.

Still, Loren was too well-bred to call me on it, even if his expression darkened at my request. We changed seats so that I was positioned directly between him and Letty.

I made a poor barrier, as far as walls went. This was the opera: true love conquered all on a nightly basis.

“Desire’s Folly” was the recent creation of a Fengali playwright who’d fled his home country after composing a ribald ditty about his current emperor. He’d sought refuge at Bellcrest Court, where King Eldin granted patronage on the condition that the writer continue to point his mocking pen at foreign leaders rather than the Verdan nobility. As a result, the piece bordered on political propaganda. On the surface, it was a love story between a humble shepherd and the princess of Fengal. The princess endured all sorts of humiliations at the hands of her father, who promised her hand to one foreign prince after another. All the princes had some sort of flaw: one was an old man on his death bed, another had a nose so long he tripped over it, and a third insisted on walking backwards in order to present people with his “best side.” The fourth, most likeable, prince was in love with his valet.

The princess and the shepherd despaired of ever being together—the actress’s heartfelt aria bemoaning fate’s cruelty caused Letty to visibly tear up. After numerous trials, the fourth prince and the shepherd discovered that they were long lost identical twins and agreed to switch places. The shepherd married his beloved and became the next emperor, and his brother happily ran off with his manservant.

The performance was in equal measures a romance and a comedy of errors. I found it more amusing than emotional, but Letty’s eyes were rimmed red by the time the curtain closed.

“Imagine being so in love with someone,” she sniffled as Loren escorted us outside, “but knowing your relationship is forbidden.”

Loren clasped her gloved hand between his own. “Now, then, don’t cry,” he said gently. “It ended well enough, didn’t it?”

I coughed. Loren released her hand, guilt radiating off his tense shoulders even in the darkness of night. He bowed curtly as our carriage pulled up and the coachman opened the door. “Thank you for tonight, ladies. I trust I’ll see you both at tomorrow’s picnic?”

Letty’s head swiveled my way; I was the one who usually arranged our schedule and made sure that she knew what to expect for the various different types of social occasions. But I was weary of playing nursemaid to someone whom I knew would stab me in the back. Her reaction to tonight’s performance confirmed her feelings: she was the shepherd, and I was the unwanted fiancée engaged to her beloved. Except when her and Loren had married in my past, I’d never been fortunate enough to have a handsome manservant of my own with whom to elope. No, “Desire’s Folly” wouldn’t have been near as humorous had the shepherd murdered the prince to take his place.

Even in a farce, love was victorious. Suddenly, all I wanted to do was curl in bed and sleep until it was my ninth life already.

I stiffened.

No. There would be no ninth. I’d keep Letty away from Loren, no matter how much a villain they believed me.

“I have prior engagements,” I said. “We won’t be able to attend.”

Loren ignored my refusal. “I’ll tell Vincent he can skip so that our numbers will remain even. Lady Letticia, until tomorrow.”

“Oh, but . . .” Letty’s soft protest was lost as our carriage pulled away. Disinterested in anything she had to say after she had so clearly advertised her misplaced affections this night, I ignored her the entire trip back to the castle.

Later, long after Letty and I parted ways, I locked the door to my room and retrieved my journal from its hiding place in Yainharrow’s dusty shell. I also took out a pair of silver-framed spectacles—the contraption was decidedly unfashionable, and too identifying to wear in public. Still, they saved me from squinting.

I crawled into bed and began rereading each entry by the light of the glowstone on my nightstand. Letty’s involvement in each of my deaths was undeniable. When Theo had shot me, she’d been the one to bring me to the dueling grounds. Who was to say that she hadn’t somehow tampered with his pistol so that it misfired? She alone would have had access to the family quarters where Theo kept it as well as reason to try and ensure Loren’s safety. Not to mention the highwayman from my second death. Loren’s plea that I be granted a light sentence apparently hadn’t satisfied her.

What nagged at me most was how Letty had been able to accomplish all this by herself. I knew from my first and fifth deaths that she had an accomplice. Loren obviously thought she hung the moon and would believe anything she claimed; he’d easily bought her story about seeing my face during his attack in my first life. But who had really wielded the knife? I recalled the bloody bandage wrapped around Loren’s hand and his pale grimace of pain—my memories faded but that sight had left enough emotional impact to remain vivid.

I frowned. Much as I loved the idea that Armond was Letty’s accomplice, I lacked any semblance of evidence. His cufflink didn’t match that of my mysterious assailant during my fifth death, and I’d made sure that he and Letty rarely interacted with each other. I groaned. Why had I let Loren bullrush me into that picnic tomorrow?

My only guess besides Armond was one of the Councilors. Perhaps they hoped Letty would prove to be a malleable ruler and wanted to use her to push their own agendas. I flipped through my journal, rereading my various trials. Councilor Wrenly’s disdain for Letty had been evident, and Venuda was too honorable despite her short temper, not to mention female (I’d definitely been pushed off the tower by a man). Which left Hargraves or Timons. Either was a more likely mastermind than my constantly tongue-tied stepsister. Not that their involvement absolved her in any way, but it helped to explain how she came across as so guileless.

I rubbed the bridge of my nose and sighed, taking off my glasses and placing them on the nightstand next to me. I was too tired to get out of bed and put back my journal, so I settled for tucking it under my pillow with the intention of replacing come morning.

Sleep came with relative ease despite the unwelcome developments in Letty and Loren’s relationship, my exhaustion outpacing my anxiety. My dreams were restless, a combination of flashbacks and

imagined futures. I was in chains, I was in a carriage, I was tied to a stake. Flames danced beneath me, blistering the soles of my feet and inching higher as I struggled against the rope.

My eyes opened and I sat up with a gasp. Bedsheets tangled around my legs, resembling the bindings of my dream. But I still felt unbearably hot.

The bed's canopy was a curtain of flickering orange flames. Acrid smoke choked my lungs. The fire was real.

I hadn't even turned seventeen, and I was already going to die.

[Mind Blind Bloopers Reel](#)

[Jun 3, 2021](#)

I'm still working on the new scene added between Aeon and the party for Chapter 10 (hoping to get the rest up this weekend!), but here are some bits and bobs that didn't make the cut:

* * *

You glance at `{Kent}` and resist the urge to let loose a low whistle. "So, your father is . . ."

Instead of helpfully filling in the blank, `{Kent}` cocks `{khis}` head. "Yes?" `{khe}` asks, as if not fully aware of what you're alluding to.

"Mayor Zarneki is a . . ." You trail off significantly once more.

`{Kent}` doesn't speak up, but `{khe}`'s looking increasingly amused.

Throttlebottom, Nick interjects. *The word you're searching for is 'throttlebottom.'*

* * *

"Why shih tzus?" you ask.

`{Kent}` gives you a withering stare.

"They're just . . . floofy," you mangle through your logic. "I didn't expect you to have floofy dogs."

`!{Khis}` withering stare intensifies.

* * *

I don't have feelings, you silently argue with Nick. I am feelingless. Feeling-free. The Tin Man from Wizard of Oz.

Uh-huh.

Seriously, you continue. There's nothing going on between me and \${Kent} Zarneki.

Sure.

. . . I hate you.

Almost as much as you like \${Kent}? Nick asks slyly.

* * *

\${Kent} Zarneki gives \${khis} dogs filtered watered from a pitcher while \${khe} \${khim}self drinks from the tap. You feel like you've now learned everything there is to know about your new partner.

* * *

I'm trapped in a Disney Channel Original Movie, Nick thinks. Send help.

[Writer's Blog: Interactive Mystery](#)

[Jun 4, 2021](#)

The second half of Chapter 10 will release within the next few days, after which I'll post this month's schedule. The word count has gone up to 295k, with the new scenes (yes, scenes plural!) adding quite a bit of length. Annie and Cass get their moment of glory! There's a rousing game of Chuck-It! The ball gets confiscated by a super diabolical villain!

. . . It's all very exciting. Not everyone will choose to get this scene with the shih tzus, however.

One of the trickiest things about writing an interactive fiction mystery is knowing that, if certain routes aren't chosen, players will inevitably miss out on clues. While this increases replay value, it also risks the main narrative coming across as disjointed and/or half-baked. Making sure that foreshadowing is semi-equally dispersed is something that will be one of the primary concerns for my final edit, but right now I'm just trying to make sure the story makes sense. (My philosophy on writing is to finish first, and worry about it being good later. Otherwise, projects never get finished.)

Don't get me wrong: some clues are very much intended to only be recognized upon a second playthrough (like all of Glitch's hints that K isn't a Ment, or other things which I can't yet discuss but a few genius souls have somehow picked up on). Other clues, like Noh's perspective, solve minor mysteries right from the get-go instead of delaying their reveal: if your Button took the subway to Aeon, that Chapter 2 scene in the bathroom reads very differently, as do the tiny references to Button's distracted "humming." You also get more insight into how Noh and Vengeance interacted prior to the story's beginning; if you don't see at least one of the graffitied brooms in person, the purpose of the artwork is never explained.

As a player, I hate being railroaded down certain pathways by the narrative—even though it often leads to a better story! I try to let people choose alternate scenes and avoid characters they dislike, even it means missing out on a sizeable chunk of insight into the mystery. After all, Button isn't going to learn anything new should they choose to sulk silently in their room . . . but given everything Button's gone through lately, this is a pretty reasonable desire that I think should be included for roleplay (especially for all the morbid "my soul is the blackness of a mourning veil" Buttons).

For setting up essential scenes, I often utilize time skips. *How* Button got to the hospital or returned to Aeon is left up to reader imagination—you're free to imagine that they went willingly, or that they were dragged through the door kicking and screaming. When an essential scene is part of a continuous day, however, this becomes harder to smoothly orchestrate.

I suppose a solution would be to reveal the same information in two different ways in two different scenes, but I feel like that defeats the entire purpose of having the choice in the first place. Every time you replay *Mind Blind*, I want each Button to be working from a different set of information, starting immediately from the branching pathways in Chapter 1. That way, even if you play the same character again and again (as I do, because I will never *not* play as a Chaotic Good Snarker MC), you may find your Button making different decisions based on alternate assumptions that they possess.

All this is handy-dandy for roleplaying. But, as I mentioned above, it's not the easiest way to write a mystery novel. In the end, Button is as good as a detective as you play them as being. Buttons will need to be proactive in order to solve *Mind Blind*'s major mysteries by themselves, which means asking lots of questions and interacting with all the characters. Otherwise, some major plot points will be narrated at the end via villain . . . and it's way more fun to interrupt mid-evil monologue with a condescending "*Duh, Dr. McEvil, I already figured that out.*"

[June's Interviewee is Sally!](#)

[Jun 5, 2021](#)

That's right, the showrunner herself will be taking the hotseat! Interviewer TBD . . . We'll see if Nick gets his job back, or if he runs screaming in the other direction from certain questions.

Anyway, ask your questions here or via the Sanctum of Spoilers cast interview channel.

Since Sally has two "iterations" (the version of Sally still crushing on Nick will have different answers than the version of her into Button), she'll likely get two slightly different interviews released simultaneously at this month's end--so read whichever better fits your personal playthrough! The nature of Button's past with Sally actively shapes her romantic present and outlooks, and whereas the other interviewees are all versions of the cast romantically interested in Button, Sally having two love interests complicates that.

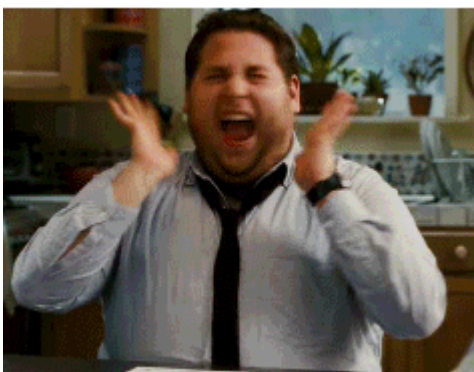
(Not that the other ROs are destined to die forever alone if Button doesn't smooch them, except for maybe Noh because Noh don't deserve love, but none have other potential romances in-game.)

(I'm kinda joking about Noh but also kinda not? Noh has more issues than National Geographic, and that first released in 1888.)

[K's Scene Update](#)

[Jun 7, 2021](#)

K has a new scene! I still need to add the newest version of the car ride to *REDACTED* and finish the "Button would rather be alone" scene where you don't go to K's house, but I was too excited not to share this right away because, well . . .



Let's just say that K surprised me and I added in yet another new scene.

Enjoy :)

New Demo Length: 291k

Average Playthrough: 72k

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-elevator/mygame/>

Next Demo Update: The rest of Chapter 10 will be up this Friday, and the first half of Chapter 11 will be released on the 27th!

(Bonus tips for the new scene: K's affection needs to be over 70 for things to progress romantically. There's a LOT of opportunities to gain affection in this newest scene, for both romantic routes and platonic, so it should be pretty easy. Not getting the romance scene in Chapter 10 doesn't completely lock you out of K's romance, but it does change things at Vengeance's party--I'm currently adding in a bunch of variations how K responds based off what happened between them and Button, which is why the party scene is still being spit-shined.)

[June Patreon Schedule](#)

[Jun 9, 2021](#)

Dates are subject to being jostled around slightly due to that chaotic force known as Life, but here's what to expect for the rest of this month!

June 9: *Mind Blind* Short Story (will be posted in the evening after my writing group meets and it's all edited!)

June 11: Writer's Blog and *MB* Demo Update (Rest of Chapter 10)

June 12: *Nick Wiseman Has Opinions* - Gray's Wedding Speech (UCRT Reward)

June 13: *Delivery for the Damned* Sneak Peak

June 14: *Delivery* Development Poll

June 16: *Lady Death's Diary* - Chapter 13

June 18: Writer's Blog

June 19: *MB* Saucy Side, featuring Rosy Posy

June 21: *Once Upon A Time In Mind Blind* (UCRT Reward)

June 22: *Aeon Student Guide* - On Telepaths

June 23: *Lady Death's Diary* - Chapter 13.5

June 25: Writer's Blog

June 26: Live Q&A (exact time TBD)

June 27: *MB* Demo Update (Chapter 11)

June 29: Sally's Interview

I think I have enough scrapped material for at least two additional blooper reels as well (a *lot* got rewritten this chapter), and I'd also like to post the *Aeon Student Guide* page about Empaths (which I'll write if I need a creative breather while working on Chapter 11).

The *Guide* will be in the final version of *Mind Blind* to clarify plot points and lore (accessible via the stat screen), so I really appreciate any and all feedback on these portions! The *Guide* is supposed to be text-booky, but I don't want it to be so dry as to be uninteresting.

[Meatloaf Day](#)

[Jun 10, 2021](#)

"Pretend that I'm her." Sergeant Martin Murphy waggled his ginger eyebrows and raised his voice to a flirtatious squeak, "*Hello, Sergeant Wiseman. Do you have something to ask me?*"

John stared fixedly at his half-completed mission report. He wouldn't rise to the bait—not this time.

"You're not my type, Murph."

"*I'm everyone's type*," Murph scoffed derisively in that same too-high pitch, causing a cold shudder to run up John's spine. Somehow, Murph was able to duplicate the exact exasperated tone that Hope so often used, and John was thrown by hearing even a satirical duplication of her voice coming out of his burly supervisor.

"*After all*," Murph continued, "*I'm a single lady diplomat with killer red lipstick and a sassy, no-nonsense attitude just waiting to be asked out on a romantic date by the big, strong Ment of my dreams.*"

"You realize that she'd shoot out your kneecaps for that comment, right?" John asked mildly.

Murph abandoned his imitation of Hope's voice. "The lipstick remark was a compliment," he said.

"Seriously, how long are you and her gonna keep dancing around each other? You're like two Manakins

mid-mating ritual.” He shrugged at John’s arched brow. “I like birds.”

“So buy a parakeet.” John forced his attention back to the mission brief on his desk.

He tapped his pen against the paper’s edge, contemplating how to best describe his team’s breach of the Northeastern blockade. It was difficult to articulate how their plan had evolved mid-mission using words, but Hope hadn’t appreciated his last Lego diorama, calling it “unfileable”. Nor had she been swayed by his argument that the 3d visual was the only accurate way to show how he issued telepathic commands on the field without needing verbalization (each of his teammates were represented by their own Lego figurine, wiggly smiles hand-drawn onto yellow heads by Murph with a black sharpie).

No, Hope wanted *description*, even though it took two-thousand words to communicate what Legos could depict in fifty bricks.

“You have that look on your face again,” Murph said. “Like you’ve swallowed a slug.”

John sighed. Slug licking would be preferable to this paperwork. “I get that the UN wants their new Ment division supervised, and I’m fine with you and Zhou being our babysitters. No offence,” he added at Murph’s bemused smirk. “You’re a great Norm nanny. But the way I give orders . . . when we’re out on field, I’m *linked* with the other Ment soldiers. Decisions are discussed and carried out at the speed of visual thought. Putting that into words is near impossible.”

Murph leaned back in his chair, its hinges squeaking and echoing throughout the large tent that served as their temporary ops center. “You wanted the military to have designated Ment units, Wiseguy,” he said. “That means following the same rules as the rest of us.”

“Those rules don’t work for the way Ments operate!” John exploded. He waved the paper at Murph. “This bottom portion asks me which directives I gave. They want me to choose from a list of hand signals and verbal directives, none of which even begin to describe the ten-second telepathic conversation that Perez and I had in field.”

“You must’ve known spearheading this whole ‘Unity’ initiative wouldn’t be easy,” Murph said. “At least the UN sent in a Ment to oversee you guys.”

“Hope’s a Telemetrists,” John grumbled. “She sees far, but she doesn’t see *in*.”

Murph blinked. “I thought you liked Hope.”

“I do like Hope.” Too much, if John were being honest with himself, which he resolutely wasn’t.

“Then what’s the issue?”

John blew out a slow breath. Murph was a great guy, but he had a way of assuming that everyone was exactly like him, even when it came to thought patterns. He could no more comprehend telepathic field commands than he could grasp the fact that not everyone loved Meatloaf Day at the Caf.

"There's no issue, Murph," John said, suddenly tired. "I just hate paperwork."

* * * *

Hope had been set up in a beige tent at the far end of the compound. Her tent was smaller than those belonging to most of the other paper-pushers, but it had two large plastic panels on the roof that let in sunlight. Today, however, heavy rain streamed down the clear panels, making John feel like he was trapped beneath a waterfall.

The thought of waterfalls in association with Hope brought to mind tropical vacations and barely-there bikinis, a visual which John futilely attempted to banish from his brain as he waited for Hope to finish going over his latest report. Thank God she wasn't a telepath. To keep himself distracted, he idly poked at the Jack Skellington bobblehead that sat at the corner of Hope's desk.

Hope glared at him over the folder, and he stilled Jack's nodding head with one finger. She was scary, but John kind of liked that about her.

"It's better than last time," Hope announced after she'd finished reading. "You can cut back on the jokes, though."

John allowed one side of his mouth to twitch upwards in a half-smile that his mother called charming. "Yes, Ma'am," he drawled. "I'll be all business from now on."

"Good." Hope's lips tightened together in what John optimistically thought might be a repressed grin. Murph was right about her lipstick.

"Any news about Target Alpha?" he asked, referencing the North Korean resistance's current leader.

Hope shook her head. "She's still in hiding. Those people we've interrogated either don't know where she's holed up, or they're unwilling to say."

"Probably the latter," John said. "I still can't believe it took us so long to realize that she was an Empath."

Hope's mouth tightened further, this time in anger. "Ments who abuse their abilities make life more difficult for all of us."

Hope was always careful with her language, even when upset. It was always "abilities," never "powers," when she talked about psychic talents. John couldn't blame her; people treated most Telemetrists as if they were little more than peeping toms, and it was a minor miracle that she'd managed to rise in rank at the United Nations. Most the soldiers on base assumed that she was a spy, including the Telepaths under John's own command whom John thought really should've known better than to jump to Pollard-based conclusions.

"We'll take Target Alpha into custody sooner or later," John promised.

"We sure as hell better," Hope said grimly. "Project Unity is on the chopping block unless we prove that we get can results. The longer this op takes, the more my superiors threaten to . . ." she broke off, looking embarrassed. "I shouldn't complain."

John wanted to reassure her, but the angry glint in her eyes told him that his efforts wouldn't be well received.

"What do you think about Meatloaf Day?" he asked instead.

Hope looked taken aback by his abrupt change of topic, and John internally kicked himself. He was usually smoother than this (too smooth, some of his exes had claimed), but Hope made him feel like a tongue-tied seventh grader handing over a Valentine's Day card to his first crush.

"I'm not a fan of mystery meat," Hope answered after a too-long pause that left John with sweaty palms.

"Of course not," John said, "but would you want to—"

Hope held up a hand. "I'm stopping you there," she said. "I'm don't date subordinates, Sergeant Wiseman."

John leaned forward, placing his hands at the edge of her desk and smiling in what he hoped was a rakish fashion. "Who said I was asking you on a date?" he asked, giving an internal fist pump of victory as Hope's mouth opened and then closed without a comeback. He righted himself and gave a sharp salute. "Ma'am."

Final word having been achieved, he turned to leave.

"John?"

He paused at the tent's exit. "Yes, Ma'am?"

"Earn a fucking promotion already."

"Yes, Ma'am."

[Writer's Blog: "Villains" and Their Optional Backstories](#)

[Jun 11, 2021](#)

(Contains minor spoilers for Chapter 10)

Oh, Vengeance. How thou dost give me a headache.

Vengeance is complicated. They're not the "good guys," they're terrorists. But not the kind usually seen on TV, although they do love a good evil monologue.

Vengeance recruits from two separate pools of people.

The first type of person that Vengeance recruits is pretty easy for Button to hate (and even easier for Button to make fun of). This is the kind of person whom Button interacts with on Podium (or at least, Button interacts with the "lite" version). They're angry with their own lives for whatever reason and lashing out at anyone they think has it better. Even if these Vengeance members have sympathetic backstories or even (perish the thought!) make the occasional decent point (like the fact that Unity tends to bulldoze local non-Ment authorities, and that maybe just maybe Nick wasn't the most qualified person to be UCRT's leader when he was first granted the position), they lose any and all credibility because they're so gosh darn *ugly* towards anyone who doesn't wholly agree with their narrow viewpoint. They're the clear-cut extremists. The kind that TV shows cast as the bad guys, because the moral complexity of their unrighteous cause can be neatly wrapped up within a 45-minute plot.

To put it more simply, these kind of Vengeance followers are jerks. My one rule as a kindergarten teacher has always been "Don't be a meanie pants," and this first sort of Vengeance member wears puffy pantaloons sewn from blind aggression and nastiness. They don't play well with others at recess, and bite the other students.

The second kind of person whom Vengeance recruits, however, is the type that makes up the bulk of the organization. For lack of a better description . . . they're "normal." They're the people whom Button meets at Reese's party.

They're freaking hard for me to write.

The issue of Ment rights (and ergo Unity as an organization that polices Ment criminals while also advocating for Ment acceptance) in *Mind Blind* is meant to be complicated in way that there's no real-world parallel. Ments *are* more powerful than Lo-Pos. They can hurt people, even when they really don't mean or even want to (Hi, Hope!).

As a result, many of the people who are drawn to Vengeance are people who have personally experienced what happens when a Ment, deliberately or not, abuses their power. Despite Unity's propaganda, it happens, because Ments are people and people can be jerks (sometimes that first type of Vengeance recruit is instead born with psychic abilities).

In the second half of Chapter 10, Button gets a chance to talk with people who have, like Button, been on the receiving end of Ment violence. These people are victims, who deserve empathy and compassion. Because of their personal histories, they're afraid. And to some extent, that's understandable: If you get nearly mauled to death by a tiger, you may afterwards be afraid of all tigers. It doesn't matter if the zookeeper claims that *this* tiger is a sweet little pussy cat who wants to cuddle, the tiger still has giant teeth and is capable of biting off your head.

Ments are people, however. People with the psychic giant teeth who can force you sign away your pension and then jump off a bridge if you trust them.

So, yeah. It's complicated. And I'm a little terrified. Making Vengeance be a "pure evil" organization who do bad things for bad reasons would be infinitely easier, but it wouldn't feel half as realistic (Within a super unrealistic premise, but nevertheless! Realism!).

I've ultimately decided to give players the choice on whether or not they want Button to listen to the backstories of Vengeance's members. It's tricky for this to happen organically, without me breaking the 3rd wall and writing: "Click here to read people attempt to justify the unjustifiable and do a disturbingly half-decent job of it." I'm still working on these selections (Chapter 10's last bit will be all out once this is done).

Button can sympathize with these Vengeance members, because they *do* deserve sympathy. Button can even emphasize to the point where they risk sliding down that slippery slope of equating Ments with tigers (because people really shouldn't be dehumanized and compared to animals, even if it's within an imaginary setting and metaphorically convenient).

Alternatively, Button can take a hard stance against Vengeance, because Vengeance's actions and goals are undeniably horrific, and refuse to listen (this is also a choice for readers who simply don't want to read those passages).

If I do my job right, it should be clear that sympathy for an individual is not the same as agreement with their actions, and Button will be able to form a nuanced stance on how they view Vengeance.

If I do my job wrong . . . well, hopefully you guys will let me know and give suggestions to improve!

[Chapter 10 Demo Update](#)

[Jun 12, 2021](#)

All of Chapter 10 is out! Sorry for the delay--there was an extremely odd bug that happened when Button chose to wear the thigh-high boots two times in a row. I still have NO idea what caused this issue, but for some reason changing the variable from "thigh-high" to "knee-high" fixed the issue.

Maybe choicescript doesn't like sexy shoes? Your guess is as good as mine.

ANYWAYS.

Length: 301k (Whooo-hoooo!)

Average Playthrough: 77k

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-elevator/mygame/>

NB: This chapter is a little more mature thematically (you get the backstories of Vengeance members, which is pretty much what you'd expect). Nothing is explicitly described and it's mostly able to be skipped over (although that will make the chapter a lot shorter). It doesn't challenge *Mind Blind*'s PG-13 rating or anything, but I'm just giving a heads up!

[Nick Wiseman Has Opinions On . . . Gray!](#)

[Jun 13, 2021](#)

Presented below: Nick's speech from Button and Gray's wedding

I bet Salome five bucks that I could make it through this speech without tearing up. But you know what? I'm gonna go ahead and concede that bet. Sal, you can collect your money after the reception.

Of course, this means I've only got a few minutes before I turn into a blubbering mess to wax poetic about my two favorite people in the universe tying the knot. I'll try my best not to spend the better part of that time squealing like a giddy schoolboy.

Gray, you've been my brother long before you became my brother-in-law. You're the best man I know, and I include myself among the masses whom fall short of your set standard (although, let's be real, I come pretty dang close). You're generous, grounded, and patient to a fault—and I really mean that last bit. Seriously, I was about ready to lock you and Button in a closet and leave you there overnight by the time that you finally decided to make a move.

And Button. My baby sibling, who has grown up to be wiser and more mature than I could ever aspire. You deserve a life filled with joy and laughter and love and little cartoon birds that flutter around your kitchen doing the less fun chores like chopping onions (chopping onions is totally the reason my eyes are watering, by the way, just in case anyone's curious). While I'm not sure about the feasibility of the cartoon birds, I know that Gray is the right guy to provide you with all the rest.

"Soulmates" is a concept that's been around for thousands of years, and the term gets bandied around a lot in romantic movies. I binged watched a few as research for this speech, and I've come to this conclusion: what you guys have is way better than being "destined."

According to the movies, a soulmate should instinctively "get" you. But you two ask each other questions. Gray could literally just touch Button's hand to learn how they're feeling, but you both take time to talk things through. There's no mystical understanding between souls—you two care enough about each other to listen and talk and learn. Neither of you take the other for granted.

What I mean is, yours isn't the kind of relationship where you're both going to remain exact same for the rest of your lives and then be content because neither has changed from the person you originally fell in love with. Heck, you've already both changed so much since you first met—Button took on responsibilities heavy enough to make others weep, and Gray has *swagger* now (you know what I'm talking about, *Wacker*).

You'll both continue to grow and change. But I have no doubt that, fifty years from now, you'll be just as much in love as you are today. Because you two aren't . . . aren't . . .

Damn it, I really wanted to make it to the end. Anyone have a tissue?

Thanks.

You two aren't meant to be married by some grand destiny or force beyond your control. You *want* to be, more passionately than any couple I've known, and I can't imagine that spark ever fading.

(Raises glass.)

Here's to the happy couple.

[Delivery Teaser: Your Pet](#)

[Jun 14, 2021](#)

In *Delivery for the Damned*, you'll be able to choose from three pets: each being the magical equivalent of a dog (Cù-sìth), a cat (Bakeneko), and a lizard (Miniature Dragon).

(The pet selection was part of last month's *Delivery* development poll, and it appears people like the classics! The Poisonous Water Shrew didn't stand a chance.)

Which species you choose will impact your pets' personality and how they talk, because, yes, these pets will have plenty of opinions about your actions over the course of the game. Occasionally, they might even help you on deliveries. For example: the bakeneko will provide useful for addresses located in Hell, since she herself is a demon. Likewise, the flying Miniature Dragon will help when delivering to giants, whose mailboxes are always too high for you to reach. And the cù-sìth will . . . well, that would be telling.

The pet is a gift from your late mentor, Lydia (who has her own post if you browse through the Delivery tag). As such, you start the game already in possession of your companion. However, the option to get rid of your pet will come later on if you so choose. After all, *Delivery's* MC deals with devils, djinns, and the like. It can be helpful to have a spare soul on hand.

Or, if you're not completely evil, your pet also gives really good cuddles. Even the dragon.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 13](#)

[Jun 16, 2021](#)

My hands flew to cover my mouth but did little to help me breathe. My throat burned and my eyes watered. Flames licked the roof of my bed's canopy—if I didn't escape, and soon, the heavy fabric would collapse and become my next burial shroud. But my route to the door was obscured in smoke.

Curses. Why hadn't I learned a spell to extinguish fires?

Because I'd never been burned alive before*.* Because this was new. Because I'd been lazy, and only taken steps to protect myself from murder I'd already experienced. My mind was slowing from lack of oxygen. I needed to move before I passed out.

I reached for the only spell I knew that might help.

"Keypp," I coughed. *"Keypp, keypp, keypp."*

At first, nothing seemed to happen. Then inferno's spread slowed. Thank the Triad for my past larceny of Delphine's tome. Smoke drifted lazily upwards instead of completely clouding my vision. There. A gap between my bed curtains only just beginning to smolder. Burning fabric seared my hands as I pushed aside the drapes. Sparks ignited the carpet, branded my bare feet. But the stone floor kept the flames from reaching the door and the hallway beyond. If I could reach the threshold, I would be safe. At least until the next attempt on my life.

I sunk onto my knees, choking on a pained shout as my burned palms hit the ground. The air was clearer here. I took in a deep lungful to avoid slipping unconscious, before slithering and gasping towards the door like an asphyxiating snake. The comparison, sprung unbidden into my head, was so wildly inappropriate that I would have laughed but for my lack of breath.

A bedpost snapped.

The wooden beam landed besides me, barely missing. Splinters pierced my cheeks and arms. I screamed. Hair burned, sulfuric. I rolled away, only just cognizant enough to do so towards the door, smothering the sparks before my nightgown could ignite. Agony flayed the raw skin of my hand but I managed to turn grab onto the doorknob just long enough to turn it open.

The hallway was cool. So blessedly cool. I stumbled closer to one of the archer's keyholes that overlooked the courtyard. Guards would be on patrol below. I yelled for them, but the attempt left me wracked by dry heaves, the aftermath of too much pain and too much smoke inhalation. My vision blurred.

I clung to conscious just long enough to hear the pounding of boots against the ground, barely audible over the sound of my roaring heartbeat.

Someone was coming.

I awoke in a panic, a scream on my lips before I realized that I was not my childhood bedchamber but an unfamiliar room. I was still sixteen.

My scorched nightgown had been replaced by a thin shift, and a delicate daisy chain was stitched along the hem of a linen sheet tucked securely around me. Something cold slid off my forehead and down my front as I propped myself up against the headboard. A wet towel.

Letty sat on a chair nearby, plucking nervously at her embroidery hoop. She set it down upon seeing me stir.

"Tru!" Her violet eyes were luminous with unshed tears. "How are you feeling?"

My throat felt raw, as if it'd been sanded by a whetstone. "Thirsty," I croaked.

She passed me a glass from the nightstand. It felt blessedly cool in my hand, but the water burned as it went down.

"Who found me?" I asked as soon as I could bear to speak. "How long have I been asleep? Did they find who set the fire?" Stupid question—of course they hadn't, given Letty's presence. My sigh came out a hoarse creak.

Letty gently replaced the damp cloth across my forehead. "I'm going to go get Lady Delphine. Rest."

I closed my eyes once she had exited the room. If she'd wanted a second attempt to kill me, she could have done it while I was asleep. No, it was too risky for Letty to act now, in her own room. Besides, my eyes stung too much to keep them open.

The door opened, but I kept my eyes shut even as my hand tightened around the glass in preparation to bash it across someone's head.

Delphine tsked as she pressed the back of her hand against my cheek. "You have a fever," she said. "My healing spells worked, but your lungs were badly damaged. It will take time for you too fully recover." She set my glass back on the nightstand and curled my fingers into a fist. "Any pain?"

I shook my head and opened my eyes a crack to look at her. “How severe were my burns?”

“Like sautéed steak,” she replied.

“You shouldn’t jest about such things,” protested Letty. “Tru almost died.”

“As if my apprentice would succumb so easily.” Despite Delphine’s glibness, worry tightened her voice. “Speaking of which, you’ve been asleep for the past two days. How much longer will you steal your sister’s room?”

“Stay as long as you need, Tru.” Letty smiled at me benevolently, as if she had not just failed at burning me alive. “I’m fine sleeping in Theo’s chambers while he’s gone.”

“As if she’s slept at all since you were hurt,” said Delphine. “You’re lucky to have such a devoted sister.”

Lucky. Not quite the word I’d use, given that Letty had most likely set the fire. Guilt, not love, motivated her tender administrations. If she could even feel guilt. More likely, her actions had been to maintain her pretense of a concerned sibling. My life wasn’t supposed to be in danger this soon; the parallels between the opera and her own thwarted love must have roused Letty to early action. What grander act of passion than arson? None of this I could say, however, without revealing my prior deaths. As confessing thus had ended with me branded a lunatic in my past lives, I refrained.

“Who found me?” I asked instead.

“One of the guards,” said Delphine. “We think the fire burned for at least an hour before she passed by on her nightly patrol.” She bit her lip and shared a sympathetic look. “Unfortunately, most your belongings were unsalvageable.”

My journal. I’d have to completely rewrite it. I had the pages memorized, but it helped to see the events on paper. Letty misinterpreted my groan and patted my shoulder. “We can go to the modiste together. I’ll help you pick out some new dresses! Not that you need help,” she hastened to add, “but I do think you’d look wonderful in some brighter colors.”

I allowed my thoughts to drift as Letty went on to rattle off several suggestions regarding which styles and hues might be most flattering on me.

Delphine claimed the fire had been burning for an hour by the time I was discovered, and that most of my possessions had already been destroyed. But I had heard someone before then—when I had escaped my room, the flames hadn’t yet reached the door or bookshelf. How long had I lain unconscious in the hallway? Whose footsteps had I heard? Letty’s? Her accomplice’s?

In addition, I distinctly remembered locking my bedroom door in order to read my journal in privacy. Yet it had been unlocked during my escape. An oversight on the arsonist’s part, to be certain, but a welcome one that had enabled me to survive. But it begged the question: how had Letty gotten inside? Only

myself and the castle steward should have possessed a key. I needed to speak to Hamen as soon as possible to learn if he had misplaced his or made any additional copies.

I interrupted Letty's oration on the benefits of tapered skirts for someone of my build. "Do we know how the fire started?"

"The guards found the stub of a candle. They assumed you'd left it burning." Delphine's eyes bore into mine. She'd gifted me with my own personal glowstone after I'd complained that reading by flickering candlelight hurt my eyes. "They said a breeze from your window must have caused the flame to spread."

Letty clutched her arms and shuddered. "I don't like to think what would have happened if you hadn't escaped," she lied. "Really, Tru, you must be more careful."

My plan to interrogate Hamen, the castle steward, on the subject of the key, was delayed by Letty's insistence that I be fitted for a new wardrobe as soon as I was capable of standing upright, and by Delphine's determination to interrogate *me* about the fire's true origin. I sidestepped most her questions but eventually conceded that I didn't recall lighting a candle. Delphine's rouged lips had flattened and her pupils narrowed to the effect of making her eyes appear even greener. She'd dropped the subject after I'd begged a headache, but soon after, new protective wards appeared etched above the doorframe of my refurnished chambers.

After a week of being prodded and poked at by a battalion of dressmakers, I finally managed to corner the castle steward in the castle library. Hamen didn't seem to recognize me at first, given that I'd been forced to borrow dresses from Letty until my own were ready. I didn't grieve for the loss of my wardrobe the same way I mourned my burnt book collection, but I loathed having to wear the clothes of my assumed arsonist in the interim.

Dressing like Letty only emphasized our differences. The gown's bodice hung loose and its hemline fell several inches short my ankles. Letty shared her mother's fondness for pastels, which only served to make me look pale and corpselike. My current seafoam green frock gave my complexion a vaguely nauseous tint. Hamen's gray eyebrows rose past his nonexistent hairline when he recognized me beneath the flounces.

"My lady." Concern deepened his already sonorous voice. Hamen sounded precisely as one expected a castle steward to sound; I was half convinced it was the reason he'd chosen the career. "How are you faring today?"

Hamen was Emilia's father and had proven a valuable source of information in the past. Like his daughter, he thrived for gossip. Since it wouldn't do for my would-be murderer to learn I was onto them, I needed to choose my words cautiously.

"I'm much improved," I replied, "and greatly appreciate all the work Emilia's done making sure my quarters were repaired and refurbished after the fire."

Hamen's shoulders straightened with pride and he was unable to keep from smiling. "Serving you is her honor, my lady."

"I couldn't ask for a better lady's maid. She found the most beautiful crystal doorknob for the new door. Did you help her choose?"

"Picked everything by herself. She was resolved to make your room twice as grand, after everything you went through."

I smiled brightly and tilted my head to the side. "Well, I simply adore her selection. Do I need a new key, or will the old one work?"

"No need to change, my lady. Emilia gave the old knob to the jewelry smith to copy."

"I only ask because I'm ever so forgetful," I fibbed. "I'm always losing my key. Thank the Triad that Lady Delphine charmed it to always return to my desk. I don't suppose you know of anyone else who's as clumsy? Who may have asked to borrow your keys recently after misplacing their own?"

Hamen's hand darted to his pocket, which jangled as he covered it protectively. His voice deepened further. "My lady, I guard the steward's copy with my life. Let no one say that Hamen Wayfar ever neglected his duty."

"Of course," I agreed. "I would never think otherwise."

He nodded, appearing satisfied by my prompt response. "If that will be all, my lady." He bowed again and made to leave.

Curses. I frantically reached for an excuse. None came to mind. Except one, inspired by my first death but which I was loathe to use. I took a deep breath. "May I be honest with you, Hamen?"

He halted and turned back around. "Of course, my lady."

"I wish to become . . . closer. To my fiancé." My cheeks burned, and I could barely force the next words past my dry lips. "Would it be possible to borrow the key to the Prince's bedchamber?"

Better the court gossiped about this, mocking me over my fake desperation for Loren's attention, than for Letty to discover my suspicions. To his credit, Hamen managed to keep his expression neutral despite how much my request must have surprised him. Not that dalliances didn't happen at court or were particularly condemned, but I'd established a reputation for prudery early on due to my disinclination (and inability) to flirt.

"Alas, my lady, my oath as steward prevents me from giving the key to *anyone*," he stressed the last word.

I ducked my head as if embarrassed by my own forwardness. "As it should be," I said in a soft voice. "But perhaps someone else has a copy of the castle keys? I wish so dearly for us to become closer."

I peeped up at him through the fringe of my lashes. Hamen's brows knit together in sympathy but his mouth twisted as if torn. I needed to be more convincing.

I continued, "It's just that . . . after the fire, I realized how short life can be. I don't wish to have any regrets." Like not stopping my murderer.

Hamen took my plea exactly as I had intended, however. Who could resist stepping up to defend true love? His eyes softened and he laid a fatherly hand on my shoulder in a rare breach of etiquette.

"I would give you the key if I could, my lady. Your love for His Highness is truly inspiring." He licked his lips as if uncertain whether or not to continue.

I sniffed as if about to cry.

"Perhaps someone else can assist you," he said. "The Council has the master key for most rooms in the castle. Used it when Lord Throckmore locked himself in his rooms to avoid arrest four years ago."

My chest felt tight, my ribcage too small to contain the hammering of my heart. "I see. And who keeps this key?"

Hamen stroked his gray goatee thoughtfully. "I believe it's assigned to a member of the Jury Council," he said. "The one who schedules trials. Councilor Timons—slender fellow with dark hair."

"Thank you, Hamen." My voice came out surprisingly even.

"I can't guarantee that the Council key will work." He sounded apologetic. "Only His Majesty has access to every room in the castle. But I will pray to Sen for your success."

I pressed a sealed envelope into his palm, thick with enough banknotes to cover an additional month of wages. What better use for my allowance, than to ensure future cooperation? The steward slipped it into his jacket's inner pocket without bothering to look.

"I'll remember your kindness," I said.

"I wish you well, my lady. In *all* things."

Long after he left, I remained in the library, too dizzy to dare move. If Hamen was correct and the Council had the only other key, then one of its members had helped Letty break into my room and set the fire. A Council member had helped try to kill me.

Such a precedent cannot go unpunished.

The words sprung unbidden to my mind, echoing in Timons' mocking timbre. Why would the Councilor be working with Letty? What grudge did he hold against me?

I intended to find out.

[Delivery Development: I vs. You](#)

[Jun 17, 2021](#)

So, despite having false memories of already making a post about this subject, looking through past posts reveals that apparently I haven't put this issue to poll yet. Which is very odd, because I could've sworn that I did! I guess I have an overactive imagination? (The natural consequence of being a writer. Also, this issue has been at the forefront of my mind for a while during my *Delivery* brainstorm.)

Despite the title of this post making it seem like I'm challenging you to pistols at dawn, the topic of this month's development poll is whether *Delivery* should be written in first or second person. When I started writing *Mind Blind*, I knew that I wanted to use the second person "you" to refer to Button, as second person can be an incredibly strong call to action for readers to empathize with a character's emotions. Given the narrative shift in Chapter 1 from Noh's perspective, I also felt that "you" worked better in order to blur that control line being crossed as they enter Button's head (sitcom title: Who's Mind Is It Anyway?)

In *Delivery for the Damned*, on the other hand, the main character is isolated and solitary . . . at least at the beginning. One of the story's major themes will be loneliness.

Because of this theme, part of me wants to transition to first person in *Delivery*. Because "you" is a connecting word--in order for "you" to exist, there needs to be a second speaker/narrator. But "I" can exist in room with only one person. I think that the shift in voice would emphasize that *Delivery's* protagonist is an island (that pun works better when spoken, but hopefully you get my drift!). There's also a lot of fun experimental things that can be done with first person coding-wise, such as letting readers customize their inner narrative from the get-go (more on that idea next month!).

Personally, I enjoy reading both first and second person in interactive fiction, but I also know many people have strong opinions one way or the other. This shift would also be a somewhat big stylistic change, so I don't want to commit until I heard your feedback!

The poll below is on which person you would prefer for *Delivery* (or IF in general!), but please feel free to elaborate on your opinions in the comments/Sanctum development channel (this would be super helpful for me to make an informed decision). Likewise, I welcome any recommendations for IFs that you believe showcase the strength of either voice. I like to get navel-gazingly philosophical about my writing decisions, but in the end this may simply boil down to a matter of reader preference. I want to be flexible, but I also have no desire to fix something that isn't broken and thus accidentally break it.

The Actual Poll: *Delivery for the Damned* should be written in . . .

First Person (ex: I voted on the poll.)

Second Person (ex: You voted on the poll.)

I Don't Care (A statement which, although written in first person, does not necessarily endorse it.)

46 votes total

[Writer's Blog: Oh Editing, How I Loath Thee](#)

[Jun 18, 2021](#)

Current Wordcount: 321,000

Average Playthrough Length: Unknown, as I have at least a day's worth of debugging ahead of me before I can run randomtest to get the average.

I've been working on *Mind Blind* nonstop today, tweaking Reese's scene in order to properly convey their flamboyant, moustache-twirling, shoe-wearing, villainous persona. Larger than life personalities can sometimes come across as cartoonish in comedic writing, so I want to make sure that as giddily wicked as Reese delights in acting, there's an element of implied danger that carries through Button's interaction with them.

When my brain gets stuck progressing the latest scene, I've been going back to do work on past chapters. My goals for the semi-final draft (the one that'll be uploaded after saves are wiped in a month or two or three or . . . let's just say four because to be honest I don't know when I'll be done with all the edits). Okay, I lost track of that thought.

My goals for *Mind Blind*'s semi-final draft are thus:

1. **At least** twice as many variances in inner and external dialogue depending on Button's stats.

2. Expanding certain scenes (ex: John's departure, Button's solo exploration of Chicago, and returning to *Sofia's* with K).
3. New branching scenes (ex: choosing not to talk to Hope and Chapter 10 scenes for ROs other than K).
4. Keeping better track of what Button knows or doesn't know, coding-wise (ex: K's mom, Button's past parttime job, that Rosy isn't American).
5. Smoother implementation of the RO paths, taking into account that Button may be flirting with multiple people (which will always be a no-go for Rosy, and may impact how Glitch feels about Button working with K).
6. Making Valero gender variable in order to make future readers think that she may be Noh. Because you guys have taught me that people code dive (I'm still wracking my brain for a way to hide Noh's identity in the code before the next update).
7. Implementing the asexual romance routes (probably to be done after the book is completed, so the alternative passages get added in all at once).
8. Find new texts for the chapter covers. The chapters will still shift depending on route and stats, but I need to use passages that won't get me in trouble copyright-wise (I'm thinking ancient philosophers?). Which means, sadly, no *Sound of Silence* lyrics. Oh well. At least you guys get to experience the subway route in all its meme-able glory.
9. Obliterate all typos and grammatical issues.
10. Code a setting in the stat screen that changes the images of Chapters and the Aeon paperwork in plain text without frills in order to be accessible to screen readers.
11. Approximately two billion and five other minor improvements.

It's a lot, but the game will be better for the changes!

Mind Blind is the first piece of interactive fiction I've ever written, and (to put it bluntly) I had no clue what I was doing at the beginning. Now, I have . . . well, maybe not a full clue, but at least a fraction of one. While writing, I'm constantly going back to prior chapters in order to tweak things and add foreshadowing as the mystery finally begins to unravel. Because we're past the halfway point, provided I keep to my 500k word goal and don't have any more *ah-ha!* moments.

[Saucy Side: Today's Rule \(Ambrosia Version\)](#)

[Jun 19, 2021](#)

This is a direct follow up to Rosy's last Saucy Side: www.patreon.com/posts/mind-blind-saucy-47004293

* * * *

As punishment for breaking her nameplate, Ambrosia decrees that you have to go the entire day at work without touching her. You agree, if only because agreeing means that next time, it will be your turn to create the rule. Alas, your easy compliance fails to take into account the fact that Ambrosia Kim is a cruel, cruel woman.

She's spent the entire day making it as difficult as possible for you to follow her no-touching mandate. Rolling up her shirt sleeves and smirking as your stare inevitably gravitates to the definition of her forearms and her elegant hands. Deliberately lowering her husky voice to an even huskier whisper that forces you to lean in to hear. Even dropping a pen and bending over to pick it up, although that last tactic may have been unintentional (or Sally's finally roped her into watching *Legally Blonde*).

This latest summons to her office, ostensibly over misfiled mission reports, is just her latest attempt to tempt you into breaking her mandate. But you're strong enough to resist temptation. You were born into hardship and forged in the fire of adversity. You are intelligent, determined, and more than capable of keeping your hands to yourself. If Ambrosia thinks that she'll win this game as easily as she did last night's, she's in for a cold-shouldered surprise. Maybe you'll even turn the tables and make *her* unable to resist *you*. That way, it will be her loss (although you'd both score).

You open the door to Ambrosia's office, and your steel-hearted conviction crumples, tissue-soft. Ambrosia sits behind her desk, narrow black reading glasses perched upon her nose. But for a white bra, she's also shirtless.

The woman is ruthless.

Ambrosia languidly closes her book as you enter. "Our meeting was for noon," she says. "You're late."

Well, she's naked. Smugly so, her dark eyes daring your gaze not to stray downwards to the curve of her cleavage and that ever-intriguing groove that leads like an arrow to her midriff. Through sheer force of will, you manage not to gape, but you're unable to resist a quickly approving glance. That you've seen her shirtless before makes you no less appreciative of the sight. Ambrosia, noting the direction of your look, gives a lazy half-smile. She thinks she's already won.

Pointing out Ambrosia's state of half-undress would venture into dangerous waters, so you instead decide to defend yourself against her accusation of tardiness.

"I ran into Kenna in the hallway," you say.

Ambrosia crosses her arms, the movement pushing up her breasts and emphasizing her sculpted biceps. Your mouth goes dry. Ambrosia's chest is a work of art, true. But her arms are and have always been your weak point, which Ambrosia of course knows. She's doing this deliberately.

You cross your own arms, although your gesture is more so that your hands remain trapped by the crooks of your elbows and are thus unable to make grabby-gestures in your girlfriend's direction. Because. You. Will. Not. Let. Her. Win.

“Talking to Kenna was more important than meeting me?” Ambrosia’s voice is a throaty rumble, with the barest hint of authentic jealousy.

“Well . . .” Provoking Ambrosia is always too much fun to resist. “Kenna hasn’t forbidden me from touching her.”

Ambrosia stands from her chair. To your relief (or is it disappointment?), she’s still wearing pants. She takes a step towards you, and then another. Soon, she’s close enough to touch.

You don’t, however. You want to, because the curve of Ambrosia’s waist beckons for your hands to pull her close. But touching means losing the game, although it’s becoming harder and harder for you to recall why that would be such a bad thing.

“Is Kenna really the one you want to touch?” Ambrosia asks.

“I didn’t realize my desire mattered more than your rules,” you choke out. Provoking Ambrosia is fun, but she’s a firm believer in payback, and the dark look in her eyes doesn’t bode well for your future victory.

One step closer, and her lips are against your ear, so close that a strand of her hair clings to your cheek through static attraction. But her skin doesn’t touch yours. No, she’ll refuse to cross that threshold first. Her breath tickles as she softly whispers, “Your desire is *always* my primary concern.”

Want has become a tangible thing between you two. Want or, more accurately, need. You need to pull her close, to wave the white flag of defeat and melt into her embrace. The game’s purpose of exquisite torture has been achieved, and prolonging the distance between you is only unnecessary torment.

Ambrosia pulls back, leaving you cold and blinking. She picks up a folder from her desk and slides it between your folded arms, still careful not to touch you. “You misfiled last month’s mission reports,” she says. “I need them redone by this evening.”

Of all the . . . Ambrosia Kim isn’t just cruel, she’s *evil*. A cold-blooded monster.

Ambrosia sits back down, opens the top drawer of her desk, and pulls on her retrieved shirt in a brisk, business-like fashion. Her chuckle follows your footsteps as you stomp from the office.

“Remember,” she calls out, the word filled with promise, “the rule ends as soon as we’re home.”

[Saucy Side: Today's Rule \(Ambrose Version\)](#)

[Jun 19, 2021](#)

This is a direct follow up to Rosy's last Saucy Side: www.patreon.com/posts/mind-blind-saucy-47004218

* * * *

As punishment for breaking his nameplate, Ambrose decrees that you have to go the entire day at work without touching him. You agree, if only because agreeing means that next time, it will be your turn to create the rule. Alas, your easy compliance fails to take into account the fact that Ambrose Kim is a cruel, cruel man.

He's spent the entire day making it as difficult as possible for you to follow his no-touching mandate. Rolling up his shirt sleeves and smirking as your stare inevitably gravitates to the muscular definition of his forearms. Deliberately lowering his husky voice to an even huskier whisper that forces you to lean in to hear. Even dropping a pen and bending over to pick it up, although that last tactic may have been unintentional (or Sally's finally roped him into watching *Legally Blonde*).

This latest summons to his office, ostensibly over misfiled mission reports, is just his latest attempt to tempt you into breaking his mandate. But you're strong enough to resist temptation. You were born into hardship and forged in the fire of adversity. You are intelligent, determined, and more than capable of keeping your hands to yourself. If Ambrose thinks that he'll win this game as easily as he did last night's, he's in for a cold-shouldered surprise. Maybe you'll even turn the tables and make *him* unable to resist *you*. That way, it will be his loss (although you'd both score).

You open the door to Ambrose's office, and your steel-hearted conviction crumples, tissue-soft. Ambrose sits behind his desk, narrow black reading glasses perched upon his nose. He's also shirtless.

The man is ruthless.

Ambrose languidly closes his book as you enter. "Our meeting was for noon," he says. "You're late."

Well, he's naked. Smugly so, his dark eyes daring your gaze not to stray downwards to the rigids of his chest and that ever-intriguing groove that leads like an arrow to the parts of him currently concealed by the desk. Through sheer force of will, you manage not to gape, but you're unable to resist a quickly approving glance. That you've seen him shirtless before makes you no less appreciative of the sight. Ambrose, noting the direction of your look, gives a lazy half-smile. He thinks he's already won.

Pointing out Ambrose's state of undress would venture into dangerous waters, so you instead decide to defend yourself against his accusation of tardiness.

"I ran into Kent in the hallway," you say.

Ambrose crosses his arms, and the increased tension of his biceps is enough to make your mouth go dry. Ambrose's chest, you might be able to resist. But his arms are and have always been your weak point, which Ambrose of course knows. He's doing this deliberately.

You cross your own arms, although your gesture is more so that your hands remain trapped by the crooks of your elbows and are thus unable to make grabby-gestures in your boyfriend's direction. Because. You. Will. Not. Let. Him. Win.

"Talking to Kent was more important than meeting me?" Ambrose's voice is rumble, deep and possessive, with the barest hint of authentic jealousy.

"Well . . ." Provoking Ambrose is always too much fun to resist. "Kent hasn't forbidden me from touching him."

Ambrose stands from his chair. To your relief (or is it disappointment?), he's still wearing pants. He takes a step towards you, and then another. Soon, he's close enough to touch.

You don't, however. You want to, because Ambrose's chest is made to have fingers run over it—your fingers, to be precise, which are currently clenched into fists to avoid splaying themselves over his broad shoulders. But touching means losing the game, although it's becoming harder and harder for you to recall why that would be such a bad thing.

"Is Kent really the one you want to touch?" Ambrose asks.

"I didn't realize my desire mattered more than your rules," you choke out. Provoking Ambrose is fun, but he's a firm believer in payback, and that dark look in his eyes doesn't bode well for your future victory.

One step closer, and his lips are against your ear, so close that you can feel the static attraction from his skin. But not touching. No, he'll refuse to cross that threshold first. His breath tickles as he roughly whispers, "Your desire is *always* my primary concern."

Want has become a tangible thing between you two. Want or, more accurately, need. You need to pull him close, to wave the white flag of defeat and melt into his embrace. The game's purpose of exquisite torture has been achieved, and prolonging the distance between you is only unnecessary torment.

Ambrose pulls back, leaving you cold and blinking. He picks up a folder from his desk and slides it between your folded arms, still careful not to touch you. "You misfiled last month's mission reports," he says. "I need them redone by this evening."

Of all the . . . Ambrose Kim isn't just cruel, he's *evil*. A cold-blooded monster.

Ambrose sits back down, opens the top drawer of his desk, and pulls on his retrieved shirt in a brisk, business-like fashion. His chuckle follows your footsteps as you stomp from the office.

"Remember," he calls out, the word filled with promise, "the rule ends as soon as we're home."

Copy of a Redacted Memo

To: Aeon Student Body

CC: UCRT Members

From: Lydia O'Leery, Unity Public Relations Coordinator, Chicago-Branch

Subject: Outreach Initiative 46A, Children Hospital Performances

As you all know, recent events have negatively impacted Unity's external reputation. Although we stand behind Justice's official statement that Unity was unaware of [REDACTED], the Office of Public Relations is nonetheless committed to our continued efforts to foster a positive relationship with our host city of Chicago. To this end, we have developed several new and exciting outreach programs to [REDACTED]

Several Unity staff and Aeon students have been selected to spearpoint a fantastic initiative in cooperation with local children's hospitals. This is a positive way to remind people of our commitment to the greater good, as well as a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children! Those of you selected will be sent a script and your assigned roles, the lines of which we ask that you memorize as soon as possible. Our first rehearsal will be tomorrow evening, with the intent of putting on our first performance later this week at [REDACTED] Hospital.

These performances will remind people of Unity's ongoing role as Chicago's protectors, while also serving to enrich the lives of children in long-term care. We ask that you refrain from commenting to the press about recent events during these outings, as doing so without PR preparation may be detrimental to [REDACTED]

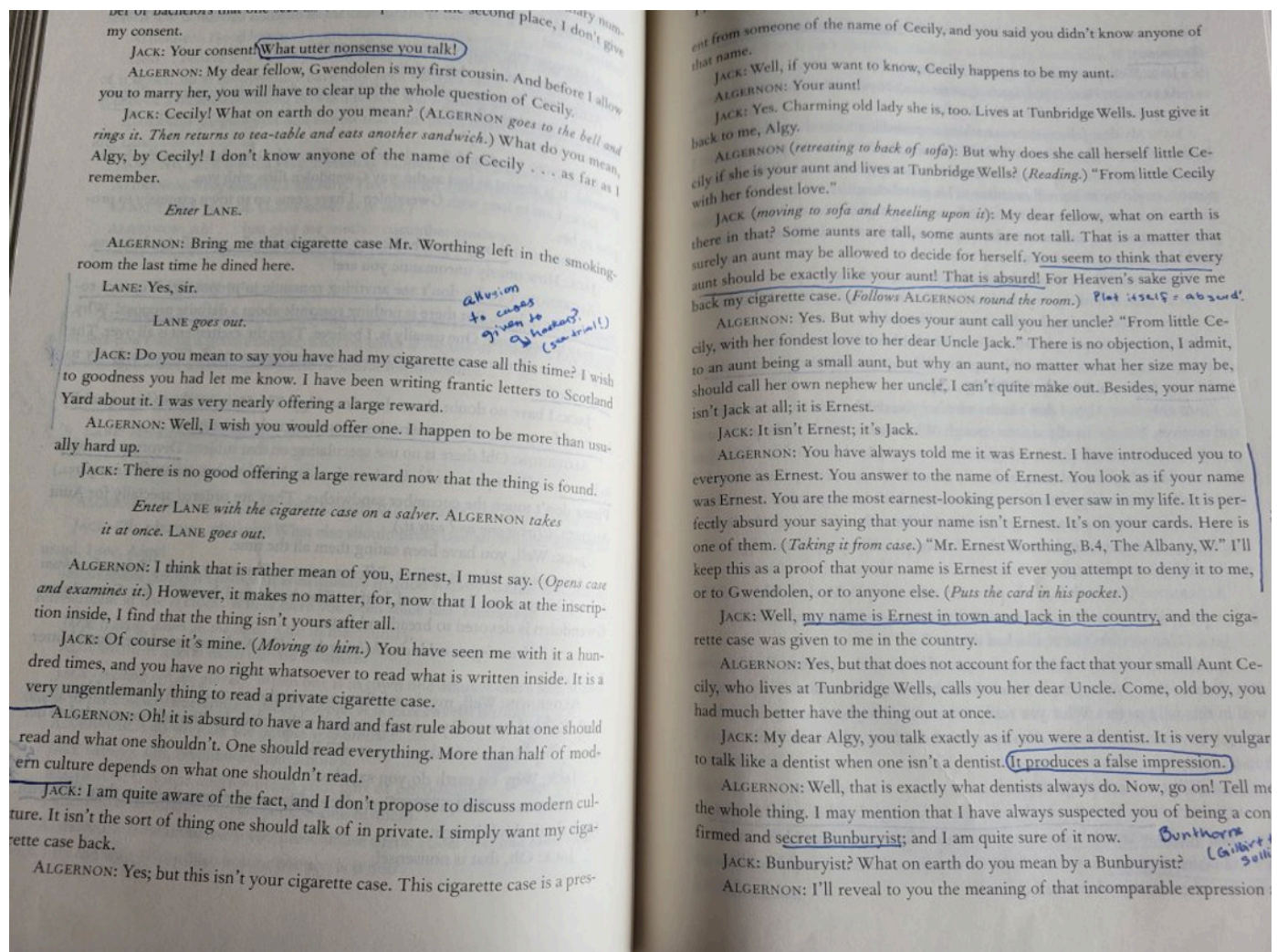
For those of you whom continue to send complaints to our office and object to starring in uplifting plays, we will once again repeat that theatrical training is not essential to creating wonderful memories. These dramatic productions are, above all, for the children. Please consider that before sending another email.

[Teaser for Tomorrow's Fairy Tale](#)

[Jun 20, 2021](#)

After deliberation, I decided that the new UCRT "Once Upon a Time in Mind Blind" rewards would work best as written in script format . . . especially when there's a lore-friendly reason why the cast of *Mind Blind* would get roped into such insanity (although that lore will remain redacted until it's revealed in the game!).

As for the person complaining about having to perform in the play: it's Rosy.



Reading to Write

Jun 21, 2021

I've mentioned before that I believe the best way to master the craft of writing is to read things written by better writers. I would even go so far as to argue that critical reading is in fact more essential than writing practice itself!

While working on a script-format short story today (to be posted this evening), I was feeling stuck. Thus, I went to my old Oscar Wilde anthology--who is my favorite playwright, with politest apologies to Shakespeare--in order to gain insight into how he incorporates stage directives between character dialogue. (Answer: he provides hardly any.)

Now, my Wilde anthology is 1,417 pages and weighs as much as you'd expect. I got my first e-reader in

high school, so haven't actually read Wilde's plays in paper format since 7th or 8th grade (although I reread at least one of his works every year, because his snark makes me giggle-snort). But my kindle currently has a broken screen, and thus I pulled out this book from behind its glass case, blew off the dust, and cracked it open.

Full disclosure: I have no idea what most of my handwritten notes here reference since I've forcefully purged all memories of ages 12-15 from my brain (highly recommended!). Most things I highlighted, I did so just because I liked Wilde's turn of phrase (or didn't understand a vocabulary word).

My reason for sharing this picture is twofold. First, because I remain obsessed with Oscar Wilde to this day and want to encourage people to read him (just look at my COG Forum profile name). But most importantly, I'm sharing because I think it's important for authors to acknowledge that we don't create or develop our style in a vacuum. My narrative voice will never be as scathingly witty as Wilde's (I wouldn't want it to be, to be honest, since I feel bad being mean to my characters!). But he's one of the writers who taught me that humor can be the most effective way to state truth, just as other of my favorite authors have taught me other lessons (like the stylistic difference in feel between "Rob said" and "said Rob"). If any of you like to write, I highly suggest that you approach every book as if it has something to teach, because even "bad" books can serve as guides on what not to do.

Reading to write has been one of my lifelong hobbies . . . although I do wish that younger me had the sense to use pencil instead of pen since she so rudely insisted on writing in margins.

[Mind Blind Fairy Tale: Goldilocks and the Three Bears](#)

[Jun 21, 2021](#)

Email to Robin Golightly, Host of The Early Show at WCGW News

Topic: Regarding Tomorrow's Program

From: Miles Stone, WCGW Onsite Reporter

Rob,

Attached is my transcript from Unity's Staff Performance of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." (I asked through official channels, but was refused access to Unity's original script.) We're going to broadcast this on The Early Bird Show, right? We'll see if performing for a few kids changes anyone's opinion on Unity.

-Miles

* * *

Email to Miles Stone, WCGW Public Interest Reporter

Topic: Re: Regarding Tomorrow's Program

From: Robin Golightly, Host of The Early Show at WCGW News

Hey Miles!

Yeah, I've been told that we're airing the footage you filmed from the children's hospital instead of that high school's performance of "Beauty and the Beast." I thought the station was trying to avoid giving coverage to Unity's obvious PR stunt? But the parents of Gaston wouldn't sign off on having his face shown on TV.

-Robin

* * *

Email to Robin Golightly, Host of The Early Show at WCGW News

Topic: Re: Re: Regarding Tomorrow's Program

From: Miles Stone, WCGW Public Interest Reporter

Yeah. Interesting tidbit: "Gaston" was just accepted into Aeon as an MIV. Coincidence? No way in hell, but the Powers That Be aren't letting me run the story.

I gotta admit, as transparent as this whole "goodwill initiative" is (it's painful propaganda), the kids did seem to enjoy the spectacle. Unity spared no expense with the backdrops, and those bear costumes were disturbingly realistic.

-Miles

* * *

Email Attachment: Unity's First Outreach Performance, as performed at Regent Children's Hospital and transcribed to paper by Miles Stone

* * *

Cast:

"Narrator" – Cadet Parker, 4th Year Aeon Student

“Big Bear” – UCRT Member Grayson Black (aka Fortitude)

“Middle Bear” – Aeon Strategic Advisor Kim

“Tiny Bear” – Cadet Alavidze, 2nd Year Aeon Student

“Goldilocks” – UCRT Member Nicholas Wiseman (aka Justice)

* * *

Parker, bending down to talk to the kids in the front row: How many of you have heard the phrase “Once upon a time”?

Most the children raise their hands. Parker grins, theatrically throwing their velvet cape over their shoulder.

Parker: When do you think “once upon a time” happened? Was it one hundred years ago? A thousand years ago? A million?

Child In Backrow: A gazillion!

The children all begin to shout out numbers, most of which are nonexistent.

Parker: My, that’s an awful lot of years in the past! But what if . . .

Parker lowers voice to a stage whisper and gestures to the painted backdrop depicting a fairy tale cottage, complete with fairies perched upon the roof.

Parker: What if I told you that this story took place only yesterday? Would you believe me?

Multiple Children: Noooooo!

Child In Middle Row: Yes! Because my mom says that Unity didn’t lie!

Parker winces at the last child’s declaration but quickly recovers, leaping upon a podium disguised as a tree stump and sitting cross-legged.

Parker: Well, this story is true! I should know, because I was there. I was there and I saw it all, because that’s what we fairies do! We watch and we listen, and sometimes, if a child is very, very good at listening, we give them candy and pizza after today’s story time ends.

The children become noticeably quieter.

Parker: Once upon a time—last Tuesday, in fact—a family of bears lived in a beautiful forest. And since last Tuesday was sunny and warm, they decided to go on a picnic.

The house backdrop is pulled offstage by a stagehand (4th Year Aeon Student, Cadet Zarneki). Behind it is another painted backdrop, designed to look like a cottage interior. Three actors in rotund bear suits are seated at a table, "eating" from empty bowls labeled "PORRAGE." Their costumes leave only their faces exposed, and all have black hearts painted upon their noses to resemble bear snouts.

Big Bear Black and Tiny Bear Alavidze wave their paws at the audience of children, smiling. Middle Bear Kim scowls, until kicked by Tiny Bear beneath the table, at which point Kim reluctantly waves.

Tiny Bear Alavidze, staring hard at Parker: Bears, do you sometimes feel like a fairy is watching us?

Big Bear Black: Of course not, Baby Bear! There's no such thing as fairies.

Alavidze glares at Black.

Big Bear Black: Er, I mean, Tiny Bear. There's no such thing as fairies, Tiny Bear.

Middle Bear Kim: . . .

Black, with emphasis: I said, there's no such things as fairies.

Kim, looking pained: . . . People also say that there's no such thing as magical bears and yet, here we sit. Eating misspelled breakfast.

Alavidze: Misspelled . . . what?

Parker coughs into their fist.

Alavidze: I mean, true! All three of us bears have special powers. For example, I can see the future! I see . . . a pizza party! And candy! Lots of candy, for all the wonderful children who are good listeners.

She smiles at a child who sighed with disappointment, and breaks character just long enough to whisper: "We have sugar-free candy, too. Don't worry."

The child grins.

Black: What an amazing power, Tiny Bear! I wish that I could see the future!

Alavidze: Aw, you have a pretty amazing magical power too, Big Bear!

Black rises from his chair, grabbing his "porridge." He pretends to drop it, only for his telekinesis to halt its fall. The dish hovers in the air below his hand, and the children gasp.

Black: Well, at least my power keeps the floors clean!

Black and Alavidze laugh overloudly. Kim does not.

Alavidze: What's your magical power, Middle Bear?

Black: Do you always know when people feel happy or sad?

Alavidze: Can you make things float like Big Bear?

Black: Can you see the future like Tiny Bear?

Kim: No.

Black's and Alavidze's smiles become strained when Kim does not elaborate. Parker, presumably to stop things from getting too far off script, leans in towards the children conspiratorially.

Parker: Would you like to hear about Middle Bear's power?

Most of the Children: Yessss!

Kid In The Far Back Row: No!

Parker: Well, maybe if we ask really, really loud, Middle Bear might hear us! Even though, uh, this happened last Tuesday. Repeat after me, everyone: "Middle Bear, what's your secret power?"

Most of the Children: *Middle Bear, what's your secret power?!*

That Same Kid in the Far Back Row: This is stupid.

Kim, looking as though they agree with the Back Row Rebel, crosses their arms.

Parker: Should we ask Middle Bear again?

Most of the Children: *Middle Bear, what's your secret power?!*

Kim, in a deadpan voice: I'm the smartest and most hard-working bear in the forest.

Alavidze: And that's why Big Bear and I always listen to your advice! Because you don't need magic to have super powers! Now, is everyone ready to go on our picnic?

Black: Let me just tidy up.

Black uses his telekinesis to neatly stack all three "porridge" bowls.

Parker: As the three bears were readying to leave for their picnic, a little boy was playing in the nearby woods.

Nothing happens.

Parker, louder: A little boy was playing in the nearby WOODS.

Nick Wiseman prances into the auditorium. He's wearing knee-length overalls, and wearing a wig of frizzy gold curls.

Wiseman, skipping up onto the stage: My name is Goldilocks! My parents told me not to play in the woods, buuuuuuuuuuuuuut . . .

Wiseman slaps his hands together suddenly, causing some of the kids to jump. Wiseman looks at his empty palms and frowns. Parker sticks out their tongue and places their hands next to their ears, fingers wagging.

Wiseman: But I was chasing a fairy that played a mean trick on me! This fairy is using their magical powers to do naughty things, and they need to be stopped.

Small Girl in the Middle Row: It's Justice!

Kid in the Far Back Row: This is stupid. Goldilocks is supposed to be a girl.

Wiseman, looking at the Back Row Kid: Says who?

That Same Kid in the Far Back Row: Books.

Wiseman: Well, that'll teach you to believe everything you read!

That Same Kid in the Far Back Row: You're stupid. Your pants are stupid.

Wiseman: Yeah, well, *you're*—

Parker, hastily interrupting: Fine, fine! I admit it. Goldilocks was chasing after *me*. I led Goldilocks deep into the woods.

Wiseman, whispering: Glitch, you skipped the part where—

Parker, insistently: And I led Goldilocks deep into the woods.

Wiseman: Fine. I chased the naughty fairy so deep into the woods, that I got lost. Maybe I should have listened to my parents and not chased that fairy. After all, it's almost lunchtime and I'm very, very hungry.

Wiseman plops down on the stage, so that his legs hang off the edge. He hides his face with his hands and pretends to be wracked by great, gulping sobs.

That Same Kid in the Far Back Row: Stuuuuu-pid.

Wiseman glares at the kid from between his fingers. Then he gives another loud cry and leans forward—so far forward that his wig slides askew. Wiseman rights himself and adjusts the wig, deliberately making its alignment worse.

Wiseman: At least I still have my bee-yooo-tee-ful golden hair!

The children, including That One Kid, giggle.

Parker: Goldilocks didn't know how to get back to his parents. Then, through the trees, he spotted a cottage! It was the same cottage that belonged to the three magical bears.

Wiseman stands and knocks against the backdrop's "door."

Wiseman: Hello? Can anyone help me?

Black, now holding a picnic basket, pantomimes opening the door for Wiseman.

Black: You're not a bear!

Alavidze: You're a human!

Kim: . . .

Alavidze: Humans are . . .

Kim: . . .

Alavidze, glaring at Kim: Humans are scary!

Wiseman: I'm not scary! I just want to find my parents.

Black: Your parents? Are you lost, human?

Wiseman: I am. Can you help me?

Alavidze, still glaring at Kim: I don't want to help a human. Humans hunt bears!

Wiseman: I don't hunt bears! I only eat bear claws!

None of the children laugh at his pun. Wiseman looks disappointed.

Black, helpfully and obviously off-script: A bear claw? Isn't that like a donut?

Wiseman: It is. I wouldn't want to eat a real bear!

Alavidze: You promise not to hunt us, Human?

Wiseman: Of course! Can you help me find my parents?

Kim, looking resigned: We don't have a telephone. Because we're bears. Magical. Bears.

Kim wearily raises a paw and gives a half-hearted “rurr.” Kim and That Kid In The Far Back Row exchange a look of mutual understanding.

Black: We may not have a telephone, but we do have powers! I can move things with my mind!

Black reaches a paw towards Wiseman’s wig, which begins to levitate off his head. The children giggle as Wiseman grabs his wig and slaps it back down, even more lopsided than before.

Wiseman: Can you move me back to my parents with your mind?

Black: Sorry, but I can’t. Magic doesn’t always fix everything.

Black addresses the children with a wink.

Black: But I can make pizza fly at our party later!

Wiseman, turning to Alavidze: Can you help me reach my parents?

Alavidze: I can’t. But I’m certain that you’ll see your parents again in the future!

Wiseman: I want to see my parents now!

Parker: Oh, no! Two of the bears’ magic won’t help Goldilocks find his parents! Who is left to save the day?

Most of the Children: Middle Bear!

That Same Kid in the Far Back Row: Me!

Parker: Middle Bear, you’re the wisest bear in the forest! Can you think of a way for Goldilocks to talk to his parents?

Instead of replying, Kim stands. Although it’s somewhat awkward, Kim manages to maneuver their bulky bear costume down the stage steps and through the rows of children. Kim stops in front of Far Back Row Kid.

Kim: How would you save the day?

That Same Kid in the Far Back Row, looking nervous: I-I’m sorry for being loud during story time.

Kim: Don’t apologize. Answer the question. How would you save the day?

Kim crosses their paws and looks around expectantly at the audience of children.

Kim: Does anyone here have any ideas on how to reunite Goldilocks with his family?

A small girl in the middle row tentatively raises her hand. Kim points to her with one paw.

Kim: What's your idea?

Small Girl: Goldilocks is Justice, right? Isn't Justice's magical power to talk to people far away? Why can't he talk to his family with his tel-ip-pathy?

Kim gives the girl an honest-to-god, genuine smile. Parker gapes.

Kim: Because Goldilocks isn't a smart bear like you . . . which is why we all get pizza, and he doesn't. Now, to the cafeteria!

Mutiny achieved and performance abruptly ended, Kim leads the child audience from the auditorium—Kim's role as bear discarded to instead play the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 13.5](#)

[Jun 22, 2021](#)

From the Personal Correspondence of Lady Vitrula Rhys

Dear Vitrula,

My mother wrote about what happened to you last month. As your own letter made no mention of it, I can only conclude that you do not consider escaping death to be very memorable. In case it wasn't clear, I am chastising you, as I find myself rather invested in your continued survival and would like to be duly informed when its threatened. Who else would I discuss Ganderlon's newest works with? Who else would dare to argue that such a renowned scholar is a charlatan? (I just checked your last letter, and it's the exact word you used.) Should you perish, I'd be forced to turn to your brother for academic discourse—an outcome I suspect neither he nor I would much enjoy.

Don't fret: I didn't tell Theo. I know how much you despise him worrying about you (though in this case, his concern would be justified). Please consider writing to him about the fire yourself. He's bound to find out eventually regardless of my silence, and I believe it best learned from you. Also, I don't want to deal with the fit he'll undoubtedly throw should he find out I already knew. Do us both a favor and make mention of it in your next missive.

You have no idea how eagerly your brother awaits your letters. We both do. I consider Theo to be one of my closest friends, but he possesses no interest whatsoever in recent publications. Recently, I found him ripping pages out of Reavely's Accounts of a Sailor and folding them into paper boats. His

argument? That his “art” was thematically appropriate given the text’s topic. Needless to say, I confiscated most the books in his possession after that. I also thoroughly trounced him when we raced the boats.

I’ve sent a copy of Reavely’s work for you (sans the first few pages of the introduction, which had a more nautical destiny). His musings on the nations across the Drimalan Sea are both informative and amusing. While most critics agree his narrative is sensationalized, I thought you might still enjoy it. Fascinatingly, magic practiced by those nations completely differs from the spellcasting found in Aelium. Reavely claims that these mages need no words but rather their sorcery is innate and controlled solely by their desires. Then again, Reavely also writes that the women in these nations stand twice the height of the men, a fantasy which several other adventurers (Biseal and Vernox among them) directly refute.

I look forward to your impressions on the work despite its narrator’s unreliability. In the meantime, stay safe and try not to set yourself on fire again. I’ve included a glowstone for you read by, in case recent events hadn’t yet convinced you to switch from candles.

Regards,

Xander

[Mind Blind Blooper Scene \(Possibly In-Game?\)](#)

[Jun 24, 2021](#)

Total transparency: I'm still contemplating including this choice, even though it's ridiculous and Button should get their head checked for taking that option. But the option also made me laugh? I'm conflicted as to its conclusion so figured I'd post it here for feedback.

NB: Contains minor spoilers for Chapter 11 and some PG13 sauciness. For the sake of brevity, I've only included humorous Button's scene (as wording changes for this scene depending upon personality stats).

* * * *

“I was expecting you.”

Reese’s casual pronouncement sends your thoughts spiraling, brain morphing into that of an anxious undergrad Lit major asked to interpret one of Shakespeare’s more obscure phrase twists without being given access to Wikipedia: Thee werst expecteth. Or is it ‘thou’? Glitch would know.

But back to your original question: what does Reese mean? His general anticipation of your appearance at this party might be taken for granted, given that he was the one to issue the invitation. However, contextually . . .

Contextually, it sounds an awful lot like Reese is implying that he expected you to search his office. Which means he knows that you were going through his stuff.

Which means you're screwed.

Selected Choice: *Aha, but I'm an optimist who finds Reese incredibly attractive! Perhaps I shall be screwed in an alternative fashion.*

You're very open to a more provocative interpretation. Why, one might venture to proposition that Reese's statement of "expecting you" is merely a flirtatious overture! The fact that the current setting is a private office instead of the traditional boudoir somewhat undermines this theoretical supposition, but it's also true that within certain literary genres a desk is considered to be . . .

Alright, Professor Hormone, Nick interrupts. Focus.

[Writer's Blog: School's Out For Summer](#)

[Jun 25, 2021](#)

Current Demo Length: 328k

Next Demo Update: Sunday! Will include first half of Chapter 11 and possibly the second half as well (depending on how much I get done tomorrow)

Average Playthrough: Probably around 80k?

I'm currently eyeballs-deep in editing Chapter 11 for Sunday's release (Reese needs to *chill*), so this weekly blog will be a little shorter than usual. But I have exciting news to share!

The Exciting News: I'm taking this summer off teaching to work full-time on *Mind Blind*!

I'll still remain on call as a substitute in order to keep my job, but I've decided to take July and August off my regular classes in order to dedicate even more time to finishing *Mind Blind* (if I can hit 400k words by the time September rolls around, I should be in a good place to finish by the end of this calendar year when school starts again.) This will also give me space to begin reworking and recoding earlier scenes, as the amount of editing feels frankly overwhelming right now (every time I think I might be ready to announce the great save-pocolypse and updates, a new problem appears that needs to be fixed, to the

point where I've begun to wonder if it would be better to simply forge ahead and then post the rework at the end).

You may have noticed me being quieter on Tumblr lately, and the reason is I've been in a bit of a creative funk. Middles have historically always hardest for me to write, not to mention that this is my first time writing for a real live audience! (I mean, I've always told stories to my kindergarten students, but they consider a fart to be the pinnacle of humor.) And lately, I've been feeling somewhat like a gymnast who, mid back-flip, begins to worry that they won't stick the landing.

A mystery novel needs to be tied with a nice bow at the end, and this goes doubly so for interactive fiction where so many plot threads can be accidentally dropped. Taking two months to dedicate myself fully to writing *Mind Blind* will enable me to have time to creatively recharge while also being more on top of social media, so that going online feels joyful instead of overwhelming because I really should be doing XYZ instead of having fun answering questions. (I'd also like to finish Rosy's half-written *Cupid Calamity* route for Patreon, as well as all of the Aeon Student Guide.)

When I created this Patreon back in January, I never in a trillion years ever imagined that taking this summer to write would be an option. You've all made this possible, and I'm incredibly grateful for your support. So thank you! I can't wait to dive into *Mind Blind* fulltime over these next two months, and am even more excited to share upcoming chapters!

[June Live Q&A](#)

[Jun 25, 2021](#)

The first live Q&A will be tomorrow **(Saturday) via the Sanctum of Spoilers at 10am PST!**

There will also be a second Q&A after Sunday's demo update, the time and date which you can vote on below. (If another timeslot works better, please let me know! I have limited availability on Monday and Tuesday due to my final classes, but my schedule is completely open on Wednesday.)

Monday (June 28), 5pm - 6pm PST

Monday (June 28), 7pm - 8pm PST

Wednesday (June 30), 6pm - 7pm PST

Wednesday (June 30), 7pm - 8pm PST

19 votes total

[First Half of Chapter 11](#)

[Jun 27, 2021](#)

Demo Length: 313k

Average Playthrough: 80k

What's New: Conversations! Spy craft! Cryptic prophecies! Useful stalkers! Poor decisions!

Next Demo: The second half of Chapter 2 will drop on July 3rd. The total chapter length is 30k, but I want to make some of the pathways longer and maybe add an option where *Redacted* sees you off at the end instead of *Redacted* or *Redacted*. 😊

Things To Know: You'll need to replay the very end of Chapter 10 in order for the game to remember whether you planted the bug in the mask (otherwise it will assume that you didn't). When leaving Reese's office, the routes urging Reese to go ahead or leave you behind are both still being tweaked, so you'll be taken back and told to convince Reese to stay with you.

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-fenderbender/mygame/>

Requested Feedback (which includes spoilers):

Some players may get a selection where the gender of a certain character is implied. Assuming said character, who we'll call X, is real and not just Reese lying through their teeth which is fully a possibility because Reese wouldn't recognize the truth if it nipped them in the bum, X's gender may be opposite of Button's, and Reese may mention this. While dialogue doesn't change for male/female characters, nonbinary Buttons will always be told that Reese expected someone more feminine/masculine and they have a couple of unique answers to choose from (or you can just ignore the issue entirely and engage Reese in a stare down at dawn). I ran the options by a friend but they're only one perspective.

If anyone plays as nonbinary characters and thinks that there need to be more options here to choose from for your MCs (or that preexisting dialogue needs to be more carefully worded), please let me know! Since this portion constitutes as a clue, I didn't simply want it to be skipped if you play with they/them pronouns.



[Next Q&A: Wednesday](#)

[Jun 28, 2021](#)

As voted upon, the 2nd live Q&A will be this Wednesday (June 30) at 6-7pm PST.

Nothing else to say, so enjoy this picture of my mother's new favorite child (a baby humming bird she rescued)!

[Aeon Student Guide: On Telepathy](#)

[Jun 29, 2021](#)

Note: *Please let me know if anything doesn't make sense in this write up, or if it gets too wordy (it's meant to be textbooky but not painful). The Aeon Student Guide portions shouldn't be necessary to understand Mind Blind, but reading them should add more to the story.*

Telepaths make up 60% of all Ments, or 6% of the general population. While the scope of their abilities varies depending on Z-wave strength, all Telepaths are capable of reading the surface thoughts of non-Ment individuals whom deliberately lower their mental guard.

A Telepath's Pollard Score is determined by three factors: the distance at which they can sense thoughts, their ability to interpret visual and subconscious thought in addition to verbal thinking, and their ability to get past natural resistance—this last being a measure of a Telepath's ability to read and control a non-Ment whose mental guard has been lowered. Most Telepaths are limited to a three-foot brainrange within which they can glean the surface thoughts of those whom permit it, but some Level 10's have been known to take full-bodied possession of relative strangers (although these controlled "strangers" are still suspected to have been forced to drop their guards in via non-psychic coercions such as the threat of physical violence, and it should be noted that Level 10 Telepaths are exceedingly rare). In addition, all Telepaths possess the ability to detect the presence of any person within their brainrange, although they remain unable to hear the subject's actual thoughts without the subject's cooperation.

Prior to the nineteenth century, most humans didn't possess the ability to block Z-waves. Telepaths were thus among the most feared of Ments, second only to Telekinetics. With their ability to read minds unchecked by evolutionary barrier, Telepaths of the past were misrepresented as invaders of mental privacy, manipulative and cruel. Their persecution resulted in the infamous witch trials of early modern history, and legal punishments for "malevolent magic users" date as far back as The Code of Hammurabi. Most Telepaths therefore learned to conceal their powers from a young age provided they survived, with many members of the world's most prominent ruling dynasties being secretly telepathic.

The most prominent example of such a dynasty is the German-Austrian Hapsburgs, whom intermarried both to secure alliances and to increase the chances of a telepathic heir.

Today, many Telepaths pursue careers in the medical and social service fields, where their innate ability to connect to the minds of willing others is an immeasurable boon. Telepaths at Unity often work in front-line ops teams due to their ability to sense enemy presence, or as medics able to diagnose and treat injuries in patients who are disoriented or otherwise nonverbal.

[MB Interview: Sally \(Snickly Version\)](#)

[Jun 30, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines on Nicholas Wiseman, wearing a familiar sequined gold vest and a top hat cocked at a jaunty angle. He sits in one of two cushioned chairs on an otherwise empty stage. A microphone is clutched in his hand.

In the other chair sits Sally, wearing a daffodil-print sundress and an exasperated expression.

Sally: I thought we agreed that you'd dress more professionally for the show.

Nick: Nope! That was something you dictated as showrunner. But today . . .

He beams a wide smile at the audience.

Nick: Today she's the interviewee! Thrust from behind the scenes and into the spotlight for the very first time, let's give a warm welcome for Saaaaalooooomeee Alllaaaaviddddze.

His announcement is met with scattered applause, the most enthusiastic of which comes from behind the curtain.

Nick: Button's taking over as showrunner today, which means my outfit has been approved.

Sally: Or you didn't bother asking permission.

Nick: Semantics.

Sally: The reflection from your vest temporarily blinded one of the cameramen, Nicholas.

Nick: Seriously? I didn't think that it was such a big deal. Is he okay . . .

Nick breaks off at Sally's smirk.

Nick: You're kidding.

Sally: Yup. It's just a really ugly vest.

Nick, to the off-camera cameraman: I'm sorry she used you in this way.

Cameraman, sounding suspiciously British: *It is a hideous vest.*

Nick, realizing that he's outnumbered, shrugs dismissively. He fans out the question cards in his hands like a Vegas magician and theatrically selects one.

Nick: Yes, this is definitely your card. Salome, given your *opinionated* views on the clothing of others, who are some of your own style icons?

Sally: Zoë Kravitz, maybe? My style can be somewhat eclectic, but I'm drawn to vivid colors and bold prints. Also, comfy fits, because fashion shouldn't be painful to wear.

Nick: What color would you change the Aeon uniform to?

Sally: Teal. It's one of the most universally flattering colors, plus it looks amazing in military styled attires.

Nick: It's ironic how you claim to like vivid colors and yet draw the line at a sequined vest.

Sally: It makes you look like a stripper, Nicholas. A stripper.

Nick: Hey, I'm wearing a shirt underneath!

Sally: Only because we retroactively made shirts mandatory in your contract.

Nick: I look damn good wearing just that vest, though.

Sally blushes. Nick snickers.

Nick: On the topic of how good I look, when did you first realize that you had feeling for me? That you were in L-O-V-E?

Sally: I could never be half as in love with you as you are with yourself.

Nick: You say that but avoid answering the question. Come on, Salome. Tell the crowd when you knew that I was the one.

Sally, sighing: It's not like there was any one moment. Things . . . accumulated. But I guess that I actually recognized what I was feeling around ninth grade. Everyone around me had started dating, and I realized that I just really didn't want to.

She mumbles something under her breath. Nick leans forward with a maliciously smug grin.

Nick: You're going to need to repeat that for the backrow.

Sally: I realized that I didn't want to date anyone but *you*. Idiot.

Nick: And you're the idiot who fell in love with an idiot. So, who's the bigger idiot?

Sally gives him a withering look, and Nick clears his throat.

Nick: Right, still me.

Sally: Smart man.

Nick: What drove your crush on me? Other than how amazing I look wearing nothing but a sequined vest, that is.

Sally laughs despite herself.

Sally: I've told you this before, haven't I? It was your cookies. Not because they're amazing, although they are now, but because when you first started baking, you sucked. Majorly, big time sucked.

Nick, dryly: Please, don't sugarcoat this for my sake.

Sally: Nicholas, half the time you forgot to add the literal sugar. Your starter cookies were the worst. But they got progressively better, because you wanted to make Button happy.

She shrugs, eyes downcast with embarrassment.

Sally: Not a lot of people are willing to work hard for the sake of others. Especially since I'd always seen you as someone who just kind of coasted through life. After I realized how much effort you put into perfecting those cookies, I realized how much effort you put into everything else. You made a lot of things *look* easy, but it wasn't.

Nick, also embarrassed: I mean, my life hasn't exactly been filled with hardships.

Sally: Everyone goes through things. But you never admitted to struggling, because you were always concerned more with protecting others. And that made me want to protect you.

Nick: Is this our cue to kiss?

Sally: Not in front of the camera. Next question?

Nick: Later then. Now, what about Button? Any opinions on whom my younger sibling should end up with?

Sally: I always have opinions.

Nick: Of that I'm *well* aware, trust me. But out of all of Button's suiters, who do you think Button should end up with?

Sally: I only really know Gray well, but I'm not going to say him.

Nick: What? Gray is *perfect*.

Sally: Gray is British. I don't want Button to eventually relocate to England.

Nick, looking struck: I never considered that possibility.

Sally: Selfishly, I want Button to be with someone who's willing to stay in Chicago since my dads live here. Other than that, I just want Button to be with someone who makes them happy.

Nick: Agreed. Anyone who makes them happy other than Kim.

Sally: Including Kim.

Nick: Can't we just buy Button a cat instead? Schrödinger makes you happy, doesn't he?

Despite his best efforts, Nick can't resist a small shudder.

Sally, smirking: I love that my cat terrifies you.

Nick: That . . . beast isn't a cat.

Sally: Of course he is.

Nick: Then what's his breed?

Sally: He was a stray that we rescued after he lost an eye to a raccoon, so we don't know. He's a sweetheart, though.

Nick: More like a monster.

Sally: You only say that because he doesn't like you.

Nick: He doesn't like anyone.

Sally: Schrödinger likes me. He likes Button. He just doesn't like you because you're always rattling around in the kitchen and rarely giving him tuna.

Nick: If I gave that cat a can of tuna every time I used the kitchen, he'd have heart problems.

Sally: Yes, and I appreciate your restraint. But it is the reason that he doesn't like you.

Nick, grumbling: More like actively tries to murder me. He *knows* what he's doing when he bolts out of closets right as I walk by. One day, I'm going to trip and die, and then you'll be down a boyfriend.

Sally: My cat will comfort me.

Nick: . . . and this is why we don't yet live together. In theory, though, if you could renovate one room in my house, which would it be and why?

Sally: Oh, that's easy! Your attic.

Nick: My attic? My filled-with-cobwebs, pretty-sure-a-ghost-lives-there attic?

Sally nods earnestly.

Sally: My dad's flip homes, and a few years ago they renovated a townhouse like yours that had been foreclosed on. Pops added skylights to the roof and converted the attic into an art studio. I was there painting everyday until they put the house on market.

Nick: I remember Button complaining that you were barely available to hang out back then. Did you give them a portrait for their birthday that year?

Sally: Yeah, I painted a selfie that we took together in oils.

Nick: Why oil painting in particular? For that matter, why painting as opposed to some other hobby like weaving or playing an instrument?

Sally: For your first question: because oils are the best. They're versatile, and their slow drying time means that they're forgiving. I do digital art as well, but there's something about physically mixing the colors to that perfect hue that's super satisfying, you know?

Nick: I do not know. My medium of choice is sidewalk chalk, and only for hopscotch.

Sally: As for why painting . . . when I was little, I was really into cloud gazing. I'd lay on my back at the park and just stare at clouds. Sometimes my parents would join me, but Dad was always interested in pointing out how this cloud looked like a two-headed porcupine or elephant, and Pops was more concerned with teaching me all the cloud names. Meanwhile, I like the way the sunlight changed. Painting lets me live in a world of light and color.

Nick: You're pretty close with your dads. Anything you can share about them with the audience?

Sally: My dads are the *best*. If I mentioned that I wanted to try something as a kid, I was immediately signed up for a class. If I wanted to go to school dressed as a T-Rex, that was fine too so long as I still paid attention in class. Both of them came from a small town with limited options, so they really wanted make sure that I had the chance to experience *everything*.

Nick: Is there one that you're closer to than the other?

Sally: Not really. Dad more understands my art, but Pops is the one I'd call if I needed someone to bail me out of prison. They're two equally awesome non-Ments whom adopted a precog daughter.

Nick: Are you okay with answering questions about your abilities? We can skip these if you'd rather.

Sally, shaking her head: I gave you the lead-in for a reason. Lay them on me.

Nick: What's the dumbest thing that someone's asked you just because you were a precog?

Sally: Other than lotto numbers? Someone once asked me where they'd misplaced their apron.

Nick: First of all, I was fourteen and didn't get how your powers worked. I thought you'd be able to, like, see me finding the apron or something and then tell me where I was going to inevitably find it so I could just . . . skip the searching part.

Sally: Basically, you were lazy.

Nick: How old were you when you had your first vision?

Sally: That's kind of like someone trying to pinpoint when they had their first ever nightmare. I've always had visions, even if I didn't immediately realize what they were.

Nick: What's the strangest vision you've ever had?

Sally: Do you remember Mr. Kravski?

Nick: Your and Button's tenth grade teacher? Didn't he retire halfway through the schoolyear?

Sally: That would be the one. Well, Mr. Kravski was into roleplay with Mrs. Kravski.

Nick: Oh no.

Sally: Oh yes. I saw his heart attack before it happened but didn't tell anyone because I didn't know how to explain why he was wearing a bunny suit in my vision.

Nick, laughing: Am I allowed to laugh at this? That definitely wasn't a detail included in the note to parents. Only that Kravski had a heart attack and was retiring early for health reasons.

Sally: I guess it's objectively kind of funny? At the time though, all I could think is that I should've told someone what I'd seen. Maybe it would've encouraged Kravski to see a doctor and he would've been able to keep on teaching.

Nick: Or maybe Kravski would've quit anyway upon learning that one of his students had a vision of him in a bunny suit.

Sally, smiling reluctantly: Perhaps.

Nick: My list of questions gets more intense after this. You up to keep going?

Sally nods.

Nick: Just let me know if you want to change topics. What was your worst or most painful vision?

Sally: . . .

Nick: We can move on if you'd like.

Sally: No, it's okay. My worst vision was of Pop's death.

Nick, frowning: Matt's still alive.

Sally: For now. But when I was sixteen, I had a vision of him in a construction accident. He looked older than he does now, but not as old as you'd want your parent to be when he passes away.

Nick: Sal, I didn't know. Did you tell Matt?

Sally: Of course. I begged him to quit the business, or to just supervise from the sidelines.

Nick: But he didn't.

Sally: Of course not. Pops loves what he does. He said that he'd rather live while he was still alive than spend his years being unhappy but safe only to die from some other freak accident. Plus, he reminded me that my visions were more likely to be inaccurate when it came to someone that I'm emotionally invested in.

Nick: How did you feel about his decision to keep doing construction?

Sally: Furious, at first. I felt like he didn't love me or Dad enough to try to stay safe. But that's not really fair; site security is a huge concern for him and Dad. And if I loved him, I wouldn't ask him to stop doing what he loved. Loving someone means more than just being afraid that they'll die.

Nick: Do you ever have any happy visions?

Sally: Short answer? No. Long answer: also no. Precognition evolved as a safety measure, intended to warn people of danger. My brain doesn't see the need to warn me of, say, a surprise birthday party unless there's an eighty percent chance that I'll choke to death on confetti or something.

Nick: Given how conflicted you've always felt about your powers, I was pretty shocked when you decided to join Aeon.

Sally: I joined because Button joined. Otherwise, I would've . . . I don't know. Maybe gone into private security. Freelance precogs make a *ton* of money. I would've been able to retire early and have time to paint.

Nick: You never considered pursuing a career that didn't use your precognition?

Sally: Precognition is a rare enough trait makes you feel like you have this duty to use it to help people. Most futures can't be avoided, but some can. I have an obligation to try and prevent the worst of what I see.

Nick: You followed Button to Unity, but do you think that you two would've ever become friends had it not been for the way your brains "help" each other?

Sally: Of course we would've. Maybe not if I'd had the ability to read Button's mind, but if I were a norm? One-hundred percent yes. I was an awkward cry baby growing up, and Button was one of the few kids that didn't bully me. I would've latched on to them regardless of whether they stopped my visions.

Nick: One last question for the road, and this one is about the past instead of the future.

He groans as he reads the question card.

Nick: Listeners want to know if you can spill the beans on any embarrassing stories about *me*.

Sally smiles wickedly into the camera.

Nick, nervously adjusting his collar: We're, uh, running out of time, though, so . . .

Sally: Sit back, relax, and allow me to tell you the tale of Miranda Hopkins.

Immediately, Nick bolts upwards in his seat. One of his hands lurches forward to cover Sally's mouth. She nips him, and he recoils with a pleading frown.

Nick: Salome, *please*.

Sally's grin widens.

Sally: Unfortunately, it looks like we're out of time for today. It's been a delight chatting with you all, and I look forward to being back behind the scenes next month.

The spotlight fades, leaving the stage in darkness.

Nick's Voice: I love you for that.

Sally's Voice: Well, it was Miranda Hopkin's loss if you ask me.

[MB Interview: Sally \(SallyxButton Version.\)](#)

[Jun 30, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines on Nicholas Wiseman, wearing a familiar sequined gold vest and a top hat cocked at a jaunty angle. He sits in one of two cushioned chairs on an otherwise empty stage. A microphone is clutched in his hand.

In the other chair sits Sally, wearing a daffodil-print sundress and an exasperated expression.

Sally: I thought we agreed that you'd dress more professionally for the show.

Nick: Nope! That was something you dictated as showrunner. But today . . .

He beams a wide smile at the audience.

Nick: Today she's the interviewee! Thrust from behind the scenes and into the spotlight for the very first time, let's give a warm welcome for Saaaaalooooooooooooomeeee Allllaaaavidddddze.

His announcement is met with scattered applause, the most enthusiastic of which comes from behind the curtain.

Nick: Button's taking over as showrunner today, which means my outfit has been approved.

Sally: Or you didn't bother asking permission.

Nick: Semantics.

Sally: The reflection from your vest temporarily blinded one of the cameramen, Nicholas.

Nick: Seriously? I didn't think that it was such a big deal. Is he okay . . .

Nick breaks off at Sally's smirk.

Nick: You're kidding.

Sally: Yup. It's just a really ugly vest.

Nick, to the off-camera cameraman: I'm sorry she used you in this way.

Cameraman, sounding suspiciously British: It *is* a hideous vest.

Nick, realizing that he's outnumbered, shrugs dismissively. He fans out the question cards in his hands like a Vegas magician and theatrically selects one.

Nick: Yes, this is definitely your card. Salome, given your *opinionated* views on the clothing of others, who are some of your own style icons?

Sally: Zoë Kravitz, maybe? My style can be somewhat eclectic, but I'm drawn to vivid colors and bold prints. Also, comfy fits, because fashion shouldn't be painful to wear.

Nick: What color would you change the Aeon uniform to?

Sally: Teal. It's one of the most universally flattering colors, plus it looks amazing in military styled attires.

Nick: It's ironic how you claim to like vivid colors and yet draw the line at a sequined vest.

Sally: It makes you look like a stripper, Nicholas. A stripper.

Nick: Hey, I'm wearing a shirt underneath!

Sally: Only because we retroactively made shirts mandatory in your contract.

Nick: I look damn good wearing just that vest, though.

Sally rolls her eyes.

Nick: But enough about me and my incredible abs.

Sally: We weren't talking about your abs.

Nick, ignoring her: Let's talk about you and Button. An adorable couple if I do say so myself. Which I do, frequently. Salome, when did you realize that you had feelings deeper than friendship for my incredible sibling?

Sally: It's complicated.

Nick: How so? You two always seemed meant to be to me.

Sally: Button was—and still is—my best friend. I didn't suddenly look at them one day and realize "oh, wow, I'm in love." It was gradual, like I'd always felt that way about them but only realized over the last course of years.

Nick: Still, you must've at least suspected that you wanted more than friendship when you followed them to Aeon.

Sally: Yes and no. Again, Button's my best friend. I didn't want to risk losing that.

Nick: And that's why you never made the move? Even though it was obvious that they felt the same way about you?

Sally: They were and are the best thing in my life. I could've confessed, but what if we'd broken up or realized that we weren't compatible? What if I'd lost them? It's Gambling 101: only bet with things you're willing to lose.

Nick: Then you were, what? Intending to keep your feelings bottled up and become a crazy cat lady?

Despite his best efforts, Nick can't resist a small shudder.

Sally, smirking: I love that my cat terrifies you.

Nick: That . . . beast isn't a cat.

Sally: Of course he is.

Nick: Then what's his breed?

Sally: He was a stray that we rescued after he lost an eye to a raccoon, so we don't know. He's a sweetheart, though.

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Sally: He usually does, with people he likes.

Nick: When is your new place with Button going to be ready again? In theory, though, if you could renovate one room in my house, which would it be and why?

Sally: Oh, that's easy! Your attic.

Nick: My attic? My filled-with-cobwebs, pretty-sure-a-ghost-lives-there attic?

Sally nods earnestly.

Sally: My dads flip homes, and a few years ago they renovated a townhouse like yours that had been foreclosed on. Pops added skylights to the roof and converted the attic into an art studio. I was there painting everyday until they put the house on market.

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Sally: Yeah, I painted a selfie that we took together in oils.

Nick: Why oil painting in particular? For that matter, why painting as opposed to some other hobby like weaving or playing an instrument?

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Sally, shaking her head: I gave you the lead-in for a reason. Lay them on me.

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Sally: Other than lotto numbers? Someone once asked me where they'd misplaced their apron.

Nick: First of all, I was fourteen and didn't get how your powers worked. I thought you'd be able to, like, see me finding the apron or something and then tell me where I was going to inevitably find it so I could

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Sally: Oh yes. I saw his heart attack before it happened but didn't tell anyone because I didn't know how to explain why he was wearing a bunny suit in my vision.

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Nick: Or maybe Kravski would've quit anyway upon learning that one of his students had a vision of him in a bunny suit.

Sally, smiling reluctantly: Perhaps.

Nick: My list of questions gets more intense after this. You up to keep going?

Sally nods.

Nick: Just let me know if you want to change topics. What was your worst or most painful vision?

Sally: . . .

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Sally: Of course we would've. Maybe not if I'd had the ability to read Button's mind, but if I were a norm? One-hundred percent yes. I was an awkward cry baby growing up, and Button was one of the

few kids that didn't bully me. I would've latched on to them regardless of whether they stopped my visions. They're my soul mate.

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He groans as he reads the question card.

Nick: Listeners want to know if you can spill the beans on any embarrassing stories about *me*.

Sally smiles wickedly into the camera.

Nick, nervously adjusting his collar: We're, uh, running out of time, though, so . . .

Sally: Sit back, relax, and allow me to tell you the tale of Miranda Hopkins.

Immediately, Nick bolts upwards in his seat. One of his hands lurches forward to cover Sally's mouth. She nips him, and he recoils with a pleading frown.

Nick: Salome, *please*.

Sally's grin widens.

Sally: Unfortunately, it looks like we're out of time for today. It's been a delight chatting with you all, and I look forward to being back behind the scenes next month.

The spotlight fades, leaving the stage in darkness.

Nick's Voice: I owe you for that.

Sally's Voice: I collect in the currency of baked goods.

[July's Character Interview Poll](#)

[Jul 1, 2021](#)

It's a new month, which means a new poll on which character gets interviewed! Noh is back on the list since they'll be appearing in game this month. (Either in Chapter 11 or Chapter 12. Scenes continue to end up longer than I'd anticipated--at this point, Noh was already supposed to have confronted Button. But hey, at least you got to almost smooch K?) Several characters are also being *added* to the poll, now that they're officially introduced.

(At this point, all major players in *Mind Blind* are in play. Cue the dramatic music and theatric gasps!)

Finally, I've just decided to just have Hope and John interview together since I think it will be exponentially better this way than if they were interviewed separately. This may mean their interview goes a little longer, but I'll have more time now that I'm taking the next two months off teaching! (Thank you all again for making that possible!!)

Without further ado, please vote on the person (or people) you'd like to read interviewed . . .

Hope and John

Reese

Andy/Liz

Clarence

Noh (cryptic answers only)

336 votes total

[A Haiku Because That's All I Can Write With The Constant BLARING](#)

[Jul 1, 2021](#)

My neighbor's alarm
Has been dying for hours.
Death, take me instead.

[What Type Of Ment Are You?](#)

[Jul 2, 2021](#)

So, after over 24 hours of incessant beeping, my neighbor's carbon monoxide detector has finally been turned off by building management. I managed to get some writing done at my friend's place (thanks, Ana!), but was distracted enough by her bobblehead collection and swivel chair that I ended up creating this short quizlet.

It's about as accurate as what you might stumble across on BuzzFeed (which is to say, don't take it at all seriously).

What Type Of Ment Are You Quiz: <https://uquiz.com/0EjrD5>

[Jul 2, 2021](#)

I'm super excited for this month, because it'll be the first that I'm spending writing *Mind Blind* fulltime. Ideally, I'd love to get *Mind Blind* up to 350,000 words by August (which I think is doable since the current count is 325k). There will also be twice the saucy sides and side stories . . . although, if you're on the Sanctum Discord, you may have already realized that one of the side stories came to me in an insomniac fever dream inspired by Pokémon and thus should be looked on skeptically.

Nevertheless, Nicholas Wiseman Collector's Edition, the sparkly version, will be coming your way soon. This story made me giggle when writing it, but I'm also easily amused and maybe thus not the best bar.

I intended to release the second half of Chapter 11 this weekend, completely forgetting that it was July 4th and that I live within walking distance of Navy Pier (i.e. it's going to be way too loud a circus to get work done for most the day). The rest of Chapter 11 will thus release Monday. After dwelling on it, I've decided to ratchet up the danger level present in the chapter. There's a nice fluffy moment with your RO/friends at Chapter 11's end, and I think the payoff will be greater if Button suffers a *teensy weensy* bit more first. I won't go into too much detail, but I'm quite pleased with how this new scene is developing. During the update, I'll also be uploading a bunch of edits to Chapter 10 and the first half of 11. Hopefully, Andy/Liz will stay their proper genders going forth.

(Is it too late to petition that all gendered pronouns in English be replaced by new pronouns meaning "Person 1" and "Person 2"? This would make my life exponentially easier as a writer in general. And let's get rid of the word "of" while we're at it, please and thank you.)

Finally, here's the roadmap for July. Dates may switch depending on what gets written first, but this is everything being posted this month:

July 3: *Nick Wiseman Has Opinions* (Rosy's Wedding Speech)

July 5: *Mind Blind Update* - Chapter 11, Part 2 (entire chapter update)

July 6: *Mind Blind* Short Story #1

July 7: *Lady Death* Chapter 14

July 8: Aeon Student Guide Entry

July 9: Writer's Blog

July 10: Saucy Side #1 (Gray)

July 12: *Delivery for the Damned* Teaser

July 13: *Delivery for the Damned* Development Poll

July 14: *Lady Death* Chapter 15

July 16: Writer's Blog

July 17: *Mind Blind* Short Story #2

July 19: *Another Perspective* Story

July 21: *Lady Death* Chapter 16

July 22: Aeon Student Guide Entry

July 23: Writer's Blog

July 25: Saucy Side #2 (Sally)

July 26: *Mind Blind* Bloopers Reel

July 28: *Mind Blind* Update - Chapter 12 (Goal: release entire chapter)

July 29: MB Cast Interview

July 30: Writer's Blog

July 30/31: Live Q&As

[Nick Wiseman Has Opinions On . . . Ambrose Kim!](#)

[Jul 3, 2021](#)

Presented below: a copy of Nick's speech from Button and Ambrose's wedding

First off, let's just kick the elephant out of the room, shall we? The buzz you've been reading in the tabloids about the youngest Wiseman marrying their brother's archnemesis? All true. We've known each other for so long, but never in a million years did I ever think Ambrose and I would be forced to become family.

For God's sake, stop glowering at me, Ambrose. I'm not scared of you any more now that you've been tamed by Button. See, I'm even calling you by your first name! Give us another four years, we'll

practically be besties.

. . . Probably not. Don't worry, I won't be dragging you away on any one-on-one camping trips. But, hey, at least I've gotten to the point where the thought of you wedding my sibling no longer makes me break out in stress hives!

Funnily enough, the part that bothers me most about Button and Ambrose getting married is just how genuinely *unbothered* I feel about their nuptials. In fact, when I do a bit of soul searching—and someone want might to record this part because it'll never be admitted to again—I actually feel this surge of contentment that might even be loosely categorized as “extreme approval.”

Look, I'm just saying how I'm feeling.

Honestly, it would be impossible *not* to approve when I witness how happy the you two make each other. While I'm still not convinced that Ambrose hasn't been body snatched every time he laughs at one of Button's bad puns, I'm big enough to admit that you compliment each other in a way that I never foresaw happening. No wonder you're making a full commitment to each other; you have what others are dreaming of.

Button, you've worked miracles. Around you, Ambrose is only half as terrifying. He *smiles*, and I didn't think he could do that without his face cracking in half. The time I first heard him give a full-bellied laugh? I thought for certain that the world must be ending and was about to duck for cover under the nearest table. But no, he was just amused by something that you said.

And Ambrose . . . as much as it pains me to admit, I owe you a debt of gratitude. Not because you saved my life back in the day (pretty sure that only made us even), but because you were able to see my sibling in a way that I admittedly had to learn. You never viewed Button as someone in need of protecting—you challenged them as an equal from day one. It was only after seeing how Button responded to you that I realized how much they'd needed someone who saw them for, well, *them*.

You two are the real deal, the couple that proves rules are made to broken and that games aren't needed to be played.

(Nick's Notes: Cue Gray to start boombox. Begin slowly shaking hips in preparation for the full dance—make sure to practice before W-Day! Also, don't drop the mic this time when Salome throws it.)

Button, what I'm trying to tell you, is that Ambrose is . . .

(Nick's Notes: Start singing)

Never gonna give you up,

Never gonna let you down.

Never gonna run around and desert you.

Never gonna make you cry,

Never gonna say goodbye.

Never gonna tell a lie and hurt you.

[Nick Wiseman Has Opinions On . . . Ambrosia Kim!](#)

[Jul 3, 2021](#)

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For God's sake, stop glowering at me, Ambrosia. I'm not scared of you any more now that you've been tamed by Button. See, I'm even calling you by your first name! Give us another four years, we'll practically be besties.

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[July's Interviewee\(s\)!](#)

[Jul 4, 2021](#)

That's right, this month's spotlight will be shined on none other than dear old Mom and Dad. (What skeletons are in *their* closets, hmm? Do you really want to know? Although in Hope's case, it probably includes a life-sized fake skeleton given her Halloween obsession.)

Please address any questions to Hope and John via either the Sanctum Discord Cast Interview Channel or by replying to this post. If your question is for only one of the pair, please make sure to clarify who's being addressed.

[Demo Update: All of Chapter 11!](#)

[Jul 5, 2021](#)

I did a complete rewrite of this second half in order to amp up the danger level, and honestly am still a little shocked that I managed to finish it all in time (considering the decision to change things was made at the last live Q&A on June 30th). There may be some typos and miscoding (since there's a *lot* of branching pathways), but still! I managed! Whoot!

Also included: you can now decide to try to stay back in Reese's office or go with them.

Finally: just a heads up that this is the first time that *Mind Blind* has any real violence to someone other than K. You may not encounter this scene at all, but if you do I'd recommend going for the nose because Feral Button is amazing in my humble opinion.

Total Wordcount: 325k

Average Playthrough: 82k

Link: <https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-fenderbender/mygame/>

Requested Feedback: Please let me know if any scenes feel like they cut off or end abnormally/abruptly, as well your overall impressions on Andy/Liz (I know what I'm going for, but don't know whether it was achieved). Likewise, if there are any additional options you'd like to see, especially when Button is returning home since I think that part could potentially be better fleshed out.

[Stephanie \(Talía Version\)](#)

[Jul 6, 2021](#)

The following short story was written at 4am after a burst of absurd inspiration (you can find receipts for this on the Sanctum Discord). There will be another Mind Blind short story later this month as well which will be slightly more serious, but I wanted to share this one as well because the concept made me giggle. I adore Valero so dang much.

STEPHANIE

Stephanie Valero absently chewed on a strand of her hair that had made its way into her mouth. Being decisive had never been her strong point, although Kim had once claimed that she was “unexpectedly competent” when pressed for time. But if she had the space to dwell on a dilemma, to examine it from all angles without that burst of adrenaline that came from working under a time constraint . . . well, she often got stuck. As she was now.

Her hand reached towards the Limited Edition Justice Holo Card, only to be hastily pulled back before it could touch the foil illustration. The card distributor, an upperclassman whose name Stephanie couldn't recall, had scolded her the last time when she'd accidentally left a thumbprint on the unpurchased goods. No, there was no touching allowed until the card of her choice was selected and paid for.

The paying part wasn't hard. Despite the high quality of the UCRT Trading Cards, their mysterious creator didn't price gouge. At least, Stephanie didn't consider the prices to be unreasonable. She'd gladly part with fifty dollars to own a full set of Shirtless Fortitudes. In fact, she already had seven Shirtless Fortitudes. Did she really need another?

Stephanie glanced to the Limited Edition Justice Holo, and then back to her other option: Shirtless Fortitude 13A, “Fortitude In Repose.” She didn't know who took the photographs for these cards, but she'd give her soul to learn how they managed to get a picture of the infamously private Grayson Black asleep and shirtless on his couch at home. Unless the photo was staged? That made sense, and honestly the prospect made Stephanie feel a bit better about her hobby (which her mother had called . . . no, best not to dwell on that). Stephanie liked the idea that every card she bought directly supported a hero—or more likely, a charitable cause that they backed. And Fortitude looked so at peace in the card's depiction, so content, that simply gazing at it made her smile.

But, again, she already had seven Shirtless Fortitudes. And that Justice Holo was a limited edition. Not to mention a foil.

“Valero, right?” the salesman drawled.

“Present!” Stephanie squeaked before mentally kicking herself. Roll call had ended hours ago; she was on her lunch break, not in class.

The upperclassman snickered. “Cute, but I'm not Rosy. No need to reach for the sky in surrender when I call your name.”

“Yes! I mean, sorry!” Stephanie resisted the urge to bow in formal apology. Why was she always so dang awkward? She could feel her cheeks burning red, but the upperclassman was graceful enough not to further acknowledge her embarrassment.

“Look,” she said, “you're a good customer. You're having trouble picking between the Limited Edition Justice Holo and Fortitude 13A, right?”

Stephanie nodded mutely.

“How about we make a deal then? You buy both, and I’ll throw in a copy of Justice: The Early Years.”

Stephanie’s eyes widened. “I thought they were all sold out.”

The upperclassman shrugged. “For you, I’ll scrounge one up.”

She paid for her purchase with trembling hands, careful to hold each card by its edge as it was handed over. “Thank you so much,” she breathed.

Stephanie left Aeon that day feeling content, which wasn’t an emotion she often experienced after Kim was done yelling at her. Justice and Fortitude were protected in the breast pocket over her heart; she couldn’t wait until the day when she became a good enough MIV to help them in person.

* * * *

Later that evening, Glitch rubbed her hands together in glee. To the casual bystander, she rather resembled a malicious leprechaun leering over her pot of gold. Truthfully, however, she hadn’t possessed any ulterior motives when she’d first befriended Ellery Wiseman. No ulterior motives related to starting a card trading company, at least. Never in a million years would she have anticipated being able to leverage their relationship into a cool million dollars (minus Ellery’s share, of course).

Ellery had initially been reluctant to hand over the family baby albums, but their reticence had faded after the first sales numbers came in. The demand for UCRT Cards had been sky high from the moment that Glitch had started printing them, and The Early Years Editions sold like, well, even hotter hotcakes. It helped that Nick had agreed to sit in on a single signing session, scrawling his signature across the acetate depiction of himself, age two, in Mighty Ducks pullups.

But the successful run of The Early Years would pale in comparison to this next batch that Glitch had just dropped off at the printers. Ellery had just shared years of Halloween photos, all with Nicholas Wiseman wearing next to nothing. And if she could convince Nick to sign a few cards while wearing that Tarzan getup from two years ago? Why, Glitch would never have to work again.

[Stephanie \(Ferro Version\)](#)

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[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 14](#)

[Jul 7, 2021](#)

"Happy birthday, my lady!" Emilia's voice, usually inoffensive, was today obnoxiously shrill and cheery. She flung open the window's drapes. After the fire, I'd done away with my bed's canopy, leaving me defenseless against the piercing sunlight.

I pulled the sheets up over my head.

"Come now," she scolded. "It's well past the hour you normally rise. Are you not excited for your party?"

"No."

"Lady Vitruva." I could hear Emilia's frown through the fabric. "I don't know why you're behaving like a child. It's time to get up."

"I could dismiss you, you know," I said without uncovering my head.

"You won't," Emilia replied confidently, and yanked away the sheets. She loomed above me, fists on her hips. "Come now. Cook prepared a brunch!" She pointed over to where a small table had been set up, plates piled high with an array of sausages and pastries.

"I'm not hungry."

"Then I'll eat it after you get dressed," said Emilia. "But you *will* get dressed."

I groaned and reached for the sheets she'd stolen. Emilia held firm. If I persisted, I'd end up in a game of tug-of-war with my maid. My dignity had already taken a blow after rumor had spread that I'd attempted to win back Loren's affection from Letty by sneaking into his room. I didn't know how much more humiliation my pride could bear.

I released the sheet and sat up. Emilia tossed it onto a nearby chair before she marched over to my wardrobe and pulled out a dark purple dress. Delphine had gifted me the garment for my last birthday, but I'd never had the courage to wear it. My taste in fashion had developed to help me go unnoticed and blend in with the crowd, and the deep-cut fabric clung to my figure in a fashion that was anything but anonymous.

I protested, "I'm not wearing that."

Emilia stalked towards me, dress raised before her like the shield of a soldier heading to battle. "An entire year this has sat in your closet. You're the same size now you were at sixteen, and I won't allow you to hide yourself any longer." She sat down on my bed and laid out the dress besides me. "You do hide, my lady, in dull colors and drab cuts. You're seventeen now—a woman grown. In one more year, you'll be wed. Today, I want you to be beautiful."

I blinked owlishly at Emilia, taken aback by her impassioned speech. Why did she care so deeply about my appearance? We argued daily over my hair due to my insistence on wearing it in a practical bun that she claimed made me look like a governess. But she always followed my instructions, in the end.

"Why is this important to you?" I asked curiously.

Emilia ran her hand down the dress, smoothing away wrinkles. "You've been good to me and mine, my lady. I want you to be good to yourself."

Certainly, Hamen was well on his way to retiring early thanks to the numerous bribes I'd plied him. Yet I suspected Emilia's devotion arose more from my willingness to give her days off whenever my father (or more accurately, his valet) visited Bellcrest. She *had* been invaluable over the past few months assisting with my investigations into Councilor Timons. Though my research had yet to turn up anything incriminating, Emilia's ongoing flirtation with Timons' aide kept me informed of the Councilor's daily schedule.

"Fine." I still didn't quite comprehend why my appearance mattered so much to her. But it did, and my compliance was a small enough favor. "I'll wear the dress."

Emilia clapped her hands together in delight. "You'll look a sight, my lady. I'll curl your hair as well."

"No curls." No need to give the gossipmongers yet another reason to compare me to Letty. Emilia frowned and I conceded, "But I'll wear it unpinned today."

She nodded, appeased. "Let's get you ready then. You only turn seventeen once, after all. Today's important."

I had turned seventeen eight times, to be exact. Still, Emilia's words were truer than she knew. This birthday was important. It marked the beginning of the year in which I always died. Which meant, despite things being thankfully uneventful since the fire, it was only a matter of time before someone tried to kill me again.

Emilia's quick fingers styled several small braids into my long hair. When I didn't protest, she grabbed an unopened pot of kohl and tilted my chin upwards so that she could apply it to my brows and lashes.

After the arson, I'd expected Letty and the Councilor to try again. But either Letty had been shaken by their lack of success, or her co-conspirator had realized that I was onto him. According to Emilia's reports and my own encounters with him during Council meetings, Timons was fastidious, humorless, and distressingly uncorrupt. Still, my gut remained convinced that Letty was being manipulated by someone else, and Councilor Timons made the most sense, given his possession of the master key and his push for a conviction during my past trials.

"All done," said Emilia. She stepped back and observed me calculatingly before plucking the pearl hairpin from her own updo and adding it over my ear. "Perfect."

I opened my mouth to protest but she cut me off. "I know you dislike jewelry. But look at yourself." She gently turned me to face the dressing room mirror.

I was confronted by a young woman staring solemnly back. My darkened lashes made my gray eyes appear large and soulful, and Delphine's dress made the most of emphasizing what subtle curves I possessed. The girl in the mirror wasn't pretty the way Letty was, but she was attractive. Striking even. Yet there was a crease between her brows and a tightness to her lips. She looked as though she never laughed.

I smiled experimentally. My reflection unenthusiastically mimicked the expression before I let my mouth again fall flat. It didn't matter what I wore or what I looked like. Only that I survived. If I were wise, I'd never leave my room without donning a solid suit of armor.

"Thank you, Emilia," I said, almost meaning it. Nevertheless, I handed her back her hairpin. "Do you have his schedule for me?"

No need to clarify who "he" was, as this had been our routine for the past two month. Emilia handed me a slip of paper, delivered by way of besotted aide, with Timons' plans for the day written on it. I opened it.

He would be at Loren's party (though nominally it was my birthday ball). At least now I had a reason to attend other than being the supposed guest of honor.

I'd spent several weeks practicing a spell that, though it couldn't force someone to immediately confess the truth, relaxed a person's reservations enough that Timons might let something slip. The spell was primarily used to calm crying babies, but I'd repurpose it for my investigation. Emilia had allowed me to practice on her—she believed that the Councilor had refused to aide in my seduction of Loren by withholding his key, and had eagerly agreed to help in my supposed quest to learn his secrets in revenge.

As a result of her cooperation, I knew more than I ever wished to regarding her love life and the alternative talents of my father's valet. Hopefully Timons would be more inclined to talk about his nefarious plotting than his romantic escapades.

I glanced fleetingly back at the mirror and squared my shoulders. Perhaps death had stolen my carefree smile, assuming that I'd ever had one to begin with. But the girl—no, the woman had an air of regal confidence. It wasn't chainmail, but perhaps Delphine's dress and Emilia's makeup provided a different sort of protection.

I was seventeen. Again.

Finally.

And I was not going die.

Timons wasn't there.

Like everything in the Green Parlor, the twin settees upon which Loren and I sat were over-gilded and under-cushioned. But it was Loren's favorite room in the palace and thus where he'd chosen to hold my gifting, arguing that it was the only other room large enough to comfortably sit the twenty-odd members of his inner circle in attendance. How many of them had been at my last execution, smiling and gossiping as if it had been nothing more than a diverting afternoon excursion? Now they gave me gifts. These were always opened later, in private, so that the recipient's reactions didn't impolitely advertise their favorite. Loren's friends, however, had discovered another way to upstage one another, and each gift I received was more intricately wrapped and in more expensive fabric than the last.

I couldn't care less: Timons wasn't here. Where the hells was he?

"Thank you." I smiled politely Lord Acouth. The gold cloth wrapping his gift had been starched and folded into the semblance of a swan, leaving me uncertain how to hold it. I set it awkwardly on the cushion besides me, crushing its beak in the process, and handed him a dried dreamroot petal from the clay jar in my lap. It was an old tradition, hardly celebrated outside of Bellcrest. But the Philosophy of Reciprocation was one of the Triad's core tenets, and Lord Acouth thanked me gravely for the blue petal.

"Happy birthday, Tru!" The door swung open and Letty rushed in, the bounce in her steps setting her curls asway. She paused momentarily, caught off guard by the parlor's defining feature.

The painting of King Ignatius took up nearly the entire wall opposite her point of entrance, forcing guests to stare directly into his cerulean glower as they walked into the room. It portrayed the former king valiantly battling a horde of Fengali archers (who, despite being directly underfoot of his horse, had for some reason not chosen to switch to swords). The oil's subject was almost indistinguishable from his grandson, which was I suspected the real reason behind Loren's fondness for the parlor. Letty seemed puzzled by the resemblance, and her lips opened slightly as she looked towards Loren.

"Lady Letticia!" Loren stood in a fluid motion and bowed, his elbow hitting Lord Acouth's chin. "Armond, your chair," he ordered.

Armond's nostrils flared at being forced to stand. Nevertheless, he complied, and Letty claimed his vacated seat.

"I'm so sorry that I'm late! I had to make sure your surprise was in order." She smiled knowingly, her lips puckering together as they could barely contain her secret. "It should arrive soon."

"Your presence is worth waiting for," said Loren solemnly.

She blushed and leaned in towards me. "You look perfect!" she gushed. "Did you have a new dress made? Oh, I wish I could wear such a bold color! But it would make me look quite pale, I think."

I resisted the urge to tug my bodice upwards. "Emilia insisted." I cleared my throat, trying to sound casual. "Did you pass Councilor Timons on your way in?"

"Is he the one with the cane or the younger gaunt one?" Her mouth pursed in a moue of displeasure. "Tru, it's your birthday. Can't you talk politics with the Council some other time?"

"Hear, hear!" said Loren. "You only turn seventeen once."

I almost laughed. People kept saying that.

"Timons is the gaunt one." Was Letty feigning unfamiliarity or was her co-conspirator someone else?

She tossed her head, her curls somehow managing to fall back into perfect position after the movement. "Either way, I don't know why you seek out with company so much older. I fear you find me uninteresting due to my lack of gray hair." Her words were teasing, but her tone rose at the end as if in genuine question.

"Tru would rather spend her time with books than with people," complained Loren. "She wouldn't even let the court entertainers attend."

As if I needed to see the jester whose ferret I'd inadvertently poisoned.

"I worry that you miss out on life sometimes," said Letty. "Between Council meetings and your studies, you hardly make time to fun."

I bristled. Why was everyone pretending to be so cursed worried about me today? My energy needed to focus on staying alive—tea parties and friendships be damned. "Books are fun," I snapped. "As you would know if your head weren't too empty to read."

Letty reeled back, a hand flying over her mouth. Hurt tears brimmed in her violet eyes. "You sound like my mother," she whispered.

Loren glared at me.

A tendril of guilt unfurled in my stomach and snaked its way upwards. Letty had attempted and would continue attempting to have me murdered. She'd stolen my life (and fiancé) not once but seven times prior. She didn't deserve my kindness. And yet . . . I knew full well my comment hadn't been fair. Perhaps Letty wasn't a reader, true, but she was usually too occupied with her own hobbies to even have time. And she was far from stupid. My very sequence of lives was testament to her ingenuity: she'd always won.

"I'm sorry." I surprised myself with how genuinely I meant those words. What was wrong with me, to feel compelled to apologize to my would-be murderer? "I find parties taxing, but my words were uncalled for. I only need to look at your sewing to know your mind is filled with imagination and beauty. You're an artist. I recognize it, even if your mother cannot."

"Do you really mean that?" she asked with a snuffle.

"I do." Murder aside, her needlepoint was inarguably excellent.

"Oh, Tru, of course I forgive you." Letty leapt up from her seat and embraced me. "I don't know why you're so cross today, but I promise that something is going to happen soon to make it all better. We—" she stopped herself and grinned. "I promised not to tell."

Her genuine delight concerned me. What scheme had she and Timons concocted that caused her to be so overjoyed? The sooner I cornered the Councilor, the better.

I allowed Letty to cling to me for a few more moments before prying her arms off from around my neck. Seeing her now, wearing a cheery yellow dress and an even sunnier smile, it felt ridiculous to think that I'd ever believed her to be the sole culprit. Perhaps if Timons confessed, Letty would leave me alone.

"I really do need to find Councilor Timons," I said. "I have some questions concerning the safety reforms that he and Councilor Bernise intend to institute for theaters."

"What safety reforms?" asked Loren, his mouth filled with a bite of the cake that Armond had handed him. His friend had been unable to find another chair and looked distinctly annoyed as he reclined against the wall.

"The reforms you convinced King Eldin to institute," I said. "You must remember that night at the opera two months ago. You promised to speak to your father and get new regulations passed. They're finally scheduled to happen."

Loren shoveled another bite of cake into his mouth. "Forgot about that. Turned out well in the end though—Council knows what they're doing."

"You never mentioned it to King Eldin?" It seemed impossible that I could become any more disillusioned with my fiancé (he had, after all, sentenced me to death on multiple occasions). But I still felt disheartened by his lack of concern over people's safety. "You should care more about conditions that commoners are faced with. Especially since the Bellcrest Opera is run by the Crown."

Loren shrugged. "Council knows what they're doing."

But things would get done much faster, I wanted to argue*, with a ruler who bothers to pay attention.* King Eldin was, on the whole, an excellent monarch. He was widely beloved by his subjects, had instituted relief programs for better living conditions in the slums, and funded a new drainage system that had all but done away with the problem of Bellcrest's annual flooding. He'd even managed to somehow keep Verdan neutral despite pressure from both Anterdon and Fengal to pick a side in their ongoing war.

All of this, Loren found boring, changing the subject whenever I tried to engage him in debate. His father was a good leader but not omniscient—if Loren discovered a problem, he should have shared it.

I sighed. I could waste the next hour preaching to an unreceptive audience or I could go look for Timons. Only one option would help ensure my survival.

"I'm going to go find the Councilor," I told Loren. "I'm sure Letty will be more than pleased to keep you company."

"Oh, but you can't leave!" An odd note of desperation edged Letty's voice. "Please, stay here just a little longer. Your surprise is due to arrive any moment, I promise!"

Her small hands gripped mine tight enough to cut off the flow of blood, and her eyes met mine pleadingly.

I groaned internally. "Just a few moments more, then," I conceded, settling back into my seat.

Letty's entire body relaxed in relief. "Oh good! I wanted to see you when . . ." She stared at something behind me, her speech tapering off and her cheeks flushing with rosy pleasure. Before I could turn to look, my chair was being lifted up off the ground.

I bit my tongue to stop myself from screaming. My fingernails dug into the armrest, as if I could physically merge with the chair to keep myself from falling off. I'd hated heights ever since my fifth death.

No, it wasn't hatred that I felt. It was fear. Undiluted, steal-my-breath-away terror. I sent a silent prayer up the Triad, not that they had ever listened: *Anyway else. Kill me anyway else. Smother me with a pillow, drown me in a lake. Cut off my head once more. Just not like this, not again.*

Don't let me fall again.

[Aeon Student Guide: Empathy](#)

[Jul 8, 2021](#)

Empaths make up 39% of all Ments, or 3.9% percent of the general population. Among Ments, Empaths are unique in that their primary ability of sensing emotions isn't inhibited by other people's mental shields.

Unlike telepathy, empathy is a power derived from supercharged observation and inference (similar to precognition). While there is some level of Z-wave engagement between the Empath and their subject, an Empath primarily "reads" emotions by picking up on and deciphering signals which would normally go undetected. This includes subtle shifts in heartrate, increased capillary flow, and micro expressions.

Many Level 6 and Level 7 Empaths require physical contact to get a reading, relying on additional information such as body temperature.

All this induction occurs almost immediately and on a subconscious level, with a hypersensitivity well beyond what can be taught through the study of kinetics. Even more uniquely, however, is what an Empath's brain does *after* sensing another's emotions: an Empath undergoes the exact physiological changes as the person whom they're reading. This means that an Empath physically experiences the exact same emotions as the person being read, although the Empath won't be able to identify why these emotions are being felt (unlike a Telepath, who would be able to read the thought process behind the physiological response but not be able to gauge the severity of emotional reaction). Some Empaths report having difficulty "shaking off" the sensation of others' emotions.

Despite the fact that their primary power isn't diminished by mental shields, Empaths have historically been the most accepted of Ment types. Different theories exist as to why this is the case, but most scholars agree that their powers meant that Empaths were uniquely positioned to appeal to their would-be persecutors. Many cult leaders and spiritual advisors were Empaths, including Rasputin and Nostradamus (the latter of whom is often mistakenly identified as a Precog).

The highest level Empaths also possess the power to manipulate the feelings of those around them. Unlike their ability to sense emotions, this trait is guarded against by everyone's natural psychic blocks. In order for an Empath to exert emotional control, an individual must willingly drop their mental guards (similar to letting a Telepath read one's thoughts). Thus, modern-day incidents of Empath abuse are exceedingly rare. Those that do occur are immediately put a stop to by Unity's AMO teams.

Today, many Empaths choose to work remotely due to their sensitivity to touch. Those that join the in-person workforce frequently take up jobs as councilors and therapists, using their abilities help others process and heal from emotional trauma.

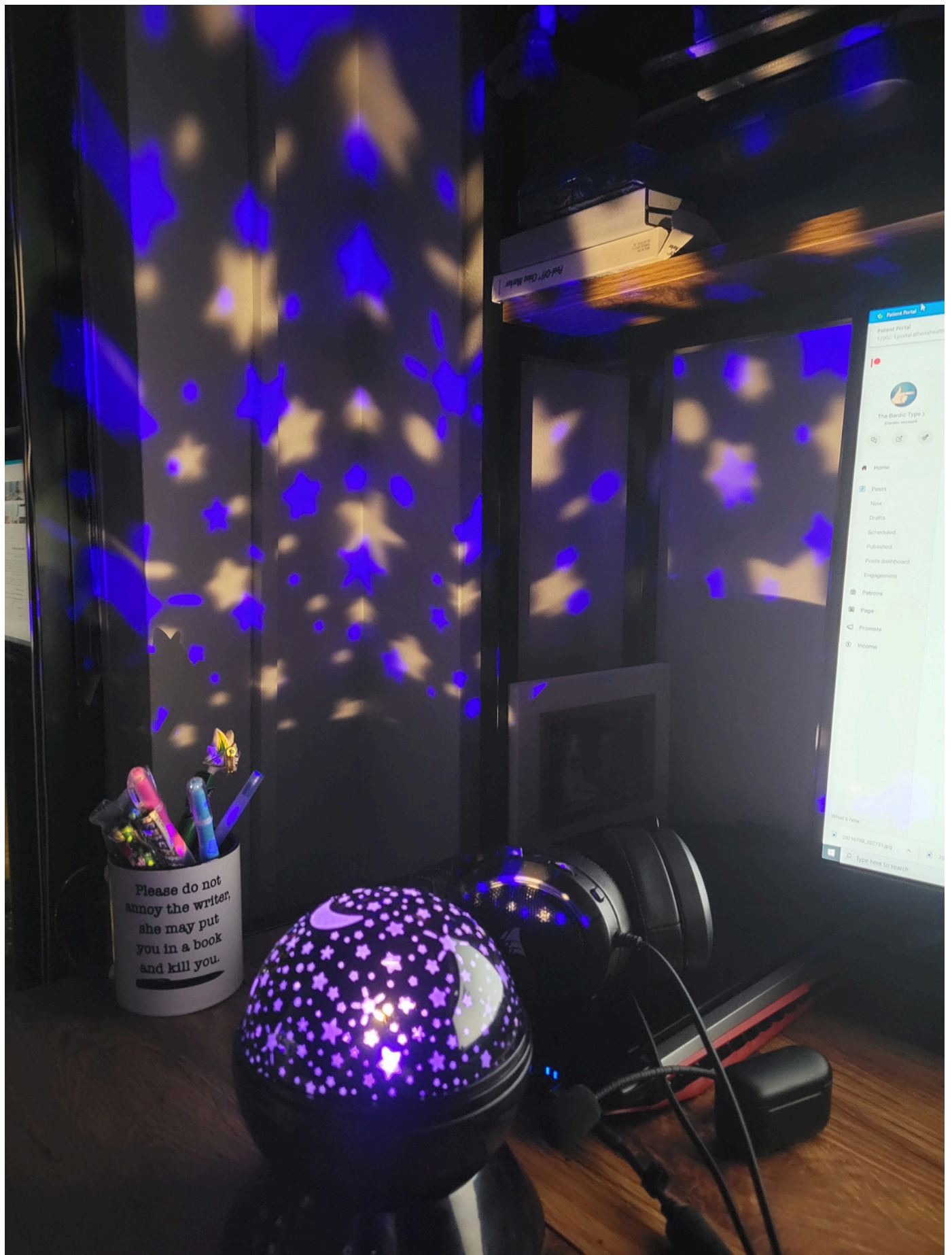












[Writer's Blog: On Rituals](#)

[Jul 9, 2021](#)

I'm a random person. Not in the way that my junior high students used to be or the way that art films idolize (I'm no manic pixie dream girl), but establishing habits has always been difficult for me. My key never lands in the same place despite having installed a hook on the wall, milk often gets left out (or accidentally put in the pantry instead of fridge), and I forget to check my mail.

Writing a long project necessitates finding a rhythm. It requires consistent dedication and keeping a schedule, things that have never been my strong suit. Even with self-imposed deadlines, I'm not a naturally structured human being. This sounds like I'm claiming to be *unnaturally* structured, when I really just mean that I struggle with consistency. Making sure that *Mind Blind* releases on time each update is an uphill battle against my very nature, mostly because I have last-minute bursts of inspiration and can't resist rewriting entire scenes.

When working on *Mind Blind*, however, I've settled into a regular pattern, as knowing that people actually anticipate reading my work is incredibly motivating. My act may usually be half on the floor and half hanging from an open window, but I do my best to get it together so as not to disappoint you guys. You keep me accountable, and I've been more productive writing-wise over this last year than ever before!

Even so, sometimes I'm simply "not feeling it." Usually because I want to work on a more exciting scene, or because I realize the current part that I'm working on will need to be eventually recoded, or am simply distracted by a newer, shinier idea (I am *very* excited to start *Delivery for the Damned* once *Mind Blind* is completed). This is when writing rituals help. Little touches can make the writing session feel special and get me more enthusiastic about beginning. Once I start writing, I can usually write for 8+ hours straight in a sort of trance-like hyperfocus (when I get into the zone, I move in with three suitcases).

I'd aimed to do this post as a video blog, but I need to figure out how Patreon's remote hosting works. Still, I wanted to share with you guys what a full evening of writing looks like for me. This is only my evening routine, since during daylight hours, I'm either coding/bug testing or on a park bench outside writing *MB*'s first draft by longhand (this first draft then gets reworked into the alpha that's typed up). I've very much turned my evening writing sessions into a *thing--*it's not just about parking my butt on the chair and fingers on the keyboard. It's about the ambience. (Don't I sound fancy? That being said, that "ambience" involves a children's nightlight.)

Important things to know about my writing ritual:

1. It doesn't have to be Honey Vanilla Chamomile tea, but it should be because that tea is freaking amazing. (Seriously.)
2. "Summoning the spirit of Nick" is fancy talk for "justifying late night carbs."

3. The stars float around the walls. You can't see the movement in the photo, but it's very peaceful. It's a newer addition to my routine, but I turn on the stars around 9pm, which is about five hours into my writing session and just when I'm beginning to feel distracted. The stars give me an extra boost, and I usually continue writing until 11.
4. Make sure to click on the photos for the captions if you're interested! Each item is explained.

Current Demo Length: 336k

Average Playthrough: Unknown! (Still need to code Chapter 12)

Scene that I'm currently working on: The intervention scenes! It's two chapters later than planned, but it's finally happening.

[Mind Blind Bloopers Reels](#)

[Jul 10, 2021](#)

Note: I'm currently writing the alternative date scenes for Buttons who don't trigger the intervention, so all the bloopers are from romantic scenarios.

"Let go of the handlebar!" Glitch yells over the rollercoaster's roar.

You think about what Glitch said earlier, about transforming fear into freedom. Then you recall that video clip you saw the other day where a carnival ride overturned and killed two clowns, and your hands tighten around the rail. Not today, Gravity.

* * * *

"Make no mistake, you're lucky." Sally tosses her curls over her shoulder in shampoo-commercial fashion with a teasing smile. She gestures to her body, hands lingering over her hips. "Because I am *fine*."

* * * *

There are few things more awkward than surrogate courting your best friend on behalf of your brother who's trapped in your head.

You and Sally exchange a look, and both of you simultaneously crack up.

"No way Nicholas told you to say that," Sally gasps out between giggles.

"He really did," you insist.

It sounded better in my head! Nick protests. He pauses then adds, *Your head?*

* * * *

You lean in closer to Kim, your eyelids fluttering closed. This is it. The moment you've been longing for since he first stepped into the classroom and knocked Glitch flat on her ass.

"Wiseman." Kim's voice is wryly amused. "What the hell are you doing?"

* * * *

Gray's thumb grazes your bottom lip.

"Darlin'," he drawls in an atrocious fake Texan accent, "you ain't got no idea of 'bout my dreams."

* * * *

Gray's thumb grazes your bottom lip.

"Darlin'," he drawls in an atrocious faux Texan accent, "that ain't a pistol in my pocket." Immediately, his face flushes beet red, and he lets go of your chin as if burned. "I am so sorry! I don't know why I said that."

[Grayson Saucy Side: Villainous](#)

[Jul 11, 2021](#)

AU where Button is a bad, bad Ment and Gray is . . . still Gray. Contains minor spoilers for Grayson's powers.

You've always considered membership to the Art Institute of Chicago to be one of the primary perks of living in the city. Back in high school, you and Sally made weekly pilgrimages. Sally would lecture you on the brushstroke technique of this or that dead painter, and you'd tease Sally about being short enough to live inside one of the Thorne Miniature Rooms.

The museum holds a fond place in your heart, which is why it's so ironic that you're now robbing it.

You've committed plenty of heists in the past. Being a Level 10 Empath makes you an expert at telling people what they want to hear and learning their secrets, which comes in handy when one makes a freelance career from performing cooperate espionage. Nick wanted you to join Unity, but you were

never one for rules. Besides, after your recent gig for a company rhyming with “Snoogle,” you’re pretty sure that your yearly income now tops his. It pays good to be bad.

Burglarizing a public institution is new, however, and something you would’ve never considered had Sally not come to you in tears. She’d been commissioned to duplicate a famously lost Rubens by a wealthy client, who had then been passed off her work as authentic and donated it to the Art Institute for a charitable tax write off. Your first impulse, which was to congratulate Sally on her forgery skill, had been the wrong one.

“I’m not like you!” Sally protested. “I don’t want to be tied up in illegal activities, always worrying about my past catching up to me. I wish that the piece would just . . . disappear.”

Being a good friend and an even better thief, you agreed to make her wish come true. Which is why Sally is now nervously waiting in a rental car outside, and you’re suspended upside down from the Art Institute’s ceiling, your face inches away from her accidental forgery.

You let out a long whistle as you eye the naked woman carrying a jug. Thankfully, the art isn’t a sculpture, otherwise her nipple would be poking your eye out. Ruben, or rather Sally, really knew how to paint ‘em. You begin to hum a nameless tune as you carefully rewire the alarm attached to the painting’s back, careful not to jostle the frame. The three nightguards usually patrolling this wing may be all passed out in a janitorial closet, sent napping by your empathic suggestion to “sleep,” but triggering the alarm will alert the whole building. Last time you tried to control more than twelve people at once, you got a nose bleed. You have no desire to gush blood all over a masterpiece, even a forged one painted by your best friend.

A heavy sigh from behind makes you twist mid-air, your movement causing your rope to sway like a pendulum. You curse—the only thing worse than being caught with your pants down is being caught hanging upside down—and shift your weight in effort to avoid crashing into the still-booby-trapped frame.

Your body freezes mid-swing, hovering at a forty-five-degree angle with your nose mere centimeters from the aforementioned nipple. Rather than be relieved that you didn’t set off the alarm, you’re annoyed. Only one person could stop your movement without a single touch.

“Hello, Fortitude!” you chirp with false cheer. “Fancy meeting you here.”

Grayson sighs again. His hand glides across the small of your back as he uses his telekinesis to gently lower you to your original position. As glancing over your shoulder would only set you swinging again, you patiently wait for him to spin your body around so that your eyes are directly parallel with his.

“UCRT agreed to let your activities slide so long as you ran all of your jobs by Nick,” Gray says in a disproving tone. “We’d rather know what corporations are up to than not, so you’ve been granted relative carte blanche to use your empathy. But last time I checked, “art theft” wasn’t part of corporate espionage.”

You shrug, the motion causing you to sway once more. Gray catches your shoulders firmly, and you repress a shiver. The sensation of his hands on your body isn't at all unpleasant, although you do wish his touch were under less condemning circumstances.

"I'm diversifying my skillset," you say, tongue-in-cheek. No need to get Sally in trouble as well.

Grayson sighs. That makes, what, his third? His gaze runs up the length of your rope, to the grappling hook coiled around a steel ceiling beam. "I don't suppose there's an easy way to get you down from there?"

"There is."

When you don't immediately drop, he crosses his arms over his chest. You try to ignore the cold that follows his hands abandoning your shoulders.

"What are you waiting for?" he asks.

"Am I being arrested?" Your utility belt has two buttons: one which will disengage the grappling hook and set you down on the floor, and the other which will pull you up to the ceiling so that you can escape via the same air vent that you entered. Which button you push depends on Gray's answer.

"I *wish* I could arrest you," Gray groans, raking his fingers through his hair. The disheveled look is cute on him, even if his unmarked UCRT fatigues rather ruin the look. "But no. Sally filled us in on what happened. She saw men get out of an unmarked SUV and enter the museum, and was worried that you'd been caught."

Sally called UCRT? Over a decade of friendship, and she rats you out to your big brother's Micky Mouse clubhouse? Oh, you and she are going to have words once your feet are back on solid ground.

Gray must've picked up on your disgruntlement, because he adds, "She thought you were in danger. For good reason: her patron was Bruno Ricci."

You shrug again, trying not to smile when Grayson immediately reaches back for your shoulders in order to still your swaying. "I mostly deal with copyright disputes turned ugly," you remind him. "Ment mobsters are supposed to be your business."

"Which is why Sally should've brought this forgery business to UCRT's attention instead of asking you to break into a museum."

"Don't tell me that your feelings are hurt, Cookie Monster," you purr. "It's okay. You don't always get picked first in dodgeball."

He glares, then breaks into a reluctant smile. "It's hard to take you seriously when you're hanging upside down like that."

Fair enough. You press the first button on your belt and the grappling hook disengages with a *whir*. Gray catches you on instinct, stiffening as he realizes that he's cradling you in bridal position. The red emergency lights prevents you from discerning his blush, but you have no doubt of its presence across his cheeks. Giving into an impish urge, you wrap your arms around his neck before he can let you go.

"If Sally told you about her artwork, then you know we can't just leave it here," you say casually, as if unaware of Gray's accelerating heartbeat against your back. "What's your plan?"

"My plan *would've* been to inform the Art Institute's Board of Directors that the painting was evidence needed to apprehend a Ment villain," Gray states. "Which is true."

You pout. "Are you calling me a Ment villain?"

"No. I'm calling you a Ment who illegally used empathy to knock out three guards, and thus made a protocol handover impossible. Ricci would be our target."

"If UCRT requisitioned Sally's piece, it would just alert this Ricci guy that Sally had snitched," you argue. "Your upfront methods would've gotten my best friend killed."

"Our methods would've ended with Ricci in prison," Gray shoots back. There's a crackling heat between you, as neither is willing to concede to the other's point of view. After an angry moment, that heat transforms into something more seductively self-aware.

Gray's Adam's apple jerks as he dry swallows, and his head tilts closer. You look down, but his thumb gently tilts your chin back up. You stare at each other, wordless yet saying more than ever before.

A shrill screech shatters the moment's potential as the museum's alarm goes off.

Gray releases you and unleashes an eloquent stream of profanity. You make a mental note to research British curse words as he grabs your arm and yanks you around the corner, just in time to avoid the dual glare of two flashlights. Gray's hand covers your mouth, his breath hot against the nape of your neck.

"You missed one." His whisper tickles your earlobe.

You squirm to break free, but his hold only tightens. "Shhh," he warns.

Stampeding footsteps echo through the hallway, growing dangerously loud near the alcove where you and Gray are tucked away. There must be at least five people. Not just a solitary guard, then, but Ricci's men, likely here to steal back Sally's painting before it's revealed to be a forgery.

You stop struggling, pressing your body against Gray's in an attempt to take up as little space as possible. Despite the danger, that self-aware edge from before returns.

Trapped in near darkness and unable to make out more than blurry silhouettes, your other senses take on electric hyperawareness. The alarm falls silent, and you can hear the thrum of Gray's pulse and the

rasp of his breath. Your body tingles where Gray touches: your lips beneath the callouses of his palm, your cheek against the prickle of his stubble. You bask in the warmth of his body, the rigidness of his arms encompassing your torso, and the hardness of his thigh pressed between yours.

Being unable to see Gray's face is likely a blessing, because this time you wouldn't have the willpower to look away.

Gray removes his hand from your mouth with a reluctant slowness that indicates you're not the only one who was enjoying this forced proximity. "You disabled the cameras, right?" he asks in a low voice.

What does he take you for, an amateur? He smiles at your glare.

When you can no longer hear the footsteps of Ricci's men, Gray tugs you back into the previous room where Sally's art still hangs on display. He grabs the frame's side and yanks it off the wall, shrugging at your offended gasp.

"They already know someone's here," he says as a new alarm begins to blare. "Let's go."

"Go where?" you demand. "We can't go back the way I came—my grappling hook isn't strong enough to lift two."

He doesn't reply, instead pulling you over to the other wall. His eyes close. The drywall ripples.

"Let's go," Gray repeats. He pulls you close, ignoring your protest, and then . . .

Then, for the briefest nanosecond, you're *inside* the wall. Or rather, the wall moves around you. You can't breathe, and only Gray's hand squeezing yours prevents the surge of panic from overwhelming you. As suddenly as it happened, however, it stops. You and Gray stand outside in the Art Institute gardens, plaster coating both your bodies to ghostlike effect. You glance back at the building behind you, its concrete façade showing no indication of having just let two humans and a nude reproduction pass through it.

Gray leans Sally's artwork against a nearby tree before dropping to his knees with a coughing wheeze. "I hate doing that," he sputters.

"I didn't know you could do that," you say, tentatively patting his back.

"Yes, well." His cough releases a cloud of white dust. "It's not my first choice."

You don't respond immediately, chewing your lip in contemplation. Gray hid with you from Ricci's men, which means . . .

"Was this an unsanctioned mission?" you ask him.

He turns away and grabs the artwork. "We're done here," he says gruffly.

"Grayson!" There's an urgent need for you two to leave the garden. You realize that, and yet you're unable to follow until you *know*. "Did you break protocol to save me?"

At first, you think he's not going to respond. His back is turned towards you, shoulders wide and lonely. A sigh wells up inside you, a sigh that contains years of "what ifs" and "maybes" and "we could bes".

Finally, Grayson looks at you. His eyes burn blue with an intensity that you've never before witnessed, and your long-suffering sigh catches in your chest.

In his gaze, you read the answer.

[Delivery Teaser: Zane Etienam](#)

[Jul 12, 2021](#)

Introducing Zane Etienam (Detective, Fairy Negotiator)

Zane's last name means "Good Person," which is appropriate given that they're the only *Delivery* RO without a body count. The child of Nigerian immigrants, Zane is the eldest of five siblings and fits many of the firstborn stereotypes: they're dutiful, protective, and cursed by a fairy.

This fairy curse (the result of nine-year-old Zane spying on a pixie party) left Zane sightless, their brown eyes transformed an unnatural gold. In an quirk of fate, however, their "cursed status" has been a boon in regards to their career of choice; fairies consider it rude bestow an additional curse on another's fairy's handiwork, akin to defacing another artist's masterpiece. Thus, Zane's rare immunity to fairy mischief makes them a perfect fit to lead the Garda's Fae Crimes Division, and the most common fairy tactic of invisibility spells is rendered useless by a detective whom relies solely on their keen other senses.

You may find yourself drawn to Zane's goodness given the moral bankruptcy of almost everyone else in *Delivery*. Unfortunately, when tasked with investigating the death of one of your clients, Zane's primary suspect . . . is you.

Zane is *Delivery*'s third RO, and gender variable.

[Delivery Development: Death is a Temporary Imposition](#)

[Jul 13, 2021](#)

Genre-wise, *Delivery for the Damned* will straddle the lines between humor and horror (as well as fantasy, mystery, and romance). The horror aspects, however, means that it will be possible for the MC to die. But don't fret too much: there's a comedic in-game explanation for implemented "save points" that let you try again (guardian angels are neat that way).

Choicescript doesn't currently have an easy way to implement a save system, which means that it will be tricky (but not impossible) for me to code these automatic restarts after the MC dies. On the other hand, coding languages like Twine allow for save slots similar to what's done via Dashingdon. I'm not eager to learn a new coding language, especially since Twine is reputed to be more complex, but I'm willing to contemplate making the switch for *Delivery* if the system better suits my needs.

On the flipside, I do appreciate how easy Hosted Games are to access via mobile phone, as well as the undistracting simplicity of book presentation. Maybe I haven't played enough Twine games, but the fact that they seem PC/web browser reliant is a downside for me. In addition, not using Hosted Games would mean having to handle indie publication myself (which I find somewhat/very intimidating).

On the *flip* flipside, I like the idea of having full ownership over my work. And, of course, the easier(?) implementation of save slots is a huge benefit. My question this time isn't plot related, but it will fundamentally alter how *Delivery* gets written:

Would you be willing to play *Delivery for the Damned* even it wasn't ultimately accessible on the Hosted Games omnibus? (The full beta version of *Delivery* will still be accessible to most Patrons, just like *Mind Blind*.)

Delivery should be a Choicescript game like *Mind Blind*, distributed via the Hosted omnibus app and via Steam.

Delivery should be a Twine game and distributed via itch.io.

I have no preference other than wanting save slots.

Other. (Please elaborate in comments or in the Sanctum!)

62 votes total

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 14.5](#)

[Jul 14, 2021](#)

From the Rewritten Journal of Lady Vitrula Rhys: The Fifth Death

Of all the things my deaths have stolen from me, I miss the stars the most.

After the duel between Loren and Theo resulted in my fourth death, I concluded that avoiding my engagement was no longer a viable path to survival. I needed to marry Loren to stay alive. My family would be content to see the betrothal honored, and Letty would give up when I became Crown Princess. Treason, after all, was a much more serious offence than mere murder.

Thus, all my energies in my fifth life went to keeping Loren and Letty apart. I rarely left Loren's side, becoming a proficient enough horsewoman to join him on his hunts. Just as he chased after foxes, I was equally relentless in pursuing my quarry. His hobbies became my hobbies, his habits my own. Ironically, it was during this cycle that Loren seemed to like me most. He still stared after my stepsister like a hound at prime rib, but I ensured they rarely had time to talk.

Nor did I neglect Letty. Whenever I wasn't with Loren, I was by her side. If I wanted to avoid a knife in my back, the best solution seemed to be never turning away. I even socially strong-armed a few of Court's more handsome members into courting my stepsister in order to keep her further occupied.

Most every waking moment, I altered guard between the would-be lovers. There was only one place where I went to be alone, a refuge that neither had ever expressed interest in.

After the Northern Uprising and the abolishment of the Mages Guild, King Corbin had ordered the guild's preexisting headquarters at Bellcrest Castle be converted to an observatory. The Southeast Tower's domed glass ceiling, a marvel of magical architecture, was a cunning combination of spells and engineering. Overlapping convex and concave panels magnified the night sky, the arrangement of which could be adjusted to focus on different constellations using small metal knobs. In winter, when the Snow Moon made its annual appearance to join its more constant twin, the reflection from both moons caused the observatory to remain lit throughout the night.

Residences of the castle were granted full access to the tower, though few nobles ever bothered to visit. It also opened to the public once a week, when schoolchildren and their teachers swarmed the palace courtyard for lessons on history and the stars. After I received my nightly reports from Loren's and Letty's servants that their masters lay sleeping, I would go there to read books by starlight.

It was summer, barely a month before I turned eighteen. I hadn't survived this long since my first death, and confidence caused me to grow careless. With the looming deadline of my birthday and our marriage imminent, I started slipping away from Loren more and more frequently. Such chances to escape would be hard to come by once we were wed. I stopped waiting for the servant's reports before sneaking off to the observatory each night. This carelessness cost me everything.

The observatory's metal paneling, which usually concealed the dome's moving mechanisms, had been taken down earlier that summer. This allowed breezes to flow through the gaps in order to keep the area cool and prevented the gears from warping in the heat. Knowledge of how the devices worked had been lost with the Mages Guild—if they were damaged, no one would be able to repair them.

With the seasonal absence of the Snow Moon, there wasn't enough light to read by so I stargazed instead. I stood close to the metal knobs in the corner, having just turned the ceiling to reflect my favorite constellation: Andrane the Warrior Queen. She'd famously refused to marry after inheriting the

Crown, and it had been under her reign that Kothe had been conquered. Scholars never treated her well: every book I'd read blamed her lack of heir for Verdán's subsequent period of instability—the Reign of the Eight, when a quick succession of monarchs from competing families had led to eight different rulers in as many years before the Tivalls seized power. But I thought Andrane had been fearless. Numerous attempts had been made on her life; she'd outlived all her detractors and died of old age. Unlike me, she hadn't needed a prince to survive.

Her constellation admittedly didn't much resemble a warrior queen or even a woman at all, given that the six aligned stars had originally been recognized as a mage's staff. Another thing repurposed and renamed after the Northern Uprising, like observatory itself.

I'd never been particularly devout, and my prayers to the Triad Gods had only grown more infrequent with each death. Andrane was recognized as Ascended, however. If only she could offer me advice.

So, there I was, head tilted back and gazing at the stars, silently pleading with a long-dead queen for advice on how to stay an alive princess, when a shove came from behind.

I stumbled forward, arms cartwheeling and hands clutching at empty air before one grabbed ahold of something. Someone, I realized, before my assailant used their free hand to shove me once more. My fingers clawed down their arm, something hard and sharp coming loose from their sleeve in the struggle. A cufflink with a crescent-shaped stone, a fiery orange-red that burned with reflected starlight.

It skittered across the floor before falling off the tower's edge and into the blackness below. Immediately after, I followed.

[Writer's Blog: Feedback Request for Noh's Person \(Grammatical Not Physical\)](#)

[Jul 16, 2021](#)

Demo Length: 348k! I'm almost done writing the first draft of this chapter.

Those of you who decided to take the metro in Chapter 1 may have encountered an individual of dubious and overly dramatic nature (aka Noh). If you haven't played through the metro route, I would recommend doing so now, because otherwise this post won't make much sense and will contain lots of confusing spoilers.

Noh's perspective is written in second person, similar to the way that *Mind Blind* is written overall:

Your eyes widen beneath your mask. Its lacquered wood gleams obsidian under the flickering light of the tunnel's lone bulb. Carved similarly to a Noh mask, its expression shifts with eerie fluidity between exuberance and rage. You were quite pleased with the unnerving visage when you gazed into the mirror earlier this morning.

Yet realizing their identity feels infinitely more satisfying than concealing your own.

So, this is the Wiseman child. The younger, broken one.

When I decided to add in Noh's perspective, I kept using "you" for several reasons. The first is that players get to make a decision as Noh, choosing whether Button hums, sings, or sneezes. I felt like keeping the same format flowed smoothest, and also semi-poetically blurring the line between who "you" really is in the story (since Noh is controlling Button's brain at the time). The other reason for second person was more pragmatic: I wanted to hide Noh's gender.

However, I recently decided to add another break away scene to Noh's perspective at the end of Chapter 12 (I'm working on this now). Second person no longer seems to work as well, but I still want to keep Noh's gender on the down low. I could use "they," but that feels like an obvious cheap trick meant to hide things from the readers ("you" works functionally the same, but doesn't *feel* as deliberately deceptive even if it totally is). Currently, I have two versions of this scene: the first with a second person voice similar to the subway route scene that triggers if you already encountered Noh's perspective, and a vaguer third person version for walkers and dog protectors that simply refers to Noh as "The Ment" (implying their the one behind the bombing).

I'm not sure which voice works better, and also wanted to check in that you guys didn't find Noh's 2nd person jarring in the first place (it's meant to be creepy and blur the line between who's controlling whom, but not be confusing). Thus, I'm requesting feedback, because I've been contemplating this issue all day and haven't come close to arriving at a clear cut conclusion. I like second person, but only if it's continued from Chapter 1's perspective. Otherwise, I think third person works better. Which is why there's currently two versions of Noh's new scene.

Unlike earlier chapters, this time you don't get the chance to make decisions for Noh—which was, again, one of my primary reasons for using "you" in the first place. Although the voice change may seem like a relatively small issue, Noh plays a huge role in the story. Your feedback would really help me make sure that Noh comes across naturally, as would any input on whether to use 2nd("you") or 3rd (he/she/they) voice for their scenes.

(On a side note, wow but I really leaned into the whole 'mwahaha' factor for them back in Chapter 1.)

Below, I've included two versions of the same Chapter 12 scene (heavily redacted to avoid most spoilers, but there are still some minor revelations).

This is scene that you'll get in Chapter 12 if you took the metro to Aeon:

The fallout from the bombing had, with one major caveat, gone precisely as you'd intended:

Unity was aimed at Vengeance's throat.

You had possession of the truth, held it now in your very hands.

All you had to do was wait. Wait for Unity to lower its guard once more, and then you could leak the documents to the press. So long as you were patient, there was no chance of Unity realizing your identity.

You were good at waiting.

This is the version you'll get if you didn't take the subway in Chapter 1:

The fallout from the bombing had, with one major caveat, gone precisely as intended:

Unity was aimed at Vengeance's throat.

The Ment had possession of the truth, held it now in gloved hands.

All that remained was to wait. Wait for Unity to lower its guard once more, and then leak the documents to the press. With patience, there was no chance of Unity realizing the bomber's true identity.

The Ment was good at waiting.

Although this may seem like a subtle difference, the decision in which voice will impact a pretty sizeable scene. Your input on how you'd prefer non-Button perspectives to be added would be helpful (now only Noh is planned, but I may add brief moments from the ROs' perspectives in a later chapter).

Also, part of me just wonders if "The Ment" comes across as relentlessly corny. Not that I object to corny in my writing, but it's more reserved for Button than for Noh. Opinions would be greatly appreciated!

[Unity: U + Me](#)

[Jul 17, 2021](#)

July's 2nd short story! I wanted to it to be serious and insightful, but well . .

This happened.

Something is wrong with your best friend.

Sally didn't show up to Aeon today, and over the weekend her texts had become more and more curt. The last time you texted her, asking what she thought of your all-black outfit in a deliberate provocation, she'd only replied with "Looks nice!" Her approval of attire she would've customarily deemed "depressingly gothic," combined with the fact she was texting normally as opposed to in all CAPS, lead you to an inevitable conclusion: Sally had been body-snatched.

When Kim informed you that Sally had called in sick this morning, your suspicions were confirmed. It wasn't that Sally never got sick (she was human, after all), but rather that she usually refused to acknowledge it. The only logical supposition was therefore that Sally was no longer Sally, but rather an imposter.

Determined to unmask this intruder, your fist now slams on the front door of Sally's house. You hadn't texted in advance that you were dropping by, afraid that it might alert whomever had taken possession of Sally's body. In your non-knocking hand, you carry a grocery bag filled with tissues, Gatorade, and a sealed tupperware of Nick's chicken soup—just in case your best friend is genuinely sick.

The door creaks slowly open. Sally's face peeks outside, cheeks ashen and dark bags shadowing her red-rimmed hazel eyes.

"What are you doing here?" she croaks.

"Making sure you haven't been possessed," you answer, shouldering your way into the house. You examine her from top to bottom: her red curls escape her bun in sloppy disarray, and she's wearing a well-worn yellow bathrobe with a toothpaste stain down its front.

"What happened?" you ask, aghast. Sally usually takes pride in dressing up, even on days when you two lounge around the house doing nothing.

Sally laughs, but it quickly turns into a cough. "Just a cold."

"Sal, you look like Death with a capital D. All you need is a pale pony."

"I'm tall enough for a regular horse!"

"Not my point. You look *sick* sick*."*

"I had a minor fever," Sally concedes.

"How minor?"

Sally shrugs. "The doctor said I'd be fine at the hospital. I have meds."

"You were *hospitalized*? And you didn't call me?" A pang of hurt pierces your heart; after all this time, you'd deluded yourself into believing that Sally felt comfortable relying on you, felt that she was one of

the few people who treated you as simply “you” rather than someone needing protection. Were you wrong about your friendship?

“No!” Sally exclaims hastily as she senses your emotions. “I meant to call, I swear! But then, uh . . .” she trails off, her eyes guiltily downcast.

You cross your arms.

Sally sighs. “I keep dying because Gray doesn’t love me.”

* * * *

“It’s called *Unity: U + Me*,” Sally explains, stretching across the living room couch to pass you the Switch controller. On the wall-mounted TV, cherry blossom petals flutter over an anime depiction of Aeon Tower. Since when did Chicago have cherry blossom trees? “The original game was a charitable collaboration between Unity’s Tokyo branch and Pickaman Games, but the standalone was so successful that they made it into a series.”

You scour the depths of your memory. “Isn’t Pikaman the company that made that dating sim that went viral last year?”

Sally nods eagerly. “Yeah! Only in *Unity: U + Me*, the dateable characters are famous AMOs instead of cats.”

Wait. You vaguely recall Nick mentioning that he’d been asked to voice lines for a dating simulation, but you’d thought he’d been joking.

“This is an advanced copy,” Sally explains. “You play as a fictional member of UCRT called Love, and fight crime while romantically pursuing the other members.”

“Everyone on UCRT agreed to do this?” Nick’s cooperation makes sense, but you have a hard time imagining Grayson being comfortable with the idea of whispering sweet nothings into a mic. And Peace never even takes off her mask.

Sally shrugs. “The proceeds go to charity, and it’s good PR for Unity. Besides, it’s not like *U + Me*’s UCRT members are exact one-for-ones.”

She takes back the controller and pulls up the main screen, where a cast of anime men and women lounge in provocative poses and stare back at you from overlarge eyes. Despite Sally’s claims, you easily recognize the two intended to represent your brother and Gray. Gray’s eyes are purple, and his shirt is several sizes too small, but it’s definitely him.

Sally hovers the cursor over Gray. “This is Black Greenson,” she explains as the anime character whispers a sultry “*well hello there*” in Gray’s voice. She selects Nick. “And this is Nicola Smartkid. It’s

pretty obvious that the game's a fictionalized version of UCRT's real members, but their personalities are mostly tropes."

"*Together, we'll be undefeatable!*" Nick's voice chirps from the TV.

"Uh-huh." You're uncertain whether to be amused or horrified. "And you've been dying because Gray—because *Black—*doesn't love you?"

"His affection points are impossible to gain!" Sally huffs. "Most VNs have some sort of visual cue that you're making the right choice, but *U + Me* doesn't give any indication until you're already on one of the bad ending paths."

"Uh-huh," you repeat. "How'd you get ahold of this any way?"

"Glitch stole an advanced copy," she says. "We trade game recommendations." She waves a dismissive hand. "It's not important. What matters is that Gray won't love me!"

"You mean Black."

"Whatever." Sally waves a dismissive hand. "Look, I've done all the other routes, but can't unlock the True Ending until I get his last CG."

"Wait. Does this mean that you romanced Nick?"

"His route was easy," Sally replies. "Just click on all the answers involving cupcakes."

"So you—"

"Bestie, *please*." Sally clasps her hands together in a praying gesture. "Help me with the last route? I seriously can't figure out where I'm going wrong."

Curiosity compels you to agree. It takes Sally under a minute to blaze through the common route, using the skip function to pass over each character's sparkle-laden introduction.

"I've been playing this game for three days straight," she says darkly. "Getting on Black's route just requires offering him one of the cookies that Nicola makes for you."

"Uh . . . huh."

Finally, the words "Chapter 1" float over the character sprite for Gray—er, Black. Greenson?

"Now we're on his route," Sally announces. She plops the controller into your hands. "*Woo him.*"

* * * *

Nick was worried. It was already past midnight, and Button still hadn't returned home. Not that they had a curfew, but usually they called if they were going to be home this late. His mind longed to stretch beyond its resting range in search of his missing sibling, but he'd promised to be less . . . "hover-crafty" was the phrase Button had used. Which meant he needed to exercise restraint and call like a normal brother.

Button's phone rang five times before they finally picked up.

"What is it?" they snapped, sounding agitated.

"Just checking to see whether you'll be back tonight!" Nick said, doing his best to come across as cheerily unconcerned. They'd answered the phone, so at least they were still alive. And they were irritated at him, which meant that they were probably still themselves.

"No, I—" A cry of anguish cut off Button's words.

Nick frowned. "Was that Salome? Are you guys okay?"

"We're fine," Button said shortly. "Except Black won't love us."

"What—"

"I'm gonna sleep over at Sally's tonight. I'll talk to you later."

"Love you," Nick started to say, but they'd already hung up.

His next call was to Grayson.

"Hullo?" Grayson asked in a bleary voice. The man went to bed at 11pm sharp every night, so Nick's call had likely woken him up. Not that Nick was in any mood to care.

"Gray, I'm going to say this as polite and calm as possible," Nick said, "because you are my best friend and I trust you."

Gray yawned. "Is this important?"

"What the hell did you do to Button and Salome?"

"What?" Gray barked, suddenly awake. "Nothing!"

"Then why did I just get off the phone with Button who complained that you wouldn't love them?" Nick demanded. "Did you say something? Did you *do* something? What happened?"

"Don't be an arse," Gray shot back. "You know me."

"Which is why I'm so confused!"

"Tell me what they said. Exact words."

"I don't know!" Nick was becoming increasingly upset. He didn't like being kept in the dark—wasn't used to it. But Sally's house was outside his resting brainrange, and he'd promised to be less of a helicopter brother. Which meant, for the first time in his life, Button's thought process was a mystery to him.

"Button said that they were fine, except that you wouldn't love them."

"They said that?"

"We're fine,'" Nick quoted, trying to mimic Button's voice. "'Except Black won't love us.' Verbatim."

". . . Nick."

"What?"

"When has your sibling ever called me Black?"

"Never, but—"

"You're a moron. They're probably talking about that stupid game you convinced me to do. The one for charity, where my character is called . . ."

"Black Greenson," Nick realized, aghast and relieved. Of course Gray wouldn't have done anything awful. "But *U + Me* hasn't publicly released yet."

"You seriously think that would stop them from getting their hands on a version?"

"No," Nick conceded. "Do you think that they realized—"

"That Greenson's route is bugged?" Gray finished with another yawn. "Doesn't sound like it."

"Should I call Button back and let them know?"

"I don't give a damn, Nick. Just let me go back to sleep."

[Another Perspective Story: Smile](#)

[Jul 20, 2021](#)

Perspective: Nick's

Scene: Events leading up to Chapter 3's phone call. Button in this version has a bad relationship with Hope and John.

Sometimes, I wish that I were someone else.

It's a selfish, petty feeling that I've never admitted to anyone but Gray. I'm under no delusions that my life has been in any major way hard, especially compared to the discrimination that my parents faced and everything that my sibling now deals with. Being afraid to venture out in public because people will read your mind or worse control it? That's a genuine problem.

Me? The only danger I ever face is the kind I willingly throw myself into and get lucratively paid to put down. And even on the job, it's rare to come across any Ment that presents a genuine threat to *me*.

I know exactly how powerful I am.

Still. Sometimes, I feel stressed. And maybe a little weary. Weary of forcing a smile around the public, and even more tired of doing it around my own family.

Don't worry about Button, Dad, I lie when he reaches out telepathically. *I'm sure that they won't skip lunch with you.*

"Don't worry about me, Mom!" I lie to her over video chat. "Button sends their love."

Not to mention how I lie to Button every single time that I pretend not to be absolutely terrified whenever they leave the house alone.

I glance at my phone's clock. The cookie dough that I'm in the middle of mixing is almost ready; the oven is preheated and my timer set for twenty minutes. Dad and Button will be meeting in only a quarter hour, assuming Button doesn't cancel. Button's relationship with our parents can be . . . well, complicated is the nice term. "Shitshow" is the accurate one.

Maybe I should call Gray to ask how Button took his encouragement. Knowing Gray, I doubt he was subtle; Button must've picked up on the fact that I'd asked him to make sure that they went through meeting with Dad. Actually, scratch that. I'm giving Grayson way too much credit. He probably caved within two sentences and confessed everything. When he's not in Fortitude mode, that guy has zero ability at subterfuge.

Conclusion: I should definitely call Gray. To ask how Button is handling their first day at Aeon, if nothing else. Sure, I could stretch out my mind to try to pick up Button's thoughts, but deliberately overhearing them when they're not aware that I'm near is something I try to avoid when possible.

My palm stings as I slam it down on the countertop. Enough dithering. I'm Nicholas Freaking Wiseman, UCRT's Justice, twice winner of Aeon's "Most Awesome Ass" award, and Nicholas Wiseman does not dither. It's settled: I'm calling Gray.

. . .

. . .

. . . Except Gray can be annoyingly obtuse when it comes to Button, who's probably the most talented person I know at faking a smile (excepting perhaps myself). Plus, who knows how Button will react once Dad reveals that Mom's getting a BRS? Hell, I freaked out when they told me, and I consider myself to be the easygoing sibling. I possess beachbum levels of chill, or so I try to convince myself. But the idea of Mom giving up her telemetry is hard to handle, even if I get her motive.

If Button reacts half as poorly as I did, then I should probably be nearby. Just in case. If I call Gray, he'll only order me to quit being so damn overprotective, which always feels like he's criticizing me for caring. (I know the emotions aren't the same, but with Button it can be hard to untangle the two.)

I work at Aeon. It wouldn't be strange if I dropped by my workplace on my day off. That just makes me a workaholic. Besides, it's not like I don't think that Button can handle the BRS revelation by themselves; I just don't want them to be forced to. I want to be there if they need me. And if they don't end up needing me . . .

Welp, I'll just be that dude who randomly drops by the office on his day off. Not a reputation that I ever expected to gain, but there are worse roles. I could be that dude in the office that no one likes because he has a face that would curdle cream. I could be Clarence Garfield.

I turn off the oven and stash the bowl of batter in the fridge. Baking cookies can wait.

* * * *

Speak of the devil, and he'll be at the front desk. I groan as I catch sight of Garfield in the lobby. He's seated behind Aeon's main admin station, his arms crossed and face mottled even purpler than usual. Whoever sent him in a snit has both earned my respect and inadvertently made my life ten times more difficult. According to Unity protocol, I should let him in know that I'm vising UCRT today despite being off-duty.

I debate my next move for about half a second before sneaking straight around the corner and to the UCRT elevator. I'm already guaranteed to receive a lecture from Gray about respecting Button's boundaries—I simply don't have the *fortitude* to deal with Clarence as well. Heh.

After getting off the elevator at UCRT headquarters, I frown. Gray's nowhere in sight, which is odd since I figured he'd be holding down the fort in my absence. He would've let me know if UCRT was called out on a mission, right? Mandatory vacation or not, I'm still Justice. It's my duty to make sure everyone in the group makes it out alive and intact. Even if I haven't always been so successful at the job.

I meander over to Gray's desk, giving a small shudder at the way it looks out over a thousand-odd foot drop. I don't have a phobia of heights, just a healthy respect. Gray's insistence on locating his office area on a glass floor both bewilders and disturbs me. Especially because I'm ninety-two-percent

convinced that he *does* have a pretty severe fear of heights, given the way our first mission together went down.

There's no clue as to where Gray might've disappeared to, and I'm not sure whether to be relieved about staving off his lecture or disappointed that he's not here for me to commiserate with.

Wait. Is that my multicooker half hidden beneath the desk? What the hell, Grayson? I gave that to him decades ago, in hopes that he'd get his act together and learn how to cook a basic meal. I was young and idealistic back then.

. . . Is the implant safe, like Dad claims? Or is he telling you now so that you can prepare for the worst? The worst being— Nope, don't think about that. Shelve it to scream into your pillow later. What does this mean for your relationship with your mother? Can people stop being Ments? It's never worked before, but technology evolves. Why can't scientists try to fix your mind . . .

Button's panicked thoughts fill my mind, causing me to freeze midway from bending over to pick up the multicooker. Button becomes louder the more upset they get, and right now they're practically screaming within my head. I fumble for my phone, almost dropping it as I punch in their number.

It's a good thing that I came. As the phone rings, I force a smile onto my face. I read somewhere that people can hear when you smile over the phone.

"Hey, Button!" I say once they pick up. My gaze darts around the room, desperately seeking an excuse to explain why I'm calling, before settling on the multicooker. "I'm at UCRT Headquarters. Do you know where Gray stashed my Wolf Gourmet Multicooker?"

[Lady Death's Diary: Chapter 15](#)

[Jul 21, 2021](#)

"Happy seventeenth birthday, little sister!" Theo's voice boomed from directly below my uplifted chair. "Enjoy your present!"

Suddenly, there was music, a stream of it, all flowing through the doors. A flute player trilled a fast-paced melody. Three acrobats followed in her wake, leaping over delighted guests on nearby couches. Human waterfalls, silver and blue ribbons streaming from their costumes as they cartwheeled round the room before meeting in the center. They formed a human dais with their hands and together lifted the still-playing flautist up to my own elevated position.

She caught sight of my face, and played a wrong note.

No one noticed. Letty laughed and clapped her hands in rhythm, and Loren handed off his cake to Armond in order to join her. Soon the entire parlor was clapping in time to the music, all eyes directed towards me but unable to see my terror. I wanted to look down, to scream at Theo to stop, but to move was to plummet off my precarious perch.

The fluteplayer's eyes were sympathetic over her puffed out cheeks. Yet if she stopped playing, she risked ruining the performance and forfeiting her pay. Her jaunty tune continued, mocking my paralyzed terror.

I summoned just enough discipline so as to appear composed by the time Theo and Xander deposited my chair back onto the ground. The acrobats departed. The flautist moved to the corner, switching to slower compositions that gently blended with the sounds of conversation and laughter.

"Were you surprised?" asked Letty, bouncing in her seat. She and Theo shared expectant smiles, oblivious to my pale face and shallow breaths.

Xander, however, frowned. His brow furrowed with concern and he leaned down under the pretense of fixing the beak of Acouth's paper swan. He was just as tall as I remembered, perhaps a bit broader in the shoulders, and his freckles more pronounced after spending the summer in Anterdon's desert climate. "Not unpleasantly so, I hope," he murmured, his voice low enough to escape the other's ears.

"It caught me off guard," I replied, relieved to find my voice steadier than my hands. "How long have you three been planning this?"

"It was Letty's idea," said Theo. "She sent me a letter a few weeks back, concerned with how low your spirits had been and wanting to cheer you up. *She* told me about the fire." He glared at Xander then at me and then back.

Xander coughed into his fist and arched an eyebrow my way as if to say 'I told you so.'

I sighed. "I didn't want you to fret."

Theo pulled me from my seat and embraced me in a bearhug. "I deserve to worry," he said into the top of my head. "I'm your older brother."

I patted his back. He ignored the cue and squeezed me tighter.

"I'm fine now," I lied. "It occurred a long time back."

Theo released a puff of air through his nose. "Well, I only found out a few weeks ago. Letty wrote than you've seemed down ever since it happened. She said that most your books were destroyed."

"Please." I tutted. "It takes more than charred parchment to break my spirit. One trip to the bookstore, and I recovered in full. Xander even sent me a few new copies to add to my collection."

"Ah yes." Theo's glare returned. "Xander. *My best friend. Who knew.*"

I smacked his arm. "He asked me to inform you, and was respectful enough to give me opportunity to do so. Consideration is hardly a crime."

Theo clapped Xander on the back, though from the volume of the slap, his forgiveness would leave a bruise. "You're lucky that my sister is so persuasive. Note, she doesn't specify whether she actually intended to tell me."

"A born diplomat," said Xander, who had impressively refrained from wincing. "Why was she not the sibling sent to Lord Errans? Your sense of humor is liable to start a war."

Theo guffawed. "Uncle Al would agree, especially after the kilt incident. But Tru is too busy preparing to rule the country."

Loren rose from his seat. He grabbed my hand and pressed his lips to its back, too briefly to be called a kiss, before bowing to Theo and Letty. Xander, he ignored.

"If you'll excuse me," he said, "but I think I'll join Armond." Armond, along with all but a few lingering guests, had at Letty's encouragement followed the acrobats into the outside garden, where ribbon-wrapped poles had been set up for them to perform.

Although Theo and Letty had been the ones to arrange the exhibition, neither showed any desire to join Loren. Theo casually rested his elbows on the back of Letty's chair. He blew on the top of her head whenever there was a lull in our conversation, causing her to swat at him after each puff. Meanwhile, Xander slid into Loren's unoccupied seat, beneath the portrait of King Ignatius. The family connection wasn't immediately obvious like with Loren, but it was there, present in Xander's cheekbones and brow. I'd have to warn him to avoid the portrait gallery, unless he wanted others to realize the secret of his birth. Not that he knew that I had learned about his father. Perhaps I could send an anonymous note?

"How long are you in Bellcrest?" I felt oddly uncomfortable meeting Xander's gaze. He and I had parted little more than strangers, only to grow better acquainted through our letters. Should I treat him informally as my brother's friend? Call him by his title since he worked for Uncle Alistair? Or were first names fine, as we'd recently begun to use in our letters?

"Two weeks at most," he said, stretching out his legs. "Your uncle should be arriving within the next few days. Theo and I rode ahead of the cavalcade in order to make it here in time."

Theo groaned. "Now you can't keep a secret? Uncle Al's visit was to be a surprise!"

Xander's green eyes met mine for a prolonged second. "I think your sister is the type who would rather know what to expect. Besides," he turned his attention back to Theo, "I thought you hated secrets."

Theo pulled a face. “Only when they’re kept from *me*!”

Letty and I laughed. In that instant, I forgot. I forgot about the fire and Timons. That the girl smiling besides me was my enemy, even if she was being manipulated by someone else. Forgot that Loren didn’t love me and my mother hadn’t wanted me, and that my father would think me mad and declare war if I ever told him the truth. Forgot that I would never be able to climb to the top of a tower again and look at the stars without hyperventilating.

For the briefest moment, I forgot about death and simply enjoyed being alive.

“Your hypocrisy is endearing, brother,” I chuckled. “Really.”

Theo flashed an unrepentant grin. He held out his hand to Letty and nodded towards the center of the room, where several others who’d chosen to remain indoors had pushed aside the furniture and begun dancing to the flute’s slow melody.

“Shall we?” he asked.

Letty dimpled and allowed him to pull her towards the other dancers.

“I’d ask for a dance as well,” said Xander once they were out of earshot, “but I have something to give you.” He pulled a small book from his coat’s lining and handed it to me. He sounded self-conscious when he added, “I’m sorry it’s not wrapped.”

I looked at the title. “Yainharrow! I can’t believe you found a copy.”

“You mentioned that it was the only book you hadn’t been able to replace. It’s almost as if booksellers don’t believe people will be interested in the difference between a pre-Empyrin Fengali squat hut and a post-Noratin mud house.”

I gaped at him. “Don’t tell me you *read* it?” Even I hadn’t gotten past the first chapter, and had indeed chosen it as the shell for my death diary because of its incredible dullness.

Xander grinned. “No. But now I know you haven’t either, since everything I just said was entirely made up.”

I laughed again. Forgot, again. “All the other authors in my library, I swear I’ve read. But Yainharrow is —”

“Boring,” finished Xander. “Agreed. I don’t suppose you had time to read the latest tract I sent you? It’s more interesting than post-Noratin mud houses, I assure you.”

“Which you just admitted don’t exist.” I smiled at him. “I read the pamphlet. You must have departed before my last letter arrived. Truthfully, I can’t decide whether Anterdon’s new policy is brilliant or insane. Legalizing piracy for crews that go after Fengali vessels provides extra protection for their own

merchants, but it's only a matter of time before Fengal catches on and instructs their fleet to run different flags."

Despite my familiarity with the subject, I began to feel painfully self-aware under Xander's gaze. Why had I ever allowed Emilia to talk me into wearing this gown? I no doubt looked ridiculous, like a child playing dress up. "My written argument was much more eloquent, of course," I continued. "In the end, it will only exacerbate tensions between the two countries."

"Only if Fengal can prove that Anterdon has been granting clemency to those captains targeting their ships," rebutted Xander. "Which is difficult to prove given that—"

"Given that the pirates sink the evidence."

He smiled at my quick grasp of his point. "Exactly. Employing privateers is morally ambiguous at best and ethically corrupt at the worst. Nevertheless . . ." He paused, staring at me as if trying to decide something important. His unabashed perusal made me itch. Eventually he nodded, having reached some internal decision.

"Nevertheless," he continued, "the King has asked for my opinion on whether to adopt a similar policy, given Fengal recently sunk three Verdan merchant ships." His lips tightened. "They claim they mistook the ships for Anterdonian, but all three targets were transporting exceptionally valuable goods. His Majesty believes that Fengal's military has found a new way to finance their aggression, and that privateers might provide a deterrent."

"King Eldin asked you?" I repeated dumbly.

A faint smirk tempted his lips upwards. "That would be our monarch, yes."

As well as Xander's father. I hadn't been aware that the two had any ongoing relationship to speak of—although given Delphine's continued romance with the King, such a bond made sense. Still, Xander's willingness to disclose that connection with me seemed to indicate I'd earned more of his trust than I'd realized.

I mulled over his proposal before responding. "Fengal is primarily a naval power," I finally stated. "Their fleet dwarfs both Anterdon's and our own. Anterdon can risk targeting their ships, since they're already at war and have nothing to lose. But Verdan is allied with both countries, at least nominally. Rather than threaten that peace with outright aggression, wouldn't it be better to enter into an arrangement with Anterdon where we provide them with . . . let's call it a *gift* for any Verdan vessel their paid privateers defend?"

Xander took time to process my argument, leaning back in his seat and closing his eyes. I seized the opportunity to study his face. He wasn't as handsome as Loren, but he was easily better formed than most the men in court. His lashes were dark and surprisingly lush, his nose straight if just the tiniest bit too long. I was inexplicably glad to see that his dusting of freckles fell across his cheekbones exactly as I recalled. I averted my gaze when he reopened his eyes.

"Your conclusion more or less mirrors my own." He looked away. "You'll make a wise queen."

I didn't respond. There was nothing to say.

He stood up and held out a hand, nodding towards the dancing. "Should we join them?"

More than anything, I wanted to nod. I deeply, desperately wanted to take Xander's hand and proceed to dance the night away until I forgot I most likely had less than a year left to live. I could forget: I'd proven that tonight. My hand hovered in the air above his. We were on the precipice of . . . well, of something. I didn't know what. But if I accepted, some intangible thing between us would shift.

I wanted to say yes.

"I can't." My hand, suddenly leaden, dropped back into my lap. "I need to find Councilor Timons."

My effectiveness finding Timons was impeded by what seemed to be every member of Bellcrest's court under twenty-five, whom, spotting me separated from my family herd, pounced on the opportunity to corner me with their well-wishes. Several attempted to commiserate about my "stepsister's shameless behavior." I feigned cluelessness and scolded their audacity in implying such an obvious fabrication. I may have been lying, but I lied with enough conviction that the rumormongers eventually scattered with expressions that were half-cowed by my reprimand and half-confused by my apparent cluelessness.

After I managed to escape, I recruited several servants to help me locate the erstwhile Councilor. Without needing to search, and in the eerily presentient way of well-trained staff (no doubt, Emilia had not been as tight-lipped as I had hoped), they pointed me to one of the balconies, where Timons stood by himself overlooking the garden. His hands were clasped behind his back as he watched performance below. He bowed curtly upon as I joined him, his manner as brusque at a social event as it was during Council meetings.

"Happy birthday, Lady Vitrula."

"Councilor Timons. You have no interest in joining the crowds?"

Timons graced me with a subdued smile. The moonlight cast his bony features in shadow, giving his hollow cheeks a macabrely skeletal slant. "You also seem to be refraining from the festivities despite this being a party in your honor."

My laugh sounded strained even to my own ears. "I prefer quieter gatherings, I suppose."

He inclined his head. "In that way, my lady, we are much alike. I, however, may seek solitude at my discretion. You will not have the same luxury, once Crown Princess."

His words gave the opening I needed to begin my interrogation. "*Remo*," I muttered.

"Excuse me?" asked Timons. His hooded eyelids drooped even further and his jaw worked back and forth as he fought off a sudden yawn.

I faked a cough to cover up the spell I'd just cast. "A mild cold," I brushed off his concern. It had taken me ten months to corner Timons, and someone would undoubtedly come looking for me if I stayed away too long. "Would you trade your anonymity for the throne then?" No time for oblique references and hidden meanings. Timons might be dismayed by my candor after the spell wore off but by then I would've learned all I needed. Ideally, without being caught—enchanted a government official was hardly legal, even for a future princess. At best, King Eldin would only cancel my engagement to Loren. At worse, the Council would order that I revisit the guillotine.

"I haven't thought of it." Timons' words emerged slow and ponderous, as if weighted down by his unwillingness to be forthcoming.

I stared at him intently, searching for any sign of subterfuge. He fidgeted under the scrutiny.

"I haven't thought of it much," he amended.

Thank the Triad. As with Emilia, the spell had successfully decayed his ability to lie. "Much?" I pressed. "You have considered it, then."

Timons rolled his neck with an audible crack. Under the influence of the spell, his self-control frayed enough that he could no longer suppress a large yawn. "Every Councilor has considered it," he admitted. "What we would do if we controlled it all. But I am loyal to His Majesty."

"Are you loyal to me?"

Timons' head dipped down in a nod, though he struggled finding the energy required to lift it back up. He yawned again. "I dislike your father."

To be fair, my own fondness for the man was tenuous at best. Still, he hadn't answered my question. "I'm not my father, Timons. Do I have your loyalty?"

"You are not your father." His words were beginning to slur, and he grasped the balcony railing with both hands as if to prevent himself from toppling over its side.

A low growl of frustration escaped my throat. Patient prodding was getting me nowhere. I leaned in closer, until our noses almost touched and I could smell the coffee on his breath. "Did you set the fire?" I demanded. "*Did you try to kill me?*"

Timons recoiled. His mouth opened and shut. With visible effort, he let go of the banister and drew himself upright. "You are His Highness's intended," he said. "I would *never* harm the royal family."

I evaluated him through narrowed eyes. His shoulders swayed slightly from side to side but he was obviously trying to fight against the lethargy caused by my spell. Despite being barely able to close his

mouth, he was nonetheless making a valiant effort setting his jaw at a haughty angle. Our eyes locked, his glare unflinching but for a few drowsy blinks.

He was affronted that I had questioned his loyalty. Enraged even, despite his sluggish countenance. And no one could act that well when rendered magically vulnerable.

Curses. Timons was innocent.

I headed back to the parlor, only vaguely aware of the celebrations taking place around me. My mind felt shrouded by a heavy fog; my eyes grew dry from forgetting to blink.

Timons wasn't Letty's accomplice.

I'd wasted time and resources tracking the man's every move. I knew his favorite meals and when he ate them. Could recite the trajectory of his political career, beginning with his appointment as Wrenly's second secretary, back when the Council's leader had sat at the Table of Coin, which approved all laws related to trade and managed Verdan's treasury. Timons had taken Wrenly's seat after he had been promoted, before eventually ascending to the Table of Law alongside him. All evidence had pointed towards Timons being loyal—he had never embezzled nor voiced any discontent with the Crown.

Yet I had convinced myself that there must be something I'd missed. Because if there wasn't and Timons were as law-abiding as he appeared, then I'd wasted several months of my increasingly short life.

An impact hit my shoulder. I mumbled an apology to the austere matron I'd run into, whose offended sneer morphed into a toothy smile once she realized my identity. I knew her face, deep wrinkles evident beneath a heavy layer of paint, but couldn't remember her name. What if *she* were part of Letty's plot? Perhaps it had been her footsteps I had heard. Perhaps there had been no footsteps at all. What if the entire night had been a delusion?

Hells, what if everything was a delusion? What if my journal was filled with the ramblings of a madwoman and I had never died at all and Letty was innocent and . . .

No.

The fire had been real. My memories, real. This was not an unfamiliar spiral, and I refused to capitulate to doubt. Not now, not ever.

I was Lady Vitrola Marianne Rhys, daughter of the Duke of Kothe. Betrothed to His Royal Highness. Apprentice to the Court Sorceress. Future Queen of Verdan.

And I was *not* insane.

I steadied myself with a deep breath and refocused on the noblewoman I'd crashed into, who had launched into an impassioned monologue on the health benefits of volcanic bath salts. Having calmed down, I could recall her name.

"Please excuse me, Lady Geneva." I smiled politely. "But I truly don't care."

The Countess's open-mouthed shock was amusingly fishlike. I dipped a curtsy before beelining towards where I had abandoned Xander. If I had only a year left to live, I would might as well dance with whoever I desired.

"Pardon me, m'lady." A maid stopped me before I could reach the other side of the room.

"Can I help you?" I tilted my head, trying to catch site of Xander from over her shoulder. His chair was vacant but I caught a glimpse of red hair through the crush of people dancing. It disappeared, before reemerging next to lower blonde head.

Letty. He was dancing with Letty.

I inhaled sharply, my pained hiss causing the maid to start. Her hands twisted her apron nervously and her eyes darted around the room. I frowned at her, annoyed that she'd witnessed my displeasure. My jealousy? Best not to contemplate my reaction too deeply.

"Out with it, girl," I snapped, "and stop looking as if I'm about to order you beheaded."

Her eyes widened. In retrospect, that morbid joke had probably only been funny to me. Context and all that. "They said to fetch you m'lady."

"Who did?" I prodded, bestowing what I hoped passed for a reassuring smile. The girl was trembling like a hare in a trap, as if she genuinely believed I'd call for her execution.

"Steward Hamen," she squeaked. "His daughter—that is, your maid. She's been poisoned."

[Writer's Blog: How To Build A Clarebear](#)

[Jul 23, 2021](#)

Demo Word Count: 357k

I admit, most of what I've learned in college has faded. I was a night-before crammer, which means that while I did well on tests, I retained knowledge very little after that do-or-die test period hour. Technically, sure, I majored in Creative Writing. But I would argue that I spent the next years recovering my naturally irreverent style after my professors attempted to drill into my head that Writing was a Very Serious Art

meant to Examine the Human Condition (and yes, my use of capitalization on that last bit is completely at random).

Even when learning about writing almost made me hate writing, however, I've always wanted to tell stories. Some authors claim that writing is "necessary" to them, and that they "write for themselves"—these people are true artists, for whom I harbor immense respect and awe. I'm not like that. I write because I want to share a story.

Writing is *hard*. Closing my eyes and imagining what will be written? That's fun! So much fun! Imagining is the best! But actually putting words on a page and then editing? Not always as easy.

Writing a large work becomes easier, however, when instead of forcing characters to behave a certain way, I allow them to write themselves. My mom (an engineer) always gets confused when I talk about this.

"What do you mean 'he decided' to turn evil?" she'll demand. "He's in your head. You get to direct his actions."

One of the biggest issues with some of my earlier work is that I agreed with her: I thought that my characters were mine to direct. And, okay, fine, technically this is still true. I can reign in their behavior, and I'm not claiming to ascend to some spiritual realm where the will of the character is channeled through my fingertips as I meditate before a keyboard (although I've read some authors so good that I'd swear this must be what happens). What I really mean is that, instead of looking at each character as a portrait painted by yours truly, I view them as jigsaw puzzles where I only paint the pieces.

I don't always know how those pieces will fit together within the larger picture (aka plot). But, unlike with a blank canvas, precut pieces will only show one true image—put the pieces together wrong, and the puzzle will look warped and bumpy. It's my job as the writer to figure out the best possible image.

I may have lost the metaphor a bit here as I've ran out of caffeine and am thus prone to tangents. I had another metaphor planned involving marbles and physics as well, but an example will probably work better. So, let's make an example out of Clarence.

How many puzzle pieces a new character gets depends on how important they are to the overall story, and how often they'll appear. Usually, I'll take a personality quiz for each major character, write side stories dedicated to them, and create complex backgrounds and past relationships. Clarence didn't get any of that. He's a side character. Other than his general personality, his jigsaw only needed the three most basic pieces: what he wants, why he wants it, and how he's going to get it. Desire creates action, so in order to figure out how Clarence will behave I first needed to know his deepest (darkest?) desires. This all sounds like a late-night phone hotline ad but bear with me.

Since Clarence is a side character, I didn't initially bother giving that much depth to his base needs. He wants power. Why does he want it? Because he thinks that he deserves it. How is he going to get it? By intimidating those with less authority.

They're all extremely simple answers, but the combination is enough to give Clarence a distinct personality. I know that Clarence is a coward and a bully since he only challenges those beneath him. I know that he thinks that people (or at least, he) should get what they deserve, which means he's also an idealist. "Bully" and "Idealist" seem like conflicting character traits, which means that Clarence was probably disillusioned somewhere along the way. What could've disillusioned him? Probably not getting something that he wanted or expected. Add in the evidence of his administrative job within *Mind Blind's* world, and that probably means he wanted to be a Ment but isn't one. But if he ever thought he had a chance at having powers, that likely means that people in his family are Ments and that he himself has a relatively high Pollard Score.

Ergo, Clarence is now a Pollard Five who dreamed of being a superhero as a kid since one of his parents was a Ment, only to have his dreams crushed by just barely missing the bar. He's not an MIV, either, which would be the next natural job choice, so he probably failed the ASE. Clarence isn't as smart as he thinks he is, and deep down he's afraid of admitting it. Because if he admits it, then he's at risk of also acknowledging that, according to his ideals, he doesn't deserve the very thing that he wishes for. Which is power. (It all comes back to the Big Want.)

This is why Clarence acts like a jerk to Button, and is so upset about them joining Unity. Every single question about Clarence (his background, what he would do in a given situation, etc.) can be answered simply by making a conclusion based off what information I already know about him.

It rarely feels like I'm "making up" these details beyond the three original components. Rather, I'm solving how they best fit together within the story's premise. Sometimes pieces fit differently than I'd anticipated, which is why I often feel that it's the characters, and not me, who are making the decisions.

It's the logic of creativity.

[Sally Saucy Side: Laying Siege](#)

[Jul 25, 2021](#)

You stand at the front door of your new townhouse. Sally's dads sold you the renovated home at cost, claiming that the month they spent rebuilding the place was their wedding gift to you two. It's your first day after moving in, but your wife is nowhere in sight despite her bicycle chained to the stand outside.

"Sally?" you call down the hallway.

A faint, familiar giggle replies, quickly cut short as if by hands being clasped over a mouth. You follow in its direction until the hallway ends. Where is she? Your house is by no means a mansion, but it's big enough that searching room by room would be a hassle. You poke your head into the living room and let out a gasp: the room looks ransacked, its couch stripped bare of all its cushions and decorative throw

pillows. If it weren't for the television and your computer still being there, you would've suspected a robbery.

What is Sally up to?

You scan for clues—a cracked-open door, another stifled giggle, anything really—until you spot a pair of stockings knotted around the foot of the stairwell banister. Bemused, you head up to the second floor, swooping down as you go to retrieve an unzipped skirt from the middle step.

From there, you follow Sally's trail of breadcrumbs: her jacket lies at the top of the staircase, its sleeves arranged so that they point down the hall. A few steps later, her shirt awaits outside the door of her art room. You enter.

Half-painted canvases have been pushed to the room's perimeter to clear space in the middle. Sun from the skylight above, installed so Sally could have natural light to paint by, spotlights a pillow fort. Every single pillow in the house has been carefully piled atop one another in brick-like formation from largest to smallest; you recognize the missing living room cushions, the pillows off your bed, and even the padding from Schrodinger's cat bed fortifying one corner. A faded, daisy-print bedsheet serves as the roof.

"How long did this take?" you ask.

"The castle is under siege, Schrodinger!" Sally's cry is muffled from within the pillow fort. "Attack!"

As soon as she issues the command, Schrodinger darts out from a narrow gap between the cushions. The white cat pauses to twine himself affectionately between your legs, briefly permitting you to pet his head. Then he gives one last disgruntled glare at the "castle," hisses, and flees the room before Sally can recapture him.

"Your troops fled the battlefield," you inform Sally.

"Noooooooooooo!" she cries theatrically. The fortress walls shake, and you hear her curse under her breath. "Wait one moment," she says.

After a minute, the fortress stops wobbling, and the green handle of a Swifter emerges from beneath the bedsheet roof. A lacy pink bra is tied to its end.

"Is that your white flag?" you ask.

"Whites are in the laundry," Sally retorts. "But this *is* my favorite bra."

Your mouth goes dry as you realize that her last piece of clothing has just officially been surrendered.

"How do I join you?"

"Entrance is around the back," Sally says.

You circle the pillow fort to find an opening so small that you're forced to drop onto the ground and elbow-crawl your way through. It's awkward, but doesn't diminish your anticipation. Inside the fort is surprisingly spacious, with enough room for you to sit upright.

Sally awaits, clutching a blanket around her that falls to reveal a freckled shoulder. She bites her bottom lip, eyes downcast with embarrassment that's completely at odds from her former bravado.

"I, um, was trying to be sexy," she admits softly. "Schrodinger was only in here with me because I worried that he'd knock over the fort if I let him run free."

You smile, your hands reaching out to gently lower her blanket further. "You're always sexy," you inform her. "Trying isn't necessary."

She laughs. "Well, that's a relief."

Later, you lie in each other's arms, the fort still (barely) intact but its blanket roof pulled down to allow you both to stare up at the night sky. The moon is a gold sliver, bright enough that you can make out Sally's smile in the dark.

"I love you," she says, snuggling closer. "I'm glad that we both surrendered."

[Chapter 12 Update: The Intervention](#)

[Jul 28, 2021](#)

Demo Length: 340k

Average Playthrough: 87k

Notes:

First off: it's only half of Chapter 12 (which turned out to be a BEAST of 43,000 words total), with the rest coming later this week. I reworked the intervention scene after having a therapist friend read it over and give feedback. Basically, my first draft more resembled an addiction intervention as seen on TV, where everyone gangs up and yells "WE CARE ABOUT YOU" at the target. After research and feedback, however, I've learned that mental health interventions are best done a little differently. Ideally by a professional.

Also, Nick can't stop making inappropriate jokes because he's coping with his own baggage right now, so there needed to be a more mature third party.

Originally, the intervention happened during the same night as Vengeance's party. I think I ironed out all the looping bugs that happened from taking it out, but please let me know if there any that residually remain.

Since I still want to emphasize that Button has supportive friends, however, I'm changing it so that Button still goes on the date with either their RO or chosen friend after meeting with Sohvi (who is a newly added after my friend's feedback). The date scenes will be different depending on how Button's meeting with Sohvi went, and requires a lot of new coding that I'm not quite done with yet (but should be out in a week or so). These date scenes are when most the romances fully finalize and discussions are had--basically a little interlude before shit hits the fan in the last 4th of Chapter 12 (which you can get a little sneak peak of if you keep clicking past the "Under Construction" image).

Getting feedback on the mental health intervention is important for me, since it's my way of making sure that Button has a parachute and I want to make sure that it works. Thus, it currently triggers for all Buttons. So if the game is acting like your Button is depressed, yet you have an Acceptance score of 99% and play as happy-go-lucky jokester . . . this is why. After the next update, however, this scene only occur if your "depressed" stat is over 12 (of a possible 22), and even then you have the option to tell Sohvi that she misdiagnosed your mood.

Also on my to-do list: find song quotes for Chapters 11 and 12. I've pretty much exhausted my lyrical knowledge after running out of Sound of Silence lyrics.

AND FINALLY, THE LINK:

<https://dashingdon.com/play/wildelight/project-geode/mygame/>

[Aeon Student Guide: Precognition](#)

[Jul 29, 2021](#)

Precogs make up almost 1% of all Ments, or 0.01% of the general population, and have the ability to predict the future with near total accuracy.

Precognition relies on the processing and analysis of data by the Precog's subconscious mind. Visions are uncontrollable and usually limited to disasters, most of which turn out to be unavoidable. Thus, precognition does not so much allow people to avoid calamity as give them an opportunity to begin

preparations earlier and thus reduce fallout—an immeasurable boon to early agrarian societies that faced setbacks such as crop failure and flooding.

Geneticists believe that precognition was the first psychic manifestation to evolve, and that those possessing the ability were frequently revered as godlike figures throughout prehistory. As centralized empires and kingdoms began to form, Precognitives began to be more frequently viewed as undesirable challengers whom commoners considered to be “blessed by the gods” and thus undermined the proposed divinity of the emperor or king (see index: *Khufu reliefs*, *Hadrian’s Villa*). By the first and second century C.E., Precogs faced severe persecution and stigma alongside Telepaths, Telemetrists, and Telekinetics.

The closer a Precog emotionally feels to the subject of their vision, the less likely it is that the vision will come to fruition. However, Precogs tend to have visions about those closest to them, usually foreseeing moments when their lives are in danger. One theory for the uncertainty of these particular predictions is that the vision itself introduces a new variable into the mental math work, thus diminishing the odds of the vision occurring. An opposing school of thought theorizes that the introduction of bias into the calculations results in a skewed prediction. It is unknown which theory, if either, is correct, but the fact remains that predictions about individuals with whom a Precog is close decreases the accuracy rate from 99.9% to merely 80%.

The more information a Precog has access to, the more threats their brain is accurately able to predict. With the advent of the internet and age of shared information, many Precogs find themselves overwhelmed by the volume of their predictive visions. Today, many Precogs use meditation or, in rare cases of Level 10 Precogs, prescription sedatives help to reduce their exposure to visions. Others end up living “off the grid” to limit their knowledge of the outside world and subsequently stop most their prophecies.

For those who choose to embrace their abilities, precognitive employees are sought after by private security firms and governmental agencies, and consistently rank as having the highest-paid careers of all Ment types—both due to the rarity of their ability, and because of the overall usefulness of threat assessment. At Unity, Precog AMOs are invaluable team members whose visions often determine mission success.

[July Q&A](#)

[Jul 30, 2021](#)

The first Sanctum Q&A will be tomorrow **(Saturday, July 31st) at 9am PST.**

The second will also be on Saturday, but at one of the three given timeslots based on your votes. I'm trying to make sure there's one in the morning and one in the evening so that everyone can make it regardless of time zone. Also note that one of the sessions will be recorded per usual if you can't make it, although which one depends on how cooperative Craigbot feels like being (he's fickle).

Please vote for the second July 31st timeslot:

6pm - 7pm PST

7pm - 8pm PST

8pm - 9pm PST

21 votes total

[Writer's Blog: Creating a Safe Space for Anonymous Feedback Without Involving Johnbob Doesmith](#)

[Jul 30, 2021](#)

I'm dealing with an inner ear infection that has thrown off my balance and left the world pleasantly spinny, so I'm going to keep this blog post short(ish) and then go and curl up with the newly-released game *Bustafellows* in bed. (One of the best things about writing IF is that I can technically claim that playing a romantic visual novel qualifies as, ahem, "field research for gaming development.")

First off: Hope and John's interview will be posted tomorrow, so you all have until 7am Chicago Time when I wake up to add any last-minute questions (the "meat" of the interview is completely written, but I could use some more lighthearted questions to help facilitate transitions). There's been a learning curve to writing an interview with three people, as the flow from one topic to the next can't rely as heavily on back-and-forth banter and jokes.

Second order of business: I'm announcing a new way for Patrons to provide anonymous feedback on *Mind Blind*'s demo via Mindblindbetatest@gmail.com (which is also the email I'll be using once I get official beta testing rolling).

For now, though, this email is specifically designated so that people can anonymously provide higher-level feedback on sensitive topics. Bug/Typo reporting is best done either via discord or Tumblr.

The reasoning for this email address: I'll be blunt and admit in that the prospect having conversations about any semi-serious issue on Tumblr terrifies me. I'm much less guarded here on Patreon, but Tumblr is The Wild West. Prior to posting *Mind Blind*, I didn't have any social media accounts, and it all

often still feels very overwhelming. Some anon messages that I've received on Tumblr have been hard to mentally bounce back from (no, random stranger whom delights in messaging me vitriolic hate mail twice weekly, the inclusion of Rosy's romance does not make me a predator who should be fired from teaching kids).

Please don't get me wrong! 99.9999% people who reach out are wonderful and delightful and incredibly kind and I love interacting with them, but the internet is still . . . well, it's The Internet. Podium Users exist.

In recent months, I've considered blocking anonymous comments on Tumblr due to a few (unfortunately persistent) meanie-pants, but I also receive a lot of well-thought-out feedback from readers who didn't want their usernames to be public (presumably for some of the same reasons I try to be careful about what gets posted). I really want to be able to read these criticisms, especially when they point out potential gaps in my knowledge. Sometimes, I have follow-up questions to anonymous feedback that unfortunately I can't ask without publicizing the entire conversation. I want to learn and do better, or at least fully understand the issue to make an informed decision, even if my viewpoint ultimately diverges. But I'd rather the conversation be one-on-one.

Not because I plan on acting like a jerkity jerk behind closed doors and want to trap you in my evil lair while pretending that I'm perfect in public, but because it's less stressful and more productive for me to ask questions in a conversation where I and the other person can give each other the benefit of the doubt without worrying about Johnbob Doesmith the Internet Troll deliberately misinterpreting our words and spewing hate into my inbox. Because I simply don't have the capacity to deal with any more of that. Unfortunately, it only takes one person being relentlessly ugly to negatively impact my headspace—and "headspace" is super important when working on a creative project. Logically, I know that internet trolls shouldn't be taken seriously, but emotionally some comments take their toll.

Unfortunately, whereas I can privately respond to messages with names, anonymous messages sent via Tumblr don't allow me to ask you follow-up questions outside the public spotlight. All this means that if you send me anonymous feedback and it's about a deeper-than-Deep-Dish topic, I likely won't publicly respond. Not responding is a lose-lose situation, though, as you may believe that your helpful opinion is being ignored (it's not), and I'm unable to request clarification. While my DMs are always open, I understand that not everyone will feel comfortable disclosing their online identity in order to provide feedback, especially when it comes to sensitive topics that risk revealing personal details.

Mindblindbetatest@gmail.com is my attempt to fix this issue, since it allows Patrons to reach out via a burner email address and share feedback that they're not comfortable attaching their names too and allowing me to ask for any follow-up questions. My hope is that it provides a safe space for you guys to anonymously reach out, while also protecting me from having to deal with trolls like Johnbob Doesmith (which is what I've named my "I'm going to report you to Child Protective Services" anon).

. . . Well, this post didn't end up being all that short. I also may have overshared, for which I'm blaming the ear infection.

[Live Q&A Reminder](#)

[Jul 31, 2021](#)

Just posting a quick reminder that today's second Q&A will be **6pm-7pm PST**. It will not be recorded, as my tongue tends to slip when it's later on in the day and Craigbot thankfully already recorded the first slot.

The first session can be listened to at:

<https://craig.horse/?id=420306863&key=294134728>

[Monthly Interview: Meet the Wisemans](#)

[Jul 31, 2021](#)

A spotlight shines on Nicholas Wiseman, wearing a formal suit and with his hair neater than usual. He sits on the edge of his seat with rigidly correct posture, staring at the two empty seats in front of him.

He clears his throat and addresses the camera with a stiff smile.

Nick: Greetings all, and welcome to today's behind the scenes interview! This evening, we'll be interviewing two legendary UCRT Members who also happen to be two of my favorite people. Let's hear a welcoming round of applause for . . . Hope and John Wiseman!

John and Hope enter onto the stage, taking their seats. Hope's gaze warms as she takes in Nick's appearance, and his smile relaxes under her approving scrutiny.

Nick: Also known as my mom and dad. Glad to have you two on the show!

John: Glad to be back.

Hope waves quietly at the camera. She shifts in her seat, nervous how the audience will respond to her presence, and John lays his hand on her knee.

Nick: Hope and John Wiseman—man, do I feel cheeky calling my parents by their first name—helped to found Unity, and both were the very first leaders of UCRT. So tell me, why did you both decide to join the military?

John: It paid for college. Hoo-rah!

Hope: I started out as a translator, and ended up being assigned as an aide to the UN's Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development in NYC. When the question of using designated Ment taskforces in UN allied troops arose during the Korean Reunification, they sent me to help oversee the integration since I was one of the few Ments in UN employ.

John: Korean is also one of the *seven* languages that she speaks. They didn't choose her just because she was a Ment!

Hope: Really, John. They mostly chose me because I was a Ment.

Nick: Dad, you were one of the first to push for exclusively Ment units. Was there a specific event that made you feel like there should be Ment-only taskforces?

John: Almost all North Korean leadership had some form of mental agility, especially the ones highest on the pecking order. It was one of the reasons that desertion was so rare despite the god-awful conditions that their troops were under. What soldiers did seek refuge were mostly Ments who'd hidden their abilities and thus been able to resist their commander's empathic order for unwavering loyalty.

Nick: That made Ment-only taskforces essential?

John: The Korean Reunification wasn't like other wars. After my first encounter, I realized that these guys would fight to the death, because they literally weren't allowed to even contemplate surrender.

Hope: Telepathic coercion was also why so many of our captured troops ended up "switching sides." Sleep deprivation and starvation makes a brain incredibly susceptible to psychic suggestion, and after the first few months of fighting, North Korean forces began to kidnap and brainwipe South Korean soldiers in order to replenish their ranks. They only left allied troops alone because of the language barrier.

John: It was a level of Ment crime that the modern world had never seen. I may not've been able to convince an enemy combatant to drop their gun, but I was at least able to shove their leader's voice out of their heads long enough for them to have the choice to do so. My Norm buddies didn't have that option—they could either shoot an enemy who didn't have full control of himself, possibly a brainwashed man they'd fought beside in the past, or be shot themselves.

Hope: I also grew concerned with the international lash back that the Ment community was bound to face world-wide after it came to light how powers were being used. Creating a Ment taskforce to directly fight against the crimes of other Ments at least meant proving to the public that our powers could also be used to protect.

Nick: After the Reunification, Unity was founded as an organization for Ments to combat Ment crime. What was the best part of being on UCRT?

John: Being on UCRT was so much better than being a soldier. The missions became about saving people instead of just seizing territory goals.

Hope: Agreed. Ments weren't allowed to join American law enforcement back then, but Unity gave us a way to help. I was able to use my telemetry to locate missing persons.

She smiles in fond reminiscence.

Hope: Seeing a kid returned to their family was always the best part.

Nick: What was the worst thing about being on UCRT?

John, snorting: Politics.

Hope shoots her husband a disapproving frown. She chooses her words carefully.

Hope: It often took . . . time for different parties to agree on whom was in charge of what. In the beginning, we were often prevented from helping by local governments that still had anti-Ment regulations. By the time they agreed to let us in, it was often too late.

Nick: That's not a problem so much anymore. If anything, governments now no longer want to deal with Ment criminals at all without our help.

John: I'm not admitting that I'm old . . . but a lot has changed in the past twenty-five years.

Hope: Agreed.

Nick: Unity's changed as well. How do you two feel about the NPO Program?

John, bluntly: It's a bad idea.

Hope elbows John in the ribs, then gives the camera a practiced smile.

Hope: My husband worries that public will see the success of the NPO Program as proof that Unity isn't needed in the first place, since anyone can theoretically be trained to combat Ments.

John: Which they can be, but with much higher mortality rate than when a Ment goes up against a another Ment. The sides aren't equally armed.

Hope: I for one have always argued that the MIV/AMO division wasn't as pragmatic as it could be. Precognitives and Telemetrists like myself would frequently serve better as strategists collecting information, while people with a Pollard Score of 5 are resistant enough to face down most Ments. UCRT members might always need to be Ments given the psychic strength of those they face, but Unity at large could benefit from . . .

John: Honey, Nick gets it.

Hope: Yes. Well. It's why I recommended Adsila hire personnel who shared my sentiments.

Nick, groaning: Thanks for that by the way.

Hope: Kim is an excellent strategist, and one of the most skilled combatants I've ever witnessed.

Nick: I'm just saying, I figured that my mom would've stopped picking out my babysitter after I turned twenty.

Hope: I didn't hire you a babysitter. Adsila asked for a recommendation, and I gave Kim's name.

Nick, sarcastically: Again, thanks for that. Let's move onto more pleasant topics than A-Is-for-Asshole Kim.

Hope: Language. You're on air.

Nick, automatically: Yes, ma'am.

Nick shuffles through the cards in his hands before grinning impishly.

Nick: You know, I think that the audience deserves to hear the story of your first unofficial date.

John groans. Hope laughs.

Hope: John tried to be romantic. He planned a surprise picnic.

John: Except we were stationed in a warzone.

Hope: He had to improvise with rations from the canteen, so he . . .

Nick, in a manner of one having heard this story a hundred times: He shaped the spam into little pink hearts and jabbed them through with toothpicks.

John, defensively: The toothpicks were supposed represent arrows.

Hope kisses his cheek.

Hope: I, for one, thought they were adorable.

John: She told the whole troop about it.

Hope: I only told Giselle.

John: Who then told the rest of our troop. It was traumatic.

Hope, chuckling: They called him "Sir Spamalot" for the rest of deployment.

Nick: Mom, are you familiar with the term “himbo”?

Hope: I’m more surprised that *you’re* familiar with it. I didn’t realize that the word was still in use.

Nick: In your expert opinion, does Dad fit the definition?

Hope: Oh, most definitely. You and your father both, if I’m being truthful.

John: . . .

Nick: . . .

John: Should we try to argue?

Nick, sighing theatrically: It’d probably be futile. I’m a little hurt, though.

Hope: You’re both intelligent, but impulsive enough that that doesn’t mean much. Need I remind of you of our first family vacation to Paris?

Nick: I was only five!

Hope: An excuse which doesn’t extend to your father. You two got us kicked out of the Louvre! A place that I’d dreamed of visiting since I was a girl!

John, trying not to laugh: All we did was take our shirts off.

Hope: That is not how you respectfully pose beside the Venus de Milo.

Despite her harsh tone, her lips quirk in a barely-repressed smile.

John: The photo was worth it. Which you snapped, might I remind you.

Hope groans.

Hope: Your father was a bad influence who turned me into one of “those” Americans.

Nick: I don’t think we’ll ever be able to fully understand why you married him, Mom.

Hope: He makes me laugh. More than anyone I’ve ever met.

She smiles at John fondly. He takes her hand and squeezes it.

Hope: It’s why I proposed.

John: More like informed.

Hope: Firmly requested.

Nick: The fact that *you* asked *him* to marry you is one of life's greatest mysteries.

John: I planned on asking!

Hope: He was so nervous in the month after buying a ring, that I eventually realized what was going on. I figured that either I needed to be the one to pop the question, or he'd stress himself into a heart attack.

John: She looked at me over a bowl of spaghetti, said "Let's get married next July," and that was that.

Hope, to John: You stressed too much about the details. I didn't to be watching the sun set over Rome's skyline—I just needed you.

Nick: So, if Mom fell for your . . . himbo-ness . . . what made you fall for her?

John, gesturing to his wife in *isn't-it-obvious* fashion: Your mother is *hot*.

Nick: Gross.

John smirks as Hope smacks his arm.

John: Other than the fact I find her drop-dead gorgeous? I think I fell in love with her the day Murph shared that video.

Hope groans and buries her face in her hands.

Nick: This is new intel for me. What video?

John: Your mother used to participate in flash mobs.

Nick blinks.

Nick: Excuse me?

John: Flash mobs. I don't think they're as popular anymore, but back when we were your age, a big fad was to—

Nick: I know what a flash mob is. What I'm *not* computing is your claim that Mom participated.

John: I wouldn't have believed it either until Murph forward me the Youtube video. You know how your mother plays the oboe, right? She was part of this orchestral group that staged flash mobs all over NYC. Reactions to flash mobs are always great, but the *shock* on people's faces when this nineteen-year-old goth girl in a black *Alien Sex Fiend* tee-shirt whipped out an oboe and started dancing around to, what was the song—

At this point, John is laughing too hard to continue.

Hope, sighing: We used to play *Do-Re-Mi* from *The Sound of Music*.

John, wiping away a tear of mirth: I was emailed the video proof of her past about a month after we met. And that's when I realized that she was the woman that I was going to marry.

Hope rolls her eyes but looks pleased.

Nick: How did I not know about this?

John: Your mom swore me to secrecy. But I figure if she were going to divorce me, it would've already happened after I got us kicked out of the Louvre.

Nick: Honestly, your marriage always seemed rock-solid to me. Has there been any setbacks that I don't know about?

Hope: There was a learning curve.

John: Our first Halloween together was . . .

Hope: Rough.

John: Rocky.

Nick: Do tell.

John: We got invited to my buddy's party, and were supposed to dress in a couple's costume. I wanted to go as Bob Ross and a Tree . . .

Hope: He wanted *me* to be the tree.

John: And she wanted to go as Jack Skellington and Susy.

Hope: *Sally*.

John: Right. It was a stupid argument.

Hope: But it was our first after getting married. We hadn't lived together before that, and we were both adjusting to suddenly cohabitating with another person.

John: Exactly. She kept trying to *diplomat* me—

Hope: And he kept claiming that his idea was better. Even though he wanted me to dress as a *tree*.

Nick: Who won?

Hope and John smile at each other.

John: We hadn't talked to each other the entire day leading up to the party.

Hope: Not true. I sent you a text, asking if you still planned to attend. Remember?

John: That's texting, not talking.

Hope: The point is, we'd both RSVP'd to the party, but hadn't decided on a joint costume. Which meant, since it was the day of Halloween, it was too late to order a decent suit.

John: We drove separately to the party, with Hope leaving from her friend's house.

Hope: And when I got there, I saw John.

She chuckles.

Hope: He'd cut out bones from printer paper and glued them to a black sweatshirt, with total disregard for actual anatomy. It was the worst costume that I'd ever seen.

John, to Hope: Yours was no better! She'd stapled leaves onto a tank top and worn brown leggings. She looked like a castaway.

Hope: I was supposed to be a tree.

They smile at each other.

Hope: The next year, we went as Jack Skellington and Sally.

John: And the year after that, Bob Ross and a tree.

Hope: But I made him be the tree.

Nick: *That's* the story behind the photograph of you as a pregnant Bob Ross? I just thought your couples' outfit didn't quite hit home that year.

John: You were her happy little mountain!

John and Hope exchange high-fives. Nick cringes.

Nick: Guys, please. I'm working here.

Hope: Young man, given the way that you dress for Halloween, you've lost the right to cry "shame."

Nick: Annnnd this sounds like a great time for a slightly new topic! Did you both always plan on having two kids?

John: Well, the Stork wouldn't do product exchanges.

Hope: John!

Nick: I mean, fair. You should've kept the receipt after I was born.

John: That's what I said, but your mother seemed to think that you were in working order.

Hope rolls her eyes.

Hope: Both you and your sibling were planned. We both agreed that two was the perfect number.

Nick: I don't remember everything given how young I was, but what were things like after Button was born? Did you realize that they were mind blind right away?

John: No.

He blows out a breath of air.

John: We thought that Button was just . . . a special type of Ment. Like you.

Nick: When did you realize that they weren't a Ment?

John: When they were a toddler and started trying to lie. A Ment would've been able to stop projecting their thoughts, and an early-administered Pollard Test confirmed what we'd begun to suspect.

Nick: How did you take the news?

John: I don't think we did "take" it. Both of us hoped that maybe this would be temporary, or that your sibling would eventually develop powers.

Hope: Neither of us realized what their Zero fully meant until Alan Chung.

Nick: On a related note, what was it like overhearing Button as a baby?

Hope: Honestly? It was delightful. When Button was an infant, I never had to guess what they wanted in order to make them stop crying in the middle of the night—they visualized their needs. Every time they encountered something new and got excited, our whole family shared in that joy of discovery.

Nick hesitates before asking his next question. Hope reaches into her purse and pulls out a gold tube of red lipstick, which she tidily reapplies before nodding at her son reassuringly.

Hope: Go ahead.

Nick: So . . . it wasn't always difficult for you to be around Button?

Hope: Not until they became verbal, and reached the age where they realized that they were different and wanted privacy. It's agonizing, overhearing all of your child's pain and being completely unable to fix

it.

Nick: Did the two of you ever wish that Button were “normal”?

John begins to answer, but Hope stops him with a hand on his shoulder. He nods, accepting that this question is hers to answer.

Hope: I wish that I had been born normal so that I had never endangered my baby. And I wish that Button’s life was easier, and that they weren’t constantly in danger. I will never stop wishing those things.

John and Nick stay silent. Hope takes a deep breath before continuing.

Hope: I’m proud of my child, and I appreciate whom they’ve become. They’re someone that takes risks and tries to prove themselves, and who seeks out a job where they can protect others. Even if I selfishly wish that they’d play things safer, I’m proud of them.

John: We both just want Button to be safe.

Hope: If Button hadn’t been born mind blind, then they might be a different person. And I have *never* wished my child to be anyone but whom they are, even during the years when my mind couldn’t handle constantly overhearing their thoughts.

Nick: I know that you want to see them again, Mom. But are you sure that getting a BRS is the right call?

Hope: There’s very little that I wouldn’t do to be able to hug my child again.

Nick, heatedly: I told you, Dad or I can shield their mind! You don’t need to cripple yourself in order—

John: Nick.

Nick: I know. Sorry.

Nick looks down dejectedly at the remaining question cards in his hands.

Nick: Remember how you guys used to always go on about how “we’re an honest family”? Mom, you never told anyone what you were going through. Why?

Hope flinches.

Hope: I couldn’t. How could I reveal that my own child made me want to run away? Parents joke about their junior high students, but with Button, I—

She chokes up, momentarily unable to continue.

John: I should've realized what was going on. I thought that being on UCRT was taking its toll; you were never trained to be a soldier. It's why I encouraged you to resign.

Hope: The year leading up to what happened, missions away were the only thing that kept me going. I could handle hearing Button's thoughts after getting back, but in about a week after returning home, it became hard to block out again. The way I handled things didn't make things easier—Button sensed me withdrawing, and that only caused them more pain.

John: Which in turn made things harder for you.

Hope: It was a cruel cycle. I felt trapped. Like I'd failed as a mother.

Her fists clench in her lap.

Hope: I *did* fail as a mother.

Nick: Hey, now. Even if we're sticking with this metaphor, you failed one test. Your grade as a parent is still pretty high in my books. Honor roll, even.

Hope, shaking her head: I almost killed my own child trying to force them out of my mind. If I'd explained the reason that I was requesting more out-of-state missions, if I'd admitted how I was feeling . . .

John: You couldn't even admit it to yourself.

Hope: I should've handled it better.

John: We both should've. Nick, you know how much—

John stops, his eyes darting towards the camera as if just recalling its presence.

John, gruffly: Your mother and I couldn't have gotten through that year without you.

Nick, following John's cue and looking directly into the camera lens: I'm awesome. What can I say? Was I always this perfect? Of course, just ask my parents.

Hope and John exchange a look and then chuckle. It's an unsteady, tentative laugh, still raw with lingering emotions, but a laugh all the same.

John: Perfect? Really? That's the adjective you're going with?

Nick, flexing: Yup. Unless you have evidence otherwise.

Hope and John, simultaneously: The band.

Nick: What?

John: That noise you and your friends called music that used to come from the garage.

Hope: 'Ment Hell Ice Slum," you called yourselves.

John: I was this close to giving you up for adoption.

Hope: Thank God that Button was the one with a Zero and not you. I would've snapped much sooner had I been forced to listen to your 'compositions' running through my brain all day.

John and Nick stare at her, wide-eyed. Their expressions are unilaterally horrified.

Hope: It's true.

Nick, still recovering: Uh, and on that note, it's time to end our interview. Mom and Dad, thanks for joining me on the show.

The camera turns dark as, offstage, someone with a dark sense of humor similar to Hope's snickers.

[August Character Interview Poll](#)

[Aug 1, 2021](#)

The ROs are officially back on the list! I've also realized that minor and newer characters need to be double upped and share interview slots in order for them to have a fighting chance against more easily kissable characters (which, I mean, fair).

If you choose "RO Repeat Interview," you're drawing a bit of a wild card. If that option wins this poll, I'll select an RO based off how many questions I didn't get around to answering the first time (likely Rosy or Kenzie since they were last up to bat in Jan/Feb). This is just to ensure that there will be enough queries for the interview. Any second interviews will also have a different host--so Rosy will be questioned by someone other than Nick, and K by someone other than Glitch. This way, a new dynamic can be explored. (Interviewees may even answer the same question in a different way, depending on who's asking!)

Below, please vote for the person or people you'd like to be interviewed this month:

Edit: based on Skippy's suggestion in the comments, Schrodinger will be the interviewer should Team Dog win first place.

Clarence Garfield & Stephanie Valero (Team Aeon)

Reese "Rudzite" and Andy/Liz "Ugh, Why Do I Share A Last Name With Caleb" (Team Vengeance)

Noh (Doesn't believe in teams, cryptic answers only)

One of the previously interviewed ROs

. . . Antigone and Cassandra (Team Dog, because why not?)

464 votes total