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Letter from the Editor
By Liana Warren

The sheer amount of creativity that RPGs inspire has always been one of my favourite – and one of the most awe-inspiring – aspects of this society. RPGs are inherently creative, so it should come as no surprise that so many creative people are a part of this society. However, I am amazed by both the amount of talent visible in this society and the sheer creative output; despite covering only 6 months of games, this edition has more than 100 pages of art.

It has been an honor to be able to compile the many wonderful works included in this volume. This includes traditional and digital art, as well as fibre art, printing, poetry, short stories, clay, and even cookies! This volume also covers 4 Society Games, as well as a number of other formats of RPGs.

I want to give a special shout out to the designer of the cover of this edition, Noureen I, whose incredible artistic skills are also visible on many of the pages in this edition. She immediately grasped the tone of the cover that I was hoping for and has created a more beautiful cover than I could possibly have imagined.

I hope that you enjoy reading through this edition of the Nightflyer as much as I have enjoyed putting it together!

For extra content on a special extended edition of the Nightflyer, please see: <https://sites.google.com/view/nightflyer2024>



Signs of Life – a Nightflyer game by Oli Jones

Before most of us were born, a dozen vessels with small crews, were flung from Earth at lightspeed, on the search for extraterrestrial life. Now, decades later, we receive the logs of their travels. We won't reply -- an entire human lifespan would elapse in the time it took them to receive any signals we sent back -- but we will treasure the testimony of these brave humans.

What is Signs of Life

Signs of Life is an experimental new *Nightflyer game* which will run in the next two issues of the magazine. This article explains a low mechanics solo game for you to play to generate the story of one of many crews who went on a one-way voyage into the stars to search for life. You will then write a small testimony on behalf of your characters, submitted to a google form to be released shortly after this issue is printed. These diaries of the crews' journeys will be published in the next edition of the *Nightflyer*.

The game is intended to be mellow but ultimately hopeful, imbuing interpersonal relationships with importance equal to interstellar voyages. Signs of Life is heavily inspired by Becky Chambers' *To be taught, if fortunate*.

Submissions will be accepted via an online form, released via discord shortly after this issue. The form will be open until the submission deadline of the next issue of the *Nightflyer*. As an OURPGSoc game, submissions should adhere to the CAT Policy (on the OURPGSoc website). The only appendix B themes which are permitted are consensual sexual activity (fade to black) and childbirth. Any appendix B or C themes will appear only with content warnings.

Playing the Game

Playing the game is divided into three parts: creating a crew, simulating their journey, and submitting their testimony.

To create your crew, come up with 2 to 4 scientists to be your crew. Give each one a name, pronouns, age, and specialisation from *leader*, *biologist*, *technician*, and *pilot* (all of the astronauts will be trained in each area, but excel in one). Finally, give each

scientist a personality consisting of 2 adjectives (for instance *disciplined but paranoid, quiet and loving* or *adventurous and short fused*).

Next, you will simulate your crew’s journey. The point of this section is to get to know your characters and generate ideas for their testimony; not everything that happens here will make it into the message sent back to earth – they were only going to ever get a snapshot of your characters’ lives. You will need a standard deck of 52 playing cards (digital decks are easy to find online), and possibly some way to take notes.

Once your characters come out of hypersleep, they’ll visit several planets on their search for life, each one for three to five years. Each card you draw from the deck will represent their time on a new planet, and for each one you’ll generate a key memory your crew has of that planet.

Draw a card from the deck. Come up with a short vignette or key event that happens to your crew on the current planet. The suit of the card tells you what kind of dramatic beat this is, while the rank gives a more specific (but broadly interpretable) prompt – see the tables below. Think about what happens, which characters are involved, and how they feel about it. You can play these events out entirely in your mind, but you may prefer to make a few notes for concreteness, and to have something to refer to when writing your testimony. Don’t worry about making it presentable – the only thing that will be shared with the Nightflyer is your crews’ final testimony.

Suit	Dramatic Beat
Hearts	Interpersonal Bonding
Diamonds	Scientific Progress
Spades	Interpersonal Conflict
Clubs	Scientific Setback

Rank	Event
Ace	Life Discovered! [See Below]
King	A shift in authority
Queen	Something is created
Jack	The crew splits up
10	An event about food
9	Something is repaired
8	A radio message
7	A stroke of good luck
6	A debate
5	A hostile planet
4	A mechanical problem
3	Something is broken
2	Something is lost forever

If you draw an Ace, then you have found alien life. The suit of the card still applies, come up with the story surrounding the discovery. On the first ace, the life you find is single cellular in complexity. On the second, you find multicellular life. On the third, the life recognises you as alien and attempts to communicate. If you draw all four aces, the life you find is beyond human comprehension. Think about what kind of life your scientists found. How alien is it? How does it make them feel to have found what they were looking for on the mission they gave their lives to?

On other draws you may have found evidence of life somewhere on this planet at some point in time, but no living things.

When you have fully resolved your card, it is time for your group to move on to a new planet: draw another and repeat the process. Continue this process until you have either drawn cards from all four suits, or 3 cards from the same suit. You will end up

with between 3 and 7 memories (for instance, a finished draw might look C, C, D, S, D, H, and that player's crew would have visited 6 planets and have generated 6 memories).

Finally, you will write a testimony to return to earth. This is the last broadcast that will ever make it back from your mission: the last chance they have, to tell the earth what they discovered and how they lived. It's up to you if this is the first time the crew has been able to send a message to earth or the last in a long line; if they plan to continue their mission or not; whether or not they know they'll never send another message again. Perhaps from the journey its clear what will happen to your crew next, or maybe you don't need to know.

Due to the way data is transmitted, you have a strict limit of 1200 characters (including spaces). Alongside this message will be a strictly scientific log of raw data about the extraterrestrial life they encountered, if they met any – but any subjective of human interpretation they want to provide should be in the testimony. What you send is up to you: what was important to your characters? How do they want their lives recorded?

We won't see what was sent until the next issue of the Nightflyer. In the meantime, you are welcome to discuss the game, but please don't share specifics of your responses, or anything you wrote down while generating their story.

For the characters, it will be about 40 years, give or take a decade, until this message makes it back to earth. By the time anyone else reads it, they will almost certainly be dead. Don't despair for them: through you we see testimony that they were so very *alive*.



<https://forms.gle/UrCYNyHzR2pe1Tbd7>



Dice Bag by Dahria





**Terminus Cookies by
Sophia de Medeiros**



Luna by Noureen I

IN THE CASE OF MANAGER PIPER MONROE

By Maisie B. Manning

“Piper Monroe, was it?”

She blinks. She’s in the Director’s Office — not just the building in Caput, but the office that belongs to zir and zir alone. She wore her best outfit for this interview, woke up early, rehearsed the lines until the nerves went dead and silent; she’s not about to mess this up by zoning out.

Get a grip, Piper.

“Yes. My mother’s surname. If you look here,” she leans forward slightly, pulling out one of the many pages behind her record splayed on the desk, “you’ll find I have many recommendations for a placement here. I’m good at filing away physical records, I have enough practice with computers, I can organise meetings, I could keep subordinates in check — anything that you needed, really.”

Director Avgust Kovač doesn’t respond
Piper clears her throat.

“Why do you want a position here?”

“Wouldn’t anyone?” Piper almost laughs at the absurdity of his question, but she holds it, doesn’t lose face. She needs this. A shot, a chance, a hope. *Doesn’t everyone in this fucking hellhole?* She gives her scripted reply. “This is the centre of everything in the Underground, and I want to be a part of keeping it running. Ever since I was little, it has been my dream, Director.”

I dream, I want, I wish—

Director Avgust Kovač doesn’t respond
Piper clears her throat.

WHY DO YOU WANT A POSITION HERE?

This isn’t right.

Why would the Director ever interview someone, a new face — when would zie ever have the time to see someone with his busy schedule? It’s an application, a process, not an interrogation. There’s people for that; people like *her*.

And zie is still sitting there, and her record melts, and the frosted glass shatters, and—

This never happened.

She opens her eyes to a chair, the one at her desk, the one she sits down at every morning and gets up from every night — Piper sits until her legs ache, she leaves it to rush another lunch break, she almost closes her eyes as she ticks another hundred boxes. There is nothing but that chair.

Manager Piper Monroe is already sitting in it.

WHY DO YOU WANT A POSITION HERE?

She winces in the blaring light.

“Because I’m a hard worker. I have the credentials. I will put the Director’s Office first. I will be whatever you need me to be. I will do what has to be done. I will do it well. I will do it for years.”

IS THAT REALLY WHY?

“Because I want to be recognised. I am so tired of everybody ignoring me. I want purpose. I want something to be remembered by, something bigger than myself. Doesn’t everyone?”

THAT’S IT?

“Why do you care so much? Who even are you? This is *my* head. It’s my business, my thoughts; *mine* and mine alone.”

THIS IS WHY YOU’VE SPENT SO MANY YEARS WASTING AWAY IN A CUBICLE?

The rage bubbles and she can’t help but snarl.

“And do *you* spend your miserable existence tormenting people with more important things to do? Do you enjoy it? You won’t get anything from me. You won’t get a rise. You won’t get anything at all.”

A spotlight.

Doctor Promethea Delphinium.

“IF WE DON’T GET OVER THIS NOW YOU’RE GOING TO BE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF FOREVER AND THAT’S UNACCEPTABLE.”

It's the Doctor's office, and Piper is standing up for herself. She laughs bitterly even as her fist clenches around her briefcase's handle enough to snap.

"Oh, because you're so above reproach? Talking to Archie, like he's your own dad – even when he's taking advantage of you, like he does everybody else? I bet you feel so qualified to lecture me because you think you're better than me. Just because fate doesn't spit on you forever doesn't mean that we *all* get everything handed to us."

She clasps her hands, the briefcase clattering to the floor, putting on a lilt to her voice so she can capture even a hint of how much she hates them.

"Oh, *everyone* forgives Doctor Promethea Delphinium, the best doctor in Medicus, *no*, the whole history of the Underground! We don't mind how awful you were or how you called us stupid! No, it's okay, because you *deserve* happiness, because you were *so* sad to make up for it! Thank you *soooo* much for your sacrifice! What a load of shit."

"YES YOU HATE YOUR JOB AND YOUR FATHER AND THIS WORLD FOR TAKING YOUR FRIENDS FROM YOU BUT YOU GET THE CHOICE TO LEAVE ALL OF THAT BEHIND."

"Just shut up! Shut up. I don't need some pathetic doctor to tell me what choice I have. What I need is for you to go away, and—"

A spotlight.
Engineer Edwin Morari.

"I KNOW YOU DON'T OWE ME ANYTHING, BUT IF THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON IN CAPUT, YOU'RE ONE OF THE BEST PLACED TO UNCOVER IT."

The two of them are outside the boundary of the Director's Office, next to Caput's empty platform. A chill rustles through — she's leading them here so she will have one less report, one less problem to deal with, while she waits and waits for someone to notice her.

She reaches out to them.

"Edwin, I—"

"EVEN IF I WASN'T TO YOU, YOU WERE A FRIEND TO ME. IF I'D HAD MORE TIME, I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE GOTTEN TO BE YOURS AS WELL."

"You are— *were*." Her voice breaks like her empty heart. "*You were*. I'm so sorry, Edwin. I'm a monster, a fucked up person. All I can do is set everything on fire and stand and watch. I want to feel the flames. I want to know I did it. Just like—"

She can't bring herself to say it; Piper is sobbing and she's furious at herself for it.

"I used you! I did. I would've backstabbed you. I would've reported you. The second your martial law failed, I would've abandoned you for the Director. I was only on your side because you kept listening to me, kept trusting me, and if you'd gotten further than zie ever did, maybe I would get somewhere, too, and I— I don't deserve this. Please don't think I'm a saint. Don't remember me like that. I can't bear it."

They are made out of paper, when she finally makes contact.

"You're the only one who thinks of me like that, and you're dead."

A spotlight.

Trader Sophia Trinketson.

"MY ELIAS WOULD NEVER DO SUCH A THING TO HIS MOTHER, BUT I GUESS THAT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS."

She's still crying after the last, at her desk, inbox flashing with an alert. Piper slams her fist into the keyboard, before picking up the whole horrible machine, and—

"You're right, it *ISN'T!*"

It shatters like a body on the carpet, the pattern picked out by Avgust (just like Mai before zir, just like Dane before her).

"Stop it. I'm not your son! I don't want to hear about him, and your perfect life, and—you're trying to contort me into a perfect daughter, another shiny thing to line your shelf. You'd change me and make me love you, make me like *you*. And it doesn't work on me. I'm not your plaything. I'm not another child for you to absorb into yourself."

"LET ME KNOW WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU."

Piper's head is in her hands and she's back in that chair like she never left it.

"What would be best for me is if I wasn't related to any of you at all. I never asked for this. I never chose to be born. It's not my fault. It's not my job to fix this. Why can't I exist without all of you?"

YOU ONLY EXIST BECAUSE HE MADE YOU.

It's herself, now, small and naïve and just a girl. She pulls on her mother's arm, practically buzzing, looking at the clock, waiting for him to come home; she'd been

waiting to play, always *waiting, waiting, waiting*. The station's housing is small, but it doesn't matter to her. Not if he's here.

The clock spins, the cycle marches on.
He missed her birthday again.

"No!" A scream. "No. It's too much, don't show me it again. I can't keep waiting forever. I'm not defined by him. I exist without him. I want to live for myself, I want to *be* myself. Please, stop."

Lyra Monroe will take Piper to bed after she blows out just one candle, coaxed to do so before it becomes just another not special day. She never told anyone her wish — because if you ever tell the world what you want, then it'll never come true.

Piper watches herself close her eyes and believe.

I wish dad would come home.

HE NEVER DID.

"I know he didn't!" She watches herself leave, a bounce still in her step, before she'll one day come to lose it. "I know! I don't need any of this, any of these memories. I already know he'll never, *ever* be the father I wished for."

A wretched sob.

"Not for me."

YOU ONLY EXIST BECAUSE YOU WERE A FOOTNOTE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE.

An unshattered monitor blinks to life.

And of course, there's my daughter, Piper Monroe. She was always closer with her mother — that's her surname she's taken up. No one remembers old Archie's last name, not even old Archie. Now she's all grown up with her fancy job in the Director's Office, and she don't talk to me. Not if she can avoid it, and she usually can. I get it. Seeing me just makes her sad. I ain't been a good father, or really a father at all, but I'll be sure to leave her something when I'm gone. I owe her that much.

She turns away, but Archie's still there to face her.

"You owe me so much more."

The rest is a blur. She runs away/chases after him like she always does, Caput doors ripping open and doors slamming behind her; she blinks and he's the Director, and then— Middle Manager Stanley Medar, holding zir hand. Her face falls. The screech of a train veering off course.

"You *don't* care about me, Stanley! None of you do. You should've known I wanted to make decisions, and see the world shift for them. I didn't want to be treated as disposable, as a nobody, as another low-level nothing. You're so far ahead of me, and no matter what I do, I can't keep up."

Middle Manager Stanley Medar takes the hand of a daisy chain of people, pulled into Caput and pulled out with power; friends in high places get to skip the fucking queue. The hands of the Underground's people raise, a vote is held, another unqualified no one receives applause.

"Why? *Why?* Why won't you help *me*? Am I not good enough?"

A pile of paperwork flutters down from above, sheets and pages, turns and plans. As one falls into her hands, Piper holds it as his words fill the page.

What would you like to do and what do you want to achieve: Get to know the Director better, and the inner workings of The Director's Office.

She crumples it up and tosses it aside.

"Is that all it took? Another step that I never got? I'm just locked out of making decisions, and people with nothing to their names, no years of work, get to choose the reality we live in for us? Because someone up high decided you were *special*? It's not fair! I never get to be on top. I never get to move first. And I thought we could be friends. I wanted... I wanted to have those. Lovers, too. But I..."

"STAY DEAD."

Her own words, now.

"I wanted him to hurt like he hurt me. I wanted him to remember me, after I was gone and we never saw each other again. I needed to last. I know they all got their happy endings! Most of them, anyway, the ones that didn't—"

The hallways of the Director's Office shake with the impact of explosions, incendiaries out of view; what her father supplied the world to feel important.

"But they all still had a family, and wives, and game nights, and— I didn't get *anything*. I didn't tell the world my wish and it still never fucking granted it. I hate them. I *hate* all of

you. I hope I never see you again. You took the one friend I had, and I don't even know why they liked me."

WHY DO YOU WANT A POSITION HERE?

A hissing sound as she recoils.

"Because I would've done a better job. I would've been a better Secretary, and I would've been a better Director. I would've shot anyone zie asked me to. I would've covered it all up. I would've kept the machine going. None of them deserved to see the sun."

A glimmer of it breaks through the dirt ceiling; it begins to crumble, and the only way out is to climb.

WHAT DID YOU DO?

"Whenever anyone made a mistake, whenever stepping on someone else was the same as doing my job well, I didn't hesitate. I sold out bosses. I reported suspicious individuals. I didn't care who lost their jobs. I didn't care if someone disappeared. They never meant anything to me at all."

Drew holds a hand out to her beneath her desk. Richard gives her a tissue. She's crying, and it's so embarrassing, being seen like this. She's disgusting. Her mother holds her when she still felt a child enough to break.

"No, no. This isn't fair. Would Aslan, would Avgust, would Stanley... would any of them be forced to be torn apart, broken down like this? Why is it always me?"

Adela hugs her, and slides her a bowl of stew. Mirax asks her for advice. Elias Secan doesn't chase her away; there's a coffee on her desk. Nina gives her a puzzle to solve, just for her.

"No, no, no. Don't. Don't. It's just wishful thinking. None of them really loved me."

YOU'RE JUST LIKE HIM.

"No." This is too far, it isn't true, it's not—

A ding of another email, another incessant attempt to get her to care about their issues; always their problems, and never hers. His words fill up her vision. She cannot escape them, even when she runs and runs.

"I WAS ALWAYS LOVED. AND IT WAS NEVER ENOUGH. I CRAVED POWER. RESPECT. FEAR, EVEN. THAT'S WHAT ALL OF THIS WAS ABOUT."

Her ID card digs into her palm, the plastic slicing at her skin like it's so much more than what it is. In the artificial light of her cubicle, MANAGER PIPER MONROE peels off, disintegrates away, dipped in moonshine sweat; and there he is, TECHNICIAN ARCHIBALD, waiting underneath.

The noise of anguish she lets out is matched by the unearthly sound of the ID snapping.

"You're wrong! You're nothing. Nothing at all. None of you really care. You used me as much as I used you."

Manager Drew Lopez never quite stays for long. Manager Richard Henley forgets. She can't help her mother like an eldest daughter should. Stallholder Adela Sterling wants to keep everything safe and the same. Director Mirax Caspian only wants advice because there's no one experienced left to ask. Archivist Elias Secan will always be his mother's son. Courier Ninator Kermada tells her she doesn't see the world like them, and it's true, it's true.

"I LOVE YOU, PIPER. I AM PROUD OF YOU."

She scatters the remains of the identity to the wind.

"Don't make this about you. Don't take away my mark on the world and make it yours. I never did any of this to make *you* proud. I am not another product of yours, a concoction, a Molotov, something you can claim credit for. There is no pride to find in me, Archie, because all that I am and all I have managed to do is my own, *my own*, **my own.**"

A spotlight.

A young Piper, and behind her, a young Archie, and behind him, his young father, and behind him, behind her, behind him, broken people who have brought broken children into this world.

They speak as one.

"I DON'T BELIEVE THE WRONGS I HAVE DONE TO YOU CAN EVER BE PUT RIGHT."

A stern father doesn't show his love in the ways people think one should. Archibald is dressed in his father's old suit, hair slicked back with gel, and it's all a performance so he can be what he is supposed to be. Piper wears her mother's hand-me-downs, Lyra's bracelet on her wrist to fiddle with, and the lines they rehearse are the same.

“And that’s why—”

A lie told a hundred years ago drags them all into the dark, to squabble and kill each other over their little slice of post-apocalypse. But a lie can outlive the person who began it: it only needs more hosts to crawl inside of. The Underground thrums through them like a disease, passed down, the world above fading, dimming; station to station, father to son to daughter.

“That’s why I have to leave.”

IS THIS YOUR STOP?

There is only little Piper left behind in that spotlight, now — the girl she was, and couldn’t be.

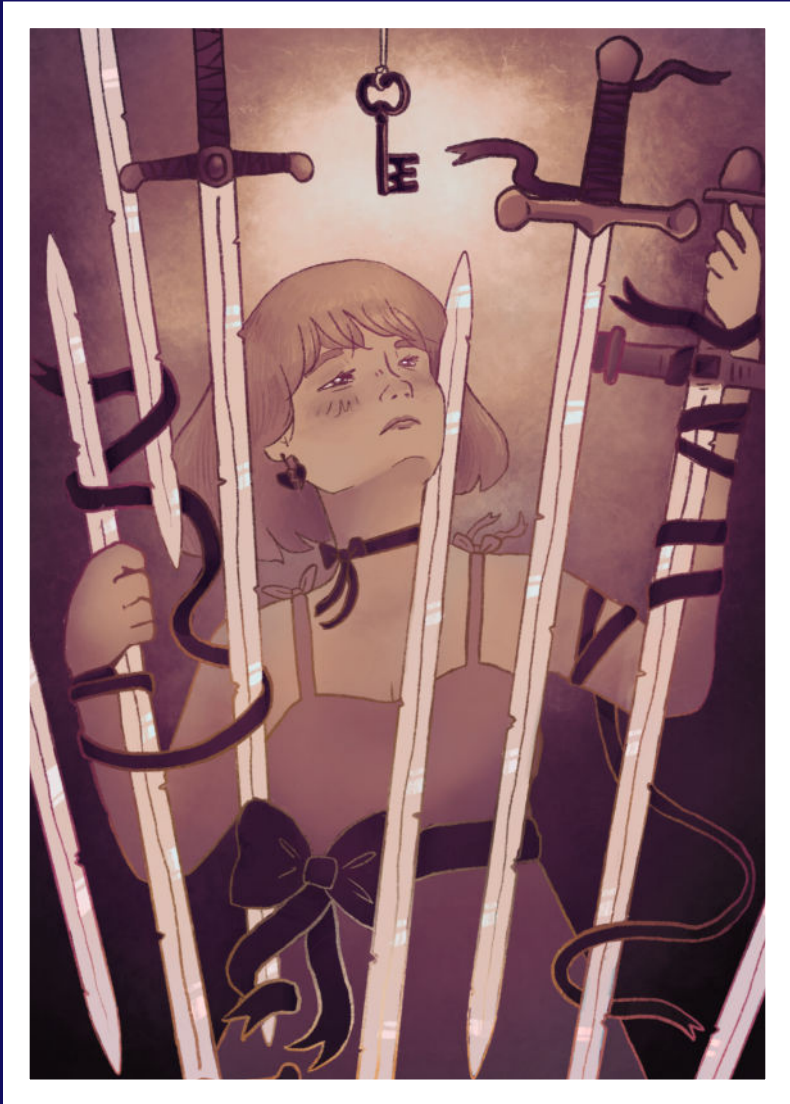
The world outside whirls by, but it is all coming to a close. It already has. Mechanical doors part with a whoosh, the elevator rises, the sun batters skin that has never felt it, the sand and remnants burn but it is better to burn than whatever torment below. She will not look back.

“SMART KID.”

Her younger self holds her own hand.

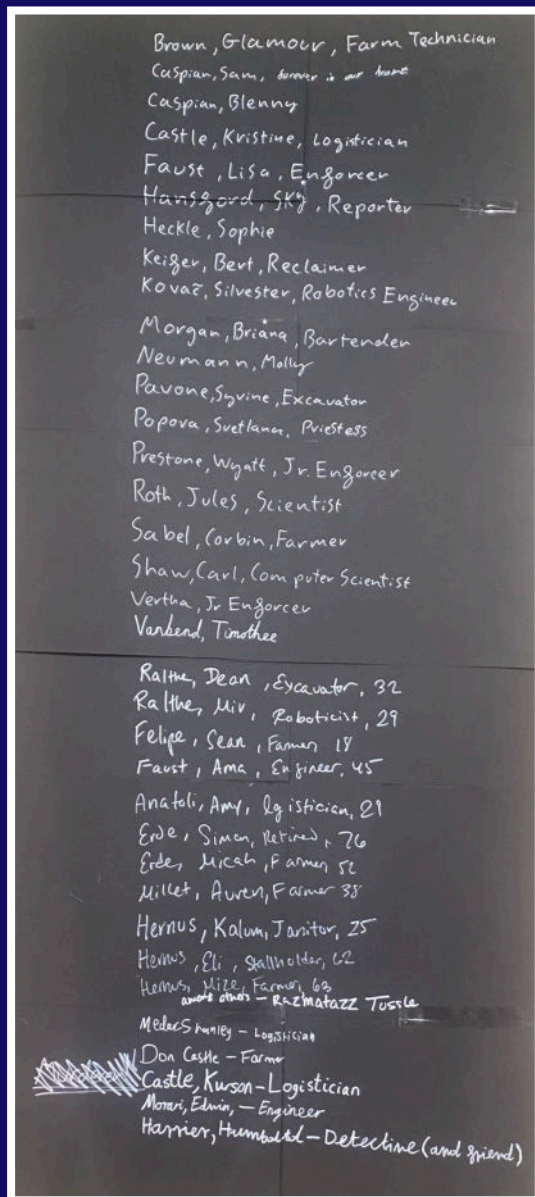
“SURE AS HELL DIDN’T GET THAT FROM ME.”

Piper steps off into nothing/everything.



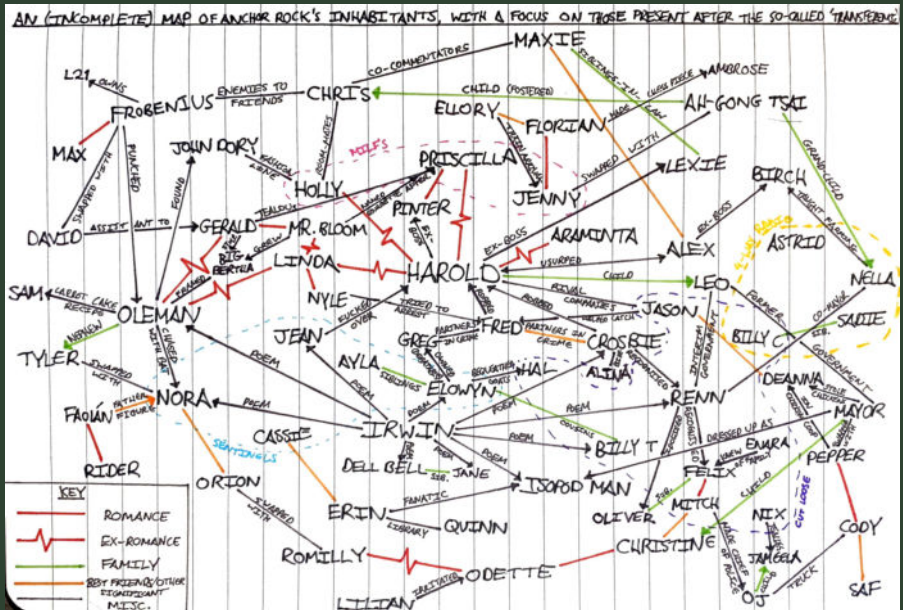
**Eight of Swords by
Sophia de Medeiros**

Memorial by the Players of Terminus





Transference



Transference Relationship Map by Ben C



Bake Sale Sign by Faith Rose Cortis



Leather Working by Harry Wright



Quarry Group by Dakota Hart



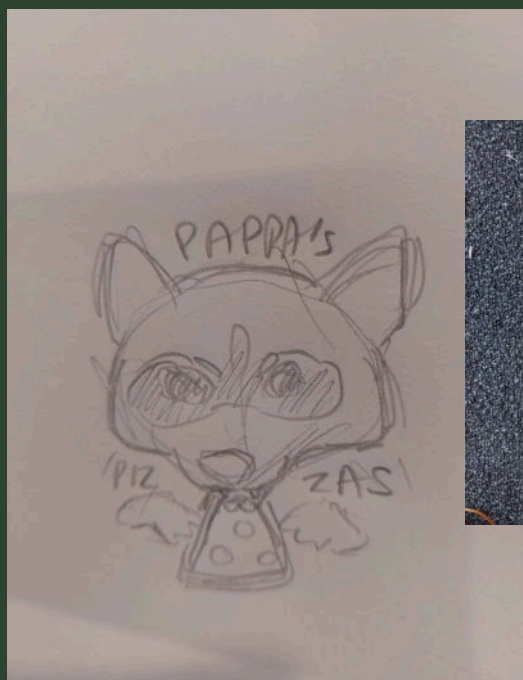
Twins by Nourreen I



Orion by Konstantine Borbély-Soproni



Pepper by Sophia de Medeiros



Papa's Pizza by Sophia de Medeiros



Sunset by Ruoqi Huang



Sleepy by Ruoqi Huang

Memories of Anchor Rock

An excerpt from a Transference fic by Ben Chung

On Wednesday 2 May, 2024, at 3:57 local time, the Transference occurs. Its effects are widespread - just how much so is somewhat difficult to gauge, though. When half the adults in the world are suddenly displaced, as if trading places with another person at complete random, the lightning speed of modern global communications must inevitably pause. Systems slowly crash, networks grind to a halt as those who maintain and moderate them are no longer present to do so. The big-picture effects of this event are immense in large part because they are unprecedented.

This story, however, is not about large-scale and long-term consequences.

This is a story about the transfers, who find themselves one moment in lives they know well (for better or for worse), and a heartbeat later in a place so deeply unfamiliar to everything and anything they have ever known. This is a story about the transfers, hours after their lives are overturned in the midst of what should have been an ordinary day.

This is a story about the locals, who find themselves surrounded one moment by faces they might have known all their lives and a blink of an eye later by utter strangers. This is a story about the locals, hours after their lives are upended by the abrupt disappearance of some and arrival of many others.¹

*This is **not** the story of Anchor Rock. But it is **a** story of Anchor Rock.*

1 Opening paragraphs up to this point from the Transference wiki: https://transference.oxfordrpg.com/the_transference (credit to the GMs as listed on the wiki)

*...Your voice carrying whisper-like through time
Your words quietly echoing across space
Revealing lost secrets like flecks of gold
Pulled up by the easy-flowing stream...²*

The initial shock has worn off a little by the second day of the Transference, the new (and not-so-new) population of Anchor Rock slowly adjusting. The town square is the busiest it's been in years, transfers and locals alike mingling, chatting, a community beginning to form.

"Hey, Renn!" Enara called out. No response. A slight glance maybe? She walked over, calling out again. "Renn!" Finally, they turned. "Hmm? What is it, Enara?" "So, I was thinking," she explained, "We seem to have a lot of musicians about. So what if we started a band! Felix plays the bass, Nix does piano, Hal on guitar...Billy Clarke says he can do drums! We could even have a woodwind section with Jason's clarinet and your flute!" "That sounds great, but... I don't have my flute. I could do recorder though?" They didn't seem particularly enthralled by the concept. "Well... that could work! But I'm sure we can find you a flute somewhere! Wouldn't want to miss out on the chance to hear a member of the Melophobic Philharmonic!³ Weird that we haven't run into each other earlier, I've worked with the MelPhil a couple times..." She squinted, trying without success to recall the face.

2 Garden, Irwin. "Visions of Renn." *Visions of Transference*, 2024, p. 3

3 An orchestra founded in Winchester (in)famous for its renouncement of melodies, only performing pieces based solely on harmonies. The discussion over what exactly constitutes a 'melody' has caused fierce debate and several splinter orchestras, including the rather extremist Melophobic Melharmonic, which rejects the idea of musical notes entirely as 'too melodic', instead focusing on timbres and exploring sources of sound in the natural world.

“Yeah, weird...” They gave a quick shrug before adding, “Though I have been on hiatus for a little while now. So I’m probably pretty rusty too... don’t have too high expectations.”

“Oh, don’t be modest, I’m sure you’ll be great! Anyway, I’m thinking of having band practice tonight in the town hall. It’d be great to see you there!” Enara looked at them hopefully.

“Yeah, maybe... I suppose I could have a look around for a flute...” they replied, eyes sliding to one side, before looking back to Enara with a small nod. “Yeah, I’ll be there.”

“Perfect! See you tonight!” She smiled, before returning to her hunt for any remaining musicians.

“Um, excuse me everyone...” Secretary Leo struggles to weave above the clamour. “Could I have everybody’s attention please...” A couple heads turn but the thread of his voice is quickly lost in the chatter.

“Hey! Everyone! Secretary Leo has something to say!” Deanna cuts in, quietening the crowd.

“Yes, thank you, so, um...” Leo begins, clipboard clutched to his chest, “It has come to my attention that maybe we should have someone representing the transfers-”

“Yes, that’s why-” Alex Alderman interjects, halted by a glower from Deanna. He grumbles, but relinquishes the spotlight with a scowl.

“Um, actually, I think Renn had something to say?” Leo smiles at them to take the floor. They adjust their scarf and clear their throat a little before speaking.

“Thanks. Right. So. I do think the transfers need a say-”

“-so you agree with me then-” Alderman begins nodding.

“- which is why I’m running for transfer representative.” They turn to stare down Alderman, who glares back in disbelief.

“You didn’t tell me you’d be running.” It’s almost an accusation, her frown radiating disapproval.

“Was I meant to?” they reply coolly. Before Alderman can respond, Deanna chimes in again.

“I believe Pepper also wanted to run?” She looks questioningly towards the delivery boy.

“Uh, I guess?” He gives a hesitant thumbs up, as Alderman looks increasingly sullen (and perhaps a touch panicked?).

“Okay, great!” Leo beams, “So we’ve got, let’s see, three candidates for transfer representative!⁴ Maybe we can hear a few words from each one, and then hold the vote?” He looks around for a moment in case of any objections, then continues. “Um, Pepper, why don’t you go first?”

“Oh, ok!” He doesn’t seem to be overly enthusiastic about it, but steps forward with a nervous smile.

“Well, uh, I might be a transfer, but where I’m from isn’t all that different from Anchor Rock! It’s a small town too... so I know how to farm! And, hopefully, I can listen to transfers *and* locals to, to do what’s best for the town and everyone who’ll be here for the next few days.”

He pauses as if thinking of something more to say, but eventually just nods and hurriedly steps back.

Alderman wastes no time in taking centre stage.

“I, **Alex Alderman**, am of course the natural choice for the position of representative of the transfers. I have decades of experience of managing an incredibly successful^[citation needed] business empire,⁵ so I’ll have no trouble whatsoever managing the affairs of this little town.⁶ It’s clear that the transfers require a strong voice to speak up on our behalf and ensure that we aren’t exploited by the locals.⁷ Obviously, there is no one more qualified to fulfil that role than me⁸ and in a

4 Making it the most contested election in Anchor Rock for 30 years

5 Under the guidance of a board of directors, it should be noted

6 Debatable

7 Alex Alderman went on to attempt to exploit the transfers (and locals) through cake fraud.

8 *Very* debatable

gesture of extreme philanthropy,⁹ I have consented to take up the position. Now let's just get this needless formality of voting over and done with.”¹⁰

Leo waits a moment to make sure she's (finally) finished. “Thank you, Alex... and finally, Renn!”

“I agree that we need a voice,” they begin, “But what we don't need is a businessman. We don't need someone who's going to cut corners and, and make profits. We just need to work together, it's only a couple days until the train arrives. And all we need for that is someone who can listen. Someone who can be trusted.”

“Great, if the transfers could line up here, we'll record the votes.”

Secretary Leo begins the process of collecting votes, assisted by Faolán and Fred. A range of expressions is visible amongst the faces of the voters, from enthusiasm, to indifference, to reluctance. Finally, the last tally is marked and a hush falls on the square.

“Okay, I believe everyone has voted now -” Leo announces, casting a glance for any stragglers, “- so I'll announce the results. I'm pleased to say that Renn Andersens has been elected as transfer representative!”

The musician blinks in surprise at their win, while Pepper beams and joins in the applause. Alderman storms up to Leo angrily, demanding to see the votes and clamouring for a re-count. One of the transfers, a reporter – was it Manksy?¹¹ Moxie?¹² something like that anyway – comes up to shake hands.

9 ‘Philanthropy’, according to Alderman, is a word which means ‘what you say you're doing when you want the public to stop criticising you, but don't quote me on that’.

10 Alex Alderman's speech kindly provided by Isla (footnotes by me)

11 While possible, it seemed unlikely that this was the man behind the indelible graffiti artist.

12 So close! That is a soft drink

What are you good at?

Music, I guess? I'm a decent hand at tennis¹³. And I've always fancied myself as a bit of a linguist, I seem to pick up new languages pretty quick. I can speak passable Lutetian and Esdoloric, and I'm working on Keiman.¹⁴

The town square is quiet, a contrast to the hubbub of the morning. But there! – the faint notes of a piano, escaping the lit window of the town hall. Then, the sounds of a bass tuning up. Like a moth, movement – a figure, walking (very slowly) towards the hall. A pause. A knock. And the door swings open. “Renn! Great of you to join us!”

The lack of flute isn't too big a deal, in the end. It's not the most orthodox band; piano, bass, and guitar all typical enough, but joined by clarinet, recorder, and paint cans (drums). But somehow it all comes together, the group managing to string along a passable tune (despite Hal's constant attempts to change to a weird time signatures¹⁵). Renn found himself enjoying it a lot more than expected, the usual dread of struggling through replaced by the harmony, both musical and social. The time passes in a flash, and before long the yawns become too frequent to ignore.

13 Or rather, the closest analogue to it in the world of Anchor Rock. While still a racquet sport with broadly similar equipment and courts, 'tennis' is played in teams of three and is more akin to volleyball in its rules.

14 Adapted from my character creation submission form

15 Almost all pop music, and a large proportion of classical music, is in 5/4 (i.e. 5 beats in a bar) due to its perceived simplicity (theorised by some to be linked to the 5 colours of the rainbow). Time signatures such as 4/4 are considered overly mechanical and rarely used in mainstream composition.

“Right, I think that’s enough for today.” Enara puts down her pencil (acting as an improvised baton) and smiles at everyone. “That was really fun though! We should definitely do this again. Maybe a small performance for the town?”

There are a couple nervous glances.

“Maybe let’s see how we do next time,” Renn replies.

“Of course, only if we feel like it. But it’s so nice we’ve managed to put this together. To think, without the Transference, none of us would’ve met...”

Renn spots Hal nodding wistfully out the corner of their eye.

Definitely a silver lining, at the very least. They blink bleary eyes, beginning to long for sleep (even the makeshift mattress of blankets seeming appealing now).

“Well, I don’t know about all you young ones, but I’m off to bed.”

Nix announces, carefully closing the piano lid with a small thud.

This prompts another round of yawns in agreement and a chorus of ‘good night’s as the rest of the band begins to pack up. They disperse, into the night, the final chords still rippling through the leaves.

The next day brings with it a strange mood, as the news arrives that the train has been postponed and the town realigns. Some transfers seem dazed, others imbued with a new lease of life. The highly anticipated football match does something to alleviate some of the disappointment, and with Frobenius and Oleman on the same team (along with Alex Alderman), it was sure to be an event.

In the town hall, there is a rapid band practice taking place in anticipation of the half-time show. It’s an informal affair, with musicians dropping in and out, and the quality of the music is similarly variable. Enara is running around, reassuring on missed notes and trying to keep things running, completely in her element. “Ok, let’s try counting in again from the top...”

Hal immediately comes in too early on its guitar, and swears under his breath. "It would help if I had my synth, then we could be a real band." He plays a wrong chord again.¹⁶ "What are we even playing for the half-time show?"

Billy looks around him at the various pots and paint tins arrayed like a set of drums.

"I'm not sure. Did we... were we playing a song? I thought we were improvising?"

Felix seems to be attempting to gnaw a hole in his cheek. His fingertips look red, where he grips his bass. "I don't actually know, Hal."

Enara stops the rehearsal. "It's a bit... complicated. With all the different styles, we're just making it up as we go along, I think. We got it to work last time!"

Renn plays a quick scale on their recorder,¹⁷ frowning at a missed note. "We could always say it's 'modern'."

"Yes, modern, that's a good idea! A mixture of classical genres and electronica. Avant-garde!"¹⁸ Hal exclaims.

Felix smiles. "Avant-garde! Even better!"

Billy looks quizzical, before muttering, "Like... fencing?"

"No, like cutting edge! New and exciting!" Enara corrects him, not unkindly.

"Cutting edge! The fencing metaphors never end," Hal laughs.

16 Though it would argue that no chord is 'wrong' and anyone who says otherwise simply doesn't appreciate the intricacies of Post-Present Power Punk Philosophy (which would be difficult, considering he made it up).

17 Scales are formed of a sequence of nine notes and usually come in three 'flavours'; major (broadly considered to be 'happy'), minor (sad) and umami (mmm).

18 A loanword from Lutetian, originally signifying 'before custody', describing the oft-abstract scribblings of artists shortly before being arrested.

"I suppose it's always going to sound a bit...strange, with these instruments." Renn comments, looking at the assortment. Billy beams, pots and pans at the ready.

"Hey, strange doesn't have to mean bad. I mean, I thought a lot of you were strange at first, but here we are, making silly little tunes in the middle of a worldwide catastrophe. That's the best kind of strange, to be honest." Hal says.

"Oh, I don't mean it as an insult. Appropriate, given the circumstances." Renn replies, with a slight smile. "We do need a name though, if we're going to be a proper band."

"What if we do something with 'cutting edge'? Like a pun? The dueling somethings or something like that?" Billy trails off, thinking up more.

"Cut adrift? Bit too abstract maybe," Felix muses.

"That could work! Or *cut loose*TM?" Billy suggests.

"*cut loose*TM... Kinda punk, I like that." Hal nods.

"We were all kinda cut loose, by this transference thing. Feels right." Felix says.

"Do we want a vote? Or are we all happy with *cut loose*TM?" Enara asks, receiving nods from the rest of the band.

"I think Felix is right, it's weirdly appropriate." Hal says, before muttering under its breath, "Though I don't think I was as much cut loose as reconnected..."

"*cut loose*TM sounds good to me. Now all we need is a logo," Renn adds.

"I think for now, a set to play during half-time might serve us better," Felix points out.

"Very true. Maybe a tune everyone knows? Something by King¹⁹ or BAAB?" Renn suggests.

19 A classic rock band, with hits such as 'We Are The Losers' and 'We Will Stone You'

“Very feel good. Could keep the spirit up, though maybe we should try and spark a revelation with something a bit more punk...” Hal looks around for support.

“I’m not sure everyone is here, so it might be hard to make sure it’s something everyone knows... we can agree on a couple set songs and a trademark improvisational section?” Enara proposes.

“That could work,” Nix agrees.

“Aye, that sounds good! We need to pick a song that everyone knows. How about Umami Caroline? By Niel Emerald?” Billy asks.

“Oh that’s such a nostalgic song...” Enara clearly approves.

“A bit basic, maybe, but if it’s what the people want, who am I to deny democracy...” Hal says with a light smile.

“That was one of the first songs I learnt when starting guitar! And bass too!” Felix exclaims.

“How about something classical too, like In the Hall of the Valley Queen?²⁰” Nix adds.

Felix is a bit more subdued when he speaks. “I know that too.”

“I was also going to suggest Sunlight Concerto²¹ but I think it may be a bit too morose...” Nix says.

“Anyone have any need for a 20 minute synth solo to spice up these classics?” Hal offers.

Enara laughs. “We only have 20 minutes total, but if the half-time show goes well maybe we can get another concert set up!”

“I suppose we don’t know how long we’ll be stuck here now...” Renn says, their tone a little strange.

20 One of Neitherwegian composer Greg Edwards’ most famous works, characterised by a continuous ritardando from its frenetic opening, slowing and quietening until the notes are so faint and infrequent that the audience is unsure whether or not the piece has actually ended.

21 A classic piano piece for beginners written by Lodewyk van Wasphoven, though before he famously went blind.

“Yeah, especially since the train isn't coming anymore...” Hal mutters. “Maybe the world actually is ending,” it says even quieter. “Hey, if the world was ending, at least we'd go out with music,” Billy reassures it.

“We don't know how long, but we can keep the town entertained the whole time,” Enara says cheerfully, “I'm sure the world's not ending though.”

“I think it's just giving us more time, to see what this strange happenstance gives us,” Felix adds, “I think there's something nice that can be found in all this.”

“For what it's worth, I'm enjoying having people to play with, even if we are a bit rough around the edges.” Nix chips in.

“Me too.” Renn sighs. “I don't know, this feels like it happened for a reason. But maybe that's just optimism.”

“Yeah. I mean, why here? Why now?” Hal asks to the air, “It's all very convenient. I'm not a big believer in fate and destiny, but maybe there is something in all of this.

“A kind of meaning to be found in it all... A song to be found within the chaos.” Hal laughs a little.

Enara speaks up, in a moment of uncharacteristic seriousness, “You all are right though. I feel more optimistic and myself here than I have in the last 5 years.”

Felix stills for a moment, not rocking back and forth on his heels any more. His smile is softer. “Same.”

Hal's gaze softens a little. “It's strange, isn't it? Why is it when I'm so sure that the world is coming to an end, the music is at its most hopeful?”

“There will be singing in the dark times. About the dark times.”

Enara nods in agreement, then checks her watch “Oh! There's only 10 minutes until the football match! We'll have to wing it.”²²

22 This conversation largely adapted from the #town-hall channel in the Transference discord server, with Enara, Felix, Billy, Hal and Nix written there by Liana, Nourreen, Harry S., Sasha and Ella respectively.

There's a sudden scramble as the band hurries to pack up, perhaps with a tinge of panic as their first big performance approaches. But first, there is a half of football²³ to watch. The players take their place, wearing hastily scavenged shirts in red and blue. Mitch is eventually pushed onto the pitch, striped shirt and 'police' hat doing their best to give him some authority. He tosses the coin up in the air, loses it in the grass for a moment before finally announcing that the Wonky Wolves would kick off (all the while apologising profusely to the Loyal Wombats).

The combined effort (often against each other) of Chris Keller and Maxie provided the commentary:

"And... we're off! Christine starts the match, punting the ball forward past the 50-metre arc. Alex Alderman is in close pursuit, gaining ground on the Wombats' player – quite magnificently, too, just look at the form on those strides – but that's a neat turn by Christine to gain a bit of space. That business suit is not helping Alderman's agility. It's not about what you wear, but how you wear it, Chris! ...right. Well, anyway -

"- here comes Oleman, surging in to bolster the Wolves' defence and – ooooh, that's a nasty collision between the two Wolves players, and all so avoidable, Aldurman just took an eye off play for a moment... I do hope Oleman's alright... yes, he's getting up now. Meanwhile, Christine goes on, tapping it to Billy Clarke, right on the 80-yard line, who bounces it a couple times and looks to shoot! – That's an excellent block by Florian to deny the chance, a natural-born corner-back if I've ever seen one. And now Billy has no choice but to play it out to Nella on the flank.

"OJ closes in, the former basketball player using his speed well... though not before it's floated across box and – my goodness, I can't

23 'Football', as with 'tennis', being the closest analogue. (To which football? Yes.)

quite believe this... A goal for the Wonky Wolves! – has that gone in off Mitch? You may be right there Maxie, but it did look accidental. Well, that is certainly controversial, blatant interference by the referee... Now then, this is Anchor Rock football, remember, I do think that's perfectly above board, as long as his hat was facing westward... Well, that's just ridiculous, this is quite inexcusable..."

The bickering was briefly punctuated by Mitch's faltering whistle for half-time, still backing away from an enraged Loyal Wombats team, led by Alex Alderman. The arguments continued as the band set up, but were soon drowned out by the blare of the opening chords to 'Trafalgar'²⁴. The players and crowd quietened down to listen (some still silently seething) as Cut Loose performed their debut concert. It was... chaotic, to say the least, but uplifting. Billy Clarke pounded away with plenty of enthusiasm (and syncopation) at the upturned paint-pots and despite his frustrated expression, any mistakes by Felix on the bass were unnoticeable. Hal surprised everyone (including the rest of the band) by embarking on an... adventurous guitar solo which zigged and zagged before eventually happening its way back over the border into familiar territory. Nix's piano provided a steady backdrop for Renn's recorder-playing to tie everything together, embellished with Jason's clarinet and the last-minute addition of Mitch on the whistle. By the end, the crowd were singing along in one voice, 'Umami Caroline'²⁵ ringing out across the pitch.

But the unity didn't last long as soon the two teams faced off once more.

24 A classic by BAAB, exploring a tumultuous break-up as a metaphor for the life and times of Admiral Trafalgar.

25 No football match would be complete without a rendition of 'Umami Caroline', Niel Diamond's tribute to the breakthrough discovery of the final 5th taste (completing the quintet of Sweet, Salty, Sour, Bitter and Caroline).

“Aaand we’re back! Frobenius kicks off, looking dangerous (in more ways than one), heading out of the centre square and oh! Surely that was an elbow from Frobenius towards Billy! Looked like a fair challenge to me, Chris, but it’s turned over to the Wolves anyway. Hal brings it into a dangerous area but the defence is looking good – not for long, this is a great solo run by the Wolves rover and yes! A goal for the Wonky Wolves! It’s 2-0! Well, you have to say it may not be entirely deserved, Chris, don’t you? More than a hint of luck in both goals here, and it’s the Wombats getting the short straw. The game’s the game, Maxie, and they’ve simply been outplayed so far.

“The Wombats have to regroup here and that’s great footwork from Aldermin to sidestep Astrid and a perfectly weighted pass straight to the knees of Jason. Takes a touch before sending it towards the top pocket – and Christine can’t stop that one. Goal for the Loyal Wombats. Now I wouldn’t write off a comeback here! That would be some story for Aldeerman and their plucky teammates. It certainly would be, but for now, the Wolves maintain the lead.

“And now is that... Pepper Partridge? Coming in from the crowd to play for the Wolves. I do not recall that being allowed in particular, but Mitch is allowing it... I have to say, the rules will certainly be the subject of much discussion after this match, I’m sure of it. Some, not me, of course, but some, may even call it a disgrace. Let’s leave that till the match is done... as Pepper continues to advance, Oleman is careening towards him and – oooh! That looks bad. The attempted spinning cartwheel tackle did not come off there... and he looks to have come the worst out of it... Mitch is waving for a medic, I do hope he’s alright... Oh good, he seems to be hobbling off the pitch. Holding his back, someone should have a look at that, but there’s not much that can keep Oleman down!

“Well, I think that’s all from us here at Anchor Rock. Final score: Wonky Wolves 2, Loyal Wombats 1. We’ll be back with some post-match analysis right after our ad break!”²⁶

...a few days later...

On Monday 7 May, 2024, at 20:57 local time, the train leaves. Its effects are minimal – the interchange of people in a small town somewhere near NNYC have little to no impact on the rest of the world.

This story, however, is not about large-scale and long-term consequences.

This is a story about the transfers, who found themselves one moment in a place so deeply unfamiliar to everything and anything they have ever known, and a few days later in lives they wish they’d known earlier.

This is a story about the locals, who found themselves surrounded one moment by utter strangers and a short week later by faces they might have known all their lives.

*This is **not** the story of Anchor Rock. But it is **a** story of Anchor Rock. And it certainly won’t be the last.*

26 They were not back, nor was there an ad break.



Alex/Renn by Ben C



Cut Loose Logo by Ben C

This poem was written as a turnsheet for Faolán, Ace D's character. Faolán lied about being married for the majority of the game, and used to write poetry about his imaginary wife, at this point in the game he was struggling more and more with the weight of his lies, and in this turnsheet his writing is disturbed by Rider (an NPC who he eventually confesses to, both about the lies and his love for him)

A lonely man
By Jasper Hopkins

The silence of being unloved
filled
with nothing but your words
believed by all:
most.
Not by him.
Not, anymore, by you.
When stories aren't enough
When there is no language to
believe in—

You seek it in the forest:
familiar embrace of brown and
green,
the only one you truly know.
Find again your wife's beauty.
Carve out metaphor and
memory.
Write.

Right.
Rite.
Write?
The poetry is dry on your
tongue,
cloying—
spoiled milk, stale bread:

expired.

In that quiet clearing
your words echo: hollow.

Footsteps—
resonance of your silence
dampened
leaves barely disturbed
tentative approach.

The two of you speak, yet
those words matter less
than those put to page

Ink to paper
Paint to canvas

Together you create
Capturing beyond
What can be captured no
longer

One looking to the stars
One, for once, looking down
from them

supernova
By Ace Doody

a supernova
is as much a death
as it is
a birth

at last,
pulse flattens
quivering of chest
ceases

fingertips skim
solitary spark
quiet

and yet,
from the hollow damp of earth
from ashes to ashes
comes, once more,
a flame

it offers, at first, nothing
more than a glimpse

a life budding
in gentle warmth
of curling palms

perhaps,
it is but the nature of a thing
so enticing to be
so fleeting

a sorry song of hope
of breath and touch and life

trickles out from every cradle
of kindling

burning and
beautiful and
burning still

at once, again, too much
a chest so flooded with
gasoline and desire

far too much to be
held

and then, again
a supernova

is as much a birth
as it is
a death

to carry beyond

it is something holy
something aching and sickly
and bleeding
to be fleeting

to die

what could it mean
to hold a life eternal
to grasp the weeping stars

to wrench them from their nest
and simply
breathe on

to watch the dancing mortals
limbs and hearts entangled
in rotten knots of desperate
sorrow

to uproot a thing once living
and
tear asunder
cast aside

but to watch those things, then
crawl and care and caress
to peck and pick and pet
'til something beautiful stands
quivering
wailing and squinting
yet singing still
in the bitter light of morning

a creature born anew
shattered pieces forced
together
held close with petals and
poems and prose

the thing knows, though
it cannot stay
whole

as fast as it is formed
it is apart
once more

this one becomes many
and one all the same
ocean and sky may tear
finger from hand
limb from torso
feature from face

but the thing
it is not shattered
it is not crumbling
at least, not yet

that thing bleeds
it aches
it retches
and

it knows
the day must come
it knows
every part of it must die

it will return to the earth
for, perhaps
it is but the nature of a thing
so beautiful to be
so fleeting



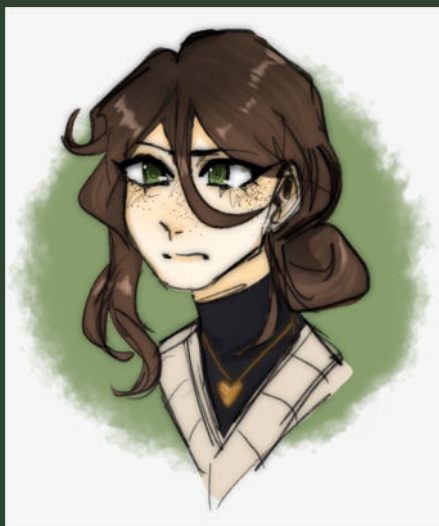
Nora Teredo by Dakota Hart

Your Favourite Animals
By Dakota Hart

You think you read somewhere that sound travels faster through
water,
and you would like to think so.
Every Saturday morning at breakfast,
you would glimpse them from the TV,
those “other” ones,
a pile of sagging flesh decidedly yanked under
and into
the barren realm where all is blind.
Often,
in those greasy afternoons,
with your hair like a slick and ragged predator,
you would find that flickering kinship dancing upon your weary lids,
dazzling and ditzing into non-caresses
at just shy
of seven feet.
And as you enact your adorable little throng
of scintillatingly painful proto-speech
(that too becoming sorted, *archived* in the stale sea air),
you find that
you are not blind at all.
Perhaps you
see
too clearly.



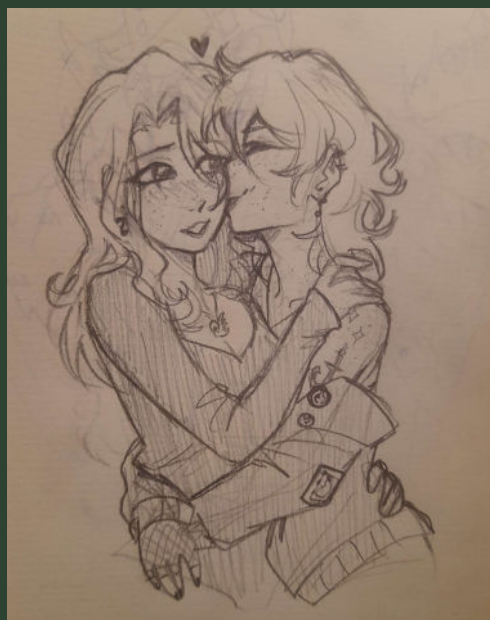
Odette by Nourreen I



Odette by Konstantine Borbély-Soproni



Odette by Faith Rose Cortis



Odette with Violin & Christine and Odette
by Konstantine Borbély-Soproni



Christine by Faith Rose Cortis



Christine, Felix, and Florian by
Konstantine Borbély-Soproni

Quinn after the Transference by Liana Warren

I came back because my town was dying.

We all moved away. For college, at first, or a first job, or training... but most of us never came back. Why go home, when the Big City has movie theaters and night clubs and more friends than you ever thought possible and life?

I came back, though. Someone had to. It's twisted sort of love, to care about something only because it's dying. But Anchor Rock was dying, and we all knew it. One of its children had to go home and be the caretaker, and I was never as social, never as good with the lights and sounds of the city. I had less to lose. Plus, I had the history degree, so I could pretend I knew what I was doing.

When the old librarian moved to the city to retire closer to his grandchildren, I applied for his job. I wouldn't have been eligible, anywhere else, but in Anchor Rock, I was the only application. My parents were thrilled. My friends didn't get it, and we kind of lost touch. No city 20-something has time to make a trip when the train is only once a week.

So I came back to the dying town, and I wasn't alone, sure, but Nella had her family and her farm, Odette didn't talk to anyone anymore, Mitch was so caught up in his responsibilities, and Luke was dead. The ghosts count, in Anchor Rock, but it's not the same. I met some of the newbies — Erin, Cassie — and it was nice, but I never understood why they'd come.

I worked on my archives. Tried to catch our elders before they passed. Tried to get their stories written down. I figured one day Anchor Rock would be too small even for the tiny library we had, and on that day I'd send the archives off to somewhere in the Big City, and at least someone, somewhere, would know that we existed.

Then the transference happened, and it changed everything. It was like the city people brought the life here with them. It didn't really fit, not at all, not the kind of life Anchor Rock had ever knew how to hold, not even at its biggest. But we changed, and they changed. My dying town wasn't the same town it had always been, but it wasn't dying anymore either.

It's nice to be at the library now. I see people, when they visit — bringing the books they borrowed and taking a new one with them, so they always have a reason to come back. The train's running a little more frequently. I don't feel like I'm stuck collecting ghosts, anymore. Did you know, I got a call from an NNYC, something about wanting archival material on Cut Loose? People want to know about what's happening in the here and now.

I came back because my town was dying, but today, I stay because it's alive.

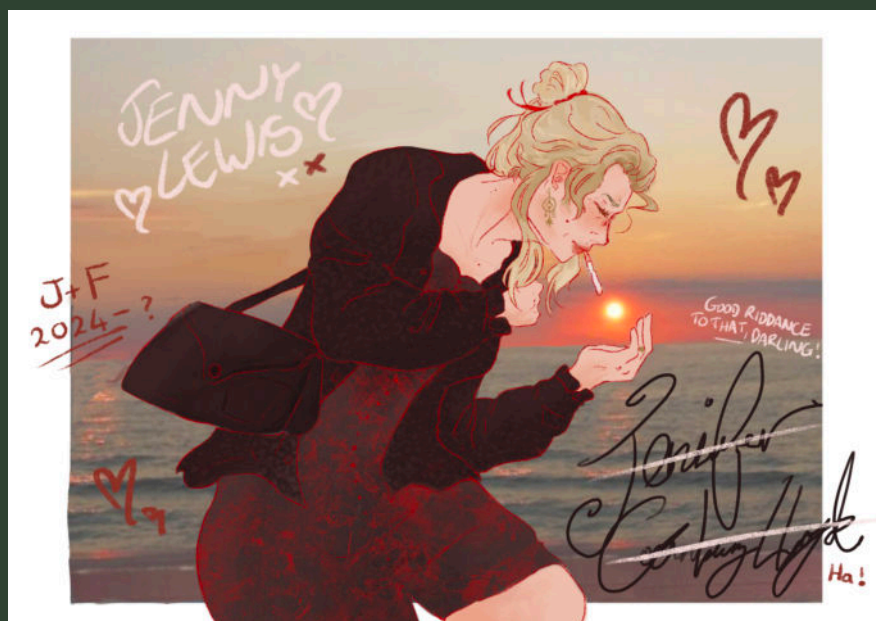
Orion after the Transference by Tenaya Fottrell

For many years, Anchor Rock has been losing its young people to the allure of higher education, the sort that can only be found beyond its little borders and buildings, in cities big enough to promise bachelor's and master's degrees. Today marks the start of something different, though, for the cozy town has gained its first PhD student.

Orion moves back in with more than just the clothes on xir back and the playlist in their earbuds. Xe remembers to bring their backpack, for one, having remembered to retrieve it from a lecture hall. This time, xe has a duffel bag, small, with all their worldly possessions. And a suitcase, big, with all the instruments xe needs for research.

Their hair is longer now, falling about the collar of xir leather jacket. It's a new one, but already just as battered, to the point at which they had to call a friend in the know and ask if it would be appropriate to wear to the symphony performance that xe stopped in NNYC to see on the way out here. They have more piercings, too, the ones that, years ago, xe worried about getting because they weren't sure what xir parents would think. They don't worry about that any more; xe knows their parents don't mind at all, as long as xe's happy. They never did mind.

And so they return to Anchor Rock, this time here to stay. *Until my research is done*, they tell xirself, and then a half beat. *Okay, maybe a little while afterwards too*, xe thinks with a little smile as the clock strikes 18:27 and the train pulls in to Platform 1. After all, who wouldn't contemplate staying forever when such a cozy little crowd is gathered here to welcome them home?



Postcard from Jenny Lewis by Rose



Morning by Ruoqi Huang

An article by **Alex Alderman**

*An exceptional tale of an **exceptional person** in exceptional circumstances ...*

By Isla H

When I arrived in Anchor Rock, I considered the locals to be a backward and primitive people. They didn't understand the value of money, or the market economy, and they had frankly alarming gaps in their general knowledge. This will be hard for the reader to believe, but many of them didn't recognize *me*! Did they live under a rock? *The Anchor Rock*, perhaps? (I chuckle to myself as I write this. It is important for the reader to remember that I am *very* witty, and for your own safety I recommend that you do not attempt to consume any hot drinks whilst reading this article).

However, over the course of the past few days, I have become more understanding of the people here, and contributed greatly to their society. Although they were initially strange and/or hostile, I must admit that some of them have grown on me and shown a surprising level of kindness and decency. My relationships with my fellow transfers have been more polarized, for better and for worse. On the one hand, I have made an incredible friendship with Maxie (and, to a much lesser extent, Jason). On the other hand, I had the misfortune to encounter the criminal formerly known as 'Fred Reading' and my traitorous former employee Birch (Surname? Get Maxie to check).

Of course, being **Alex Alderman**, I had *quite* an impact on the town of Anchor Rock. I expect they will talk of my visit for many generations to come. I played the key role in discovering the nefarious schemes of 'Fred Reading,' known to some as 'The Rouge Rogue.' 'Fred' (I refuse to use his ridiculous alias) believed he could *outsmart* me. (You see now, reader, why I advised you to

stay away from hot drinks). He daubed the Anchor Rock in slanderous (Or libelous? Check with Maxie) graffiti in an attempt to tarnish my reputation and repeatedly lied to me. Furthermore, he stole the property of a therapist and forged documents using the mayor's seal. (Maybe shouldn't mention this in case it comes up in court??) But do not fear, reader. Of course, I discovered his petty schemes through my impressive talents of deduction and general people skills. I confronted 'Fred' multiple times and warned the people of Anchor Rock about my suspicions, singlehandedly saving the town. I heroically recovered the stolen property of the therapist and returned it to her. (Get a quote from Jean here describing how I'm her hero. Don't let her mention the fact that I went to therapy.) And I discovered that 'Fred' had forged a letter which caused great offense to my friend Maxie and reassured Maxie that the lies were false. (Nice long quote from Maxie here talking about how great I am)

Although my time in Anchor Rock was brief, I made an unforgettable contribution to the town, showing myself to be a true hero (which I always have been). And perhaps the town has made a very small contribution to me, by giving me some time and space for self-reflection and providing some fairly enjoyable company for the past few days. This has been a rather turbulent time, but I am confident that I emerge from it as a stronger person, who has further honed their business skills.

Written by **Alex Alderman**

Visions of Transference

By Ralph Whitworth

We came here in the bone-still dead of night from every distant
fathom of the spinning planet

We came here empty-handed gasping through the vortex of the
stars, knowing no one, knowing nothing

We came here stepping gingerly off the train, as off a cliff, to that
lonely platform singing in the rain

We had been here all along, high up framed by the heavens on the
mountainsides

Wandering, pathless, the unknown womb of the forest, in the
heady buzzing evening

Poised, ready to leap, amongst the boulders of the quarry, golden
in the rising sun

Asleep and awash in sunny dreams in our little houses nesting
warm and quiet in the valley

We were packing, ready to leave, suitcase lying open, to strive
forth towards the blue sky of the world beyond

We were newly-arrived, smiling sheepishly, blinking a little, finding
our way through bright and unfamiliar spaces

We had never moved at all, and never intended to, and were
happy sat in the same old chair by the same old fire

We were coming home again, after long years on strange roads,
tired, dewy-eyed, to step through welcome doors

And we were cast adrift again on unseen currents carrying thought
and light to the furthest reaches of time

We saw everything change and break apart and form again in
glorious new forms around us

We saw nothing change at all

Oh holy Crosbie! Breaking like a firework from the dust-strewn
shadows of that Didcot bike shed to race streaming gloriously in
the unknown

Oh holy Renn! Leaving the past like dust behind you to play on
resolutely, set pen to paper once more, quietly and unnoticed lead
the people through a new dawn

Oh holy Ferb! To come fists-up loud and glorious from the tired
riverbanks of Dogacre and, with sombre dignity, to go home once
more

Oh holy Billy! Holding all the secrets of time in your calloused
hand, to put them back down again, and turn your eyes back to the
world

Oh holy Hal! From electric blur of cities to take up that time-
honoured staff and set foot alone on the old paths through the hills

Oh holy Chris! After all that time to breathe out, finally, leave the
door open, and roll away towards the sun

Oh holy Jason! Ringing, calling, typing and struggling only to stand
helpless, like a child, in the face of mysteries you could never solve

Oh holy Nella! You gave that land your tireless commitment and whilst others around you chose to abandon their posts you stood quietly steadfast on your track through the hills

Oh holy OJ! Sworn first to protect your daughter from the unknowable forces of the universe and now to protect the rest of us as well

Oh holy Christine! Dragged back again in shame from that diner to my stinking living room to face yourself in all your flaws and glories

Oh holy Fred! You clothed yourself in a mystery I could never penetrate but you did it with all the wit and splendour of a great magician

Oh holy Leo! Tireless scribbler in the dust, bent over with that notepad, to raise your tired head for the first time and see the sunlight

Oh holy people of Anchor Rock and elsewhere! Though I never learnt all your names and stories, I will follow you all with my thoughts on your meandering journeys to the sunsets at the ends of the Earth

Oh holy Jean! You came to us from celestial darkness with a soft voice and open arms to lead us like children from the night into the dawn

Oh holy Elowyn! You put down your missionary's staff and stepped down from the sunlight on the mountain to follow those hidden paths behind time to the light of nameless suns

Oh holy Dell! I will follow you like a brother, in undaunted faith, on the last train out of here and grasp as I always have at the simple genius of your beautiful mind

Oh holy Nora! I will always be with you as you follow your unknown course in the wake of unimaginable beauty from that lonely house beside the sea to the infinity of stars

I came here lost, wandering tired all the years of my life, undirected and drifting through the empty sea of time

Sat lonesome on the hillside in sour smoke to the rhythm of faint music and languished like a dying houseplant

Was wrenched like everyone out of the door to lie cursing and bitter in the dirt

And staggered off, head-spinning and hungry, nothing to guide me, into the unknown shimmering light

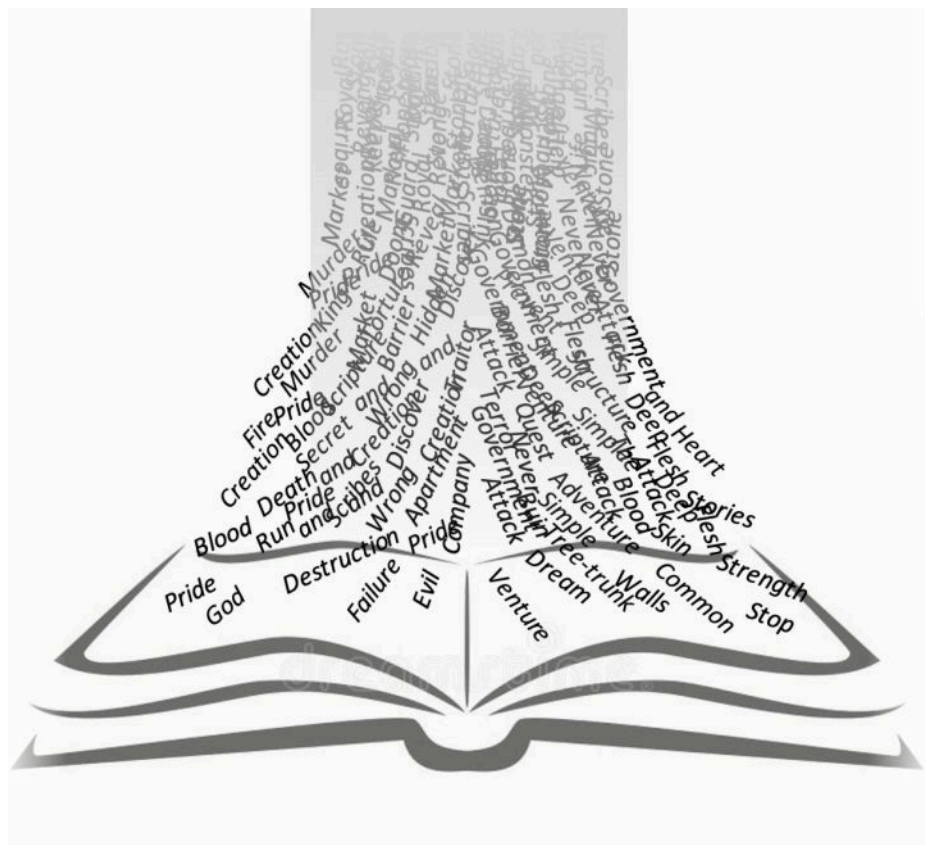
Now I emerge again 'like a newborn baby', like an old self long-forgotten, still without direction, but smiling

Blinking in a light which falls differently on my face and reveals old nooks and crannies that had been hidden there all this time

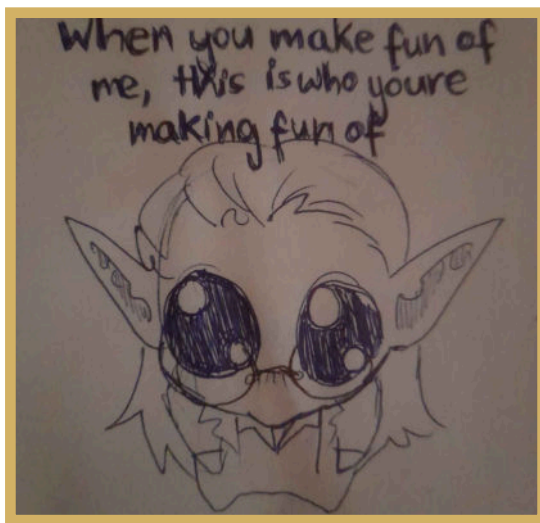
Shows me old forgotten postcards and the brambly path behind the houses leading home

And will some day soon take me back here, tired as always, pen in hand, to that little village nestled tight, anchored amongst the hills

NNYC, 10/5/24



Scripture



Sohtar Quest-Shaper
by Konstantine Borbély-Soproni



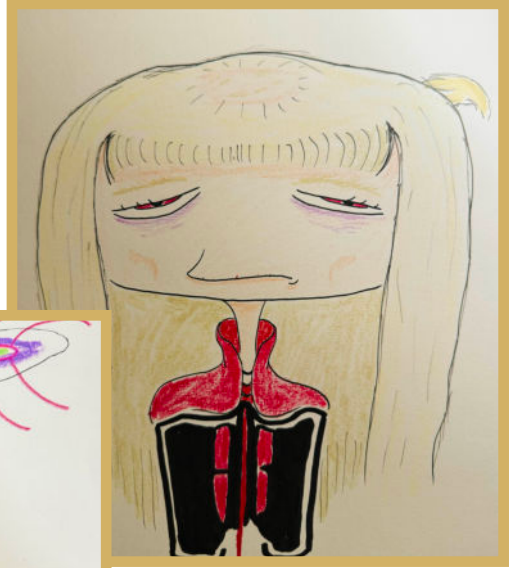
Accolade by Ruoqi Huang



Dome of Protection by Ruoqi Huang



Catch me before I fall by Ruoqi Huang



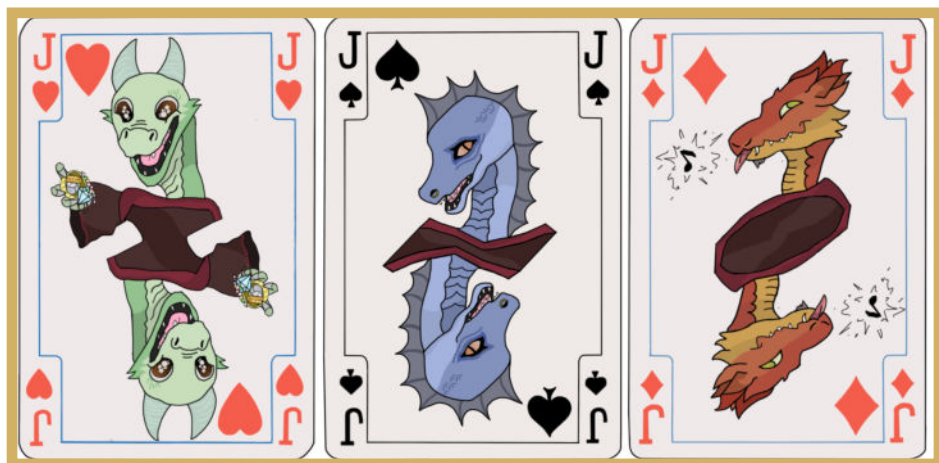
Mirabel Miracolo/Tatiana Schwangau
by Dakota Hart

BLUE

A song written and composed by Mirabel Miracle, Ytic's #1
pop icon

By Dakota Hart

Scenes to be seen,
Words to be heard,
But dark and deep is my silence.
Birds on the tongue
Find space for everyone
Drifting back and forth on highlands.
Time to breathe.
Time to be.
Time for you.
Time for me.
In the blue...
In the blue...
Cerulean, swirled again, obsidian...
The nature of a dune.
In the blue...
In the blue...
Cerulean, swirled again, obsidian...
The nature of a dune.
And the nature of that time, too,
Where did it go?
Was it resting upon weary hearts,
Or was it lost to the flow?
So much I cry for it to beach
Itself upon the shore,
But little do I know that there's
No beach anymore.
It's just breath.
It's just me.
It's just you.
All that's left to see.
In the blue...
In the blue...
Cerulean, swirled again, obsidian...
The nature of a dune. In the blue...
In the blue...
Cerulean, swirled again, obsidian...
The nature of a dune.
The nature of you.



Jix, Jax, and Jex by Kamil Maczan



The Crow and the Faun
by Caroline Kent



Phoenix by Hana Isphani



Rhys Vaughan
by Konstantine Borbély-Soproni



Mirara and Princess Aina
by Kaiya Collins



Bones For Thrones

*Or why you should stop
worrying and just love the
Empire of the Crimson Skull*



Make Skull Thrones!

Participate in an important staple of Crimson Skull culture. Making **Skull Thrones** is a deeply fulfilling experience that symbolizes the fundamental tenets of the Empire of the Crimson Skull – murder, skulls and conquest. It helps bring a slice of home with us wherever we go.

Life Satisfaction

Making a **Skull Throne** isn't just about the result, but also about the journey you took to get there. The feeling of community you get as you chase after enemies of the Empire with your Crimson Cohort. The variety of different people you meet as you search for skulls. That feeling of accomplishment as you watch your bone pile turn into a real **Skull Throne!**

Healthy Exercise

Life in Modnik has become far too sedentary with all your "Notes" and that just isn't healthy. Look in awe upon the Crimson Legion and see the benefits that regular exercise can provide. And what better exercise can there be than making a **Skull Throne**? Workout your legs as you chase down the materials. Then move onto your arms as you hack and slash till you find bone. Finally, feel that tension in your core as you carry away the bodies.

Horns

The true sign of a Crimson Legionnaire! Whether you're fashionable or utilitarian – horns are the way to go. The more time you spend with the Crimson Legion, the more **Skull Thrones** you build, the further your horns will grow (regardless of whether you had any before). Pierces through your foes and wow your friends with this beautiful addition to your head.



Be made into Skull Thrones!

Participate in an important staple of Crimson Skull culture. Becoming a **Skull Throne** is the ideal pastime of anyone that refuses to submit to the Empire of the Crimson Skull. But worry not – this is only something to look forward to!

Life Satisfaction

With just a quick mind-blowing operation, all of your worries can be gone! No more fear or pain. No more worries about your place in the world – your place is clearly inside a **Skull Throne**. Moreover, this way you get to be part of something greater than you, serving a vital purpose. Not a single person that has been made part of a **Skull Throne** has ever complained!

Perfect Shape

While your philosophers have pondered over questions like “what does perfection look like”, the Crimson Empire has long had the answer – a skull. No imperfections, no squishy flesh – just the pure, strong, white bone. Never again will you have to consider whether there is anything to improve in yourself, for you will already be perfect.

Legacy

Your petty kingdoms will collapse in mere centuries. Your flesh will not even last you for that many decades. Even ideas come to die with time. However, **Skull Thrones** are forever. Both as a spiritual practice and physical thing, it remains eternal and indestructible. Become part of something that will truly last, make a legacy that your children’s children’s children will still be able to enjoy.

Join the Crimson Legion

In one way or another

Only good things can come of joining the Empire of the Crimson Skull. Also, you have no choice. We will invade your land and take all the skulls of those that defy us. So don't wait and take the first step to a better life by joining us in our endeavour. Or relish the feeling of being of being a skull in a **Skull Throne**.

Here are a few quotes from those that have come to love the Empire of the Crimson Skull:

"AAAAAHHHHHH!!!"

- Josh

"Death to all who defy the Crimson Empire!"

- Legatus Tarron-Nyir

"Please, stop, I have a family!"

- Lily

"I just kept killing and collecting skulls, didn't even notice as I got to my 10th Skull Throne!"

- Turuk, the peaceful

"NO, NOT MY SK-"

- Lacrom

"I love murder!"

- Gastin, the murderer

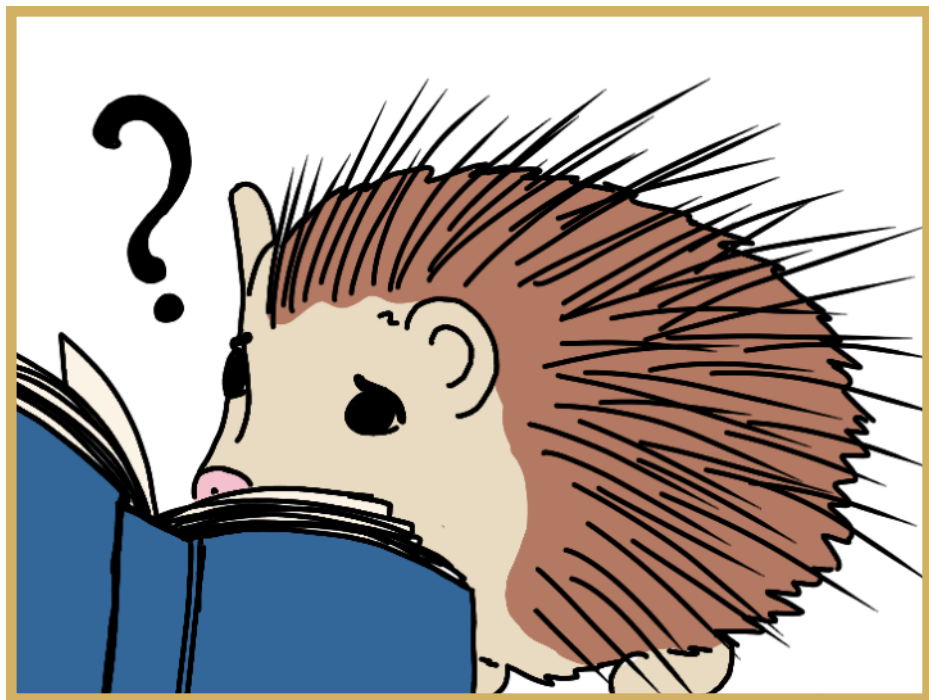
"....."

- Skulls in the Skull Throne

With malice, from Likara Rezik



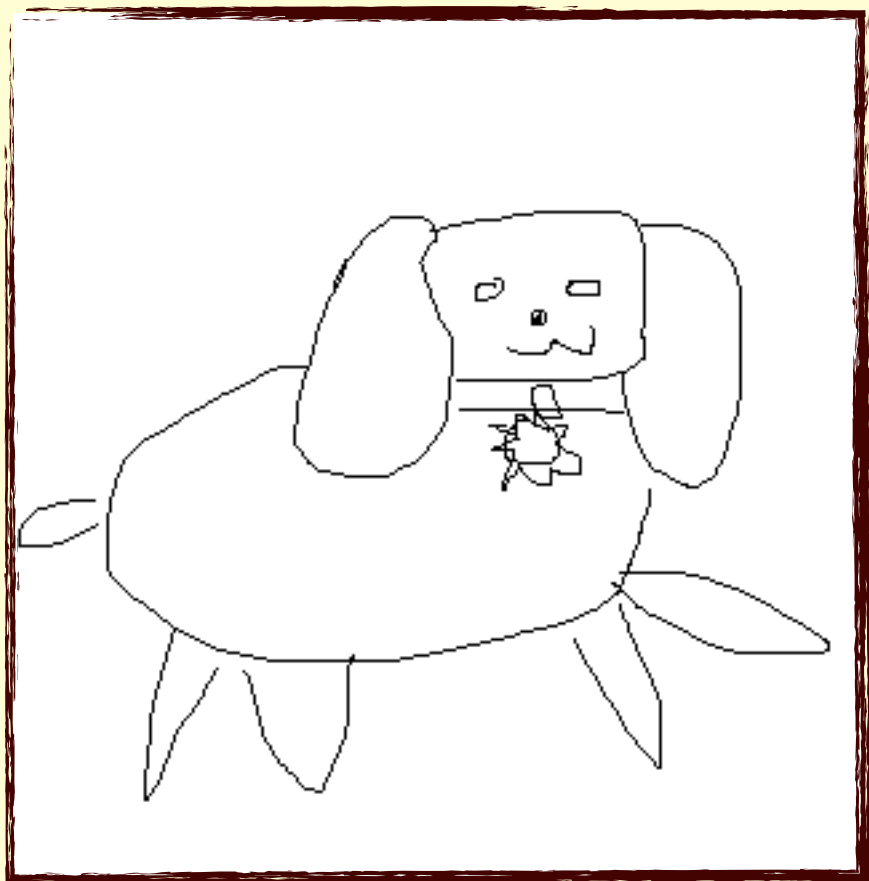
Previous: Pamphlet by Ivan Chernyshov



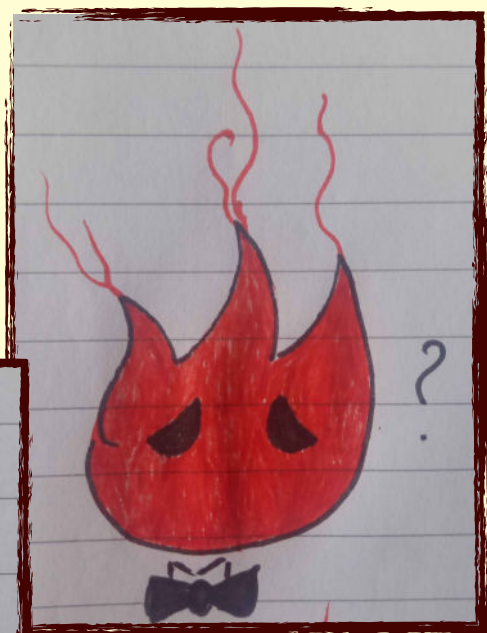
Hedgehog by Harmann Bansal

THAT'S
ALL,
FOLKS!

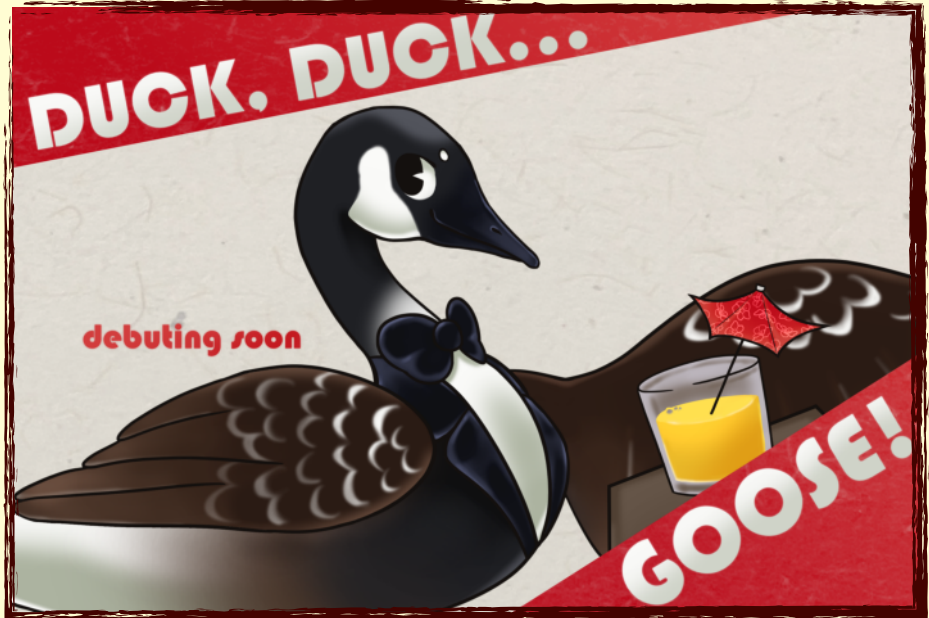




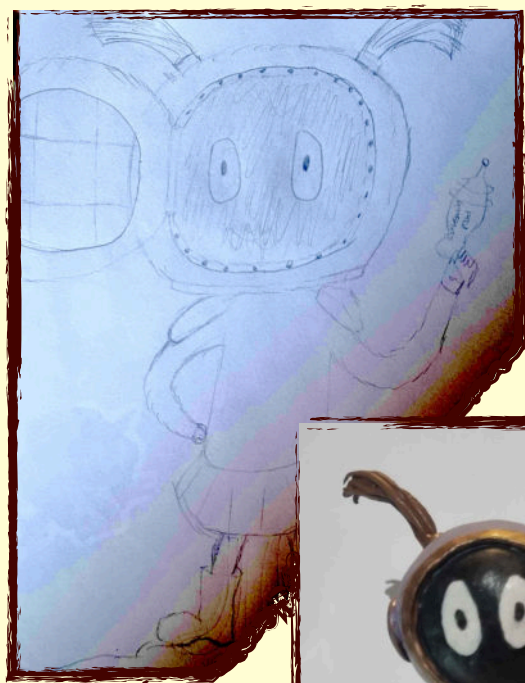
**Moony's drawing of Sunny by
Elynor Kamil**



Alfredo by Danielle Skeith



Duck Duck Goose by Konstantine Borbély-Soproni



Trixie Juniper by Harry S



**Space Unicorn and Marshmallow
by Harry S**



**Space Unicorn
by Annabel and Elizabeth Philp**



Ratty and Splits by Faith Rose Cortis



Bug Advertising by Faith Rose
Cortis

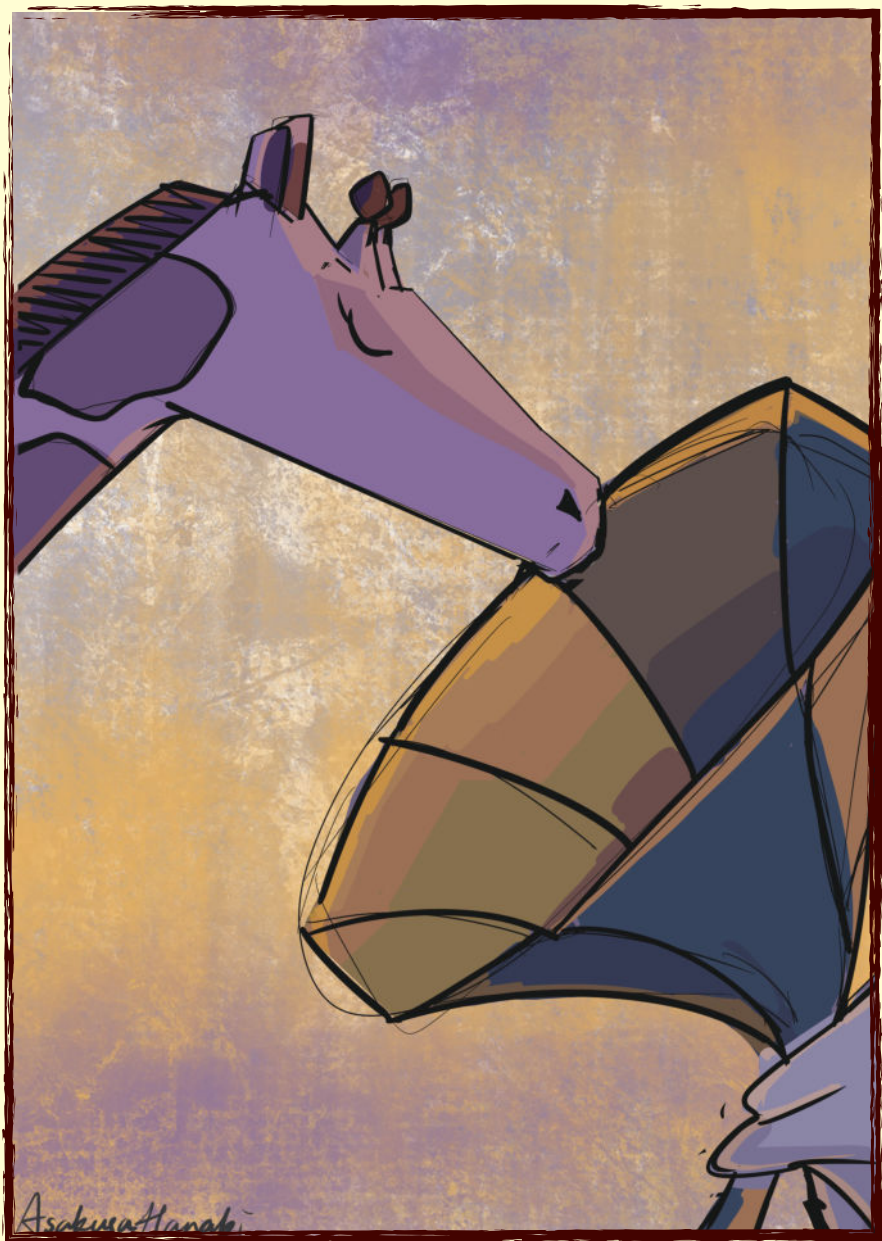
BUG THE CLOWN



*Merchandise
made for
'Clowning
Around'*



Bug Merch by Faith Rose Cortis



Kiss by Ruoqi Huang



Melodia by Ruoqi Huang



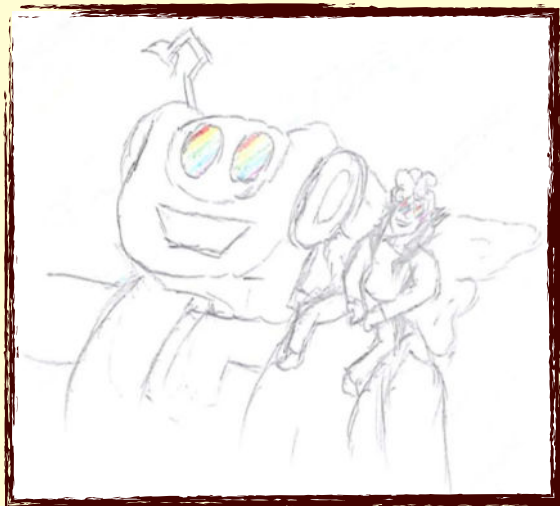
Curtain Call by Ruoqi Huang



'Allo! Vera by Harry S



**Detective Chum
by Isaac Christopher**



Beep-Boop and Phoebe by Oli J



Woolma and Phoebe by Sasha



**Phoebe by Faith Rose Cortis (left)
and Noureen I (right)**



Phoebe and Ani by Noureen I



Ani and Phoebe



By Noureen I



Maurizio by The Players of TAF

(Design by Paddy. Contributors: Conner, Dakota, Danielle, Heather, Isaac, Isla, Konstantine, Paddy, and Ruoqi)



**GM Gifts by Aleisha Lanceley,
Harmann Bansal, and Liana Warren**



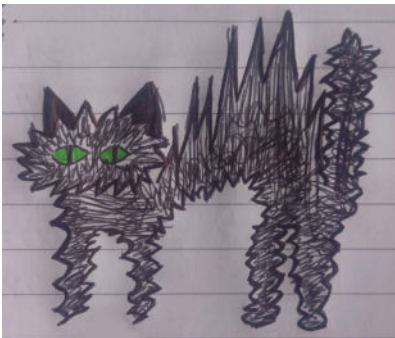
Canon! By Faith Rose Cortis

Freeform 1: Court



Banner by Konstantine Borbély-Soproni, King by Noureen I,
Turnip by Harry S.

Freeform 2: Bookshop



The Artist and The Artist after Eating Something New by
Ruoqi Huang, The Cat by Danielle Skeith



*Birdie (from Secret Society Oneshot, left) and Adelaide
(from Interdimensional Speed Dating, right) by
Noureen 1*

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Caroline Kent (71)
Dahria (7)
Dakota Hart (25, 49, 50, 68, 69)
Danielle Skeith (82, 100)
Elynor Kamil (81)
Faith Rose Cortis (24, 52, 54, 86, 87, 88, 93, 98)
Hana Isphani (72)
Harmann Bansal (79, 98)
Harry S (84, 85, 91, 99)
Harry Wright (24)
Isaac Christopher (91)
Isla H (59)
Ivan Chernyshov (75)
Jasper Hopkins (46)
Kaiya Collins (74)
Kamil Maczan (70)
Konstantine Borbély-Soproni (26, 52, 53, 54, 66, 73, 83, 99)
Liana Warren (55, 98)
Maisie B. Manning (11)
Noureen I (Cover, 10, 26, 51, 93, 94, 95, 96, 99, 101, 102)
Oli Jones (3, 92)
Ralph Whitworth (61)
Rose (58)
Ruoqi Huang (29, 58, 66, 67, 89, 90, 100)
Sasha (92)
Sophia de Medeiros (9, 20, 27, 28)
Tenaya Fottrell (57)
The Players of TAF (97)
The Players of Terminus (21)

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Art not listed if the sole character depicted was the creation of the credited artist.

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- Scripture Logo by Ivan C.
- The character of Sohar Quest-Shaper by Luke P.
- Characters in “Accolade” by Ruoqi H., Georgia C.L., Isla H.
- Character in “Dome of Protection by Ruoqi H., Caroline K.
- Characters in “Catch me before I fall” by Ruoqi H., Dakota H.
- The character of Princess Aina by Georgia C. L.
- The character of Likara by Georgia C.L.
- TAF logo and Sunny art by Konstantine B.-S.
- Moony’s drawing of Sunny based on the drawing of Sunny by Konstantine B.-S.
- The Character of Duck Duck Goose by Will B.
- The Character of Space Unicorn by Annabel P.
- The character of Ratty by George S.
- The character of Splits by Matt S.
- The characters in “Kiss” by Ruoqi H and Danielle S.
- The character of ‘Allo, Vera! By Esther L.
- Character of Phoebe by Noureen I
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- Characters in Banner by Konstantine B.-S., Harry S., Kaiya C., Rose G., Tenaya F., George S., Faith C., Noureen I., Paddy C.
- Character of the King by Konstantine B.S.
- Character of Adelaide by Faith C.

The End



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