

BTW

Baka-Trio Webzine



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#6

Death in Visual Novels

FEATURES

- A Hideous Beast
- As Easy As Death

Special Feature

One Week of Eternity
The Final Chapter

Serial Fiction

- Super Network Wars
- One Week of Eternity



A Fascination With Death

What is death? The simplest answer would be that it is the end of life. However, depending on the person's circumstances, death can be viewed in many different ways. In some religions, death is simply a transition from life to afterlife. Some people are scared to even think about the prospect of death and dying. Others still, simply cannot be bothered to formulate an opinion on the subject matter when there are other, more productive and less morbid things to contemplate in life. What about in the context of visual novels? What is the significance of death to visual novel stories?

To sum it up: death is power. Now while it might seem ironic to say that killing off a character confers power, it actually makes perfect sense. When a character dies, the emotional impact on the reader is immediate. A character who is killed off occupies a piece of mental real estate in the reader until the final conclusion of the story. Furthermore, the writer can choose to include either subtle or direct reminders of the character throughout the story to heighten the emotional impact of the character's death. In effect, the ghost – the legacy of the dead character – is firmly etched into the reader's mind. Kamina's death in the anime *Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann* is a prime example of this. His untimely death glorifies his character and makes his heroism that much more significant, especially near the end of the series.

The undeniable power of death in storytelling is not limited to heroic characters. Any character stands to benefit from dying. A seemingly useless side character who goes down in a blaze of glory is remembered for that one moment of brilliance at the point of his death. Even villains can redeem themselves from being the focal point of the reader's aversion to an icon of ultimate sacrifice and redemption. Take the case of Darth Vader in the original *Star Wars* Trilogy. His ultimate sacrifice and return to the light side is immediately followed by his death and transformation into a force spirit. Even though he was touted as the main villain throughout the trilogy, his final sacrifice effectively secures his place as the chosen one who was instrumental in defeating the evil emperor even though he strayed from the light side.

The way a character dies and the way death is utilized is a key factor to harnessing the true potential of death's power in writing stories. It can extend the effect to benefit the entire story rather than the individual character. A violent and unfair death inflicted upon a frail, innocent character shows the cruelty of the perpetrator and fuels that innate sense of justice in all of us. When Aerith died at the hands of Sephiroth, it was a moment of shock, followed by an immediate feeling of loss and the desire for vengeance. Cloud and the others felt it, and so did we. For the first time, the party was united by a single strong bond that went beyond their self-serving goals. Some stories are even centered almost entirely on the events that make a character's death more meaningful. Almost all visual novels by KEY focus subtly but surely on the eventual death of the female protagonist. *Narcissu* takes it one step further by establishing that Setsumi is terminally ill from the very beginning. Other media such as movies and video games also demonstrate the immediate the power of death as a tool of catharsis. *300* and *Crisis Core* would have been much less epic if they did not include the noble and inescapable deaths of their main characters. There are also more innovative ways of using death. In Mitsukazu Mihara's manga *The Embalmer*, death is one of the main themes. While the main character never actually dies in the mini-stories presented in each manga, he has to confront and embrace death almost every day since his profession requires that much dedication, especially because embalmers are often subject to social discrimination in Japan.

It is easy to see why death holds such a strong power over human creations. It is our very attachment to life that fuels the fascination with the concept of death. Just as we indirectly do so in works of fiction, we have glorified death throughout human history by holding elaborate funerals and celebrations in honor of our dearly departed. Halloween is only one of such rituals. People wish to believe in the possibility that the dead continue to exert influence in the physical world long after their passing. And perhaps we, the visual novel developers, have found one way of doing just that – by immortalizing our ideas, characters and stories in the medium of visual novels.

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As Easy As Death by mikey

One day, quite a long time ago, I was talking to a friend, who in context of one of the topics we discussed suggested that a very good way to get the player's emotional involvement at the beginning of a game is to let an NPC sacrifice itself for him.

We talked about all this and came to the conclusion, that in fact, in every good story (one we liked, anyway) there is death. I'm not talking about killing games, dark comedies or gore films, where death is the point. It's those other games, where death sometimes occurs. Not overdone, but at the right place and moment. It's what makes a game's story have weight and credibility. Death means realism and seriousness, and it gives a bit of maturity to any topic you discuss. We continued to talk about the construction of plots, and I vaguely remember some of the points:

For example, you have your survival stories where there is a group of people in a dangerous situation. How do you convey this? If the shark eats a few of them, that should definitely make players aware. Then, maybe, you want to tell the player a very important message, making sure he pays attention. If you put that information in the mouth of a dying person, the player will listen to his words more carefully. Do you want emotion? No problem. Aeris' death in Final Fantasy 7 is a prime example of how a game can use the emotional investment the player has put into his experience to create a sense of deep loss, personified by a game character's passing away. Death can also cause a sense of shock or dramatic twist when things begin normally and all the characters are happy; until a brutal murder changes everything.

There are many more applications of death, and years after that conversation, for me, it still all made sense. Until, one day, it didn't.

I don't know precisely what changed. When I think about it now, I still acknowledge that Aerith's death was revolutionary and emotional. But, not taking anything away from that scene, there was also a certain cheapness to it. You simply know that the director had to know very well what he was doing, as he went for the

most tender person - the girl, the florist, the cutest one. If he was my cranky neighbor, I'm sure he wouldn't kill the old cat or the parrot. He wouldn't even poison my fish tank. No, he'd go straight for my snow-white puppy with those big black eyes that I just taught how to bring me a ball. His game doesn't really create the actual feeling of loss as much as it triggers it, exploiting the natural affection for the weak.

You can observe this pattern with a lot of the things which involve death in fiction. Deaths appeal to your sense of humanity, something that is already established and deeply rooted in you. This means that the ground work is already set up, and it becomes relatively easy to take advantage of it. The emotional response is very high, simply because people you like die, and you are preprogrammed to feel sadness.

You can spend fifty pages detailing the emotional attachment of a man to his job, trying to create a sense of loss, but just one page with an unfortunate accident resulting in the loss of the sister you loved usually creates the same and even bigger sense of loss, especially if you have a female sibling. Why? Everyone knows the nature and the strength of the ties, and they value persons more than things, so with death you have the luxury of working with emotions already available and at a very high level, in the player.

If you have children, you will be very frightened about a news report where a kidnapper sends the parents their daughter's finger. If you love your spouse, you will be terrified by the possibility of him or her being hit by a car. If your father lost his job, your family is broke and he started to drink alcohol to drown the depression, your heartbeat will triple every time the phone rings, in fear it's the police informing you of a suicide. So imagine being presented with a story in a game or book that deals with these subjects. Of course you will be highly sensitive to them, and often you don't even need to be in a similar situation. Humans are social and very perceptive to tragic events, and you need only attack a well-understood and observed value to get a strong emotional response. It's not difficult to turn to death as the ultimate emotion trigger.

The concept reminds me of when writers create an ambiguous ending to their stories. There is a certain artistry to the approach, leaving conclusions and finality up to the player. Yet at the same time, it also means that the creators did not put an ending into the story, regardless of whether it was done on purpose or due to a lack of ideas - the story simply has no ending and the responsibility of ending it has been delegated to you, whether you like it or not. So when the ambiguity of an ending makes you feel intrigued (or, to get back on topic, when death stirs you in a story) it's more than fair to attribute this effect largely to you, rather than to the skill of the artist.

As much as this is probably not going to be a very popular statement, I would say that the sensitivity to death has a lot to do with the length of time one has been alive and confronted with the subject. It's like falling snow. You know about it from the beginning, but it takes time to noticeably cover things. As the days pass and the snow falls, you will start to feel all the implications. And so the less you feel death's finality, the more you can discuss it on a neutral basis - much like the thoughts in my conversation at the beginning. It's not surprising to me now that when I was 17, death to me was as simple as understanding that one day I am no more. And when I felt it was "done right" in films or games, there was a certain seriousness, even coolness to it. They weren't just children's stories. They were real. The equivalent of watching the first snow flakes while admiring a postcard where everything is buried in meters of snow.

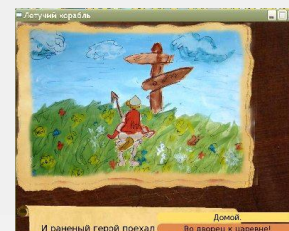
But now, there is no real coolness to it. Much like I actually find it annoying when snow covers everything so that people are stuck in their homes and you can't even go out to buy food, I don't remember any more the last time I liked when someone died in a game, film, or a book (again, excluding the splatter films, comedy with death or shoot-em-ups). I always tend to think about the fact that it probably could have been done without the death. I suppose that since death happens, it's okay to have it here and there. But even if I accept it, it doesn't really impress me when someone makes their characters die.

Part of this - I admit - is down to me. My friends and I, we now end our visits by sincerely wishing one another good health. When someone close has an operation, I actually worry. Worry so much that no DS game can make the time go faster. And sure, if it helps you, you can say I'm old and turned into some hopeless overprotective blend of what my parents used to be like. Just remember though, that it's impossible to explain to someone he lacks a context, precisely because he lacks it, since as such it's impossible for him to identify it as lacking.

However, the other part of my dislike is, I believe, down to those general considerations from the above paragraphs. There are very few things which can create emotion as quickly and as effectively as death can. One death will destroy years of relationships and love, and create sadness and grief, affecting many people in many ways for many years to come.

It's much like a few sticks of dynamite, which can demolish in ten seconds a bridge that took ten years to build. It's something small and simple destroying something large and complicated. And I'm sure there is fascination with its effectiveness and the way it can turn things around so easily. But in the end, if you don't already, I hope you will always prefer to respect the bridge and not the dynamite.

NEW EVN RELEASES



"Летучий корабль." By Locator Studios

"This is a interactive-tale game based on russian tale called "Flying Ship".
- Anntenna_



Autumn (English Version) by Nya-chan Production

Meet our hero, Takkun. He's just moved into the middle of nowhere. It's early autumn, and he goes out on a friday. He has yet to know that this weekend might change his life forever.

PlayStation 2



Original concept by
Red "KiRa_YaMaTo" Mendoza

Written by
Benedict "Moonlight Bomber" Villariaza



Tenkou Star

Korina Sanchez
အင်းဝ ဝိသုဒ္ဓိ

Broadcaster Lord Knight

VERSUS



Tenku Star

Mel Tiangco
အင်းဝ ဝိသုဒ္ဓိ

Broadcaster Whitesmith

Episode 4: The Champorado Thickens / Korina's Hairbrush, Again

Meanwhile...

Even though we can say that Korina Sanchez got her magic hairbrush back (Katie found it while Mizuki and co. approached the ELJCC), Mel Tiangco still couldn't resist the urge to pilfer the prized relic from her former student.

And in a grassfield near the Quezon City-Bulacan border, the two's paths have crossed again.

Korina: Ex-sensei Mel, we've met again.

Mel: I'm expecting this from my former student.

Korina: I know all along the reason for your presence.

Mel: Of course. Your hairbrush.

Korina: Snatch it again? Well, you're mistaken.

It's because my hairbrush's container is packed with

security features. What's your say?

Mel: If you can do security... (pause) then 120% of my strength will shatter it!

Mel transforms into a Whitesmith.

Korina: You're a Whitesmith, huh? Are you ready for my transformation?

Korina transforms into a Lord Knight.

Statistics:

Korina Sanchez

Lv. 120 Lord Knight

HP: almost reaching 30,000

Mel Tiangco

Lv. 120 Whitesmith
HP: almost reaching 20,000

ROUND 1 --- FIGHT!

[Duel: Korina Sanchez vs. Mel Tiangco]

Attack:
I'll unabashedly attack you!
Let's see if you can dodge.
Taste the power of the Kapuso!
Taste the power of the Whitesmith!
Oh, what now?

Defend:
Alright, hit me.
I'm now ready for your attack.
Fight or flee?
Can you exceed me?
Here, think. I'm on standby.

Deathblow:
Give me strength, Pareng Mike!
Goodbye, my former student.
In the name of GMA, I'll pulverize you!
I'll get your hairbrush after this!
You won't last 24 hours!

Meanwhile, at the Big Brother House...

Henry Angeles (in Safer Sephiroth form, still) is prepping up for his siege on the aforementioned house.

Henry: Hahahahaha!!! Because of what those arrogant Lopezes have done to Hero, I'll destroy this house so that PBB Teen Edition will never be continued! Hahahahaha!!!

And Henry commences his attack on the house.

The teen housemates are startled by Henry's attack. They're very helpless because of his immense power.

Meanwhile... at the ELJCC...

"ALERT! ALERT! BIG BROTHER HOUSE BEING ATTACKED! THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!"

The six female applicants are surprised by the alarms that dominate the building.

Mizuki: W-what's that?
Saber: Someone's attacking a nearby place!
Arcueid: Probably Nero Chaos is doing it!
Ayu: Uguu... this is bad...
Misuzu: Gao... how depressing...
Asa: What are you standing around here for?
We need to act!
Mizuki: But how about our applications?
Asa: We'll take care of them once all of this is over!

Saber: CHARGE, COMRADES!

(BGM: "Sugod" by Sandwich)

And the six leave the building and head towards the battlefield.

How will Kira's crew, the Voltes team, and the Raijin-Oh team (thanks pinacolada_neko), and even the rest of the ABS-CBN anime characters react to this sudden turn of events? Stay tuned!

Stars Introduced So Far

Tenku - Empty Star
(Suo Chao, the Swift Vanguard)
Mel Tiangco

Super Network Wars continues in BTW #7



**"Alyssa... it's time."
Under the shade of that giant tree...
As I was busy watching my friends play...
As I cried inwardly at how frail and helpless I
had become.
As I smiled outwardly so that they would not no-
tice my weakness...
I met her... again.**

I saw her face for the first time. She was beautiful, exactly as I'd imagined her to be. She had long, auburn hair, aquamarine eyes and wore the sweetest smile on her face. Her dark, crimson dress seemed to flow with the wind and clashed with the drab colors of our surroundings. She had this otherworldly presence about her that made her look strangely elegant.

TICK TOCK TICK TOCK!

She took out her pocket watch and showed it to me. I remembered it clearly now. What really happened back then when I lost consciousness. She'd told me to watch it intently, and as I did so, the rhythmic swinging movement seemed to rob me of what little strength I had left. It wasn't anything unpleasant though. It was relaxing; like falling into a deep sleep. That was when she said those words – the ones that kept ringing in my head every so often ever since I was discharged from

the hospital:

"Look at the clock.... drift off into sleep... when you awaken, you will not have seven days to live, but one week of eternity..."

I stared at her curiously, and she returned my gaze, her smile unflinching.

"Excuse me, miss, but could you tell me your name? I've been wondering about who you were since we first met."

She didn't answer me immediately. Instead, she stroked my head gently and crouched down a bit so that our eyes were the same level. And finally, she spoke.

"I am Mistress Lillet." She paused for a moment. "You might say... I'm a traveling magician."

"Miss Lillet... not the rabbit-pulling type, I guess?" I don't even know why I said that. It seemed as if all my inhibitions just melted away after I'd heard her voice and I could talk to her normally – tactlessly, even.

"What a straightforward child!" Again, she paused after speaking as if gauging my reaction. I managed to

keep my eyebrows from furrowing at being called a child so patronizingly.

She continued, "I gather you haven't noticed the effects of the spell I cast on you yet?"

"S-Spell?" I blinked twice, wide-eyed and totally confused, "I... don't think I remember anything like that. I wanted to thank you for saving me back then.... But I don't know anything about a spell...", I bowed my head low to hide my expression and muttered under my breath, "I think not..."

Lillet smirked with an air of self-satisfaction, "Is that what you really think, Alyssa?"

"I'm positive!" I tried to sound as confident as possible. Just what was this woman getting at? We barely knew each other.

"What a stubborn child," she held her hands out in a gesture of resignation, "I suppose it can't be helped."

"What? What can't be helped?" I was seriously starting to get annoyed, though I was so weak that I doubt my face even showed it.

Then, without warning, she reached out and hugged me... softly, lovingly... it was a strangely familiar feeling that seemed to drain away all thoughts of resentment that I harbored. We stayed like this for awhile. It could have been a minute, a few seconds or forever - I'd lost track of time and just allowed myself to relax in her embrace.

Lillet spoke again, more seriously this time. "Alyssa, in less than five days, you are going to die."

"...Yes." I replied with total acceptance. It seemed as if it didn't matter anymore; that I'd lived a fulfilled life - no matter how short it might have been.

"But..." She held me by the shoulders firmly in front of her and looked deep into my eyes. Her violet irises seemed to dance as she spoke.

I closed my eyes and the words that she wanted to say seemed to flow throughout my entire body. It felt surreal, but I was certain that I knew what she was going to say.

"I will give you..."

For a split-second, I saw flashes of a lifetime. A kaleidoscope of moving images not unlike watching several television screens all at once. From the various scenes I saw, the one that stuck most in my mind was

a scene of a pink cat who looked like a bigger version of Rin-Rin and an older girl wearing a junior high uniform who held a striking resemblance to me, a group of three rascally looking teenagers running closely behind them.

We said it in unison.

"One week of eternity."

~~~~~

"Alyssa? Alyssa, are you alright, dear?" Mom's voice startled me back into reality. It was just a few hours after the flight, but my parents insisted that we had to see this specialist immediately. Germany looked like an interesting place with all sorts of weird structures that I'd never seen before, but I didn't even have time to take in the view. The flight had exhausted my already-frail body, and the taxi was running at the speed of light on instructions from Dad in a mix of hastily self-taught German and English.

We alighted from the taxi and entered the hospital. Mom and Dad had to hold on to me since I didn't even have the strength to walk on my own. Thankfully, the doctor's office was just a short elevator ride to the 9th floor.

"Alyssa, this is Dr. Erich Hoffmann. He's the person dad had been trying to get in contact with for the past few days."

"How do you do, Alyssa? I'm Dr. Hoffmann," the doctor's expression suddenly turned serious with one glance at me. "Mr. and Mrs. Cruz, let us dispense with the formalities. This child needs to be treated immediately."

"Yes, of course doctor," Dad replied

"Good! If that's settled, then there's only one thing left to do."

The doctor leaned - no, crouched down in front of me so that our eyes were the same level. His expression softened again.

"Alyssa, I hesitate to tell you this because you're so young, but it would be against my principles not to."

My heart skipped a beat. Whatever it was, it couldn't be good, judging from the way he phrased it.

"What I am about to do - this operation, is going to hurt."

"I'm prepa-" He held out his hand as if telling me to calm down and hear him out.

"It will be terribly painful, Alyssa. And furthermore, I cannot guarantee your safety," he said in an almost dejected tone.

"Oh my..." Mom covered her mouth with her hand and held on to dad.

Dad caressed my shoulders and gave me a reassuring pat on the head.

"But," Doctor Hoffmann continued, "I swear upon my honor as a doctor, to all of you inside this office right now, I will not allow this child to die."

"Doctor... I don't know about this..." Mom's voice was cracking as she said this.

"Elisa, please..." Dad tried to comfort her.

"So I must ask you, Alyssa," Doctor Hoffman said sternly, "do you still want to go through with this?"

I smiled with my eyes closed in a wide-eared grin even though the tears I'd been holding back were threatening to burst through my eyelids.

There was no hesitation in the way I said it... at least not that I can remember, "Doctor, my mind is made up. Please do the operation."

Everything seemed to happen in a blur as soon as he received my confirmation. A team of nurses and doctors, probably more than a dozen of them all clad in medical garb, seemed to come out from all directions to prepare me for the operating room.

Before, I knew it, I was being wheeled across the hospital's hallways while various medical personnel accompanied me each step of the way, all mixing up different cocktails of sweet-smelling medicine and anesthetics.

And I thought; I thought for the longest time. About my friends and family; about school; about how I found Rin-Rin; and about everything that led me to this place; about mom's muffled moaning through the roar of indecipherable medical jargon rushing around me; about dad's stalwart, unseen presence...

And then... I thought about how much I'd gained in a few short days and about how all these things wouldn't really matter.

## Epilogue

*"Are you certain, Alyssa? It's not beyond my ability, you know."*

*"Yes, the magic that you gave me that day was more than enough for me."*

*She snickered a bit, "You are really unique, Alyssa."*

*"Nah, I think I'm quite normal. That's why I can say this."*

*"If you're sure about this, then it's not my nature to impose on you. Take care of Rin-Rin. Goodbye, Alyssa."*

*Then, she began to walk away, slowly fading from my vision.*

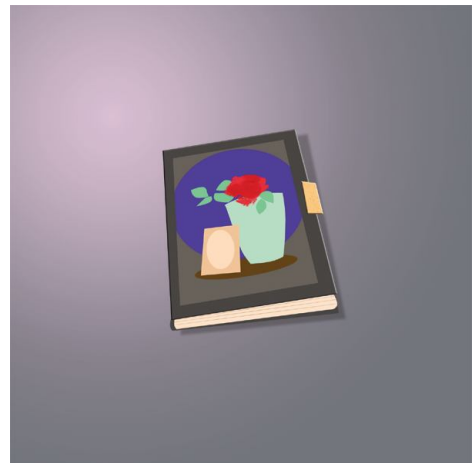
*"Lillet!" I hollered.*

*She stopped in her tracks and turned her head sideways so she could see me from the side of her eyes.*

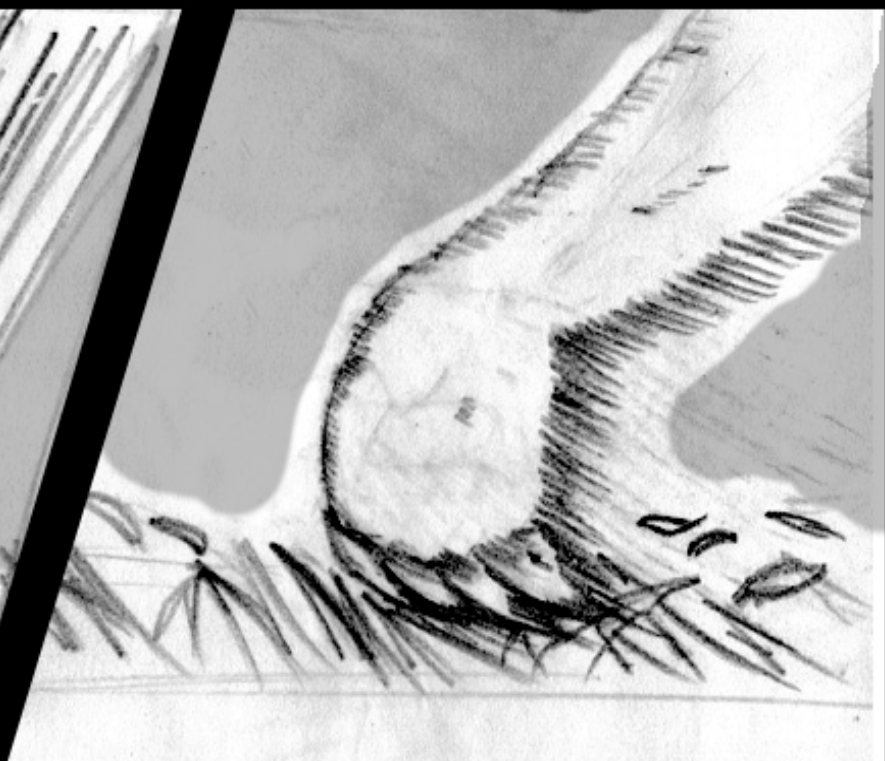
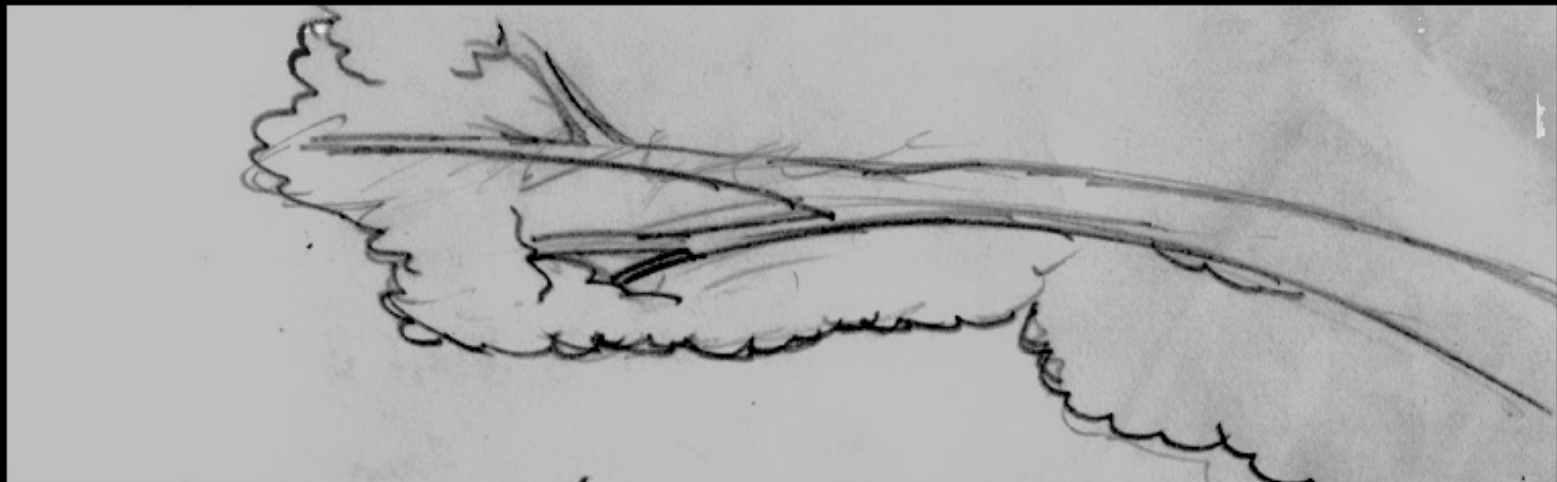
*"Let's meet again someday! Maybe in one. five, or even twenty years. I'm a terrible cook right now, but I'll try my best. I'll treat you to some homemade cookies, and we can have tea and talk together like old friends."*

*She smiled, "I'll be looking forward to it, Alyssa."*

## THE END







THAT BEAST.  
IT IS STILL  
AFTER ME.



I HAVE TO KEEP RUNNING.  
I NEED TO AT LEAST  
DIVERT IT FAR AWAY FROM  
MY CHILDREN.



YES. I CAN HIDE INSIDE THAT  
PLACE!

THE MOMENT I AM  
INSIDE, I GASP FOR AIR  
AFTER THAT  
WEARY RUN.

AND SOON, I SENSE THE  
BEAST'S PRESENCE OUTSIDE.  
I PEEK OUT FROM A CORNER.





THE BEAST GAZES AROUND  
AND LETS OUT A HOWL.

I AM SURE OF IT.  
IT IS THE SAME ONE  
THAT KILLED MY BELOVED.

THERE IS NO WAY I CAN  
DEFEAT THIS MONSTER.  
I CAN ONLY HOPE TO  
OUTSMART IT AND ESCAPE.

THE BEAST CONTINUES TO  
GAZE AROUND AND SOON  
TURNS ITS BACK TO ME.

THIS IS THE OPPORTUNITY  
I WAS WAITING FOR.



I SPRINT AND  
MAKE MY ESCAPE.

BUT MY EFFORT IS  
TO NO AVAIL,  
AS A PAIN FROM  
BEHIND IMMOBILIZES ME.  
I TURN MY HEAD AROUND.



ANOTHER BEAST STANDS  
WHERE I FACED.  
THE HOWL IS BUT A CALL  
FOR THE OTHER.

SOON, THEY SURROUND ME,  
AND I KNOW...  
THE END IS NEAR.



NICE SHOT. I KNEW  
I CAN TRUST YOU.

AND I TRUST YOU  
WILL NOT FORGET  
ABOUT MY  
REWARD.

A STRANGE ONE  
INDEED. I DON'T  
THINK I'D BELIEVE IT  
WITHOUT SEEING IT  
WITH MY OWN EYES.

OF COURSE, IT WILL  
50-50 AS PROMISED.  
BUT BEFORE THAT,  
WHAT DO  
YOU THINK?

A BEAST THAT RELIES ON  
ITS HORRID FACE FOR SURVIVAL.  
WELL, I DID HAVE TROUBLES  
DEALING WITH  
THE FIRST ONE.







### AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE CONCEPT FOR THIS STORY BELONGS TO DRAKENAVARONE. IT WAS ORIGINALLY MEANT AS AN ENTRY BY ME AND HIM FOR THE HALLOWEEN STORYTELLING CONTEST HELD BY VJUTSU LAST YEAR BUT WAS CANCELED FOR A FEW REASONS. SINCE IT IS TIME FOR HALLOWEEN, I GUESS IT WOULDN'T HURT TO TRY AND GIVE LIFE TO THIS STORY. THOUGH I HAVE TO IMPROVISE WITH THE VAGUE MEMORY OF IT.

EXTRA NOTE: NO WEIRD FUNNY-LOOKING ANIMAL IS HURT DURING THE MAKING OF THIS WORK.

- F.I.A



# #Baka-Trio Comics

lordcloudx and denzil playin Scarlet  
Weather Rhapsody netplay...



I blame lag for this...  
I totally do!

GRAZE!  
GRAZE!  
SPAM!  
K.O.



Denzil! j00 effin nubcake!  
There is no honor in winin  
via spam! real l337 players  
fight head-on!



They want to lose that badly?  
That's the way I like to play.  
Deal with it.





# **KIKIRIN WANTS YOU TO SEND US FEEDBACK**

Do you agree/disagree with any of the articles featured here? Do you want your game featured in next month's issue? Would you like to submit an article of relevant interest to the English Visual Novel Community? E-mail us at [baka\\_triad@yahoo.com](mailto:baka_triad@yahoo.com) for your submissions/comments