

def function (singularity):

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def function (singularity):

by Anonymous

Summary

it's always *why did you mess with your player data and you're missing half your data structures* and never 'how was playing with your data. messing with code looked fun was it fun'

(it is, right up until it's not.)

Notes

wrote this on mobile while sitting outside an operating theater so i'll take it as a win if its anywhere near coherent ^^;
partly inspired by [felix_j's fic!](#) (hopefully the link works if it doesnt i'll fix it later)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

If anyone asks, Ash has a perfectly sensible, reasonable explanation for all of this. It's normal isn't it, to be *curious* – to poke and prod at corners until his already loose connection to the world unravels even further, just to see what happens.

Aren't you excited? Aren't you even the slightest bit curious, as to what might happen? Really, anyone else would do the same. Maybe it all boils down to hubris – human arrogance, and all the fallacies that come with it – but none of that has ever kept Ash from doing what he wants when he

puts his mind to it.

And why not? *Why not*. Who's going to stop him?

So he sits down at a table in his base on what is an otherwise normal day and double-checks that Parrot isn't on the server at the moment. It's fun at first, albeit somewhat unsettling and painful – he gags, hands shaking as he *pulls* – gleaming, woven cables of code and flickering variables, coated in bright, bloody red.

He is holding himself, watching himself, watching himself *watch* himself in a recursive loop, and he thinks this must be what a star will feel like when it finally collapses into itself.

The world fades in, out of focus. If he changes this function, the rainbow band around his upper arm changes into a dull blur; another smudged constant and his shadow disappears, leaves behind a negative space; there is so much *else* happening – the shimmer of pixels as textures render into place, the whisper of a command hissing into the air as a library loads, a million different pieces fitting into places like gears, a slow ticking machine.

Blood drips from his nose – where his nose should be – and from his hands. It fades into the air in a way that it *shouldn't*, twisting and turning before disappearing entirely in a way that Ash's mind can't process, so he stops looking.

He should probably be concerned about that but you know, it's fine really – he's got this handled. Completely under control, nothing to see here. He's more preoccupied with the possibilities; because if he could change *this*, what else could he change?

So he keeps pulling, because there is power at his fingertips and in Lifesteal they'd made a currency of it. Stars dot in and out of his sight. Tunnel vision narrows his focus down to the wavering connection in his hands – his eyes are wide open in spite of it.

And well – he's curious. (Aren't you curious?) There's more to see, more to unravel, so he pulls–

And the thin, wire-edge connection falls flat – not quite *dead* – in his hands.

And the world *melts*, cracks open, going dark and gray and it takes a moment for his eyes to adjust – there is lava, the sky blooming beneath his feet, a labyrinth of caves somewhere else, underground, *under ground* – and then he stops seeing, because his eyes have realized he's not meant to see this.

And Ashswag, who is all bluster and teeth and dry words sharpened with a knife's edge, feels horribly, terribly small all of a sudden. Like a pinned butterfly on a board, all his soft parts put up on display and ready for vivisection.

the dark pressing on his skin and bones and flattening him into nothing and it's not – it's not the seeing it's the understanding it's realizing you'll never be able to string together enough words to explain the unknowable – the world, the haunting voices of the entire universe as you know it – it's the feeling of being incomprehensibly small and alone – worthless – because no one else would understand no one else could understand you – he can't breathe and it hurts–

Lava lakes – he thinks faintly, struggles to put together thoughts around the ringing in his head – *are not supposed to be that deep*.

He might be screaming, a little. If there are tears on his cheeks and blood trickling down his ears then that's just no one's business except his, isn't it?

Look up. *Look up* – someone's snapping their fingers in front of him, saying words in a language that he should probably know. Everything that should be familiar feels twisted, an inch to the left just wrong *enough* to nag at him.

He blinks, waits till the world tilts back into something vaguely resembling what it once was. An uncomfortable heat flash and nausea coils up in his stomach. The blur in front of him solidifies into shape – red, red, Red.

Reddoons.

The door had been locked. The windows had been closed. Ash had made sure of it.

How did he get in?

He's crouched in front of where Ash has crumpled onto the floor – he must've fallen out of the chair at some point, not that Ash can see where it is anymore – and his chat hovers around him, small ladybugs babbling to themselves and trying to settle in Ash's lap even as Red half-heartedly attempts to shoo his goons away. It doesn't work. He can't hear them, but from the look on Red's face it's not anything bad, just a little overexcited.

Ash doesn't have his own chat. There are the pixels that flicker into undefined shapes around him sometimes if he settles in one place for too long, taking his face and parroting his own words back at him sometimes, and the off-color ones that like to pull at his legs to make him trip, but he doesn't really have a *chat* in the way Reddoons and Subz and Zam does. Branzzy doesn't either, and he's not sure what it says about either of them.

Red doesn't say anything, just sits there like he's waiting for a cue. Ash is half-expecting him to make a joke and break the tension as he does, to tease Ash for curling up on the floor like a scared animal – he doesn't, waits patiently, and that more than anything is what makes Ash open his mouth and say; "Something's wrong."

Connection, he thinks. The need to tell someone, to try to make them understand even if the floor still felt like it was falling out from under your feet and it might've been kinder not to say anything at all.

His hands are clammy. Gross. It's probably not what he should be fixated on, but it's either that or think about *everything else*.

Red smiles lazily, settling on the floor in a smooth movement that shouldn't have made Ash bristle. "Yeahh- I changed my suits recently, started dyeing them a slightly different shade of red and I'll be honest, I don't think it's workin' with my complexion that well," Red rambles, stilted in a way that he usually isn't. He's good at rolling with the punches, at coming up with three different things for every situation even when put on the spot. Ash admires and envies him for it in equal measures.

"No one gives a shit about what color dyes you use," Ash rasps out and decidedly keeps the information that he *had* noticed to himself. Red would never let him hear the end of it. And Ash, as he was right now, didn't think he would be able to stop himself from blurting out every thought he'd had about Red into the air like a confession and that would be *terrible*, worse than the world ending maybe – because it was one thing to be in love with your rival and possibly(?) friend, and quite another thing to actually admit it to him.

If it could be called love, anyway. Was there a word for wanting to keep someone close until it becomes something like a physical need? Something that stretches out across his diaphragm and

sinks, huddles like a feral animal, tuples of data somewhere between nested loops.

Horribly inefficient. Tuples weren't mutable.

"It looks *fine* –" he feebly flaps a hand at Red to shush him when he tries to speak up again, "Shut up. Shut up. Look—" a pause, as it finally sinks it that he doesn't know how Red actually got here, "wait, *why* are you here?"

Chat might be laughing at him, he thinks. He shouldn't be able to hear them.

Red tilts his head, something like confusion crossing his face. Ash can't tell whether it's because Red was particularly good at masking his expression or if Ash's own catalogue of emotions needed an update. "*Well*, you called for me."

"...No." He bites out, swallowing back a pained noise. "I didn't."

"You did."

"No, I- I didn't. I would know if I did." It's still so fucking *loud*. "I would, wouldn't I?"

"Would you?" His face – and voice – is indecipherable, and Ash wants nothing more than to reach across the few inches of space between them and knock his stupid shades off his face.

He can't even lift a finger. A hollow feeling blooms in his chest, rotting from the inside out. There's ladybugs in his ears and under his skin, static electricity and a crawling sensation that makes him nauseous. He wants to tear his skin off. He could. He could. He would, if he wasn't uncertain that the skin would grow back.

Ash closes his eyes instead.

The door was locked, he thinks.

"Are you really here?" His voice shakes despite his best efforts, his limbs tremor in time to the ticking of the world, still a pulsating mess around him.

Chat laughs.

"Do you want me to be?"

"No. Yes. I-" and it all comes out in a rush, more exhale than actual words, "*I don't know.*"

Quiet falls over them, abrupt enough that he flinches and curls further inwards. Something rolls uncomfortably in Ash's stomach when Red takes one of his hands and turns it over carelessly, like it's nothing more than an object for Red to keep.

This is not what a hand should feel like. Another inch to the left, just close enough to be familiar but what did Ash know about familiarity anyway? His own pulse is a foreign thing – it might as well be one long beat for how fast it's going. He pictures the textures on Red's skin stripping away, layer by layer, flesh and bones until there's nothing underneath except a silhouette of melting skin.

"You could open your eyes and check. See what's changed," Red mutters. He could've been yelling and Ash wouldn't be able to tell above the ringing in his ears. His fingers press into Ash's wrist – every single one of his fight-or-flight instincts start *screaming* at him – and he can't even move away, *fuck* –

Open your eyes, chat laughs at him, sounds overlapping until it's a singular, drawn out noise.

Open your eyes, the world demands of him, but there's a part of him that's still a kid and hiding under the blankets, hoping against belief that if he just *waits*, the monsters lurking outside will go away.

Open your eyes, Red asks him, gentle in a way he doesn't know what to do with, so he-
-opens his eyes.

...There's no one there.

Ash chokes out a laugh.

Hours might've passed by from one blink to the next. He can't be sure; when he'd lost pieces of himself, when Red had left, and a weak part of him, cracked open to show the mess of circuitry underneath asks *why*.

(Had anything been real in the first place? This entire time – just himself. Watching himself. A recursive loop, variables changing with the slightest gesture and the void-space in the distance between stars.)

Open your eyes, and so Ash *looks*.

you'd never been good at knowing to quit while you were still ahead

There's really nothing left to do, except reach in and pull again.

End Notes

cosmic horror is just one really long and awful anxiety attack and in this essay i will-

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