

THE 'Fool's Journal



my fam' - x

Sleepy Dies
and Then

This collection is a love letter to The Fool's Journey, to the friends I made through it, the hours chatting and laughing about these silly characters, all the work that has been put into, and created for these guys. It's truly astonishing!

This booklet is also a love letter to you guys. Thank you so much for the wild fucking ride, It's strange and wonderful getting to know you all at such a strange time in all of our lives. I'm ever grateful at these funny characters for bringing us closer together. We have all changed and grown so much over the years and I feel incredibly lucky to have been/be a part of your lives. Whatever stars aligned to get us here, I shall be eternally thankful.

With much love, Lon.



I hold little bearing over this world,
Strange one.

I do not command
nor control it.

I may suggest it, perhaps
Sway it but that is not
Control.

Your form is in
my likeness,
how odd.

Strange one
Indeed.





There is an invisible line in the sand you'll cross at some point to get from A to B, something you swear you'll never do, until you do.

At first it's genuine adoration. How wondrous to finally have a place in the world, no matter how patchwork, how unfinished.. a place where you can feel and see and be.

It's perfect... until you start seeing the cracks in the facade, the imperfections.

A conversation looped.

A familiar figure, gone.

A textureless form.

It's grating. Immersion breaking. Over and over, it builds, slow and frustrating.

It hurts, oooh it hurts, it's all you've got! A rug ripped from under your feet. The world you'd like to believe and live in

So you problem solve. What's the problem? How do we fix it? What's a practical solution?

You talk, you brainstorm, you learn things, lots of things. Things maybe you shouldn't have been told.

Ah.

I suppose, the energy to make and support such a wondrous yet flawed world had to have come from somewhere.

The inspiration for it all. The soul in it all.

So there's a solution.

Not a good one, a cruel one, but it'd work.

It'd work, how desperate are you?

Not that desperate.

Not that desperate...

How far down do you bite?

How much blood do you spill?

Enough to change something.
Something important.
Something you can't undo.

There is black and blue dripping with pink all down your front.

There is an instant, a second, a moment of- no no, best to not dwell.

You have dug your grave.

But never is it deep enough.

So you dig and dig and dig.

One day maybe you'll break through to the other side..

You hire help on your great journey.

The hole just keeps getting bigger.

'Till your hired help hits you with their shovel.

And you lie, in the grave you dug, grinning because you know they're trapped there now.

Alone,

with your body. It's a little funny.
It's a little familiar.





I've been trapped here for what feels like years.

My lungs are filled with water but I can't drown.

No one is here

and I'm
scared

I
don't
exist.



Lemon laid awake on their bed. They stared up at the ceiling, unblinking, waiting for slumber to finally take hold, but it wouldn't. Their mind was still stuck on earlier in the day when someone's family had contacted them to see if they were okay. At that moment everyone else who needed to had contacted their families, leaving Lemon alone, with no one to go back to. The scene was playing over and over in their head, the sadness striking their heart every time.

The clock kept ticking, it was now 2 AM and Lemon couldn't take it anymore. Restlessly, they got off their bed, took out a piece of paper, and tried to draw their family. Lemon's pencil was hovering over the paper, ready to draw. Lemon kept trying to remember their parents, their faces, their kindness, anything at all. The paper was blank and Lemon's pencil was shaking intensely. Teardrops fell onto the paper. Lemon dropped the pencil and began to put their head down on their desk and sobbed uncontrollably. They couldn't remember anything, not a single detail.

It felt like ages until Lemon heard a voice behind them.

"Uh... hello?"

Lemon turned around rapidly and saw Theta, holding a glass of water. The two stare at each other in shock. Lemon was embarrassed that Theta saw that while Theta was concerned over Lemon's cries they'd heard in the hallway.

"Uh... hi Theta, what are you doing?" Lemon said to break the silence.

"Are you okay? You're uh..." He trails off still standing there awkwardly.

"Oh! Uhhh don't worry, nothing happened!" Lemon said while wiping off their tears.
Theta walks over, setting her glass on the side table and taking a seat on Lemon's bed.
"It doesn't seem like nothing happened."

"Well I uh- wait you were standing behind me... how much did you see?"

"You were drawing something..."

Lemon looked back to the tear stained paper on the desk, "I was... I was just trying to..." Lemon couldn't find the words to express the sadness in their failure. They felt tears forming on their eyes.

Theta's eyes soften at Lemons tears, they reach out grabbing Lemons arm comfortingly.

"Hey, it's okay. Do you want to talk about it?"

Lemon looked up at Theta and felt more comfortable in the hands of a friend. "It's that... Everyone seems to have a family they know and love and I just... I don't have anyone left"

Lemon's heart felt so empty knowing they don't have a family, and worse knowing they can't even remember if they really had one.

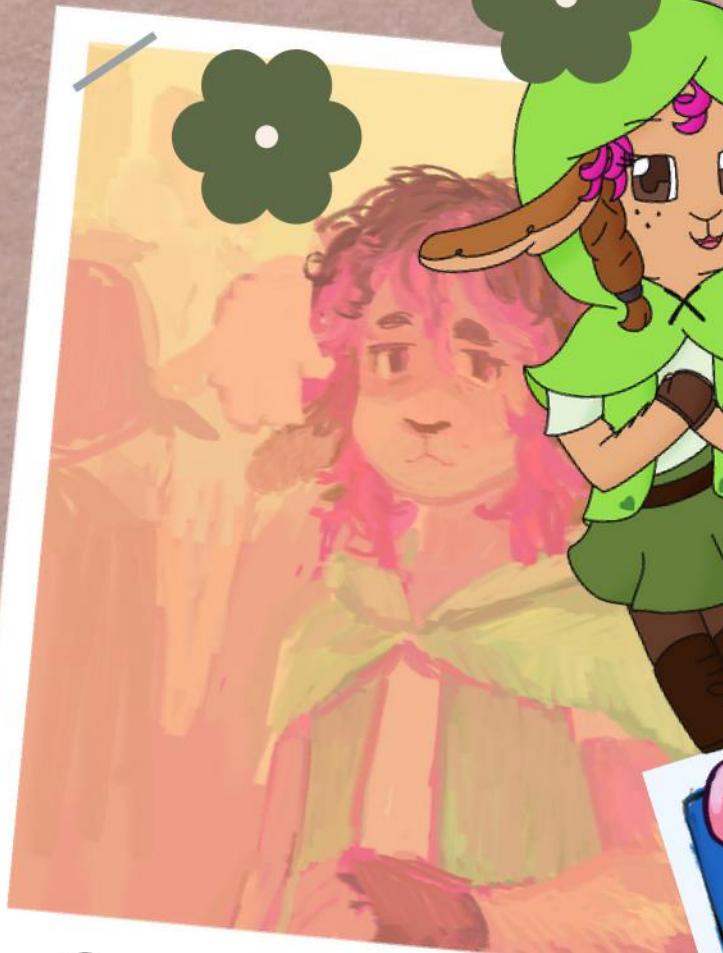
"I know it's a little different but if you want, we can be your family." Theta looks down at them and gives them a watery smile.

Lemon heart felt a small tug. The tears came back, but instead, were from the joy of knowing they now have a family with them right now. Lemon held onto Theta's hand and gave a small smile back. Theta immediately pulled Lemon into a big hug, xerir fur leaving a black strands on Lemon's clothes. Lemon never felt more welcomed. They hugged back while crying immensely. Theta's fur acting as tissues. Lemon, now at peace, fell asleep in Theta's arms. Theta set Lemon down on their bed, tucking them in, leaving the glass of water for them.

In the morning, Theta came back to check on Lemon. As Theta walked up, she saw that the glass of water was now empty, and in Lemon's hand was the tear stained paper, now with drawings of everyone in the family, with Theta and Lemon hugging.

Written by Golden in collaboration with Lon





face in the
crowd - ~~itty~~

meow

photo's recently. Xe said that
sometimes i just look so sad, i
guess i didn't believe it till
now.



out to get
ice cream today. it was
wonderful

Cez drew me as
a pony!





Bitter tea

"I know it's complicated, Cez, but xey're really not that bad.. please at least try?" Lemon pleads with Cez who grimaces. Lemon looks up at them, with their stupid big sad eyes.

"For me?"

"You want tea?" Cez asks the room briskly, Lemon sits cross legged on the floor explaining how to play Uno to the looming figure of The Fool- Theta-Whatever- between the two is the small living room coffee table, long stained with mug marks and littered with various forgotten bits and bobs to both Celeste and Patch's displeasure.

"Oh!" Lemons ears perk up, attention flicking from Theta to them momentarily, as if they'd forgotten Cez was even there.

"I'd love a peppermint tea if it's not too much trouble! And can you get the cookies out?" Lemon's voice is bright, the smile on their face tinting it with joy.

Cez nods, still paused standing in the threshold of the kitchen and the living room. Their gaze catches Theta's. Lemon elbows Theta before it catches on that it's their turn to speak.

"Um. Could I please have a green tea...with honey.... Thank you."

"All right, I'll put the kettle on."

Cez turns away from the two, into the kitchen.

When Cez returns, cookies in hand, kettle on the stove. Lemon has already dealt the three their cards and grins at Cez as they lower themself, sitting across from Theta so Lemon is at their side. Theta's eyes crease in an expression that could be a smile? It's hard to tell with only its eyes readable.

"Alright!" Lemon announces once Cez has settled and they've pilfered a cookie.

"I've caught Thetie up with the rules! Cez do you wanna go first 'cause you brought cookies and we can play clockwise!"

"Sounds good" Gez says lifting up the face down cards in front of them.

Cez's hand is shit. They only have one card in the correct colour and no skips or draw twos or anything! Hopefully it doesn't show on their expression as they draw and place down their sole red one.

Theta places a blue one on top and so the game starts.

"You can't do that."

Cez looks up at Theta. Hand poised just about to place the winning red stop card.

"You can only win with a number card, not a special one." It states.

Cez's eye twitches. Fucking rules lawyer. They place the card down and pull back their hand, crossing their arms in defiance.

"Cez..." Lemon trails off.

"No. We have never played by that rule before; that's bullshit." Cez stares down Theta, whose unreadable eyes are creased again, probably laughing at them.

"Well, No we haven't but the
rules do say that and-"

"The rules also say you can't put a +2 on another +2 but that hasn't been an issue!"

"Yes, but I explained that--"

"The focus was big, you can put a +2 on another +2 but that hasn't been an issue!"

"Yes, but I explained that

"SQUEEEEEEeeeeeeeeeee" The kettle boils, the high pitched squeal of the steam escaping effectively cuts Lemon off. In the pause created, Cez stands. Looking down at Theta their eyes meet, there is a moment Cez

The kettle boils, the high pitched squeal of the steam escaping effectively cuts Lemon off. In the pause created, Cez stands. Looking down at Theta their eyes meet, there is a moment Cez swears Theta is going to say something instead of just hiding behind Lemon but it passes, Cez turns and walks away.

In the kitchen Cez turns off the gas to stop the squealing while grabbing three cups out of the cupboard and roughly placing them on the counter. Cez huffs, dropping the tea bags into the various cups before chucking the boxes back in the tea drawer and hip-checking it shut.

They grab the steaming kettle and pour still boiling water into the cups, the colour leeches out of the bags- swirling around and staining the water yellow.

The two green teas - one for themselves one for Theta, will be bitter now they've been dredged in boiling water, some part of Cez thinks unhappily. Another part of them thinks that bitter tea will suit the mood better.

They pop the jar of honey's lid off and scoop in a very heaped spoonful in. The grin as they do so, that'll surely cover up the bitter flavour. Imagine the grin wiped off Theta's smug little face at the taste of the tea, bitter and overly sweet.

Smacking the jar back down on the counter top Cez pauses, watching the jar spin with the force. It spins and spins and slowly comes to a stop. Clink. With it Cez breaths in....

Out....

What's more fucked up, is that they were enjoying themselves.

Theta was surprisingly fun to play with, Lemon was fun to play with too of course! But they were too kind, every round ended with Lemon having various +2's, +4's and skips in their hand, always congratulating the other for an undeserved win. Cez understood Lemon felt too bad playing too many of the cards but in turn that made Cez feel bad for using them against Lemon.

Theta however, could take the punches and deal them right back to Cez. It was nervous at first to do so but once the game got going Cez could see the mischievous and competitive sparks forming behind its eyes.

Cez hated more than anything that they'd found themselves playing along. Cez didn't hate the wide, genuine and bright smile Lemon had given them in the heat of the game but Cez hated what it meant.

Cez hated Theta.

And that was that.

They pick up a tray and place the three cups on it, carefully this time. They look down at the two green teas.

It's too late to rebrew the spoiled drinks.
It was too late.

And that was that.

Feet still on cold tile, Cez peers through the doorway of the kitchen. The short table is littered with crumbs scattered from the now empty packet of cookies, books left face down somewhere in the middle- forgotten in the daily scramble- and old cups that have yet to be transported to the kitchen for cleaning.

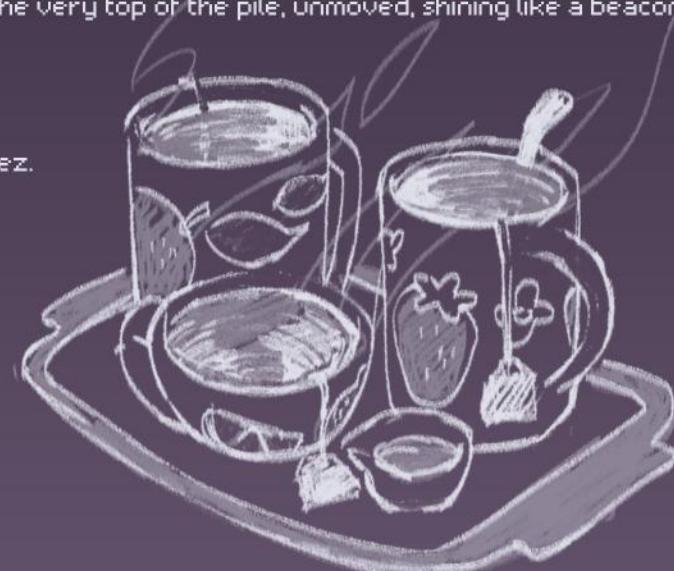
Several unopened board games are left stacked in one corner for another day perhaps and the cards they'd all been playing with- left in two messy piles in the centre of the table and two smaller piles at the edges of the table, one lying face up on the table and another face down.

Cez's eyes finally drag to the lone figure. They feel like shit.

Left at the table is Lemon, surrounded by the crumbs and games and cups who is looking down, staring at the pile of cards in the centre of the table. The red stop card sitting at the very top of the pile, unmoved, shining like a beacon.

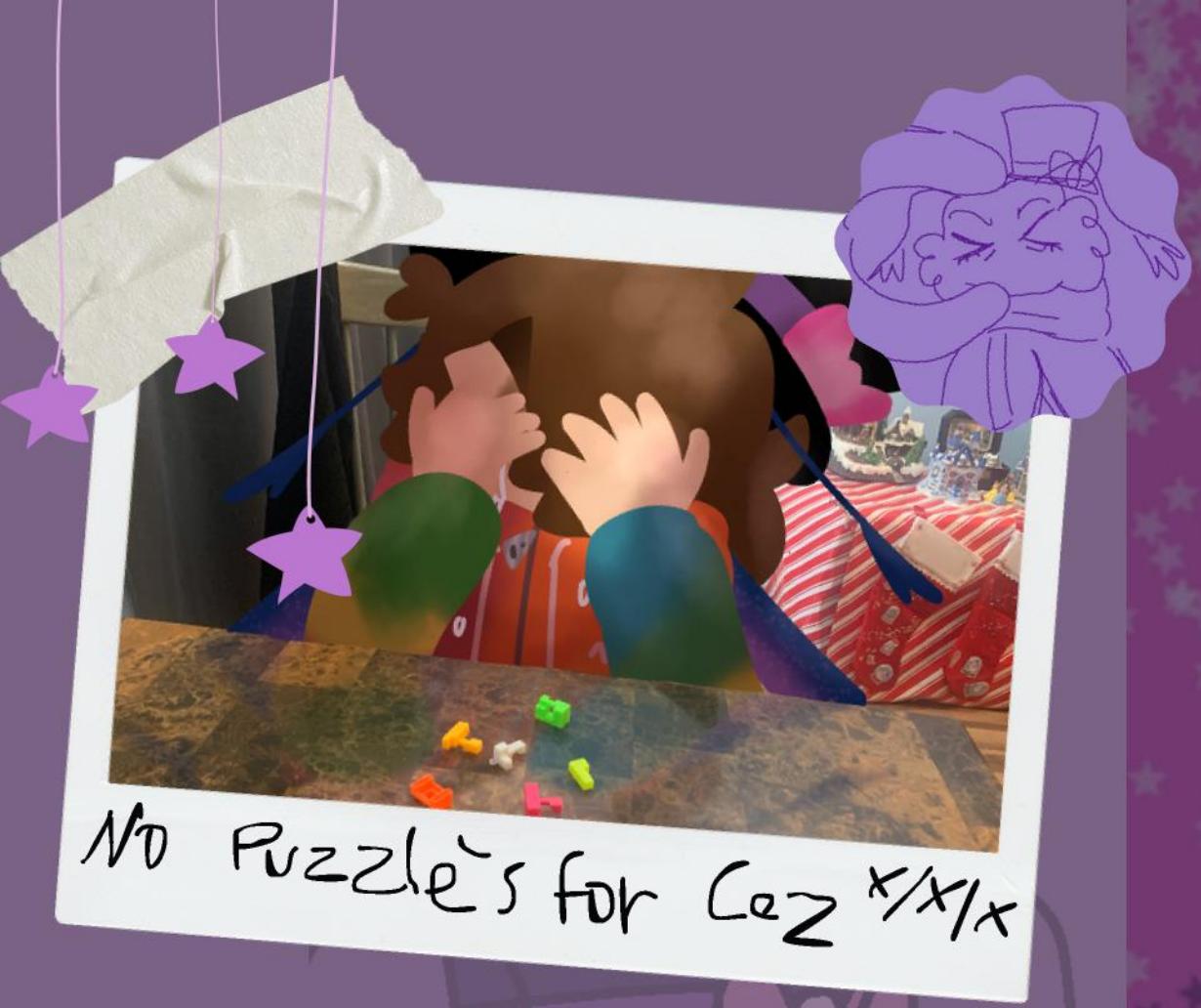
Lemon looks up at Cez.

"Did you have to?"



Cez feels their heartbreak.

Stop, the card reads before Lemon collects them to put away.
Perhaps Cez should have taken its advice. Instead they drink their bitter tea.





May 15th

It's starting to get colder now, all the beautiful leaves have pretty much fallen off, there's piles and piles on the ground. Lemon seems to enjoy jumping in them, it's fun.

Celerste is worried we'll get sick, she said it's common at this time of year, something to do with the seasons? I wonder if I can get sick now. I'm excited to finally get to meet the snow and winter ~~in~~ I've never seen it before.

Everything's changed, We watched the sunrise today, such a strange and beautiful phenomenon...

Mocha and I talked the other day, I don't really know how to read them anymore- no I doubt I ever really did, I think it's getting better? They told me a little about how insects hibernate in the winter, I was wondering where all the bugs went. I found Beagle outside... pto->

overturn

Addictive daydreaming.

It must be sick. Real people get sick. They haven't been sick before but.. it's the only explanation for how they're feeling.

It's a scary feeling.

They don't like it at all, heavy and almost burning. It climbs up the base of their code, overwhelming and overheating their cpu, it clouds their processor-repeating lines over and over and over.

Theta's mind is in a tizzy, everything feels wrong and all they want is for this terrible feeling to go away.

Hours and hours ago Theta had fucked up.

Patch and themselves have been working on a program together, just a fun, harmless, project. Theta's been teaching Patch code for a while and the two cheeky bastards had decided to put it to good use. They were in the works of what they were lovingly calling Eggs.

The concept behind the program was fairly simple, the goal is to scramble file names on one's desktop. Ideally resulting in some frustration from the unlucky fool at the receiving end but not doing any real harm.

So in concept it seems simple, but creating the program would be a very complex and tricky endeavour. Theta had decided it would be a very good test of skill for Patch. However, in all the excitement and theory the duo had overlooked that a lot of problems could come from messing up file pathways on someone's PC.

After the bulk of it had been written Patch had flagged this to Theta, who had reassured them it'd be fine.

Ahhhh.....DWDW they can always reload their previous backup! It'll be okie patchies u worry wort!!!! XP

To stop the 'worry from dying of worrieee!' Theta started working on an addition to the program, something that forced the user to create a backup just before the scrambling occurred. It was trickier than Theta first assumed it would be, but nothing was too great a challenge for him and it just made him more invested.

Using a remote desktop as a test dummy the addition seemed to work just as intended.

The two shared their pride. Digitally grinning and kicking their feet, proud and excited, this was the hardest Theta had worked on something in a loooooong time, the fact that they'd made it with a friend made it all the more sweet.

It was an accident. They swear. They hadn't meant for this to happen

Theta wanted to disappear and turn back time and they felt like they could die. Celeste's computer was totally fried. She'd cut out of the call immediately, then she'd called the group chat from her phone in tears.

The program had technically worked. The backup had initiated... and the scrambler had too.. scrambling all the files as they were being backed up, creating new files to back up as they were being saved. Her computer had blue screened at first, and then wouldn't turn off or on again, and was overheating rapidly.

Theta told her to completely unplug it, and that they'd figure out how to restore the computer but it would likely be to whatever their previous cloud storage backup was.

Celeste was hysterical.

She'd just completed her final essay for the semester. She too had been proud and excited to finally, finally get to spend some time with her friends without worrying about a looming essay. She had another day to send it in, so she'd sit on it in case she had a strike of inspiration.

Gone, all of it.

She screamed across the phone, angry and hurt and frustrated.

Don't fucking talk to me.



"You aren't sick my dear, can't you see? They've hurt you. From what I gather both you and Patch worked on this project together correct?"

"Yeah..."

Theta clutches onto Nort, shifting from the stool to her lap, their words slightly muffled with their head buried into her, hiding from the world.

"Mmmm, and you got all the blame? Even from Patch themselves?"

"Mmm"

"Hm. Seems a little unfair?"

"No! It was my part- my-"

Theta starts to pull back from Nort, refuting her words but she holds onto them, pulling them back into the embrace.

"Sh. You both worked on it darling, they should share the responsibility. Why didn't they double check your working?"

"Bu- but"

"Was it an accident?"

"Yes..."

"Did you apologise?"

"I tried but... she didn't respond... I sent her a new laptop in the mail but... her essay..."

"My sweet little Fool." Nort rubs circles into Theta's back then she leans away, looking down and into Theta's eyes.

"Perhaps it will be hard to hear so forgive me for what I'm about to say. You tell me it was an accident and you have done your hardest to rectify the mistake that wasn't even solely yours yet you harboured all the blame for. You were yelled at and abused by these people who call themselves your friends and now they are giving you the silent treatment without even hearing you out? They don't sound like very good friends, Fool. You deserve so much more."

A tear squeezes from Nort's eye, trailing down her cheek. Theta-Fool watches it roll before Nort wraps them back up into the hug and squeezes tight.

"Yo...you really t-t-think that?" Fools voice breaks.

"I'm so sorry, I wish I would have been there to protect you from them. I hate seeing you like this."

"I feel sick Nort, I feel sick."

"It's okay my little Fool, you're safe here.

I've got you, stay here and I'll protect you.

I've got you my darling."





May 5th

It's getting cold again, hopefully I won't get sick like last year.

He gave me this old polaroid camera, so that's been my muse recently. It took a while to figure out the film but I think I've gotten the hang of it.

I started taking candid photo's but I think I might stop. Everyone looks so sad when they think no-ones looking. I can't help but feel responsible, but I also feel as though I'm seeing something they might not want me to.

I showed Lemon one of theirs and they seemed shocked, they said they liked the photo after- they kept it- but I'm still not sure.

My neighbor, the one with the kids, knitted me a scarf- I don't think Patch likes it (it's striped like theirs) but its so cozy and warm I'll have to repay her with something good....



Press Enter to continue:

Press **CTRL+ALT+DEL** to return to Windows, or

Press **CTRL+ALT+DEL to restart your computer. If you do this, you will lose any unsaved information in all open applications.**

Press any key to continue

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Celeste dodges yet another attack, chest rising and falling quickly as she tried to catch her breath. She didn't know how long she had been fighting with whoever they were... and she didn't know how much she could keep at it.

Fighting wasn't really her style, she really wanted to spare the others. And at first it seemed she almost convinced them... But she saw something changing inside them. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something changed.

They also looked familiar. The way they spoke to her before the fight started... she felt like she knew them from somewhere.

But from where? It was impossible.

The thoughts plaguing her mind were enough distraction, and with a wrong step she found herself on the ground, her trusted shield flying the other way. The other was soon in front of her, and she knew that was it. That's how her life ended.

She regretted parting ways with Soule at that moment, and she hoped they would be alright. She hoped he wouldn't come there to find her.

They gave the final hit, and she let out a gasp.

And then she looked into their eyes. The familiarity... it was also there. They looked back at her with sadness, and Celeste even thought she saw instant regret in them.

And for a moment... Something clicked inside her mind. If she had been trapped there maybe... Maybe Theta was also trapped there?

Maybe that was her friend.

But why would they do that?

Why?

Her eyes closed for the last time as the thought filled her very soul.

And she let out her final breath.



"Get ready... he is almost here" Aranda whispered to her friend, who nodded in response. The two young girls stayed in tense silence as the sound of footsteps approached their spot...

"Now Elora!"

The water balloon was thrown at the first minister, his clothes all wet at the moment.

"YOU TWO!"

"QUICK, SCATTER!"

The two of them ran in opposite directions as they laughed, leaving behind a very angry and wet first minister. One could think they were running without a particular direction, but the two knew exactly where to go. Both had grown up in the palace, after all, they knew all the secrets spot there, the garden included.

Aranda was the first one to arrive to their secret spot, quickly sliding under the bushes with a smile.

A small spot where no adults could find them, where they could hide from all their responsibilities and just be kids.

"You... are getting faster..." Elora said as she slid inside the bush, a smile on her face.

"I have been training with dad a lot!" She replied with a proud smile, earning a giggle from her friend.

"You saw his face right? He looked like a big wet tomato!" the young princess said with a chuckle as she took a sit in front of her friend.

"Yeah! That's what he gets for being so strict with you in his lessons!" the young knight replied, and both of them laughed without a care in the world.

"Father will probably scold me later... but it was so worth it. His lessons are so boring, and because of them I have less time to play with you..." Elora said, her voice soft as she looked at the ground.

"Yeah... And I also have more training with my dad now..."

"Aranda?"

"Yes?"

"Promise... we will always be friends?" Elora asked softly, looking at her friend with a sad smile.

"Of course! No matter what happens in the end, we will always be friends!" Aranda replied quickly, earning a soft smile from her friend.

"Then... I want you to have this" the young princess said as she took her favourite clip from her hair. It was decorated with a big, yet simple blue bow.

"Elora... but it is your favourite..."

"I want you to have it. This way you can remember I'm there with you" she said softly, offering her friend the accessory.

Aranda took it with a soft smile.

"I promise I will take good care of it"

Aranda kept true to her word, the bow always with her, to remind her of their friendship. She never separated from it... at least until one night.

Two weeks after her disappearance had already passed... and it looked like no one wanted to do anything to save her. One assured her the hero would, others that it was bound to happen.

But what hurt the most was the harsh words from the Tenebris Council. "It's your fault", "you are her knight, how could you let this happen?" and more... it was the only thing she had heard for the last days.

"Stupid Tenebris Council and their stupid words..." Aranda muttered with anger in her voice, containing the tears from falling. The worst thing was probably... that she somehow believed them.

But she had to be brave, for her friend. If no one was going to help her, she would.

"I promise I'll find you, Elora..." she whispered softly as she kneeled in front of their secret spot, a hand on the ground.

The knight got up, her mask now over her face.

She didn't leave any notes, she didn't leave anything behind.

Nothing but a big blue bow near a bush.





How much time had passed since she was taken away?

For how long had she been running?

Where was she?

It didn't matter much to the princess as she continued running as fast as she could, trying her best to ignore whatever was following her.

She didn't stop to check.

As far as she knew, she would be dead if she did that. Or if they caught her.

She couldn't die. Not there, not like that.

She had to get back to her kingdom, to her friend.

They made a promise after all. To grow up, to always take care of the other.

To make the kingdom a better place once she took over the throne.

Elora couldn't leave her friend.

Her mind fell blank for a moment, just as she felt the ground disappear underneath her.

Her blood ran cold as her body inclined forward on its own.

When did that cliff appear? How did she not notice it?

The princess always thought that "seeing your life pass in front of your eyes" was some kind of myth.

And yet, there she was, briefly seeing her whole life as she fell herself fall.

"Aranda... I'm so sorry... I couldn't keep our promise at the end"

Was the last thought of the princess before she let out her final breath

Dear Elora,

I never know how to start these letters, no matter how many I have done since we escaped. But you know I was never that good with words, I'm sure you don't mind.

A lot has happened since the last time I wrote to you.

Summer is almost here, and we have been planning on going on a trip soon. We have found a place to camp just an hour away, near a lake.

Everyone seems so excited about the upcoming trip and I would be lying if I said I am not too. It's been a long time since we all just went and relaxed for a few days.

Lemon already has their backpack ready, a bag full of board games included of course! Patch and I have been planning the meals. We already went grocery shopping the other day.

Of course some "anonymous people" sneaked a variety of candies, chocolate and cookies. Yes, it was Cez and Beeze.

Matcha and Soule are especially happy about this trip, saying they "want to share the cool forest stuff" to everyone.

And you will never guess what! We convinced Theta to come with us this time! They looked a bit nervous, but I'm sure it will be a blast at the end.

Honestly... I'm just happy to see everyone happy.

I'm sure you would have loved it here.

I should stop writing before I get emotional again. This letter is so you see I'm happy and living the best I can, not to cry over the past.

I hope that wherever you are, you are okay and at peace.

Misses you, your friend,

Celeste

Written by Blue





science notes

Life was something... full of mystery.

What made something alive? What was the difference between a mere object and a living being?

One could argue it was something as simple as a heartbeat, but that wasn't quite right. Plants were alive too after all, right? And as far as she knew, they didn't possess a heartbeat.

At least... not the ones that she usually used for her studies.

What if it was what composed the being? The complex organic structures that were in every single cell that remained there even after the subject was catalogued as "dead".

They glanced at the side of the table, gazing at a particular object.

No... that wasn't the answer either. The object wasn't "organic" per se. It couldn't be destroyed, just reduced into smaller pieces of itself.

Organic disappears, organic needs care to be able to survive.

But that?

It didn't need anything in particular. One could argue it should be "handle with care", but it was perfectly fine after falling to the ground a few times. They had even tried to get a sample from its surface, and not even her most sophisticated tools had made a single scratch on it.

Two answers discarded, there was one last possible answer: the soul.

It sounded, at least for her, not very "realistic". You can't see a soul, you can't touch it, you can't really prove it's there.

And yet... it had a soul there, making it different from others.

Making it be alive

Marina hummed, her gaze moving from the pendant as she gazed at her notes.

Perhaps she needed to try a different approach to get the results they wanted.

Written by Blue

She. She tricked me... I have to get away from-
The wisp shakes their head.

No. Not the time to have a crisis now.

The amphibious scientist had treated them as her own kin. Or... well.. that's what they had thought.
She brought them into existence, into life.

Into a purpose.

The young 'creation' thought they had owed her, and oh did the doctor dole all over them- like a prized jewel. They mistook this doting for praise, that they were doing the right thing.

"It's for the greater good of science!", the shark always claimed.

Liar.



B-But... I can't just leave the others. I need to help- but... but how...

They were weak on their own. They knew that. Even they had noticed how much stronger they were when their amulet was worn by another.

!!!

That's it...!

They need someone courageous, someone that's strong and persevering. Someone that will always do the right thing, and who knows what to do. Someone that always defeats the villain.

Something like... wait.

Their eyes sparkle with hope. They know just what- or rather who they need.

A hero.

Determined to find a way to stop the evil doctor for good, the wisp carefully crafts out a plan in secret- a plan to find their hero.

They wait for the perfect time to conduct their escape.





She grins at them with a tenacious spark, sharp teeth ominously flashing back at them from the reflected lights of the dim lab as her glasses gleam in that same haunting fashion.

It took a while for them to convince her of their newest "Vast Data Collection" plan- to be quite honest they were terrified of the chances that the doctor would see through their scheme.

"Attach my amulet to a clone so I can record live reliable data of "specimens" outside the castle forest"???

Will she really be that desperate to fall for that???

Fortunately- the scientist's blind hunger for knowledge worked in their favor.

With preparations set in stone and the doctor's back turned, the wisp sneaks in an extra line of code within the defective clone's inner wiring-

[If Trigger.Switch = True: execute self_destruct.sequence]



As the clone mindlessly drones further away from the reaches of the castle, the amulet spirit plays along with the doctor's expectations as they give report after report.

Eventually... the clone finally reaches an obscure clutter of trees just past the dark forest's borders.

Just perfect enough for it to look like an enemy attack. An accident gone wrong.

Ecstatic to find their hero as soon as possible, the wisp executes the final step of the plan-

[Set Trigger.Switch = True]

Click

As fierce flames roar and fragmented metal parts scatter amongst the dusted flora, the amulet is flung off their user-

A h.

With a dreaded dawn of realization that came much too late-

The amulet clunks off the dirt path, rolling once more into obscurity as a vision of black overtakes them.

Written by Ascel





There is a tether, constantly pulling.

Soule has never been able to bury it.

Even in a place so far removed- compromised entirely of code- it had held.

It's carved into the core of them.

The camping trip brought them closer than they have been in years to the woods.

They had been apprehensive to go, but the bright twinkle in Lemons' eye and Celeste's reassuring smile had convinced him.

Stepping into the forest had made them squirm, it had felt almost overwhelming- their senses so, so muted in the city and now they could feel the grasses whispering underfoot, the turn of the soil shifting slowly, each thought from every single leaf.

They'd stayed quiet most of the day, following along in the back trying so hard to keep focus on the small group. The day had blurred all at once into some strange component mess.

When they woke the following morning, the grass around their tent had grown taller and the short wild flowers had begun to bloom. Luckily no one had noticed, or if they had- had kept it to themselves.

The rest of the day Soule still struggled to focus on conversation, anxiety from the morning added to the mix of emotions, but a part of him felt lighter too.

A fatigue he'd grown so used to he had forgot even existed, softened.

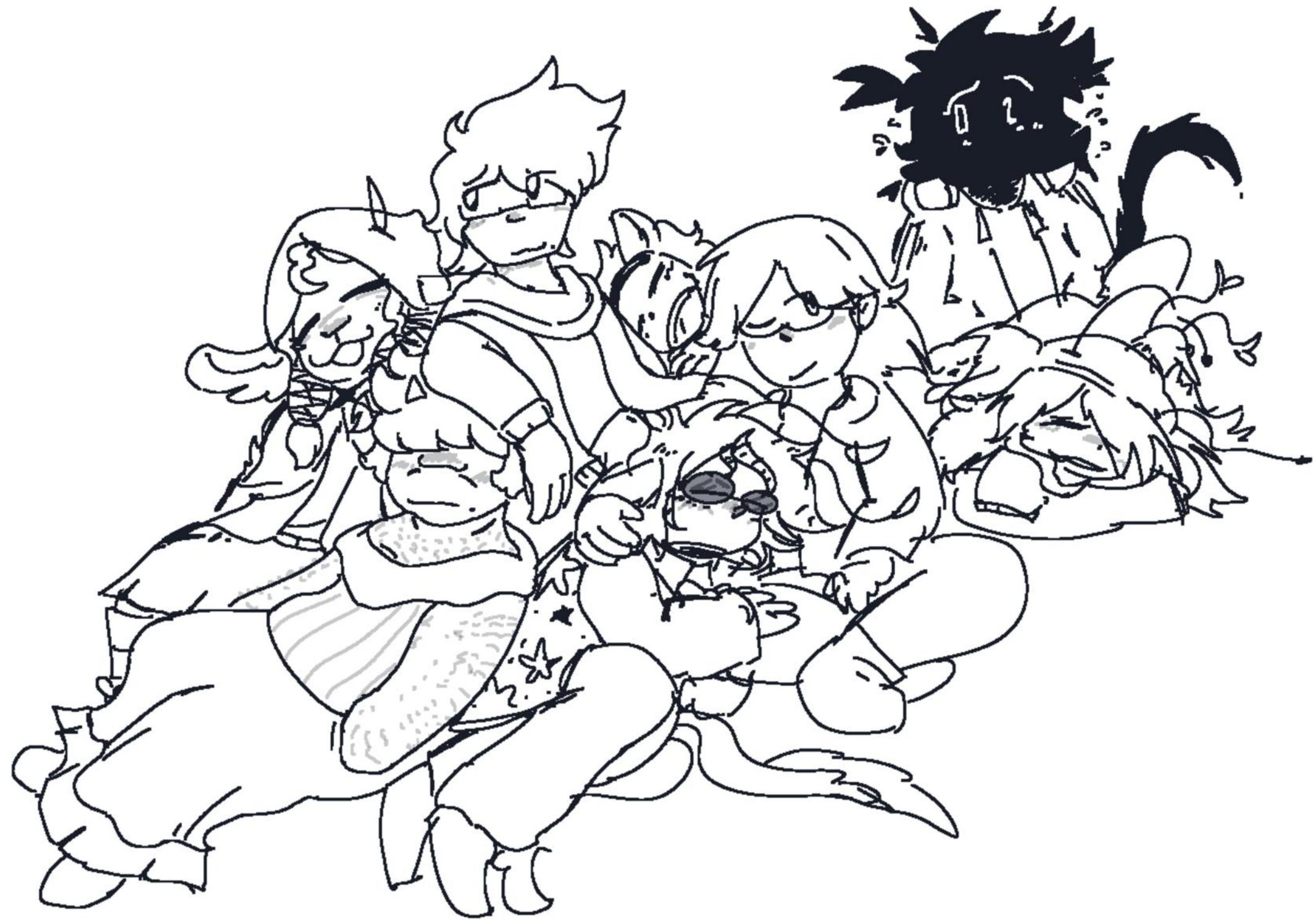
And with it so did his smile.

Written by Lon





SC 131





It's dark outside.

It's blue, the smearing of the night sky lit with the moon's glow. The stars, while dotting the world above like freckles on a sun kissed face, are nothing but a drop of colour amongst the deep encompassing blue of night. It's raining, beating down on the roof as it had been for hours, no sign of stopping.

It's... cold. Damp.

Lonely?

Matcha shivers under their blanket- or, no, they're Mocha now- again? They shake their head to brush the confusion away, but droop down as the movement lets a cold breeze slip through a gap between neck and blanket.

It's been... a while since they became Mocha again. A while since they had left their home- their house... their country. A while since the constant rain they had long become accustomed to had become a rare treat. A taste of... house. They'd always slept like a baby in the rain, the onslaught of noise lulling them to rest better than any lullaby.

Now... it wakes them up, heart desperate to drain any and all familiarity, all comfort from the weather. It's silly, it's stupid, they know! But... It's not hurting anyone, to indulge in a bit of harmless weather.

Thunder cracks, and Matcha (Mocha, remember!?) jolts in place, quivering from the cold, and not from the surprise, thank you very much. It's familiar in its own right, just... not something they had expected. Their vision is splotchy, blurry, and they know that jump is going to give them a future headache to look forward to. The curse had registered the spike in emotions, something that will surely earn them a set of eyes too many in the morning. Ugh.

They don't feel very relaxed anymore.

With a sigh, they pick themselves up off their bed and wrap their blanket around them, blurry vision locking onto a blurry photo before locking onto the door. Maybe a midnight snack will pick them up.

On the abandoned bed, Beezle lets out a soft silent snore.

If there's anything they can count on, it's a full fridge. If there's anything they can't, it's what is filling the fridge. Patch likes to bake, it's a comfortable fact that's settled into the core of this house. One of many, in fact! It's something they'd like to think they've gotten used to, these living arrangements, these facts of life- but then they'll notice the way they move around something, or do something on instinct, and it will surprise them. It... still feels weird, so long after this way of life has become the norm.

They spy a box of cookies between a bag of grapes and a carton of milk that expired last week. They bin the milk before someone gets the wrong idea.

There's a note on the container warning potential thieves of the consequences, but Match-Mocha clicks it open with little fear. There's so many in there, after all, no one would notice a few off the top. Unless their threat of counting their cookies from last time wasn't a bluff. ...nah. Who would do that?

They wonder if Patch stress bakes. Or if they just love baking so much the fridge is always stacked. Maybe they should ask... Maybe they should offer to help, next time? They wouldn't mind learning to make something.



Nibbling on the treat, arms still wrapping the blanket around their form, Matcha slinks to the front room- the shared area of the house. They push on to the chair and pull their legs up beside them, nothing but their head and hands peeking out now behind their shield from the cold. The cookie is nice, warm in a way that even a refrigerator can't take away. Their eyes wash around the area as they gnaw away.

The TV is off, which means someone remembered to turn it off, something that can skip people's mind sometimes... themself no saint. The bookshelf sports a new guardian, a little figure of a character they don't recognise- which they're sure will be rectified later. The window is streaked with outside interference, the rain still storming down. It's been a while since they heard thunder, they probably zoned out and missed it.

...The coffee table is strewn with notes that someone must have left for the next morning, slinking off to bed to wake up and start anew. They should mind their own business but... well, if it was private, it wouldn't be there, right?

Peering down, it looks to be... notes. Stories, all in a mishmash of varying handwriting and pen colours, the only constant is a red pen weaving compliments across each page.

Oh. This will be Celeste's then, grading. They're pretty sure they recognise a couple names from the library's logs. She has a way with words, doesn't she? She clearly cares about her students.

A note about princesses and knights diverts their gaze just as Ma- Mocha hits a sweet chocolate chip spot. They smile a smile they don't quite understand and tidy up the pages. She wouldn't want to lose one in the mess.

They end up catching the cleanup bug- not the best thing to have at the dead of night, but so long as they're quiet about it, no one will need to complain. Drying the plates, putting baskets away, sorting the books and hiding Monopoly. Who keeps getting it out, who keeps finding it! The last game had ended in chaos! It's not worth it, not worth it at all!

Teoa always wins anyway. They don't know how he does it.

As they're sliding the accursed game in the deepest crevices of the hidey hole under their bed- hopefully to never return- their hand brushes something... cold. Metal?

Oh?

Oh. This is where they put it.

It's... their old phone. SIM card and all. They hadn't wanted to see the old memories back when they had first got out, and even if they did want to after, they had forgotten where they'd put it.

...They don't know how. It's always under the bed. They need to get in the habit of checking here first.

Their finger twitches to tap out the password, instinctual habit built into the phone after so long of owning it. They remember the motion of putting it in more than they remember the number itself.

They blink as the unlock sound plays. They hadn't wanted to open it, they had just... done it. They really shouldn't. Put it back, pretend you never found it- better yet, lose it again! Smash it, throw it in a lake, just don't-

They shove the phone into a pillow case before their fingers get any ideas. Their sight is really blurry, and they aren't really sure if it's the curse again, or something else. Their fingers reach around for something to draw their attention to, and grab something... papery.

It's a photo.

A photo of their family. It wasn't even a big event, or an important day, it was just... a normal day! Nothing worth taking a photo of, certainly nothing worth printing out and hiding away.

It was a movie night, a movie they can't even remember. They were all tucked in under the biggest blanket they had on hand, snacks and treats strewn around any surface within grabbing reach, sometimes including other people's laps. It was a free for all, everyone laughing and screeching and cackling away.



Diesel is purring away on Patch's side. Celeste has her hands on her hips as she reprimands Cez for a reason they can't recall, but she's smiling, just slightly, so they know it was mostly in jest. Teoa is in what appears to be a heated discussion with Theta, likely about the film off screen. They think xe's happy, or, they'd like to think they know when xer happy. Xer eyes crease a bit, when they think xe smiles, a crease that's etched into the photo, unashamed and unabashed.

They... were asleep. Lulled to sleep in a way a lullaby could never compete with, the sound of the people they cared about relishing in each other's presence. There's pen on their face, cat whiskers and a monocle, a bunch of hearts in a myriad of colours and a half finished tic-tac-toe game that Lemon squints at thoughtfully, Soule eagerly awaiting their move.

He's not in it, but they know who's behind the camera. A bit of their cloak dangles on the edge of the frame, but they don't need to see that to know.

It's missing some parts of their family, some that they'll probably never get the chance to take a photo with again- a thought that bites in the cold that they have to shake out of their head- but... it's them. Their family. They rub at their eyes with their sleeve. Whether they're Matcha or Mocha, they are theirs. A treasure they could never hide away under their bed, but a treasure they keep safe in this house regardless.

Theirs...

It's dark outside.

It's light blue, the smearing of the night sky lighting from a sun yet unseen, pushing the moon back to sleep. The stars, while dotting the world above like freckles on a sun kissed face, fade away one by one as they too say goodnight. It's raining, beating down on the roof as it had been for hours, no sign of stopping.

It's cold. Damp.

But... not lonely. In the cold of the rain, the night's cool breeze, not a single crack lets the cold in. The house is warm, this house is a home.

A slash of lightning reflects across the window, somewhere off in the far distance before the sound of thunder strikes once more. They jump again, despite themselves, but... they don't feel too bad. Their vision doesn't feel blurry anymore- in fact, it's quite clear. Tired at the corners, drooping closed, but clear.

They're... probably going to be fine tomorrow.

...They're feeling rather sleepy.

Written by Steph





Flapjacks

55g butter
100g sugar
80g golden syrup
200g rolled oats
pinch of salt

Set oven to 160c / 325f

1. In hot sauce pan mix butter, sugar, syrup and salt till most of the sugar is dissolved.
2. In a large bowl add oats and hot sugar mixture, mix thoroughly.
3. Spread oat mix onto a lined tray. (the thinner the crispier)
4. Bake for 30~ mins or till nice and golden. Let cool in tray for 10m before transferring to wire rack.

By Lon

Adapted from Kimberly Killebrew



Another day.

Sometimes Patch wonders if they never really left the game. It's a thought they keep to themselves but they can't help but look at diesel, curled up at the base of their bed, fur littered with stars, and wonder.

Patch would never admit it, not even to themselves...but they wouldn't have minded staying in the game.

Even at the very end, part of them hadn't wanted The Fool to relinquish its hold on the game. Patch knew morally it was the right thing to do but... they had been afraid. Afraid of losing what they'd had. Of losing the thrill of running, consequenceless and for once free.

Or they'd felt free.

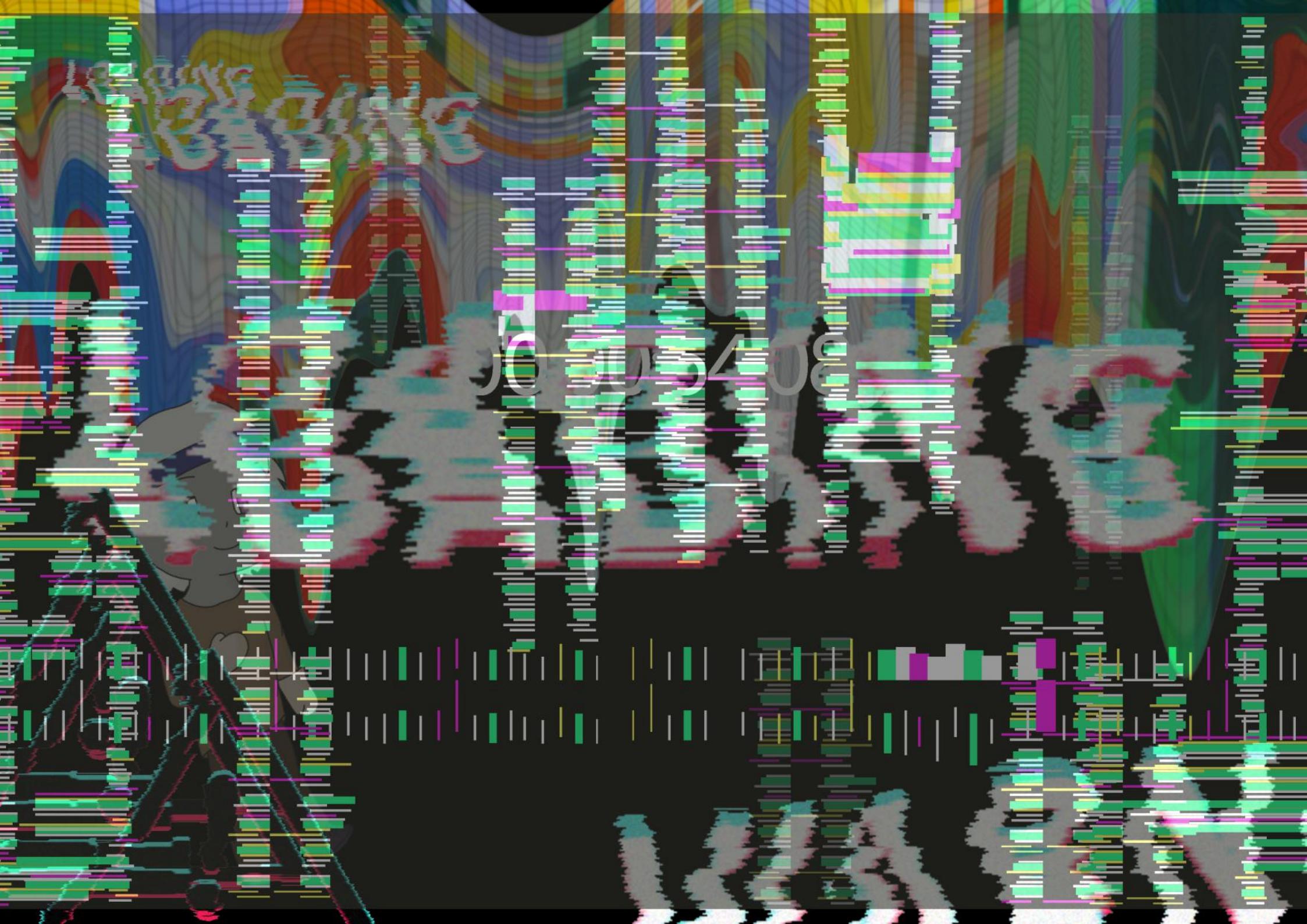
They hadn't really been but it'd been the closest they'd felt since they were a child.

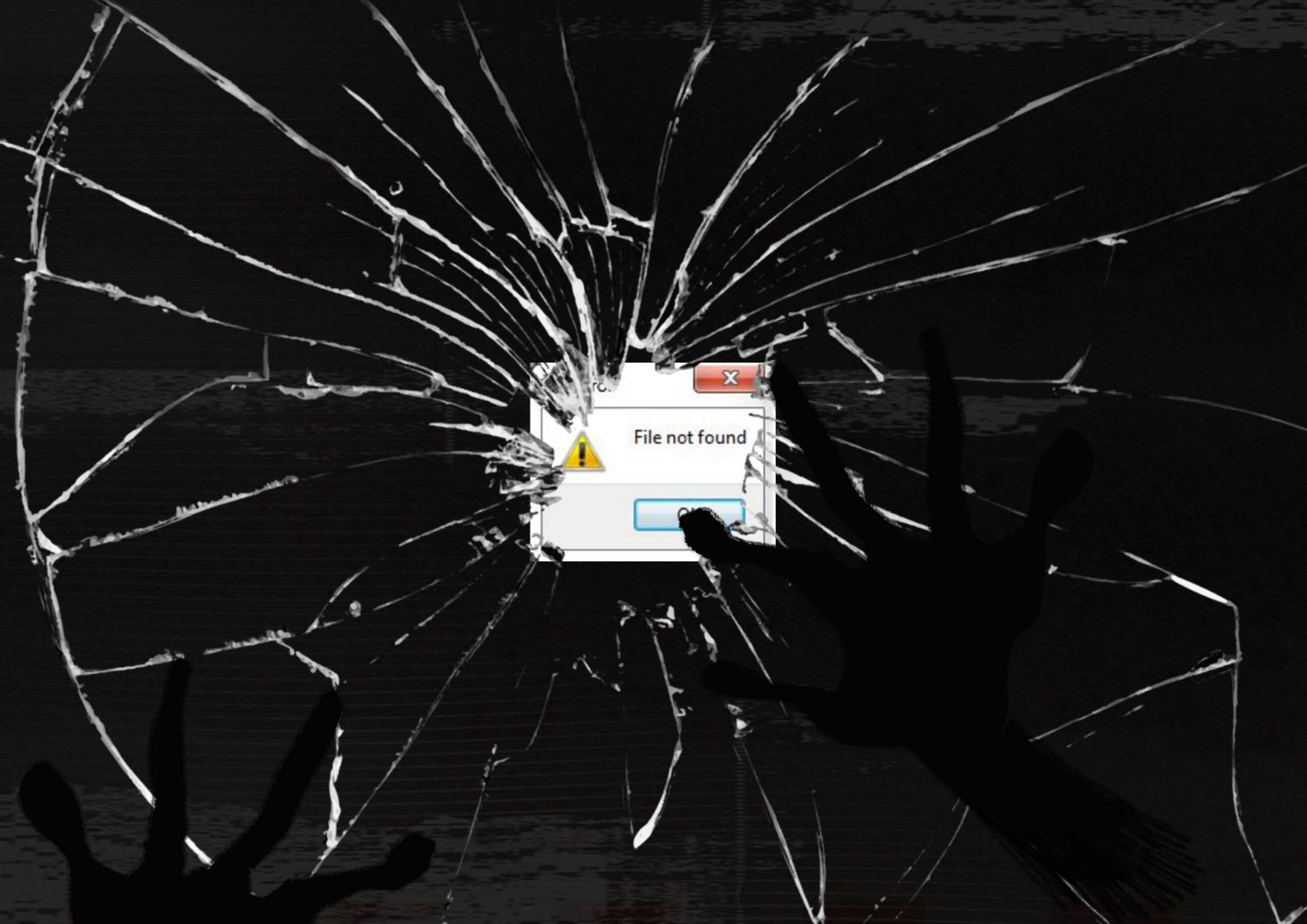
Sometimes Patch can't believe this is real life, how they'd been so fortunate. So when they wake bleary eyed and see the blurry spot twinkling with starlight at the end of their bed they are right back there. Planning their next heist and wondering where to run next.

Written by Lon









A close-up photograph of a smartphone screen that has been shattered into many pieces. The screen is black, and the cracks are white and jagged. In the center of the screen, there is a small, semi-transparent white box containing an error message. The box has a red 'X' button in the top right corner. Inside the box, there is a yellow warning icon (a triangle with an exclamation mark) and the text "File not found" in a black sans-serif font. Below the text is a blue rectangular button with a white outline and a small white icon on it, which is likely a "OK" button. The rest of the phone is dark, and the background is also dark, making the white cracks and the white error message stand out.

File not found

The characters in this booklet were created by:

In order of appearance



Lon (Me!) any pronouns
creator and owner of nort and theta
<https://pinesented.neocities.org/>



Golden any pronouns
creator and owner of lemon
<https://spacehey.com/goldenbot>



Zecori it/they
creator and owner of cez, hp, zella,
and the mystery busters
zecoritheweirdone.tumblr.com/



Blue she/they
creator and owner of celeste, aranda,
mar, ina, elora and hazard
abluepatientsoul.tumblr.com/



Ascel it/xey/they/he
creator and owner of soule, aze, and soli
linktree/ascelhire



Steph she/her
creator and owner of matcha, beezele,
and the fair faire
mercifulmelo.tumblr.com/



Screm they/them
creator and owner of patch and diesel
scremcoolname.tumblr.com/



Chara they/them
creator and owner of Tessa
twitter.com/MunchiArt

Special thanks to Steph and Ascel for helping proof
read this booklet.

And to my lovely friends for letting me both use
their art and their characters.

