

mockingbird

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/43651605) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/43651605>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Dream SMP
Relationship:	Wilbur Soot & Technoblade , Fundy & Wilbur Soot , Fundy & Technoblade , Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson
Character:	Wilbur Soot , Fundy (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Sally the Salmon (Dream SMP)
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort , Sally the Salmon is Not a Fish (Dream SMP) , Alternate Universe - Royalty , Implied/Referenced Character Death , Grief/Mourning , Floris Fundy-centric
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of Aerie
Stats:	Published: 2022-12-22 Words: 4,672 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

Even when Fundy blossoms into his craft, painting wide, beautifully detailed landscapes and portraits so lifelike, their subjects could have jumped out of their frames, Wilbur's favorite will always be that first one, with Techno's green hair and ladle-sword, Sally's double head, Wilbur's bug eyes, and little Fundy's attempt at an artist's signature at the bottom:

form fundy, it says. to the bestest Dad in the hole worl.

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Or, three times they called him Tommy, and one time it was Phil.

Notes

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

The first time it happens, he is too small to even remember it. He is five, or perhaps six years old — the young prince of an old kingdom. One day, he will be king, shoulders heavy with choices, brow furrowed from the weight of an entire nation. He'll wonder then how his father ever did it, and he'll finally forgive him for days like this one.

Because one day, Fundy will be king. But today he is just a child, and his father is missing.

He wanders down the hall, followed by a retinue of guards. He is never alone, even when he wants to be. That is the price, perhaps, of safety, of being the beating heart of a kingdom. The ribs encircle him too tightly, and some days they look like the bars of a silver cage.

He passes under paintings and flower vases and asks everyone he meets: “Have you seen my dad?” One of the guards shakes her head. Another shrugs. “Have *you* seen my dad?” The butler frowns, the maid says sorry. “Have you seen my dad?”

Finally, someone says they have. The prince heaves a sigh of relief, and then follows the directions to one of the castle’s libraries. The guards move with him like a shadow.

The door is ajar when he gets there, and through the crack, he can see his father sitting at a table, his fingers worrying over a dusty scroll in front of him, his tired face framed by a stack of books. It is a face that says a disturbance might not be welcome, but Fundy is too young and too loved to know what that looks like. He is always welcome everywhere else, so who could blame him for never thinking there might be some places his father does not want him to go?

“Dad?” Fundy pushes the door open; his guards stand at attention in the hallway outside. “Dad, I have something to—”

“Hm?” His father doesn’t look up from his work; his furrowed brows do not unknit. “Maybe later, Fundy.”

Fundy pouts. What could be more important than this? Than him? He does not yet understand that—while to him, his father was just the man who played him lullabies and tucked him into bed with sweet homemade fairy tales, and who could never say no to his Mama—it was different for everyone else. To the rest of the kingdom, he was King Wilbur, Protector of the Realm, Ruler of the Kingdom, and Champion of the Battle of Blue Valley.

“But Dad,” Fundy tries again, reaching into his pocket, “I just need you to look.” He wanders closer to the table, close enough to see the words scrawled on his father’s scroll, words too long and too big for him to pronounce. “Please? Look.”

“Not now,” Wilbur says, with a note of annoyance. That, at least, Fundy recognizes from all the times their family dinners were interrupted by some nobleman hoping to squeeze in one last royal request before the day ended. They were usually sent away with one look from Fundy’s Mama or uncle. If Mama had her way, she said once, she would bolt the castle doors the moment the sun started setting. But all of them knew she never would. And Wilbur wouldn’t either.

“That’s your fault, you know,” he once overheard his uncle tell his parents. “You’d readily break yourselves for the first person who asks.”

His father had laughed so hard, Fundy feared he might die of it. “*You’re* accusing me of being too self-sacrificing?” he said when he finally settled. “*You?*”

“Because hypocrisy is *his* fault, darling,” Mama said, smiling over the rim of her wineglass.

Soon, little Fundy will forget that conversation. He’ll forget this one a little bit longer.

“Dad,” he says again, tiptoeing to look over his father’s table, trying to meet his eyes. “Please—”

“I said, *not now*, Tommy .”

There is a deep silence, punctured only the sound of his father’s quill scratching at the scroll—quick, hurried strokes of ink that suddenly, abruptly ceases as he, too, realizes his mistake. He puts

his pen down. He finally looks up.

Yes, Fundy will forget this conversation.

But he will never forget the look on his father's face.

"Oh," Wilbur says, a soft exhale. He stares at Fundy with wide, wide eyes—like he is seeing a ghost, or perhaps willing one to life. And again, quieter: "*Oh.*"

"I'm not—" Fundy starts, and doesn't get to finish.

His father crosses the table so quickly, he practically jumps over it. The movement shakes the table and knocks over books and spills ink, but Wilbur doesn't look back, doesn't even blink as he scoops his son up in his arms. He squeezes Fundy to his chest, so tightly Fundy squeaks out a breath of surprise. Wilbur holds him like he'll disappear if he loosens his grip, and Fundy doesn't understand, not yet, so he tries to squirm out of his father's hug like all children are wont to do.

"Dad," he complains. "I can't breathe."

"Oh, gods, sorry," Wilbur says, easing away, to look Fundy in the eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Fundy's hand goes to his father's cheek. "Why are you crying, Dad?"

Wilbur just laughs, even as more tears spill down his cheeks. It's like warm rain slipping down Fundy's fingers.

Wilbur is still laughing as he kisses Fundy's hair, smoothing it back from his face with his free hand. It's been a long time since he's carried Fundy like this. *He's growing too quickly*, he often laments to his wife.

He's growing just fine, Sally would reply. *You're just not ready to let him.*

Will we ever be ready?

Sally would only laugh. They both know the answer already.

Now that he's holding Fundy again, he thinks it's ridiculous that he ever set him down. In the early months of his fatherhood, he kept his baby on a sling across his chest, or bounced him on his knee, even as he attended council meetings and signed royal decrees, even when he was eating biscuits and tea or writing another song. He could never be away too long, or else he'd feel the separation like a sickness in his soul. Over time, that had changed, because suddenly Fundy could walk, and then run, and Wilbur had to let him.

What an unfathomable thing that was to him now, to let a child go.

But he has to, because Fundy is still wriggling, trying to break free, and slowly, hesitantly, he sets Fundy back on his own two feet.

"I'm sorry," he says again, both to his son and to the boy he once sent away too many times. He should never have let either of them out of his sight. He should have taken every scrap they spared him. What a fool he was—what a fool he *is* — to forget that every second was a debt the universe could collect on at a whim.

"S'okay," Fundy says, his bafflement giving way to excitement. At his age, emotions are fickle things, easily distracted by the next new feeling. "Do you want to see what I made?"

Wilbur crouches in front of his son, smiling as he rubs the tears from his eyes. “Of course,” he says. He would take anything. Everything.

Fundy takes the rolled up paper in his hand and presents it proudly to his father. Wilbur blinks, and blinks, and then finally smiles.

“Is that... me?” he asks hesitantly, indicating the haphazard figure of lines and circles that Fundy has drawn.

“Mm-hmm!”

“And that there, that’s your Mama?”

“Yup! And that’s me in her basket, see?” Fundy points to the redheaded creature on Sally’s back that Wilbur had initially dismissed as a second head.

“And this is...” Wilbur’s eyes drift to the third stick man, this one brandishing what could either be a sword or a ladle. “Why is your Uncle Techno’s hair green?”

Fundy shifts from foot to foot, grinning the dimpled smile he’d inherited from his father. “I ran out of pink ink.”

“I have to say,” Wilbur says, “green suits him.”

“I think so, too!” Fundy replies earnestly. Then, a bit self-conscious but trying not to betray it, he asks, “Do you like it?”

Wilbur smiles, and ruffles his son’s hair. “I love it,” he says. “It’s the most beautiful painting I’ve ever seen.”

He will say that about everything Fundy will ever make, and it will never stop being true. He’ll keep each and every one of them, some framed, the others tucked reverently into a gilded box that he keeps by his bedside. Every chance he gets, he’ll show it off to everyone who asks about it (and even to those who don’t), and Fundy, as he grows older, will pretend to be embarrassed by his childhood doodles.

Even when Fundy blossoms into his craft, painting wide, beautifully detailed landscapes and portraits so lifelike, their subjects could have jumped out of their frames, Wilbur’s favorite will always be that first one, with Techno’s green hair and ladle-sword, Sally’s double head, Wilbur’s bug eyes, and little Fundy’s attempt at an artist’s signature at the bottom:

form fundy, it says. to the bestest Dad in the hole worl.

When Wilbur shows it to Techno that night, Techno reads the inscription, looks up at Wilbur’s shining face, and says, “You have *got* to hire a better linguistics tutor around here, Wilbur.”

The second time it happens, Fundy catches his uncle on a bad day.

When he is older, he’ll realize that Uncle Techno had a lot of bad days. He just wasn’t allowed to see them. Most times, it worked like clockwork: Uncle Techno would abruptly excuse himself from breakfast, and if Fundy tried to follow, his father or mother would conjure up some distraction or another. His uncle’s long absences would be explained away with fantastical tales of adventure, which could have been true for the man he used to be, but no longer.

His mother, with a small smile: “Your uncle’s fighting pirates on the Southern Sea.” His father, with a faraway look: “There’s a dragon that needs slaying.”

But always, in truth, his uncle never strayed too far away. In time, Fundy would come to know his uncle’s favorite hiding places. Sometimes, the crypts below the castle. Sometimes, in a bedroom that once belonged to Fundy’s other uncle, which had remained untouched and yet dustless. Sometimes, in one of the castle’s unused towers.

Today, Uncle Techno doesn’t get the chance to hide.

Fundy finds him in the ivy-veiled pavilion, staring silently at one of its marble columns.

“Uncle Techno?” he says.

Techno doesn’t move. Doesn’t turn. If it isn’t for the slow rise and fall of his chest, and the barest fluttering of his blinking eyelashes, he could have been just another statue in the garden.

Fundy shifts awkwardly from foot to foot. At fifteen, he does most things awkwardly.

“Uncle Tech,” he says again, softly. “Good morning.”

At that, Techno does turn, and sees his nephew with an armful of art supplies. An easel stands ready in the middle of the pavilion floor. Suddenly, a memory of a promise: he said he’d let Fundy paint him today. Techno blinks slowly again, as if coming out of a long dream he wasn’t quite ready to leave yet.

Techno doesn’t say good morning. Instead he says, “When did you get so tall, kid?” because Techno still remembers him as the toddler stumbling through his first steps into Techno’s arms, as the five-year-old holding on to his finger as they crossed the road, the little boy sitting on his shoulders to reach for an apple high on the tree.

Fundy smiles, all white teeth and dimples and hair that curled at the very ends like waves catching the light of a scarlet sunset. Wilbur once mourned half-heartedly that there was nothing of him in his son, that it was all Sally, but he’s never seen Fundy like this: lanky and awkward and asking for a favor under the shifting shadows of the walls of wisteria.

Fundy sees the change at once. For a moment, Techno’s mask slips, and Fundy can see right through him. He knows at once it was not something he was meant to see, and he looks quickly away. But Fundy is the grandson of an artist, and an artist himself, and the image is seared into his mind even as he tries to forget it, and suddenly he knows exactly what paints to mix to get the exact shade of Techno’s shuttered, grief-stricken eyes.

Fundy wants to make it go away. He wants to take whatever was troubling his uncle, all of it, and carry it for him. He wants to make his Uncle Techno smile.

See? He is his father’s son, through and through.

“Maybe,” Techno says, turning away, “we should do this another day, Fundy.”

“But—” Fundy scatters his supplies on the floor and kneels, hands desperately reaching for something that could make this right, that could make his uncle stay. “Look, Mama bought me new paint from the city, and I think it’s the exact color of your hair, see?”

Fundy holds up a tube of paint with all the hope in the world, and finds that his uncle’s back is still turned and retreating. And trembling, too, but Fundy is too busy rifling through his colors to notice.

“And I—I wanted to use this new shade of yellow for your flowers. I know last time they weren’t quite as vibrant.”

“Fundy,” sighs Techno. Despite the early hour, he has never felt so tired. “Another time.”

Fundy ignores him. “And here’s a new brush I want to break in.”

“Fundy.”

“And, um, here are the sketches I already started...”

“Fundy.”

“And I know how busy you are tomorrow, so today’s really the only day—”

“Gods.” Techno spins around at last, breathing heavily as he spits out, “Will you ever learn to *shut up*, Tommy?”

He regrets the words before they even leave his mouth. He almost reaches out to snatch them out of the air, to stuff them back in and swallow them back down before Fundy can hear them. But he cannot un-say them, and Fundy cannot unhear them, no matter how much Techno prays he could.

Fundy’s face falls. There is nothing quite like the heartbreak of a raised voice from someone usually tender and soft.

It doesn’t make Fundy think that he’s loved any less. It just makes him think he’s liked a bit less.

But he tries to shake it off, to pretend the words did not settle against him like heavy debris. He hastily collects his art supplies from the floor. It all seems silly now. Childish. He is fifteen—he should know by now when he isn’t wanted.

“You’re right, I’m sorry,” he says. Tubes of paint roll from his arms. He bends down to pick them up again; a paintbrush falls to the ground as he does. Gods, he can’t even *leave* correctly. “We’ll do this some other time.”

“Fundy, kid, that wasn’t...” Techno begins.

Fundy doesn’t raise his eyes from the floor. He fumbles for his things again. “No, it’s okay. It’s really okay. I should go. I’m going to go.”

His voice has the strained quality of someone trying very, very hard not to cry.

He reaches for the paintbrush that’s rolled out of reach. A scarred hand gets to it before he can. He finally looks up again and sees his Uncle Techno crouching in front of him, meeting his eyes, and Fundy is ashamed for the tears that spring up unbidden.

“Ah, crap,” Fundy says, trying to laugh through the sudden heaviness in his chest. He wipes his face against his shoulder, not even sure why he was crying. He’ll understand soon enough, one birthday later, that everything is just so much bigger when you’re fifteen. “Seriously, Uncle Techno, I can paint someone else today, alright?”

“No.” Techno slips the paintbrush into Fundy’s hand. “Paint me.”

In the pavilion where he used to train two boys for war, Technoblade sits with his legs crossed and his hands folded on his lap. His braided hair cascades gently over his shoulder, bursting with fresh

daisies and honeysuckles.

Behind the easel, his nephew pouts as he considers his canvas, and then his subject, and then his canvas again.

“Sorry,” he says, “can you try looking...”

“More pensive?” Techno suggests. “More dashing? Like a warrior fresh from the battlefield?”

“Less constipated,” Fundy finishes.

Techno manages to chuckle. Fundy can hear the strain in it, like an out-of-tune violin. Something is still wrong. Something still needed fixing.

There is an instinct in Fundy, inherited from a boy he will never know, to fill the silence with noise.

But he knows what his Uncle Techno needs now.

So he shuts up, and he paints.

The quiet settles like dust on an abandoned city. Beyond the pavilion, the sun continues rising, the birds continue singing, and the flowers continue their slow upward creep towards the unreachable sky. But inside, bracketed in ivy, the only sound is the steady scratching of a pencil, and then, soft brushstrokes.

Techno watches Fundy’s small face pinch in concentration, as lost in his art as Techno is lost in his thoughts. When *did* he get so tall? Techno thought he’d been keeping as close an eye on him as possible, and then suddenly, somehow, Fundy still managed to outgrow his old clothes without Techno’s notice.

Someday, he’ll outgrow Techno, too.

The silence is a balm, and after a handful of long hours, Techno is healed enough to say: “That wasn’t your fault.”

Fundy’s paintbrush falters against the canvas, smudging the blue of his uncle’s sapphire earring. He waits for Techno to continue. It takes a while, but eventually, Techno takes a deep breath that suffocates the fire that had been raging inside his chest all morning.

“It never goes away,” Techno says softly. “That bastard grief. It gets easier to bear. It gets lighter. It lures you into a false sense of security, and then it takes you by surprise. Every damn time.” His hands clench and unclench on his lap. “But then you pick yourself back up. Always pick yourself back up, alright, kid? You can’t let it win.”

“I understand,” Fundy says, and he really believes he does.

Techno smiles, fondly and sadly, because gods, there really is no way to raise a child against loss. He can try, and he *will*. He can teach Fundy everything he knows, just like he taught his father, but grief isn’t a war. It’s a tidal wave. He can’t stop it from knocking Fundy over.

The best he can do is teach the kid how to swim.

“I need to be alone, sometimes, is all,” Techno says. “That isn’t anyone’s fault. Least of all yours.”

Fundy nods carefully. “Do you... still want to be alone now?”

Techno smiles. “No,” he says. “Not right now.”

Fundy ducks quickly back behind his easel to hide the giddy smile that bursts from him like a dandelion through cobblestone. He doesn't quite make it in time; his uncle catches the edge of a dimpled grin, so familiar that it makes Techno's heart ache.

He is his uncle's nephew, after all.

Fundy finishes the painting. He gets his uncle's eyes just right. He gets his smile even better.

The painting still hangs in Techno's bedroom, right over his mirror.

What does it take to kill a kingdom?

A diplomatic visit to a neighboring empire. A young prince, nearly of age, desperate to prove himself, saying, “I can do this on my own.” A father learning how to let go; a mother's insistence that their boy is strong enough, that all will be well—something she will regret before daybreak. A convoy of carriages and royal guards passing through a dark forest.

Dark shadows shifting between the trees, waiting.

A kingdom falls with a single strike at its weak spot, and there is nothing quite as soft as its heart.

A queen waits by the window, watching the road that leads back home. He should be coming home soon, she thinks. She glances at a clock.

He should have arrived an hour ago.

It is late, too late, and she supposes, perhaps, that the road could have been too difficult to ride by night. He could be at a roadside inn, warming his feet at the hearth, or already asleep so he can ride out early tomorrow. He could be back by breakfast.

The queen's mind settles. But the mother's heart is aflame.

Finally, movement: a shadow passes beneath the castle walls. Distantly, the queen hears the thundering clatter of a horse ridden to its fullest speed. Just one horse. Just a lone rider, when her son left with a dozen.

Something is wrong.

Sally's hand curls into a fist.

Fundy wakes on the third day of his kidnapping and overhears his captors.

The abandoned keep they're holding him in has walls that echoed, and he can hear every word from beyond the bars of his cell.

His captors are getting impatient. They sent the ransom note two days ago and have not heard anything back from the castle. They are debating the possibility that the note could have gotten lost. Maybe the castle was still scrambling for their demands.

“Or,” one of them says, gruff, “maybe they just aren't coming.”

Inside his prison of echoes, the prince stills.

At sixteen years old, Fundy is the oldest he's ever been, but he has never felt so alone.

In the end, they should not have feared that they weren't coming. They should have feared that they *were*.

On the seventy-fourth hour of Fundy's capture, and not a minute more, a king, a queen and a general arrive in silence.

The first to die did not even have time to shout a warning before an arrow finds a home in his chest. More arrows fly from the forest, scattering the abductors' camp like ants before the hooves of a stallion.

A handful of them manage to raise the alarms and their defenses. They try to put up a good fight. After all, a group of bandits that manage to kidnap a prince will not go down so easily. And maybe, maybe, if they'd taken a different prince of a different kingdom, they could have survived longer.

An archer steps through the forest, into the firelight. The flickering torches dance over a face like death.

And though there are touches of gray in his hair, and crow's feet by his angry eyes, Wilbur makes them all remember that he was the man who won a war against a god.

A chain whip rattles through the air, wrapping around the leg of one of the captors. It pulls him, screaming, into the darkness of the forest where a mother sinks a crossbow bolt straight through his open mouth. The last thing he sees as he chokes on his own lifeblood are two creatures with braided hair. In the scarlet haze of battle, he cannot even tell which of them used to be a god.

One of the abductors shouts in warning: "Retreat! They brought *a whole godsdamned army*."

And they did. But it really only took three very angry, very ruthless people who would do anything to get their boy back.

A father, a mother and an uncle have arrived.

Fundy hears it all. The echoes bring him everything: the screaming, the dying, the pleading, the silence. And then the footsteps, two—no, three—running through the halls of the keep. He hears doors being thrown open, or broken apart completely.

He hears them calling for him.

"Here," he croaks, weakly. He extends his hand past the bars of his cage, waving desperately. "I'm here. Mama, Dad, Uncle—I'm right here."

His mother finds him first, crashing through the hall like a rabid dog.

"Fundy," she gasps, yells, whispers, "my *baby*," and nearly bends the metal bars to get to him.

"Mama," Fundy says. He's been trying to call her 'Mother' recently, to act mature, to distance himself from the child he used to be, but now all he can say was, "Mama, mama," as he sobs into her bloodstained shirt, once again a little boy waking from a nightmare.

Sally's arms go around him, almost crushing him, and she holds him like she has no plans of ever

letting go again. And then, suddenly, there were other hands on him, smoothing his hair back, checking his face, wiping his tears, holding him and holding him and holding him.

They all kneel around him, asking if he was alright, or telling him that he was.

“Oh gods, oh gods, Tommy—Fundy, I thought we’d lost you.”

He doesn’t know which of them say it. He doesn’t care. It doesn’t matter.

What matters is that he was safe, that they’d come, and that he’d never doubted that they would.

Why would he?

He’d been raised to doubt many things: fate, a trickster’s promise, a politician’s word, an offer too good to be true.

But he was never raised to doubt that he was loved.

“I’m sorry,” he sobs against them. “I’m sorry for making you worry.”

“Oh, my little champion,” Wilbur says, kissing his dirty forehead with a bloody mouth, “never be sorry. You are forgiven before you even make the mistake.”

His Uncle Techno brushes his sweaty hair from his face.

“Hey there, kid,” he says gently when their eyes meet. Relief crashes into them both. *He’s here, and it’s all going to be alright.* “Let’s get you home.”

It doesn’t happen often.

In fact, it shouldn’t have happened at all. They’ll call it a miracle, a gift from the universe, a once-in-several-lifetimes wonder of nature, and they will try to explain something unexplainable. But the *how* is rarely ever as interesting, or as important, as the *why*.

One warm spring morning, the curtain between worlds lifts. Just a bit. Just enough.

A king with an emerald around his neck stands at just the right spot, at just the right time. A miracle of miracles. A coincidence, for the more cynical of us.

He stands at the grave of a boy he’s outlived twice over, tending to the weeds and flowers that have taken root around the well-loved headstone.

The branches of the weeping willow arch over him, its valley-green leaves dancing on a breeze that smells faintly of apple blossoms. Around him, roses bloom in multitudes, enough to rival the stars.

The king breathes in. With spring here, it is easy to forget that winter even exists. He wishes it could last forever; he is prepared for when it doesn’t.

He has been raised well. As best as they could.

Suddenly, without knowing how, he knows he is no longer alone.

“Tommy?”

It is a voice that he’s never heard before; it is a voice he would have known anyway.

It is faint, coming from somewhere far away. Worlds away. And still, it sounds closer than life.

“No,” the king says. “I’m not Tommy.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he thinks he sees a ghost. A glimpse of gold. A fragment of a color. An already-fading memory of a sad smile. A dream. A trick of the light.

A hope.

The voice whispers, “No, you aren’t.” And then, quieter, as the curtains start falling back down: “And still, you must know I—”

He doesn’t get to finish. He could have been given eternity, and it still wouldn’t be enough. There is too much to be said. There is not enough time in the world.

But still.

Still, the king smiles. He knows the words that would have followed. He knows because his father said it to him the moment he was born.

To the wide open sky, Fundy says, “I will, too.”

End Notes

Merry Christmas and a happy new year to everyone. I just wanted to write this fic as a thank you to all of you, because you have truly, truly changed my life in ways you can't even fathom. Thank you for reading, for enjoying my work about Minecraft blocks. Because of this, I've made friends for life, I've had opportunities I never would have gotten without you (which I hopefully will be able to share soon on twitter ehem twitter.com/thcscus ehem), and I have had the absolute time of my life with this fandom.

I really will love you all forever :')

(Also thank you to Cesca Cespool for beta reading :) you've been with me since the beginning and i can't thank you enough for everything. and now to balance out all this sappiness i am legally obligated to call you a nerd. nerd.)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!