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Emotion Engine

by Jane Parker

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Hi there! If you've came across this and don't know who I am, it's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Jane. For just under two years, I've written and published articles online at playingps2.xyz. I write about things like games, comics & manga, and whatever else is on my mind. I thought it would be fun to remix and compile some of my favorite, more recent work into a **MAGAZINE** format! That's what you are looking at right now.

This compilation, the magazine, this PDF/ebook, is 100% free and NEVER to be sold. There are copyrighted images in it, so that's a big no-no. Still, I wanted this book to have some sort of appreciable graphic quality and design, like you would see in a more magazine. I love comics and mags and zines and stuff, so, this is mine.

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Replaying Undertale After 9 Years

Originally Published 5/19/2025

This article has unmarked spoilers for Undertale. I warned ya'.

Ah, do not be afraid, my child.

"It can't be that good," I thought to myself, after a friend pleaded with me to play it in early 2016. I missed the original release that took the world by storm, but the immediate and overwhelming popularity is something that caused me to be skeptical. I still grapple with that response to things today, but I'd like to think other parts of me have changed in almost ten years. I was a grumpier, less open-minded person at the time.

After seeing things through to the True Pacifist ending (where Papyrus drives that car!), had very mixed feelings on the game. I loved the music and artwork; I didn't much enjoy the story or the humor. Please bear with me here, but I had felt that the game was "trying too hard." I also wasn't huge on the whole "routes" thing, with different endings (sometimes in minuscule ways) depending on your actions.

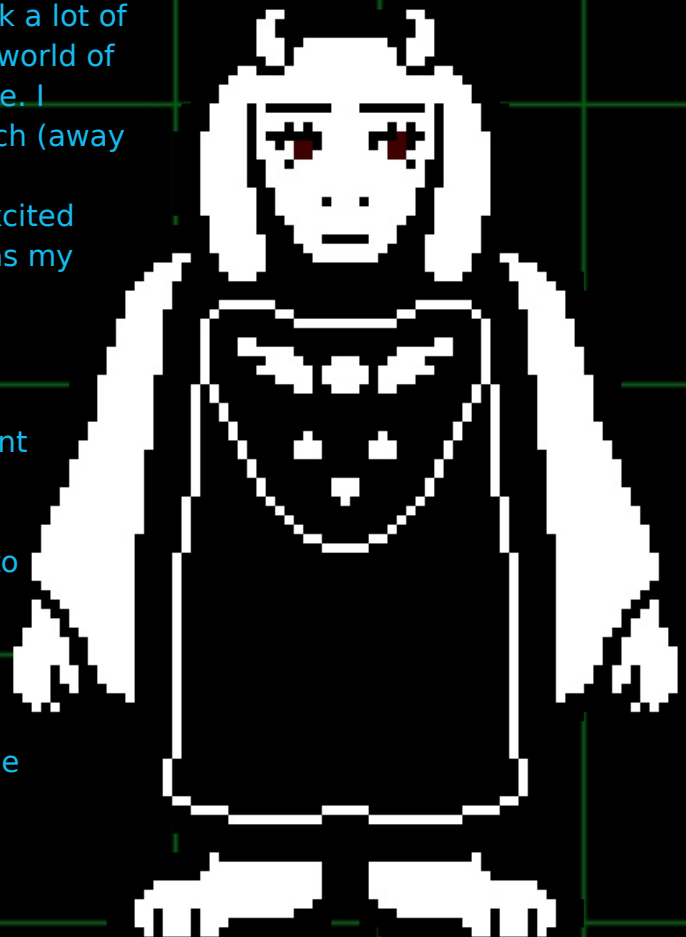
And, truthfully, just so we're all honest here, there was a part of me that felt Undertale threatened to overshadow my beloved Earthbound/Mother series. I have a very personal connection to those games, and Undertale certainly is inspired by Mother.

As the years passed, I acknowledged that I took a lot of baggage and shitty attitudes with me into the world of Undertale. I wanted to give it another fair shake. I decided to pick the game up on Nintendo Switch (away from the distraction machine that is a desktop computer) and tried to clear my mind. I was excited to give this game another try and be serious, as my

What did I discover? Well...

Undertale's first thirty minutes or so are genuinely brilliant. I would say from the moment it begins to stepping out of the ruins into Snowdin, that is its own mini-masterpiece. As "Fallen Down" began to play, my heart began to swell.

I remembered this like it was yesterday, how compelling it actually was. Flowey's appearance casts reasonable doubt on the proceedings as the truth behind Toriel's actions starts to come together. It's a fascinating mix of emotions as you yourself decide to charge ahead into the world. It's just stunning.



There's fear for what could happen next, after learning about Asgore and from Flowey's warnings. There's pain to rejecting a motherly figure like Toriel.

Then, Sans and Papyrus show up.



Everything started falling apart for me all over again. All the tension is immediately sucked out of the room. They are ridiculous. Some of it is funny, but at what expense? I think for some players, it must not break from the game's more serious moments. For me, though, after this point things are on shaky ground, at least from an emotional perspective.

Flowey's threat that you may have to kill to survive **becomes nonsense**. Why would you ever kill anyone when everything in Snowdin is happy funny silly land? And sure, I think that kind of takeaway could be something intended. But now there's no real ambiguity or mystery. Handling things peacefully is just as easy (or easier, maybe?) as killing monsters and bosses. Trying to be fair again, most video games in my experience have trouble with morality and karma. Undertale puts itself in an unenviable spot by including it.

As all this dawned on me, I was upset. Had I really not grown? Shouldn't I be thinking about this differently? This was not too different from how I felt at the time. Am I alone in this whiplash feeling? There's more going on here than just how much I love the beginning.

Don't get me wrong, the game has its big dramatic moments that work (that I'll comment upon). They are also built up very well, as you're drip-fed information about the world and your upcoming fate. While Flowey's threats feel hollow and worthless, everyone's warnings about Asgore and your SOUL is pretty palpable.



In a "glass half full" kind of way, I'd say the game is quite successful, but sort of heavy-handed in making you not want to be a murder-hobo. That is an achievement! But you must do the "dates" to see the Pacifist ending, and the game is fairly happy to remind you that you're playing a game and being somewhat "judged" for it. Sans in the church-like hallway would be the most clear example of that. When Flowey reminds me at the end that I could reset and kill everyone if I wanted, just to see something different (and cruel), it feels a little...manipulative? The existence of divided routes means that, as soon as you know about that, you are somewhat "metagaming" the system to see the desired outcome. Not all that different from how the evil powers in say, inFamous are super cool. The feelings Undertale is going for and that mechanical aspect just don't totally mesh to me.

The Genocide route of the game is often cautioned as being distressing and feel-bad; it's also tedious. That's an interesting combination to make it, and I've never really wanted to do that playthrough because of its tedious nature. I started and stopped back then, and haven't tried in modern times. Let me know if you think I should.

It surely speaks to Undertale's power that we have inspired conversation like this at all. I just... want to be totally immersed in it the entire time, like I am at the outset, and I still can't seem to get there. This bothers me.



There are some subtle moments that still touch me, sincerely, like the famous "Despite everything, it's still you."

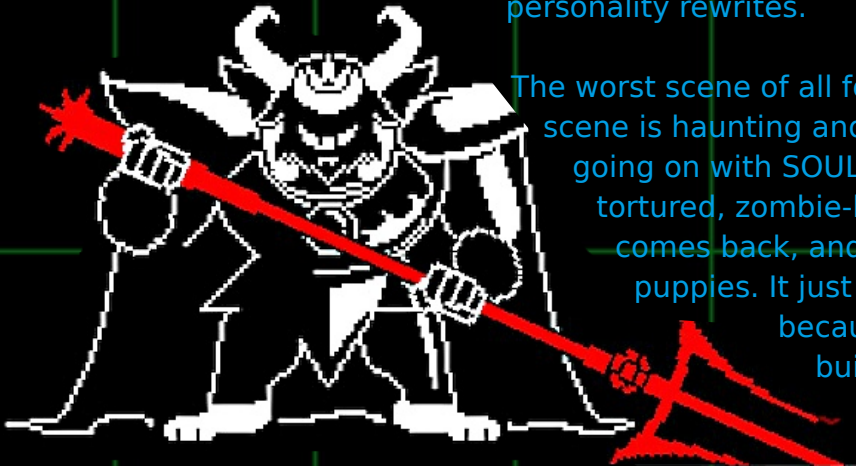
Before more play-by-play, I'll discuss some of Undertale's battle gameplay, which I greatly enjoy! So much so, that I decided to get another hit and start playing **Undertale Yellow**, a fangame. Pattern recognition can be a powerful thing; you'll gain a little bit of skill each encounter as you figure out how to dodge every bullet and attack. There's a sense of satisfaction as you "solve" each enemy and boss. I'm definitely a fan of more traditional JRPG style battles (or say, Mario & Luigi style QTEs), but Undertale's genre-mixing approach is still inventive and refreshing even today.

My only real gripe with the battles in Undertale is that sometimes it's not super clear when an enemy's attack will end. You do somehow start to get a feel for it, and of course it makes perfect sense that boss attacks are longer than standard enemies.

You'll rarely get hit because of it, but just a few times I found myself wincing at a close call. The game, in a Neutral and Pacifist playthrough, is also not particularly challenging. Many of the would-be difficult fights are effectively cutscenes. Your mileage may vary there, and I've heard that Genocide is much more difficult. So, no foul there on challenge.



The game's tone continues to earthquake from then on. There are some subtle moments that still touch me, sincerely, like the famous "**Despite everything, it's still you.**" The threat of Undyne is scary for her initial sequence, with an exciting fight to cap it off. Of course, she turns friendly, but the date where she (and you?) burns her own house down Steamed Clams style feel almost like personality rewrites.



The worst scene of all for me is Dr. Alphys' True Lab. This scene is haunting and filled with details about what was going on with SOULs and reanimating monsters into tortured, zombie-like existences...until Alphys comes back, and they are apparently more like puppies. It just doesn't make any sense to me, because the game is so good at building these different emotions and so frequently chooses comedy instead.

ASGORE can be a tough battle. Ready yourself, even if you're a peaceful soul.

It's not wrong to be funny, mind you. Mother 3 is a game I just played that has a completely engrossing story with heavy emotions and funny scenes. There are, on occasion, moments that deflate a little tension. There's also outright silly stuff in Mother 3, including some stuff that would fit right in with Undertale's humor. I do feel that the Mother series has a better balance here. Undertale is much more ... loud, let's say, about when something is meant to be funny, creepy, or flashy (like Asriel). The one section of the game where I feel absolutely everything fires on all cylinders again is King Asgore.

The game spends a lot of time building up to this moment, in small, intriguing bursts over time. The battle takes away your ability to use the **Mercy** command, and Asgore himself is a character filled with pain and sorrow at what he has to do. He's got a lot of depth if you read into his actions and choices. There is no scene where Asgore, I don't know, slips on a banana peel and decides you're his best friend. This was my favorite character in my previous playthrough, and I think he remains that way today. Well, him or Toriel.

Photoshop Flowey is probably the simplest thing I can point to of Undertale becoming obnoxious. It's so abrasive that it rolls over from being unsettling into unintentionally funny. I've always imagined that it's meant to be somewhat like a "Giygas" moment, where things become unsettling and strange. The music is this ridiculous breakbeat thing with an ominous choir, all while in reality you can't lose or fail this scene in a way that matters. If you can, I've never had it happen to me.

Mother 3 has humor not always dissimilar from Undertale.

As things came to a close on the main part of my playthrough, I felt a new sense of appreciation for some things, and disappointing familiarity with others. Am I some sort of heartless woman who is actively resisting the game? I don't think so. I went into Mother 3 and came out feeling religious about the experience.



*Thank you for taking the time to read this sign.
This sign loves you. ▼

...Do I have some kind of bias for Japanese over English games? I have to at least consider the possibility. It's hard to talk about this though. Do I have some kind of personal hangup when I see the funny dog enemies in the game because it reminds me of internet culture? That's the exact kind of thing I was trying to clear my mind of when I did this, but the thoughts creep in anyway. I really don't want to imagine myself as a "Place, Japan!" kind of person.

I was very young when I first played the first two Mother games, maybe 11 or 12. To me, they felt sincere, as if someone (perhaps Shigesato Itoi himself) was sharing something very personal with me. That feeling was important to me in my angstiest years, as I started to grow skeptical of everything around me. I'll tell that whole story some other day, but I think that feeling of sincerity is something that Undertale players took away, as well. I fear that had I played Mother at age 22 instead of 12, I may have had the same criticisms of it as I do Undertale.



I don't have a definitive answer for why Undertale's magic just doesn't seem to hit the same for me. Maybe it really is a complex web of life experiences and attitudes that have somehow led me to this timeline where I like it a lot, but don't love it. At least, not wholly. I do love and admire its creation and its creativity. Independent, creator-driven games can be so special, and make no mistake, **this is a special game**. I will say that with my whole chest. There are some scenes and moments that really are amazing, worthy of the game's lofty reputation. It's also a fun game to play in the immediate moment, which I do highly value.

I just wish it gripped me the whole way through. I wish I was enraptured in everything about it, never taken out of the story and never feeling deflated. Even now, I'm still not sure I've been entirely fair to it, but at a certain point I must concede that how I feel is how I feel.
Show me Mercy.

How

よふかしのうた

CALL OF THE NIGHT

Touched My Asexuality

Originally Published 3/4/2024

While I won't give away any late-game major plot details or surprises, I will be discussing some aspects of this series' characters. If you wanna go in blind, go now! Also, it may go without saying, but my personal experience and views about asexuality, aromanticism, and related things are by no means definitive or all-encompassing.

I'm not good at talking about my feelings. At all. It's one of the hardest things for me, especially for gender, orientation...almost any queer topic, as it pertains to myself is terribly difficult. I can't really attempt to unpack all that today, but what I can talk about is...manga!

Having been a fan of author Kotoyama's style since I laid eyes on **Dagashi Kashi** way back then, I recently dived into their latest manga, **Call of the Night**. I hadn't heard too much about the series prior, though I did see female lead Nazuna a few times when an anime adaptation aired. The idea of a somewhat laid-back, vampire manga with a budding relationship sounded appealing to me.



What I found was a manga that quickly became dear to me, as it explored so many different kinds of relationships and emotions that I've always struggled with. In a way, I started to live vicariously through the manga's storyline, wanting to be in this vampire world. Let's detail how...in hopes that I'm not all alone out here!

For me though, it rings familiar. I never developed sexual feelings when I was supposed to, and nobody particularly noticed! Myself included, for a long time. But without sexual attraction blossoming inside of me, I had no particular guidance about who I liked, or why, or what I was supposed to do with anyone and when. I thought everyone was doing this arbitrarily, kind of like how at a certain age you might start thinking violence and guns are awesome. I figured it was the same thing and that I would just decide to get into girls or boys at some point. I acted like I was, for most of my school age.

Kou's quest has some commonalities with me, then. The end goal is vampirism and a perceived life of freedom, but love is the road he's got to take to get there. He doesn't fall in love with Nazuna right away! Nazuna and Kou do quickly take to each other in a sort of "situationship"* but how do you know when you've fallen for someone? Does trying to fall in love get in the way? The series does an admirable job of letting the two grow together at a natural pace. Sometimes that means disagreements and spats, and other times Kou and Nazuna are a match made in heaven.

In one scene from chapter 43 that hits way too close to home, Detective Anko Uguisu grills Kou over his apparent inability to turn into a vampire. She tells him, "...I doubt you can become a vampire anyway since you seem incapable of falling in love. **Maybe you just aren't...equipped with those emotions.**



I've heard that before, more than once, and it sucks. It hurts badly when there is someone you like, maybe love, and you can't seem to show them in a way that feels real for everyone. I was *shocked* that a scene like this made into what I thought was a simple flirty romcom!

Textually speaking, Kou Yamori would probably be best described aromantic, not entirely asexual. It's a little point of divergence for me and Kou. Kou has a few flashes of erotic feelings, and the differences between lust, love, and everything

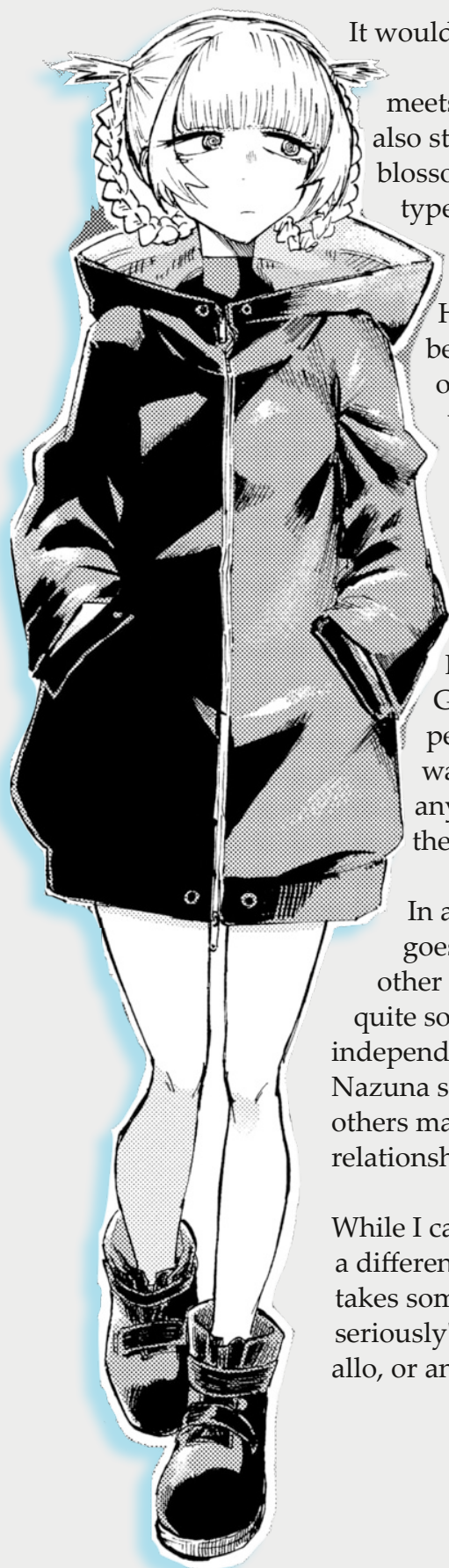
surrounding them part of the series' story. Erotic topics come up fairly frequently, especially for comedy (Viz's official age rating for the series is "Teen Plus").

For some people across many different spectrums, sex and romance can be very closely tied together. Speaking anecdotally here, in a lot of media, they're the same. Screen time is precious, not everything has time to get into nuanced depictions of love. When they are separate, it's often the case that sex will be portrayed as "lesser" or "inauthentic" versus romantic love, which is "true" love.

There's nothing particularly wrong with any of that. It is how it is. Call of the Night has shades of it too, our main characters are on quest for a kind of "true love", after all. It's also not totally shameful of sexual feelings though, which is something I appreciate. In other words, **sexual topics aren't just for perverts here**, they can be a an engaging and real part of a relationship. Lust might not be love, especially for gloomy Kou. But it's also not something that totally invalidates every other feeling you might have about someone. There are still gags about it, it is still a comedy, but a little balance goes a long way with me, and Call does have some.

All that is to say, I do relate a lot to Kou Yamori, and the tone and storytelling in Call helps me get there, too. I don't think any fictional character is going to exactly mirror me.





It wouldn't be fair to talk just about Kou though, when Nazuna is just as much the main character! **Nazuna Nanakusa** is the first vampire Kou meets, and in some ways is his opposite. Believe it or not, though, Nazuna also struggles with admitting to her love, and letting romantic feelings blossom. She's much, much more of a free-wheeling, fun-loving, flirtatious type, whereas Kou is cautious and practical. Nazuna loves to tease, screw around, and generally be playful about most things in life.

Having this kind of character as our female lead is great. I sincerely believe she's funny. There was a time I would be turned off by her style of jokes and humor when I was first rediscovering myself as asexual. I was a little more sensitive to sexy topics back then. Nowadays though, I think she's a charming little riot! **It's good to have this kind of character when you're exploring different relationships and emotions.** Someone who can push typical buttons, speak her mind, and be forward about what she wants. Unless it involves the L word.

Nazuna absolutely can't get the word "love" out of her mouth. Genuine romantic feelings, even just mentioning them around other people, completely throws her off her game. This is one of the greatest ways that she opposes Kou, who can somewhat calmly discuss almost anything in a down to Earth way. Nazuna's big and boisterous, until the gestures seem to turn romantic.

In addition, Nazuna is a fully realized character with her own story that goes far beyond Kou. While they become extremely important to each other (after taking plenty of time to navigate that), Nazuna has existed for quite some time before Kou's appearance in her life. She has her own independent things she wants. This helps make it believable when Kou and Nazuna start to bond and come to know each other. They'll laugh at each others mannerisms, big and small, things like that make it seem like a real relationship, something beyond manga hero wish fulfillment.

While I can most closely identify with Kou, **Nazuna** is extremely important for a different set of emotions. I imagine anyone who likes to have some fun, takes some pride in flirtations, but is afraid to "settle down" or "take things seriously", could see a bit of themselves in her. I think almost anyone, ace, allo, or any romantic feelings, can understand her at the very least.

I don't think I'm going to win a Galaxy Brain award for this one, but it's simply too endearing to the series identity, and my love of it, to shove aside. Vampires have a long, *long* history of being tied with queerness in some way. Not always for good reasons, but nevertheless the vampire has remained a fixture of gayness in many flavors. The tradition continues in Call. One of the most interesting things about the series is that vampires are not a monolith.

Vampires in Call do not all know each other. They don't know everything about the history of vampires. And if they do know something, it might be hearsay or legend from a long time ago. If it's something recent, they might not know how it developed or turned out in the end. Nobody seems to know all the rules for vampirism, if there are rules. Sometimes there are oddities within oddities. *Do I need to keep going here?*

Despite all of that, as the story develops, so too does a strong sense of community between all the different characters. When their way of life and very existence is threatened, they try to work together and take this wave of danger seriously. If what I'm talking about isn't clear, you can pretty much replace the word vampire with 'gay, bi, trans, queer, ace, lesbian...' and so on.

That community feeling in Call is a big part of **why I wanted to be in the world and kept wanting to come back** when I wasn't reading it. I had a bit of an insert in Kou, but everyone else is delightfully fascinating. Seri is a gyaru with blonde hair and brown roots showing with her own love problems. Hatsuka is a male vampire who dresses and presents however he darn well pleases. When this is revealed to Kou, who thought Hatsuka was a female, he doesn't shame or get mean with Hatsuka. Midori works at the maid cafe and has a delightfully different sort of boyfriend/servant/ally that's portrayed with a refreshing amount of positivity. And while it's certainly not a yuri manga, WLW relationships come up quite a few times. All this works together to creation the sensation that these are all real, queer people that we know from our own lives.



Having once worked an overnight job where I was completely alone (legal in my state!) and facing customers, I can attest to the fact that 3AM is a different dimension. The way the night itself is portrayed in Call is yet another element where I see some of my life. The night can be peaceful solitude away from everything, or crippling loneliness when no one you would normally turn to is awake. You can meet the weirdest, sweetest people, or have your life threatened in a flash. All this stuff happens in Call. I still get anxious working past a certain hour, but through this manga, I could safely relieve some of those different, interesting night time experiences. To the really tall girl in the Naruto shirt who called me "kid" at midnight, I will never forget you.

It would be a bit hasty of me to say something like *Call of the Night* is queer culture or a faithful expression of even just one queer experience. I would tell you it's a great manga with incredible pacing, fun surprises, and more drama and heart than you might expect. If you're really, truly interested in a manga focused squarely on asexuality, I can point to one-shot "*Mine-Kun is Asexual*" (this one stings, but it's good!). I'm aware that the same author, Isaki Uta, made a follow up work "*Is Love The Answer?*", to glowing reviews, but have yet to read it for myself.

We don't always find ourselves in things that are written for us, about us, or even by us. I always enjoy hearing about people's queer feelings emerging in unexpected places, popular or unpopular headcanons. One of my favorite examples is how many people (particularly transmascs) see something of themselves in *Danny Phantom*. Things like that are so sweet, cool, and come from a fascinating place.



That's how *Call of the Night* is for me. It just so happened that many elements of the series' identity and lead character hit on some part of my own life. And it's a gorgeous manga that was hard to put down. What could be better than that? Great comics are important to me! It might seem a bit odd that I found something so engrossing and absorbing here. At a glance it might seem counter to what one might imagine an aro/ace experience could be like. **But that's how it is, isn't it?** Sometimes mirrors are around the corner when we had no intention of looking at one. We can meet a new kin or role model at any time.

This is one of the hardest things I've tried to write so far. Queerness and identity are tricky subjects sometimes. It's hard to describe. I usually kind of hate talking about my feelings, but if even just one queer person enjoyed this and understands it a little bit, I'd say it'd be worth all the turmoil!

Summer 2025 Update

When I wrote this in March of 2024, I had not yet found myself in my life as a transgender woman (which kicks ass, I'm very happy), but my struggles with all of these things are still yours to read. Also, as I write this, Viz has just started releasing brand NEW chapters of *Call of the Night* on their Viz app. I've never seen a manga come back like that, even if it's just for one arc. I'll be reading these with great interest.



Majora's Mask is one of those games that will continue to be talked about one hundred years from now. I wholly believe that. That "hundred years" target was the wish of one of the developers listed in "Document of MGS2", another y2k classic, and it's something that's stuck with me ever since. There will come a time when gamers who are yet to be born from parents who are yet to be born will be discussing what we all thought of *Zelda* forty, fifty, sixty years ago in their ravenous arguments about the game. So I imagine, anyway, should the world not end.

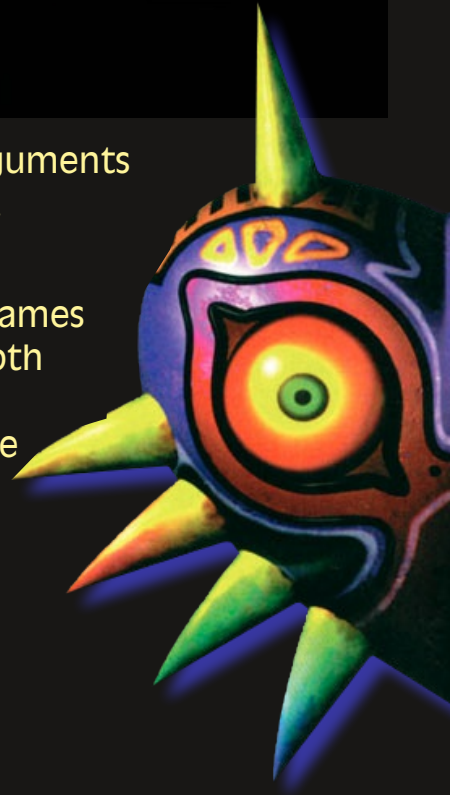


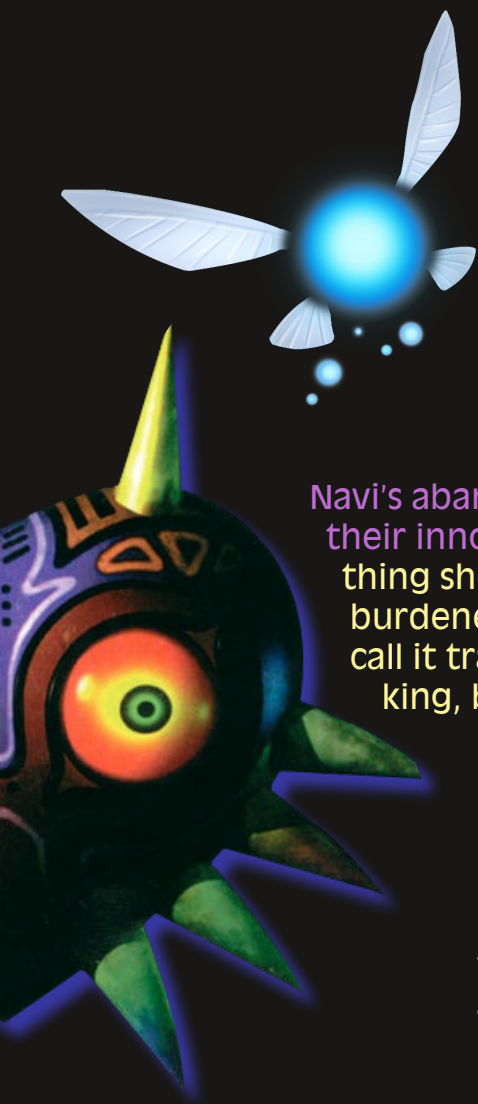
To call the discussion around the Nintendo 64 duology of *Zelda* games discourse trivializes what they are. Yes, *Ocarina* and *Majora* are both major commercial releases from the most popular video game publisher in the world, who continue to have a strong grip on the young and young at heart. They are also **thematically rich, emotionally detailed** experiences that I still find rare. It's not like I can go around politely asking for more *Majora's Mask*.

Majora is typically cited as the deeper, more challenging game in nearly every way, but *Ocarina* should not be ignored at all. *Ocarina* is a story of losing your (or Link's) innocence and suddenly being thrust into a mountain of responsibility. In some ways, I think *it's a game about nostalgia*, and longing for your youth. Princess *Zelda*, in the game's ending, gives you back your childhood.

It's an interesting story for a game whose core development team doubled from the days of *Link* to the *Past* and *Link's Awakening*, more than tripled if you include the external companies assisting with the game as Aonuma suggests. 3D development was new at this time, and **suddenly everything was bigger and more expensive**. Recall that the time traveling story of *Ocarina* was not originally a part of it in the game's very earliest days.

Subconscious cry for help? Active inspiration from development? *Completely unintentional?* I've always wondered.





There are many things to analyze and read into *Ocarina*, and I have read many brilliant things about it over the years. From my own observation, *Ocarina* is about an ostracized youth thrust unexpectedly into the adult world, where everything kind of sucks and is falling apart. Zelda gives Link their childhood back, but Navi silently abandons Link in the end. This is the emotional kickoff point for *Majora's*.

Navi's abandonment of Link suggests that Link cannot ever really have their innocence and childhood back. Zelda returned the most precious thing she could to the Hero of Time, but Link remains emotionally burdened by their experiences in adulthood. You could go as far as to call it trauma. How can one ever really go back after facing an evil king, burning villages, and the dead you once knew stalking Hyrule?

In *Ocarina*, the Kokiri (eternally children by the magic of the Forest and Great Deku Tree) are given fairy companions, though Link is initially without one at the outset. Link is not a kokiri themselves, so there is a practical reason why Navi would abandon this child, but I believe Navi's silent (remember, this character was once very well known for talking a lot!), goodbye-less exit in *Ocarina* invites the more esoteric interpretation.

Not to jump ahead, but *Link never finds Navi in Majora's*. But they do find something else special.

So, if these games are a tight pair as I believe, what is *Majora's* primarily about?

Majora's is a story of, ultimately, forgiveness. Finding joy in a world that seems doomed. A story about letting go of some of those burdens.



Much of that is told through the lens of the Skull Kid, but I think the journey applies to Link (and thus, ourselves) as well. My somewhat positive spin on the themes of the game may seem counter to the events in the bulk of the story. It all ties together though. And my thoughts are only mine, there are many, many interpretations and ideas from fans over the years. I'm certain you have your own, and if we're lucky, another generation of players will share their own ideas.

After having their horse and ocarina stolen (yet another friend missing! But Epona will return.), Link falls down an *Alice in Wonderland* style rabbit hole and ends up in the land of Termina. Transformed into a small, sad looking Deku scrub, Link is helpless in this strange place that's familiar in some ways, and not at all in others. The game's opening sequence is an extremely memorable trial of anxiety, uncertainty, and pressure.



If we continue with my idea that this Link is weighed down by their emotions, *this opening is sort of a reintroduction to the "working world" or, the adult world.* Despite Link's childhood returning, everything is wrong. *Their body isn't what it should be. Their friends and mementos of the past are gone. A new disaster awaits at the end of three short days.* For something that serves dual purpose as a kind of tutorial, Majora's intro sequence is disorienting.

Link and the player scramble to get a grip on Clock Town, and stop the moon from falling after the discovery at the dreamy, rainbow-filled heaven known as the Astral Observatory.



After climbing the Clock Tower, Link retrieves their ocarina from the Skull Kid. The game bothers to point out in text and in cutscene that this ocarina was a special gift from Zelda. In the very last scene of Ocarina of Time, Link seems to rush to Zelda in the same spot the originally met, and the game ends at that exact moment. The scene of Zelda wishing Link well on their travels to find Navi recalls this. Even though now, Zelda only knows Link from a brief childhood together, Link remembers everything. Zelda was also the one who taught Link the Song of Time.



Playing the Song of Time resets everything to the first day, and the Happy Mask Salesman is able to restore Link's human body. So, after recalling something precious, something that makes them happy, even if it's in his memories, Link starts to reform. The sort of spiritual healing can begin, through the world of Termina, Skull Kid, and then Link themselves.

The Happy Mask Salesman is a character I struggle to fit cleanly in my analysis. He is *quite* mysterious, but also so crucial to the game's story, no matter how you look at it. I sometimes picture him as a sort of scary, perhaps jaded, but ultimately well meaning adult who can see what's wrong with Link. He treats him rather scarily through most of the game, but it's he who delivers some of the last, rather warm sendoff advice to Link after everything is settled and saved.

From there, Link's quest begins to restore the Four Giants, the guardian deities of Termina, who can be summoned to truly stop the moon falling at the hands of Skull Kid and Majora's Mask. Link's rewinding of time only delays what *seems* inevitable and scary. When the boss of Woodfall Temple temple is defeated, the freed Giant is described as an "innocent spirit."

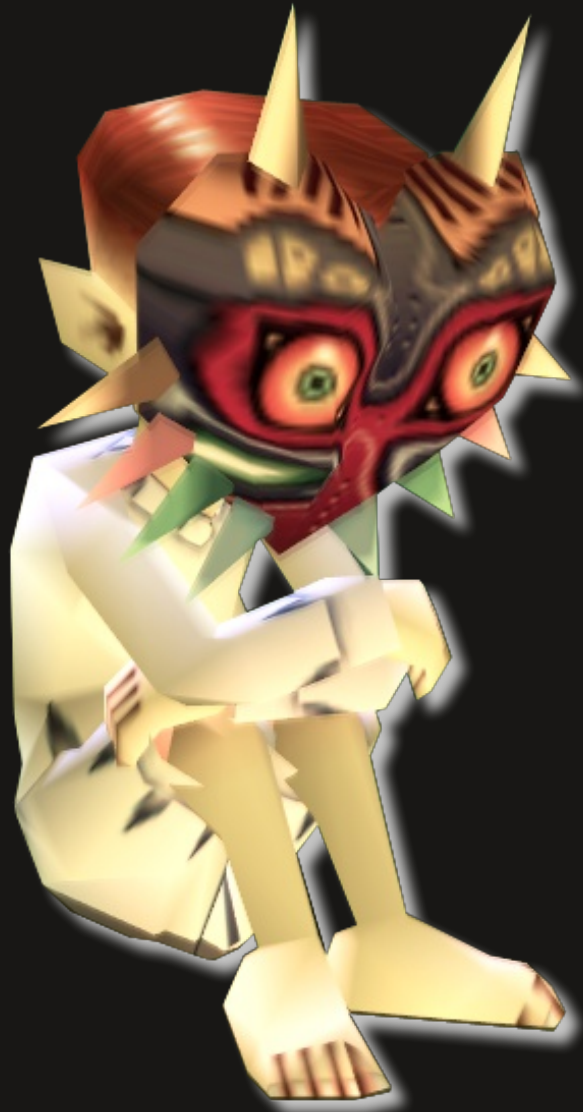


In the boss battle with "Igos du Ikana" later in the game has some very revealing dialogue. After being defeated, he says of the curse that has befallen him and his land, Ikana Kingdom:

"Believing in your friends and embracing that belief by forgiving failure...These feelings have vanished from our hearts."

There are things like this all over the game. *Termina needs healing. It needs these feelings back.* The Gaints may represent these kinds of positive emotions: Forgiveness, friendship, etc.

Part of the story of the Giants and Skull Kid could be seen as a mirror of Link's emotions, with Skull Kid being an addition. Revealed in various places over the course of the game, the *Skull Kid and Giants were, at some point, friends who would play together.* The Giants one day decided to be the guardians of Termina, and could no longer play with Skull Kid. This leads to Skull Kid becoming aggressive and sad, friendless in their mind, with the evil influence of Majora's Mask sending them into a world destroying crusade, sealing away the giants and destroying Termina.



We can also view the Giants somewhat as *"responsible adults."* All the text that I can recall and find suggests that they chose to protect Termina, where as Link was thrust into the role and succeeded in becoming a hero. Skull Kid is what gets left behind, Skull Kid is still a child, or at the very least, *still has the basic needs for some friendship and socializing.*

When Link enters the moon for the final battle, what is inside? A peaceful gathering around a tree with masked children playing together. After all the children are given masks and dungeons completed, a child with Majora's mask sits alone and asks if Link will play.

After all the healing of Termina is done, the Giants tell Skull Kid that they are still friends. Skull Kid also recognizes Link as the one who taught him Saria's Song in Hyrule. This Skull Kid actually is a part of Link's past and childhood! This raises some questions, but thematically, it's interesting. The Skull Kid is a part of Link's past that we ourselves may have forgotten about (or simply assumed it was a different Skull Kid), but we were able to make a fresh, new connection with. We found a new happiness!

In the very last screen of the ending, we see a tree carving of Skull Kid and Link together, along with the four Giants. Everyone is largely happy, though the Deku Butler's son has not been revived, and he appears to mourn him during the credits. You can't get everything back, even with a magical, somewhat surreal quest like Link's, but you can forge new things and make new friends, even in a strange place. We need friends and connections even when things look hopeless, endless, and our tragedies seem to repeat. That's how we can move ahead and make a New Day.



Majora's Mask is a dark, sometimes *nightmarish* game, and I wouldn't suggest anything too contrary to that. But it's that depressing, unhappy atmosphere that makes the finale messages so powerful. When we connect it closely with Ocarina, as I feel we should, the narrative of happiness, healing, and friendship opens up.

I can only scratch the surface of *just one* interpretation of *some of the events* in Majora's Mask, I really believe it is that rich in depth and detail. And I played both Ocarina and Majora's for the first time as an adult. I can't even imagine what it's like to have played something like this as a kid and reflect on that experience.

I look forward to the next generation of experiences with these games, and I hope that you've enjoyed mine!

Special artwork by: @digitalsunlight.bsky.social



This lovely piece was drawn by long-time mutual pal @digitalsunlight.bsky.social! The artwork is presented here with permission from the artist!

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