

P.P.F



Jack Brezler

P.P.F RE:

VOLUME 1

A WEB NOVEL SERIES WRITTEN BY

JACK BREZLER

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CHARACTER PROFILES

Damien Gerdo

Age- 15

Physical Description- Blue eyes, (dyed) black hair, and a skinny stature. Always wears a black trench coat, and most often wears jeans with a tee.

Background- Enjoys writing. An extreme introvert, and works at his uncle's cafe.

Ralph Fredricks

Age- 8

Physical Description- Blue eyes and brown hair

Background- A bad student. Has few friends, one of them being Sarah Tet.

Sarah Tet

Age- 7

Physical Description- Red eyes and brown hair

Background- Has a fascination with art. Her mother was a painter, who ran away a few weeks before her murder. Her father worked at a grocery store, and sold homemade comics.

Chloe Aldridge

Age- 15

Physical Description- Emerald green eyes, aqua blue (dyed) hair, and a curvy stature, usually wearing some t-shirt referencing some fantasy story, and jeans.

Background- An eccentric pop culture geek. Second in command of the New World Conspiracy Club.

Chris Aldridge

Age- 16

Physical Description- Black hair, hazel eyes, and usually wears polos and khakis.

Background- Has a fascination with the occult. Has a strange, secret hobby he tells no one about. The leader of the New World Conspiracy Club.

The Twins (Griffin and Gryphon)

Age- Both 15

Physical Description- People looking of Asian descent, with black hair and green eyes. Usually wear tee's with snow pants.

Background- No one knows much about them, since they spend most of their time studying ghost videos and occultic guides online through their iPod. The research committee of the New World Conspiracy Club

Talia

Age- 16

Physical Description- About as small as a 12 year old, but she's 16 (trust me.) She has ginger hair, usually tied up into a bun, and had yellow eyes, but usually wears tinted glasses. She always enjoys comfortable sweats with a tee.

Background- Fascinated with her blog, and video games. The blog supervisor of the New World Conspiracy Club.

Terry

Age- 15

Physical Description- Blue eyes, always wears a jester's hat, and wears a jacket with sweats.

Background- A health conscious individual. Level headed, especially when compared to the rest of the team. The moderator of the New World Conspiracy Club.

CHAPTER 1

February 14th, 2008

As snow falls down to the mostly quiet world, a boy runs past the many flakes, grasping a red heart-shaped box tightly in his hands. A big, goofy smile appears on his face as his run turns into a skip. Any passing adult would probably immediately be hit with a large wave of nostalgia, a reminder of when they were a child. For today is the day any couple, teenager, and child looks forward to. Valentine's Day. And, like any Valentine's day, someone, of any age, has someone they have their eye on. Same for this boy.

And it all started in November when he finally turned to his right and asked the girl he waits for the bus with how her morning was. She gave a simple answer; "Fine." It took a couple weeks before fine became, "Oh my gosh, my mom is so weird." Soon after, they were pretty much best friends. They both had visited each others house at least once and shared some pretty common interests. So, once his mom reminded him, Ralph Fredrick, that Valentine's Day was on the way, she was the first person to come to mind. With that, Ralph went to work, learning everything he needed to do to be as charming as possible. He conversed with his mother, bought a box of chocolates, and even wore a fancy shirt that he always complained about being boring. Of course, this didn't immediately matter, because his dad made him wear a winter jacket that even covered the top of his jeans.

Much like the skip in his step, his heart was skipping beats, and the closer he got to his bus stop, it simply got quicker, to the point it felt like his heart was at the back of his throat. Once his eyes caught the sight of the park's fence, he went from skipping to sprinting, growing closer to the girl of his interest. "Sarah!" The girl turned to look at him and smiled. Her short brown hair and red scarf were blowing in the winter wind, and her face was chilled red. She rose her arm, covered in a red winter jacket, and waved to him with a red mitten. "Hey, Ralph! You're later than usual!"

When he arrived next to her, he smiled as well. "Well, my mom wanted to make sure I looked perfect." The two strike up a conversation on the previous day's activities. "Hey, what's with the box? Oh, don't tell me...little Ralphie's got a crush on somebody!" his face turns red and he begins pouting. "Don't be mean!" Sarah starts laughing. "A-anyway, what do you care?!" Ralph inquires. "I hold an interest in knowing everything about my friends." Silence. "You're weird." Ralph responds. "Ha, that's rich coming from you." Ralph shakes his fist wildly. "So, tell me, who is it?" The boy snaps out of his fit of embarrassment. "H-huh?" "Come on, tell me!" The boy scratches his head. "Uh...uhhhhhh..." He gulps. "Yes, yes, just tell me." "Y-you." Her prodding ends, and her face switches to one of shock. "Eh...EEEEHHH?!" He jumps. "I'msorryldidn'tmeanitpleasedon'tkillme!!!" He guards his face with the heart-shaped box.

He shakes, anticipating some kind of violence. Instead..."Ahahahhahahhahahahahahah! The-the-that was priceless!" He looks up from behind the box, seeing his best friend holding her stomach, busting a gut. "I-it's not funny!" She keeps going, trying to speak, and failing. "I'm sorry, it isn't!" She finally calms down, looking at the boy. "I'll be your Valentine." The boy feels

his heart rise and lets his eyes widen. "R-really?" She shakes her head. "A-awesome!" He hands her the box in his hands. "A-and if you aren't busy, I would like to take you to bowl tonight...is that okay?" "Of course it is. Who says no to bowling?" her response makes him chuckle. He sighs, letting all the embarrassment from before flow out of him. "You just have to let me use the lucky blue ball." the rest of the wait for the bus was then spent in a heated argument.

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The sound of the teacher's lecture passes through one ear and out the other as Ralph stares at his paper, doodling unintelligible lines and circles. While doing so, someone taps him on the shoulder, causing him to jump, and making the whole class turn to him. Trying to ignore the piercing stares from his other classmates, he turns to look behind him. His teacher was standing there, looking at his paper. Ralph looks back to the front of the room and sees his teacher no longer there. "Uh..." Ralph's brain stops working long enough for his teacher to begin talking. "Doodling again, I see?" Ralph looks away. The man pulls up a chair, taking a seat next to the boy. "Alright, now, when you multiply, it's almost like addition. Except, instead of adding the two numbers together, all you're doing is adding one of these numbers to itself as many times as the other number tells you to. So for example, let's take 2×3 . What do you do here?" Ralph stared at the problem. "Um...you add two-three times?" The man shakes his head. "What number do you get when you do that?" Ralph answers, "Six."The teacher gives Ralph a big smile. "Correct, Ralph. See, it's not that hard, is it?"

"No, I guess not." Ralph admits, writing the answer down on his paper. "Hello, what's this?" The teacher grabbed Ralph's worksheet, reading one of the doodles Ralph had scribbled on it. A crude picture of a girl in a red jacket with red mittens. The man then begins scanning the room and then gets an Oh face. "Oh, Ralph, you never told me you were going after Sarah. Picking stuff out would have been so much easier." The man rolled his eyes as he said it. "G-give it back!" Ralph tried to reach for his doodle sheet and the teacher allows him to grab it. "How'd she react? Did she prefer caramel like I thought?" Ralph looks at the next problem, pouting. "That wasn't funny, Mr. Terrier." "Alright, I'm sorry." The man grins a little as he watches the boy work. His eyes go soft before something clicks in his mind. "Alright, class. Once everyone has finished their worksheets, you can begin exchanging candy." Once they heard this, the class went completely silent, save for the sounds of multiple pencils vigorously writing.

Now that he understood what he was doing, he got to work, slowly making his way through the worksheet. " 5×8 ." He scratches his head with the eraser at the end of his pencil. "I believe the answer you're looking for is 40." Instead of jumping, Ralph simply turns his head. "Oh, hey Sarah." The two exchange warm smiles before she plops into the seat just next to him. "Wait, are you allowed to move seats?" She puts a finger in front of her lips while winking her left eye. "Rule Breaker." The two giggle. "Wow, how are you not done with that yet?" She peaks over his shoulder and begins reading his answers. "You got 2 wrong. It's actually 42." He erased his answer and wrote down the correct one. "Sorry, I'm not uber smart like you." His eyes suddenly droop. "Oh, no, I'm sorry If I upset you." The two enter an awkward silence. "So, what time are we going bowling? I'm not sure if you told me." His eyes quickly go back to normal. "Oh. My dad and I will pick you up around 5." She nods her head. "Thanks for deciding to come

with me.” Ralph adds. She responds, “Thanks for inviting me.” His cheeks go red. “O-oh, don’t mention it.” His mouth attempts to avoid making a rather goofy looking smile.

Once he finishes his worksheet, the students each get out the paper bags they had decorated in art class before walking around the room, placing pieces of candy they had brought in from home into the bags. It took only a few minutes for everyone to finish giving out candy before they ran back to their seats and scavenged through the goodies inside their bags. Ralph and Sarah both chat away while sucking on lollipops. The bell rings, signaling the end of the school day. While the two grabbed their bags and rose from their seats, Mr. Terrier walked over to them, holding his books and binders in his arms with his laptop bag slung over his shoulder, but also seems like it could fall at any second.

“Sorry to interrupt such pure young love, but Ralph, can you please clean the chalkboard today?” Ralph looks at Sarah, who nods him on. “Okay, sir.” The man gives Ralph a handshake before rushing out of the classroom door. “Always get brownie points when you can.” Sarah gives him a thumbs up and toothy grin. He rolls his eyes. “I’ll try to be quick.” “No, take your time. I need to talk to someone anyways. I’ll meet you at the entrance, okay?”

Ralph nods to her request and she leaves the classroom. With that, he grabs the cleaning spray and a paper towel and sprays the board. While he was washing the board, he heard the door next to the teachers desk slowly open. The classrooms of the school are split into five areas. Each area is circular shaped, with six different rooms, three on each side with doors leading outside at the back and doors to the halls at the front of the area. The three classrooms on each side are connected to each other. The woman who entered the room was an assistant teacher, named Miss Clarice, who often came in to check on the students and give them their afternoon reading class. Her long brown hair came all the way down to her chest, or just slightly above Ralph’s height.

Something that gave the boy concern, however, were the heavy bags under her eyes. Her usually soft, kind eyes, had been replaced by a stern, cold gaze. When she turned to look at him, he averted his gaze, continuing his job. She doesn’t say a word. She simply plops a letter down on Mr. Terrier’s desk and leaves. Once he hears the classroom door to the hall close, he lets out a loud sigh. After that, Ralph throws away the paper towel and places the liquid on his teacher’s desk before grabbing his bag and opening the classroom door. He puts his bag on his back before walking into the crowd of bustling students. The sounds of multiple students yelling with excitement for the weekend made Ralph’s ears ring. He covers his ears and looks to his left. By some coincidence, his eyes had met the giant window looking into the main office. In there, four people seemed to be standing in the middle of the room, having some sort of serious conversation. There was a woman (the school’s principal), a man with pale, wrinkled skin sitting in a wheelchair, and two teenagers from the high school a couple miles away from here. The pale man’s eyes flicked to the right, staring right at Ralph.

He averts his gaze, hoping nobody noticed and thought he was weird for staring. He continues walking through the crowd, keeping an eye out for his friend. He takes one last turn and arrives at the school entrance. To his surprise, she isn’t there. “Sarah?” He calls her name, but no one responds. “Sarah?!” He calls her name a little louder. ‘Ok, calm down. She’s probably still talking to her friend.’ He takes a deep breath, lets his shoulders slump, and breaths out. He sits on the bench next to the doors, cracking open *Arthur in Insanity Land*.

'Yeah. Everything's okay.' Ten minutes pass. 'I'm sure she's just running late.' 30 minutes pass. A teacher from a lower grade taps him on the shoulder. "What are you still doing here sweetie?" He puts down his book, now halfway through it. "I'm just waiting for my friend." The teacher wracks her brain. "I believe everyone has already left for today. Maybe she left before you?" The boy's face droops. "I-I guess that's the case."

"Do you have someone coming to pick you up?" He gets up. "I'll just walk." Head down, he walks down the sidewalk and away from the school. Despite taking the bus to school every morning, he was committed to walking home every afternoon. Mostly so him and Sarah could stop at the nearby pizza bar to buy a slice each and laugh at each others stupid jokes. 'I'm so stupid. Why am I upset?' He sighs, slaps his cheeks and puts on a big smile. 'Besides, I have a valentine! That's all that matters!' His walk turns into a skip, making his way down the sidewalk. The path to and from school took him down many different roads, most of which were cluttered with corner restaurants, pawn shops, and, best of all, a candy shop, home to the world's best jawbreakers. The sight of the store always made the boy a little bit happier. In fact, he'd been there just a day or two ago.

Originally, his father had planned on taking him, but an extended shift kept him from doing so, and his mother, well, she never really stopped working. Then, while Ralph was slowly losing hope, Mr. Terrier had stopped by for Ralph's tutoring that day, and offered to take him. Ralph's teacher had become a friend to the family, so both of the boy's parents had signed off on the idea. And so, the two made their way to the shop, observing the many isles of sugary sweets. "Hmm..." Ralph had been eyeballing a box of mint chocolates for quite a while, and Terrier soon took notice. "Mint, huh?" Ralph nods his head. "Well, Ralph, I can agree mint has its place, but I would suggest you go with this instead." Terrier places a heart shaped box in Ralph's hands. It was a box of caramel chocolates. "Trust me, if there's anything I know best in this world best, it's chocolate." Ralph nods his head. "You might be right. I mean, I was just thinking because she's...cool?" the boy's teacher gives him a raised eyebrow before chuckling. "Keep that up and you'll be a ladies man in no time." Ralph puts on a smile, puffing out his chest.

'Speaking of Mr. Terrier, what was up with him? Don't tell me he owes the mob or something.' Ralph bites his lip, deep in thought. "SNAP!" He jumps, biting into his lip. "Ow ow owie!" he yelps in pain and surprise. 'What was that?' Ralph slowly observes his surroundings. Nothing. No snapped sticks, no people, no dogs...no cars, either. "Oooook. Not creepy at all." he laughs, still looking for the noises source. After a couple minutes of seeing nothing, he decided to keep moving. After a couple more steps, "SNAP!" He looks under his feet before looking again. "H-hello?!" Still no response. Again, Ralph notices the absence of people and automobiles. "H-haha! This prank is real funny! You all can stop now! Please!"

"...hello." A faint whisper reaches his ear. "Hello? Hello!" he looks around and around, seeing nobody. "Over here." The boy turns to his right...nobody. At least, that's what he thought until he looked down. In the snow was a set of two footprints. They weren't a part of a path or anything. They were just there with no sign of who created them. The footprints appeared to belong to a pair of winter boots. "I-Is someone there?" this time, the response is immediate. A new footprint appears, and another, and another. The path was leading him down the sidewalk toward the park gates. He first thought, 'I'd like to run as far away as humanly possible.'

However, one last phrase caught his attention. "You don't know where your friend is. Let me show you." With that, he froze. He weighs his two options in his head. 'Oh...gosh darn it!' he sighs, before beginning to follow the path of footprints.

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The footprints had led the boy through the park gates and past the many pieces of fun, colorful equipment. Now, he is standing in front of a large collection of trees known as the White Wolf's Forest. 'Why do they call it that anyway?' he shrugs his shoulders and continues following the invisible figure. As he went deeper into the forest, the feeling of isolation continued to crawl up his spine. His feet felt heavier, probably from the water in them. He felt his lungs constricting and his muscles tense. "Where are we going?" the question is not given any form of response. "Who are you?" the footsteps stop, making him flinch. The boy looks at the footprints. The last set were pointing to his left. When he turned to see his destination, he saw a small shack. It looked weathered, as if no one had lived in it for quite some time.

"What would Sarah be doing in place like this?" a laugh is heard. "You mean, what would people be doing with her in a place like this?" he stops breathing. His eyes go wide. "People...Sarah?!" He walks forward, grabbing the door handle. He turns it, pulling with all his might. The door smacks him in the face, sending him into his butt. "Ow!" he rubs his butt, looking up. His jaw drops. "Sarah..." her body was slumped to the side in a chair. No signs of a bullet or any physical contact besides a couple of bruises on her exposed arms and...a cord was attached to her right arm, and the cord was also attached to a jar, that seemed to hold some weird looking liquid. Ralph's mind stops working. His muscles loosen and fall numb. Tears fall down his face as he stares at his friend's limp body. Not breathing, moving, nothing.

"Sarah Ret has left this world. How unfortunate." Ralph doesn't know how to respond. He feels a pinch on his arm. His eyesight gets fuzzy. "S-Sarah." Another laugh invades his ears. "You know, she screamed your name. She begged, pleaded, that you would save her, anybody. Poor boy. Don't worry. I'm sure you'll make this right. In hell, of course." the voice disappears, leaving the boy in an uncomfortable silence. As his consciousness begins slipping, he hears a familiar voice call his name. Her voice. He smiles as he drifts away

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CHAPTER 1

A BOY NAMED DAMIEN

February 14th, 2012

The sounds of traffic pass through the cafe window. The chilly winter air seeps into the building through the crack under the door, making the boy near the front of the cafe shiver. "Grrh..." frustrated, he clenches his fingers, and then releases. His fingers go back to tapping away on his keyboard. Word after word, sentence after sentence, his smile grows after every percent of progress. He switches from the document he was typing on into an internet tab. He scrolls down, checking the site views. "Really?" He lets out a sigh. 5 views this week. "Why do I even bother?" he switches back to his document and continues typing. While this is happening, a man enters from the back of the shop, shivering severely. "D-damn snow. Damn winter. I hate this state." He takes off his coat, hanging it on the coat rack, before reaching for his apron. "Kid, you here?" He hears an affirming, "Yep," and smiles. He ties the apron around his waist and walks out. "Talk about cold. I'm surprised you didn't just hole up under your covers again."

The kid nods his head. "Alright, the usual?" Again, the boy nods. "Alright. Coffee with creme and sugar." The man plugs in his brewer and grabs his supplies out for the day. "Hey, how'd you sleep?" The man asks. "Fine." The boy responds. "Good. How's school?" "Almost done with my Health course." The man sighs and bites his lip. "Well, I suppose that's good." Silence. After a few minutes, the man pours the freshly brewed coffee into a mug, drops two sugars in, and adds cream. "Alright. Here you go." The boy whispers a thank you, sips the happy juice, and continues his writing. "Oh, how's your new blog thing going?" The boy lifts his head. "Pretty good, actually. I've been having a hard time concentrating on it what with classes." The man nods along. "Well, I'm sure it will be great when it's finished." The boy smiles. "Thanks." The man turns to the clock. "We'll be opening soon. You wanna take the afternoon or the night shift?" the boy stops typing and looks intently at his computer screen. "Night. I'll be busy this afternoon." The man raises an eyebrow. "Oh, right, that book thing. What, you think you're gonna make it there on time?" The boy nods and plugs in his earbuds, opens up youtube, and begins playing classical music. "Definitely." The day goes on and customers go in and out, ordering food and drinks, or just meeting with friends for the weekend. Still, the boy never moves from his seat, continuing to type away. As the hours pass, he completes assignment after assignment, while also making sure to write out his next blog post. At about 1 o'clock, the boy gets up and stretches. He waves at the man behind the counter before opening the cafe door. The sharp winter wind nips at his face as he walks out into the snow.

The snow stands all the way up to his lower leg, while the road seems to be mostly visible. He continues marching down the sidewalk, grumbling under his breath. The wires of his earbuds hang down to his knees, hitting against them as he keeps walking. Once he reaches the end of the sidewalk, he turns onto the crosswalk. The green light signaling his ability to cross the road flashes to a red hand. Once he reaches the other side, a car just barely misses slamming into him. "Douche." he mumbles under his breath. After a couple more empty threats, he lets the situation leave his mind, and turns toward a big, white building. A sign was hammered into the ground in front of it. "Market St Library." He walks down the shoveled path to the front door and pulls it open. Inside, people sit at the many wooden tables, chatting and drinking hot cocoa. He sees the employees holding trays and talking to people. His eyes zoom around the area. There's a man in the back flirting with a girl, a woman sitting in a bean bag chair, snoring loudly, and a couple people stand at the shelves looking for books. He stops his

observation and walks forward. "Hey, what's up with that guy?" "Yeah, who wears a black duffle jacket?"

He rolls his eyes and keeps walking. He walks all the way to the last row, with a sign at the top reading, "New Arrivals." he turns into the row slowly making his way down it, scanning every shelf. "Come on...come on...damn." he looks at the tips of his shoes in defeat.

"Gone...of course it is." he turns around and bumps into someone. He stumbles and falls on his backside. "Ouchers!" a rather immature word reaches Ralph's ears. It's enough to make him chuckle. He picks himself up off the ground. "Hey, watch where you-..." he pauses, his entire body going numb in shock. "I'm sorry, I should've been watching where I was going." the person, a girl, more specifically, picks themselves up. Her hair was dyed an aqua blue, and tied up into a bun at the back of her head. Her eyes were a sparkling green, much like a pretty emerald. Her uniform was composed of an orange t-shirt with a grizzly bear and polar bear eating a meal together, (referencing a scene from *Pawn of the Goddesses: Land of the Bears*), and a pair of black jeans. "N-no, I'm sorry! Are you okay-I-I mean okay?" He responds, his feet shaking in his boots. She gives him a strange look before laughing. "I'm fine, don't worry about it." her nonchalant attitude eases him at ease. "Ok, that's good, then." he buries his face in his jacket, his face turning red. "So, I see you in here a lot. An avid reader, I presume?" he meekly nods his head, his eyes scanning the area. "Oh, right. Here you are." she reaches into a laptop bag that has been hanging across her and pulls out a book, holding it to him. "...you're joking, right?" his time causes her confusion. "No? I figured you liked these books, what with how often I see you reading them, and figured I'd hold onto it for you." He feels sweat forming in his brow. "Thanks." he grabs the book with trembling fingers. Nothing. He takes the book from her grasp, and nothing happens. "Huh?" he looks around again. No one jumped out from behind a corner, she didn't force some kind of condition onto him, nothing. "Hey, are you okay?" he nods his head. She smiles, holding out her hand. "The names Chloe, mate!" he stares at her hand, a chill going up his spine. He takes hers with his own. "D-Damien."

It was at this point that the end of the world became an unavoidable conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

February 15th, 2008

"Well now, isn't this interesting." the woman was lying against a tree, watching the scene unfold before her. Her light skin and blue uniform stood out against the oak tree, which had yellow tape wrapped around it. Despite the cold air, she didn't shiver. People often called her cold blooded because of it. The Cold Blooded Woman. She chuckled at the name. "Rachel!" she looked to her left and grinned at the goofball running toward her. His skinny physique was riding the line between fine and concerning, and appeared to be carrying much less than the other officers on the scene. "Jacobs, I'm gonna sock ya next time you try bein late." "Hehe, yes ma'am~" her grin turned to a concerned look. "Don't call me ma'am. I'm not your mother, or your superior, so just Rachel is fine." he tips his hat, and with a stutter, "Y-y-yes ma-I-I mean Rachel! Sorry ma-ga, dammit!" he shakes his head and clears his throat. "Already have the details?" she sighs. "Just tell me." the man pulls out his notepad. "At 3:25 P.M on the date of February 14th, 2008, a man was taking his afternoon hike when he came across a boy on his knees, staring at a wooden shack, balling his eyes out. When the man went to investigate, he found a young girl dead, her body slumped in a wooden chair. Death was caused by a shot to the head. The girl has been Identified as Sarah Tet. That's all we have for now." The woman raises an eyebrow. "And the boy?" the woman turns to her right. A boy was simply sitting there, staring at the wooden shack with a dead gaze. The man bites his lip. "Well..." she pushes off the tree and crosses her arms. "What's the problem?" "The boy won't talk to us. We asked where his parents are, what his name is, everything, but he simply keeps staring." she goes silent, deep in thought. "Can I talk to him?" Jacobs shrugs his shoulders. "Shouldn't be a problem...maybe." the woman rolls her eyes and makes her way over to the boy. As she gets closer to the boy, she feels something odd. Like a fuzzy feeling spreading lightly through her body. She ignores this, sitting down next to the boy. The two stare at the wooden shack, surrounded by police. She asks him, "You want anything?" the boy shakes his head. "Hey, what's your name kid?" the boy doesn't respond. "I know what it's like to lose a friend too. I was around the same age as you." the boy turns to look at her. "We were walking home from the old candy shop and my friend said she wanted to stop somewhere and use the restroom. So, we stopped at this cafe. I waited a little while, but she never came out. When I went in to look for her, she was gone. I never saw her again." the two were again in silence. "I'm sorry about your friend, ma'm." the two looked at each other. "Thank you. It wasn't easy moving on. I spent every day feeling guilty, wishing I knew what happened to her, where she went. Then, I found this." she reached into her uniform's pocket and pulled out a little wooden pegasus. "When I look at it, It reminds me of all the good times we had together, and it hurts a little less. Now, I think of her, but I'm never sad." she holds the pegasus out to him. "I think you need it more than I do." the boy reaches out his hand and grips the pegasus. "Maybe you'll hurt less with it." the boy looked at the wooden figure and smiles. "Thank you ma'am." she smiles down at him. "Please. Call me Rachel. What do I call you?" the boy opens his mouth. "Ralph, what the hell are you doing?!" a lady walks up behind the boy and pulls him off the ground. "Come on, we're going home!" the pegasus drops on the ground. "M-mom wait!" the lady doesn't say another word. Police come up to her, asking her questions,

but she ignores all of them. She opens the back passenger door and forces him in, slamming the door shut before getting into the driver's seat and driving off. Rachel grabs the pegasus off the ground and holds it in her hands. "Ralph...Jacobs, follow me." the man had been sitting under a tree, close to dozing off before jumping up and running over to the woman. "What's up?" the two hop in Rachel's cruiser. "We're gonna get some answers." the two drive off.

P.P.F RE

CHAPTER 2: ENTER THE CONSPIRACY CLUB

February 14th, 2012

Two mugs are placed on the oak wood table. The man who had brought these mugs over had a muscular physique, hidden behind jeans, a red sweater and a white apron. The man's face demonstrated a tenderness reserved for the kids and those close to him, but was most often hidden behind a cold, business like stare. His dark skin and grey eyes differentiated him from the two customers sitting in front of him, one of which was thanking him with a kind face and the other giving this usual dead smile and thank you before turning to his laptop. "Damien, close that damn thing." Damien immediately does as he's told, shutting the laptop with a quickness, while also making sure not to slam it.

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with my kid. It's a pleasure to have you here." Chloe, the girl who had been thanking him, smiled at this. "Actually, it was his idea." the man's eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, before composing himself. "I-I'll leave you two be." the man walks to the back of the cafe and out of sight.

"Sooo..." Chloe drags out her o's while Damien stares at his coffee. "Is that your dad?" Damien shakes his head. "No, he's my uncle." he sips the hot liquid, and sighs as he feels his body warm on the inside. "Well, I guess I'll take a sip too." she brings the mug to her mouth and takes a sip. Her eyes widen in surprise before drooping as she lets out an "ahhhhh." She slumps into her seat, her life clearly complete. "I can die happy." the boy rolls his eyes as he takes another sip. It was definitely good, but he was clearly playing to the basics. That's how it always worked. A slow game, learning a customer's taste and forming a special cup of joe designed just for them. It's so intimate, so special, you could tell despite his no nonsense gaze he puts his soul into every pot. "Oh, don't worry about trying to make me look good. He's used to me staying pretty stagnant." she escapes her coffee induced trance to give him a look like he just escaped from a mental hospital. "That's a really dumb excuse for not bothering with trying to evolve." he returns her look. "Huh?" she takes another sip of coffee, puts down her mug, and clears her throat.

"Damien, expectations aren't supposed to be met, they're meant to be exceeded. If someone expects a low-quality result from you, then maybe you should start trying to change that and

stop trying to accept how you are. Nobody should be low quality if they can help it.” Damien blinks. And again. And again. “H-huh?” she’d gone back to her coffee wonderland before he could question what the hell just happened. While she’s enjoying herself, Damien grabs his phone out and types verbatim what she’d just said to him in his memo app. Once he put his phone away, he found Chloe on her own. “Oh, just my bro.” she types something and puts her phone away. “So, I’m guessing you’re a big fan of sci-fi?” He shrugs his shoulders. “I’m at the library whenever I’m not in school, so I’m pretty sure I’d know if you were in any other aisle.” he sips his coffee. “Really? Stalkerish, much?” she grins. “Ah, that’d make ya happy, wouldn’t it?” he rolls his eyes, cracking a small grin. “Well, It looks to me you’re quite a big fan of fantasy.” she gasps. “How did you know?” both of them point to her shirt. “Well shucks, ya got me!” she raises her hands in the air. “I’m a fan of the hobbits, the magic trees, and the savior swans.” the two laugh before turning attention to their coffee once more.

“Hey, wanna go somewhere? Do something?” he bites his lip, narrowing his eyes. His gaze softens, and he nods his head. “Whatcha have in mind?”

...

“R-really?” the two had made their way over to the mall, entering at the far left entrance, where the Chuk-Chuk-Donald was along with multiple smaller shopping departments lining the walls. They passed multiple stores filled with books, shoes, dvd’s and movies, and, most notably, stores containing clothes, one of which they were currently in front of. The name of the shop was Union Shop, written in a really artsy font with characters from multiple recognizable franchises surrounding the words. The name was even a reference to *Rising of the Serpent*, something that made Damien crack a small grin. “What? Is it weird?” Damien shrugs his shoulders. “I just wasn’t expecting to go to a Hot Topic rip off is all.” The two walk inside. The smell of the place knocked Damien off guard. It smelled like someone was burning lavender and cinnamon candles, creating a nauseating combination. “Oh, over here!” the two spent their time walking down the many racks of clothes, referencing different shows, books, movies, that Damien thought he saw a shirt with a golden mouse on it. He was able to ignore the smell thanks to all the jokes Chloe was cracking. “Beep beep, Dame!” “Dang it, that isn’t funny!” the girl was wearing a cardboard mask of Pennywise that looked like it had been cut off a movie poster, which, admittedly, was pretty affective on a pantsy like Damien. “We all float down here!” her impressions where pretty good, which was starting to make the whole ordeal a lot worse. “Alright, this is pretty cool!” she finally took the mask off, making the boy sigh with relief. “So, ya gonna get that?” she shakes her head. “Don’t have the cash to spend on something like that.” she places it back on the shelf. “Well, I’m sure you’ll get it one day.” she grins.

“Please, I’m scary enough to be my own Halloween costume!” “I concur.” “Excuse me?” “Nothing.” the boy’s face goes red as he buries it into his jacket. “Hey, thanks for hanging out with me.” After the two had walked around some more, they were once again in the mall walkway, sitting in the center area. “No problem. Thanks for not jumping me.” she rolls her eyes. “Why would I do that?” Damien seems to go into thought before shaking his head. “Nevermind, forget I said anything.” she looks at him for a second with a weird sort of look that made him shiver before she collapsed onto the bench arm. “Hey, want something to eat?” she shakes her

head. "Its okay, you don't have to do that." "No trouble." she looks at him again with the same look. One worry. "You okay?" she snaps out of it. "Yeah. Thank you, that would be nice." her face returns to its normal smiley self. He nods his head, getting up off the bench and walking over to the nearby Ice cream stand. "Ah yes, hello dear sir. What would you like?" "Two ice cream sandwiches." the man nods and bends down. He grabs the two wrapped goodies and walks off, feeling as though he could recognize the old man. "Wait. That guy in the office." he turns around and sees the man was gone. He turns back to the bench and sees some boy was sitting where he had been, chatting up the girl he'd been spending the day with. He walks a little faster. "...screw it." the boy turns and sees Damien as he arrives. "Ah, Damien Gerdo, correct?" Damien looks over at Chloe, who appeared to be staring off in a daze. "Why are you asking?" the boy sitting there was wearing black khakis and a red t-shirt. His skin was about as dark as Chloe's, a light brown color, and the boys hair was black, much like Damien's, except this new boy's hair was finely trimmed and brushed, and an unconvincing smile is plastered on his face. The new boy raises a hand. "The name's Chris. A pleasure." Damien stares at Chris, trying to pry intentions out of his features. He looks over at Chloe and decides to shake his hand. "Damien." Chris stands up. "So, Damien, I have a small request of you, if you wouldn't mind hearing me out." Damien crosses his arms. "What is it?" The request that had been asked of him made him freeze up. "Join my Conspiracy Club."

"..."

"Hahahhahahahahahaha! Hahhahahahhahaha!" Damien burst out laughing, holding his stomach in his hands. Chris's face went from a smile to a confused gaze, and then to agitation. "What the hell's so funny?" Damien tried answering but kept interrupting himself with more laughter. "I-I just-thought th-that I heard you-you say you wanted to-to have me work with you!" Damien, slowly, began to realize this wasn't a joke, and his laughter was beginning to subside. "Your-you're being serious?" Damien shook his head. "Apologies. I'm not joining." Damien backed up. "Well, while I admit your manners need some work, I'll look past it to get to the point. You see, I don't want you in my club. In fact, I wouldn't mind not seeing you ever again. It's just, I think you may be the only one who could help me." Chris reaches into a laptop bag that had been slung across his neck and pulls out a green notebook. It looks old, with yellowed pages and spots where water had dried. He grabs it out of Chris's grip, mumbling under his breath, and opens it. "What the hell?" the pages were littered with circles, each page having exactly 20 circles, and each circle had a different amount of dots in them.

"This means nothing. Just get to the point or I'm out of here." Chloe finally broke her trance and looked at Damien. Her look was one guilt. Damien clenched his teeth, and felt his lip twitch. "Well, actually, your more of a point of reference if anything. We have it mostly translated, but it references stuff we don't get, but, well, we're pretty sure you do. After all, your name is the first thing we translated." the boy handed over another, newer looking notebook. It actually had words written inside it. He scanned through the first page. He closed the notebook, looking absolutely horrified. "Ah, was I right?" Damien shook his head no. "Do you know who wrote this?" Chris nods his head. "Then you know this isn't worth looking into." Sarah Tet is dead, Ralph Fredricks may as well be dead, and I've already moved past it. Now, If you'll excuse me-

he throws one of the sandwiches to Chloe, who let's it hit her arm and fall In to her lap. He turns and walks away. He feels himself choking up, and tries to push it down with his characteristic thoughts of indifference. "Really? What am I gonna tell her now?" Damien stops. Time felt as though it was slowing as he turned his head to look at the boy who was now many feet behind him. "What? Who's her?" Chris makes his way up to the boy, Chloe getting up from the bench to follow him. Once the two boys were standing right in front of each other, Damien felt as though Chris was thousands of feet tower than him, looming over like a cloud of sick dread, ready to devour him with an impossible truth. Chris leans in, until his lips are just next to the frozen boy's right ear.

"Ralph Fredricks, Sarah Tet isn't dead."

CHAPTER 3

February 15, 2008

“How long have we been driving?” Jacobs leans back in his seat, tapping his clipboard. The woman at the wheel ignores him, taking another turn. “I don’t know. Five-ten minutes or something?” she takes another turn, meeting another stretch of path. She bites her bottom lip, watching both sides of the path. “Hey, what’s up?” she shakes her head. “Nothing.” Jacobs prods her arm with a pen. “I am no fool. Share your troubles.” she sighs, before grimacing. “It’s-It’s just painful. Looking at her, It reminds me of Chloe.” Jacobs nods his head. “I see.” she tightens her grip on the steering wheel. “I-I understand what’s going on in that boy’s mind, and I don’t like watching a kid go through that.” The man nods his head. “We’ll figure it out, and one day, he’ll move on. It sucks, but that’s how life is. It’s not your responsibility to worry about him.” Jessica sends him a cold glare. “Yeah.” she turns back to the road. Jacobs turns toward the window, cursing himself.

After a few more moments of driving, he hears her mumble his name. “Jacobs.” he looks over at her. She’s staring out the front window, a perplexed look stuck on her face. He turns to the window, and shock hits him. At the exit to the forest stands a man. He was wearing a long sleeve shirt with a white wolf on a black background. His pants are black and hang loosely off him. His physique was comparable to Jacobs, and so was the man’s brown hair. The man’s face was covered by a gas mask. The authentic look of it was chilling. “Come on.” she makes a sign for the man to move. “He might not be able to see us.” Jessica responds by moving the car forward slowly. The man stares at them. She makes the sign once more. “Okay, what the hell.” she opens the patrol car door. As soon as she does this, he gives her a gesture to come toward him. She gives him a curious glance. He reaches down into his pants pocket, pulling out an item and throwing it in front of him. With that, he turns and walks away. “Jessica, let’s go.” she ignores Jacobs, walking away from the car. The winter chill starts to die down as she gets closer to the item. Once she’s in front of this item, she felt nothing. No chill, nor heat, just a feeling of something missing. She bent down to pick up a cloth wrapped around an object. She pulls away the cloth, and takes in the item. Confusion appears on her face. A wooden horse, much like the one she has, even including the scratch on it’s butt that she’d given it when she hadn’t been paying attention. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out her own horse, holding them next to each other. Everything was the same, and she could completely confirm this.

Holding this new horse, she suddenly begins to feel queasy. She wanted to drop it, but instead, she tightened her grip on it. A ringing echoes in her ears. She grits her teeth and squeezes her eyes shut.

“Jessica!” all the tension in her body releases, and the sensations she lost were replaced as she opens her eyes to a burning patrol car. “What the-ah!” she attempts to lift herself up, but falls back down. Her left arm is covered in cuts and bruises and was pointed in an awkward angle. “Jacobs, where are you?!” she struggles her way up onto her feet and holds her arm to

her body. She stumbles toward the car. “Jacobs!” she hears a grunt from the other side of the car. She stumbles, falling onto the front of the car. She finally sees Jacobs, his legs pinned under the car. “Jacobs, wake up!” the man lets out another groan as he opens his eyes. “H-huh?” he looks to his legs. “Oh dammit!” he lifts himself up with difficulty, now in a sitting position. “Dammit, dammit, dammit!” Jessica manages to walk over to him, using the car for support. “Don’t worry. I’m sure someone will get here eventually. Just grit your teeth.” Jacobs takes a deep breath before clenching his teeth shut, his teeth scraping against each other while he did so.

Jessica focuses intently, attempting to remember how she’d gotten there. Everything was a blur, a mix up of events in a confusing order. “Alright, Jacobs, listen very carefully. What’s the last thing you remember?” the man swallowed constantly, barely able to let out a sound before trailing off. “I-we-yes, yes, I think there was a-um-bomb! A bomb! Someone put a bomb in the ca-shhhh! God, it hurts!” “Jacobs, pay attention!” “Right! Um-we-we stopped for lunch and some guy, ah, he was wearing a weird-funny, uh, gas mask! A gas mask. Guy in a gas mask left a bomb in the car!” she pats him on the shoulder. “Good job.” she nods her head, but something still doesn’t feel right. “Did the guy have a shirt with a wolf on it?” Jacobs nods his head. “Gas mask...wolf shirt...” things begin flooding back to her. The girl, the forest, that weird man. She feels her mouth go dry as a theory hits her. “Did I-” sirens sound and cars start showing up, filled with fire rescue workers. “Ma’m, what happened here?” three workers all grab the car and lift it up, a worker taking the opportunity to drag Jacobs out from under it. “A man planted a bomb in our car while we were grabbing something to eat. The man was wearing a gas mask and a shirt with a white wolf on it.” the man nods. “Alright. Come on, let’s get that patched up.” Jessica leans against the worker and the two begin walking away from the still flaming vehicle.

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Laying in a hospital bed, she stares up at the ceiling. A piece of glass had been lodged concerningly deep into her arm, and required surgery. Thus, she had to stay the night. She hadn’t been a big fan of this decision, but caved after some convincing. “Chloe.” she holds the unicorn from her outfit to her heart. The other unicorn, the one she’d had originally, was long gone. She wishes she could call the whole event a dream, but...she can’t remember whatever it was Jacob had told her actually happening. “No. It was definitely a dream...definitely.” her grip on the wooden horse tightens. “I’m sorry, Miss. Aldridge. I’m afraid you are very much incorrect.”

P.P.F RE:

CHAPTER 3

REWIND, REWIND, REWIND

February 14th, 2012

Ralph sits in his chair, staring blankly down at a wooden table. His disguise had been found out, and it had to be by the biggest douche on this planet. Next to him, with an upset face, was Chloe, doing her best not to look at the boy beside her. In front of Chloe was a girl with ginger hair tied up in a bun, wearing tinted glasses typing away on her laptop, wearing a red long shirt, red sweats, and a constant grimace plastered onto her face. Next to this girl were two boys, both looking of asian descent with black hair, green eyes, and wearing black long shirts with snow pants. One boy was holding an iPod touch, while another was writing on a piece of paper from time to time, both with an ear bud in one of their ears. Finally, sitting in front of the depressed Ralph, is Chris. "Alright, everyone, shall we begin today's meeting?" everyone, besides Ralph, stops what their doing and looks at him. "Alright, now. I'm sure you're all wondering about our new recruit." the girl with the glasses raises a hand. "Yes, Talia?" she clears her throat, sending heavy waves of smug attitude at Ralph, making him flinch. "I thought all new recruits where to have filled out MY sign up sheet before meeting with ME before we made a decision...and I have no idea who this scrub even is." he finally raises his head to give her a confused glare. "Did you really just call me a scrub?" the girl grins. "Yeah, and I'll make sure to call you a lot worse if you don't let the adults talk." the boy sighs, but keeps his head raised. "Why, what a great question, Talia." Ralph gave Talia another look. By appearance, she looked to be much younger than anyone else at the table. She was probably shorter than from his feet to his stomach. He crosses his legs and attempts to look away from her. "You see, he's only here to give us a little bit of information and then he'll be on his merry way. Is that okay with you?" the girl pouts. "Mmm...fine. Doesn't mean I have to like it." she mumbles. The two boys had merely nodded their heads at Ralph before turning back to Chris.

"Anyways, for anyone who isn't entirely caught up, a girl name Sarah Tet claimed that she had info for us to begin a case we were originally unaware of. When meeting at the point, she revealed that she had died at the age of 10 on February 14th, 2008. Everything included in the package is here." Chris grabs a backpack hanging off of his chair and pulls out the notebooks he'd shown Ralph, water bottle with a strange liquid inside and it's cap duct taped onto the bottle, a photo of a shed, and a cell phone. "The notebook has been mostly translated, the liquid is unidentifiable, the shed in the photo is most likely the one from the crime scene, but can't be found, and the phone has her number programmed into it, but she never answers. In other words, we need all the help we can get. And Ralph, that's where you come in." he slides the notebook with translated text and photo over to him. "You see, Ralph here was a witness of this girl's death, so if anyone can help, he can." Ralph stares at the two objects in front of him. He considers his two main options. Help, or don't. "Ralph, please." Chloe, finally breaking her silence, gives him one sorrowful plead...and he chose just like that. "The white wolf forest." he says. "You've already been, I'm sure, but I promise you that you can find the shed there." Chris

nods his head. "It might take me a minute to go through this, so, bear with me." Ralph flips it open, taking a large gulp.

Damien Gerdo is who you're looking for. He often hangs out in the cafe near the library. He's the loser playing with his laptop with dark hair. Send one of your female team members and he'll fall right into your trap. After that, confront him and tell him I'm still alive. He'll take the bait, even if it sounds far-fetched. That's all you need to do. Bring him into your group, and give him this.

From now on, I will talk to you, Damien

I mean Ralph.

Oopsie.

Ralph licks the film of his teeth, observing the people watching him. How did they do it, he wondered, and why? This sick joke must have lost its steam by now. He looks back down.

Alright, Fredricks, I want you to read this very, VERY, carefully.

If you don't follow my instructions, the fabric of all existence itself will cease.

Do as I say, or everyone dies.

...again.

Ralph squints his eyes at the paper, feeling his lip raise.

The shack. Lead them there on February 15th. You know where to find it.

The boy puts the notebook down and gets a nasty grimace on his face. "Who thought this was funny? Hmm? Well, what's waiting for me at that shack? A bucket of tar and feathers?" the small girl with glasses giggles. "That's funny." she whispers, no doubt imagining the scene in her head. "It's not a joke Ralph. In fact, I suggest taking this very seriously." Ralph shakes his head, his eyes making a glare. "Ralph, It's not a joke. Here." Chloe pulls something up on her phone and shows him. It's a picture of a girl with short brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a red jacket and mittens along with snow pants. He shakes his head. "It's not possible. I'm sorry." he gets up. Everyone sitting at the table gives a deep sigh before falling into a depressed attitude.

Ralph would proceed to kick himself later for this, but he says, "I-I'll show you guys the shack tomorrow. Then you guys can see that this all some stupid malarkey." Everyone gives him a surprised glance, and Chloe gets a stupidly excited smile on her face. Chris gets a smirk on his face. "Very well then..." Chris gets up with a dramatic flare. "I'll show you the power of the art of conspiracy, and the power it holds over the world itself!" everyone joins in with his enthusiasm, save for Ralph, who was wishing he was in bed.

"Hush!" the table immediately ends its celebrations after a quick warning from a librarian, who was also wishing dearly that he was still in bed.

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Everything else the other club members decided to talk about held no real importance to Ralph. Something about a school project, weird emails, he had to pinch himself to stay awake. It was an eternity before Chris whispered. "Alright. Farewell my compatriots." the girl next to Ralph was packing up her computer. "So, what grade are you anyway?" she gives him a disgusted glare. "What do you think?" he ponders. "Fifth?" she clenches her teeth. "Ninth, you douche!" his face filled with shock. "Ninth? You're barely half my height." she rolls her eyes. "Well maybe some people aren't born to be giants." Ralph groans. True, out of everyone, it was clear he was the

largest height wise. "Point taken." she nods, turning away. "Darn right." he smiles at her, and her cheeks turn red. "We'll all meet here tomorrow at noon, and Ralph will lead us then. Sound good everyone?" everyone nods their heads. He grabs his bag and gives the group another farewell. Everyone does the same, Ralph getting up with a sigh. "See ya tomorrow, duncie." Talia bumps his shoulder. The two boys nod their heads at him, and Chris gives him a satisfied smile. "Hey, Ralph, or Damien, or, uh, mmm..." the person still sitting was Chloe, pondering on what to call the boy. "Ralph is fine. No point in hiding it now." she nods her head. "Then, Ralph, I'm sorry."

He shakes his head. "I get it. It's whatever. I had my suspicion in the first place, and I should have listened to them. No need to apologize." she gives him a weird look. "Don't be so dramatic. You shouldn't be expecting people to screw you over, and it was unfair of me to do so. In fact, I actually had a good time hanging out with you today, and, if you really aren't still mad, I was hoping we could do it again...no strings attached." the surprise was apparent on his face. "Uh...um..." he ponders in his head. So much time alone doing nothing but playing with his computer or talking to his uncle, he found himself unsure. He thought about the calm that would be staying alone. Not having to deal with anyone else...and he made his decision.

"Maybe if you're free after the visit tomorrow, we could go do something. If you're up for it, I mean." the girl smiled. "Sure, that sounds awesome."

Ralph would then proceed to scream into his pillow all throughout the night, in memory of his now dead, peaceful life.

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February 14th, 2012

The girl sighs as she opens the door to apartment 207. "I'm home!" the girl yells, dropping her bag on the living room couch. In the kitchen, she could hear the sounds of her mother humming as she chopped something on her worn down cutting board, after years of use. "The dutiful Chloe has returned from her day of activities." the woman responded with a, "How was your day?" Chloe sat down on one of the kitchen table chairs and gave a simple, "Ok," in response. "Did you meet with your brother's conspiracy something today?" Chloe got a smirk on her face. "Mother, the Society of Conspiracy tells no secrets." the woman giggles.

It was at this moment that the woman stopped chopping up the carrots on the cutting board. Chloe turned toward her mother. "Hey, mom, you okay?" the woman turned toward the girl, tears streaming down her face. "C-Chloe?" the woman muttered. The woman's name was Jessica Aldridge.

CHAPTER 4

October 31st, 2018

Rain tapped against the apartments windows, giving the man inside comfort. He sat on the living room couch, a room that easily took up 60% of the apartment's space, and observed the scene. To the left of the couch was a baseball bat, and in front of that was an R.C car, the remote to which was sitting on the table, next to a plate of mini sandwiches. He grinned, and a knock came upon the door. "Come in." the man said, turning to the door. The door made a heavy screech as it opened. In the doorway stood a woman with black hair and a young face, wearing a red wool sweater and black sweatpants. She gives him a warm smile. "Well, wasn't expecting a call from you. Gotten over the Chris thing?" the man nods. The woman walks over, sitting next to the man. The two stared at each other, bringing their hands together. "So, we'll be free soon?" the man nods. "You will be, anyway." he corrects. "Hey, don't be like that." she wraps her arms around him. "Soon. Just a little longer." the man feels a tear roll down his cheek. "Hey, I made you something." he points to somewhere behind the couch. She grins. "Aww, shucks." she gets up, moving away. The R.C car rams into her feet, tripping her over. "Ow!" she starts getting up when an object smashes against her head, sending her flying to the ground. "H-huh?" she looks up. The man was standing above her now, holding a baseball bat. "Wh-why? Why-!" he smashes the bat against her head again. She didn't get up again. Blood poured onto the wood floor, forming a puddle. He observed her from above, her warm face now cold and lifeless. He dropped the bat, turning away from her. He opened the door and walked out.

The next day, a friend of the rooms original occupant went to check on them, and found nothing.

The girl was never found.

P.P.F RE

CHAPTER 4: THE NOTE WRITTEN IN MY

DREAMS

February 15th, 2012

His phone blaring a generic ringtone woke the boy from his slumber. Ralph, rubbing his eyes, grabs his phone, sitting next to his bed on a wooden box. "Chloe" the caller I.D reads. "Hmm..." he debated simply ignoring her, but he quickly gave in, hitting the accept button. "Good

morning!" a cheery voice greets him as he yawns. "Yep. You too. So...why are you calling at 9:00 a.m in the morning?" an awkward silence follows. *"I'm hungry."* Ralph raises an eyebrow. "Then eat something." he hears something downstairs, and through his phone. "Wait...what the hell are you doing here?!" he hears a giggle from the otherside of the phone. *"You asked me to stay, didn't you?"* he searched through his memories from the night before. "You're full of bull!" he hears her bust a gut from under him. "Okay. Just...I'll be down in a second." *"YAY!"* he hangs up. "I don't even have pants on yet. Why am I dealing with this already?" He gets up, walking over to his dresser, opening the bottom and 2nd drawer, grabbing a black long sleeve and loose sweatpants. He sniffs his armpits, and grins. "And that is why I shower at night." he throws on his clothes and opens his bedroom door. A soft chill wafted from the window at the end of the hall. He mentally notes the issue and turns to the stairs. He shivers as he steps on the stair, growing colder as he descends. Arriving on the ground floor, he opened the wooden door and entered the cafe.

The place looked well kept. Nothing was out of place, or even touched. The exception being the bench seat to his far right, which housed a girl wearing blue pajamas and a thin blanket. "Hello!" Ralph pinched his cheek, sighed, and unlocked the gate to the kitchen area. "Eggs and a muffin?" the girl gave an ooh. "Yes please!" Ralph threw a slab of butter into the pan, and watched it melt as he mixed up some eggs in a concoction of pepper and salt. He pours the eggs into the pan, counts to twenty, and sprinkled some cheese into the cooking yellow yolks. While he worked, Chloe wrote a text to her mother. "Mmm." she stared at the words on screen. She deletes it. "Almost done!" the boy yells to her. "Okay, gracias!" she goes back to staring at her phone.

"Sorry for scaring you. Please, can we talk?"

Chloe read her mother's message again and again.

"Are you really my mom?"

She hits send just as Ralph sets the plate on the table. "Oh my, this looks good." Ralph bites his bottom lip. "Yeah, not the best, but it should be serviceable." she shoves a piece of egg in her mouth. "Wow...what, cooking run in the blood?" the boy blushes, scratching the back on his head. "Y-yeah, I guess." he laughs, sitting down. "So, why did you sleep in a cold cafe as opposed to a warm bed?" she taps her chin, looking to the ceiling. "You don't remember?" she asks. "Nope." she sighs. "Pity. You were acting like a little charmer. I wasn't expecting you to have such confidence." she winks. "Wh-what the HELL are you talking about?!" she laughs. "Relax...you were actually balling like a baby! Begging me to never forget you! What, bad dream? Filming an A.R.G? Come on, you can tell me!" he crosses his arms. "I have no idea what you're talking about." her joking smile slowly fades into a sad grin. "That, and...there's something up with my mom, and I needed an excuse to not be home." Intrigued, he points to his ear. "Ahh, don't worry. It's probably stress. Being a journalist must do that to someone." he shakes his head. "Yeah, probably." he pats her on the shoulder. "Well, I'm sure it'll be alright soon enough." she sighs in relief. "Yeah. Thanks."

While the two were sharing this moment, the back door opens. After the man hangs his coat on the coat rack, he puts on his apron. "Ah, Chloe—" Ralph removes his hand from her shoulder, staring down at the table. "...hang on, I'm grabbing my camera."

"U-uncle!"

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"Thanks, come again!" Ralph handed the man a muffin and wished him well. The line had finally ended, and Ralph leaned against the counter. He eyes the stock of snacks in the glass case. Each shelf was at least half full, so for now, he was good. He sips from his water bottle hidden under the counter. "Hello!" the boy chokes on the liquid jumping in his throat. "Cough-cough!" he grabs a wet wipe and wipes the disgusting liquid off his arm. "I-I'm sorry, sir." finally taking a look at the person, his apologetic grin turned to curiosity. The boy appeared to be around his age, with blue eyes and pale white skin. He appeared to be much heftier than him, and, most confusingly, there was a jester's hat on top of the boy's head. "What?" Ralph shakes his head, holding in a light chuckle. "Nothing. What can I get you?" the boy's hat jingles with its small bells at its tips. "Hmm..." the boy examined the snack bar, in deep thought. "Three blueberry muffins, two cookies, one coconut vanilla and the other double chocolate, a chocolate muffin, two creme and sugar coffee's..." Ralph grabbed a notebook and began writing the boy's order.

He feels sweat falling down his forehead just staring at the list. It came down to 7 muffins, 6 cookies, 6 coffees, 6 travel cups, and a mishmash of caramels, mints, chocolates, and 2 cake pops. "Umm...your total is 58 dollars." the boy hands him a hundred dollar bill. Ralph taps a few buttons on the monitor, and hands the boy his change. The boy gives him a grin and walks over to a table at the far side of the building. Ralph felt every organ in his body drop, and his knees quaked. "W-why?" he sighs, setting up a new pot of coffee. He grabs a tray from the other counter and begins putting items on the tray. The pot finished and he started the first two coffees when he turned to look at the boy. His mouth dropped. Every member of that God forsaken club was sitting there. After two more cups of coffee, and contemplating his relationship with God, he brought the tray over to the table, his face completely flushed. "Ah, hello, servant." the girl known as Talia gives him a cocky grin. "Ah, thank you, Ralph." Chris gives him a phrase of thanks before biting into a cookie. "Ahh. Perfect." One of the twins slump into their seat, grinning. The boy he'd been talking to before was drinking water, holding a half eaten blueberry muffin in his other hand. Chloe was sitting at the far end of the table, where she'd been the entire time, writing something on a notepad. On closer inspection, it appeared she was writing in the same code as what was in the old notebook. Everything was really basic, like "hello, " bye", and "Ralph's a big fat-" Ralph felt a vein pulsate. Chloe gave him an innocent grin. "Ralph, you're off!" the man yelled at him. "What?!"

The boy sighs, sitting next to Talia, who was purposefully prodding him with a straw. "So, now that everyone's here, we review!" Chris points at one of the twins. "Griffin, go." The twin nods. "Yesterday we were told to visit a shack in the White Wolf Forest by an encrypted message in a notebook. We recruited a temporary member and now plan to prove to him that conspiracy isn't stupid...cause he's a moron." Chris smirks, planting his feet on the table. "Place your disgusting appendages upon this plank of wood and I'll have you clean it with your tongue." Ralph

threatened. "Jeez, fine." Chris takes his feet off the table. "R-right. Anyway, everyone's phone charged?" Talia asked. All the members nodded their heads. "Alright. Let's go!"

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"Oooh." The two twins were staring inside an old looking candy shop. Ralph, staring at the shop, felt a small bolt fly up his spine, making him shiver. "Alright, let's stop here for now." all the members let out a woohoo before following Chris over to the front door. "Hey, what are you waiting for?" Talia slaps Ralph's back. "I'm not a horse." "You sure? Cause you sure do look like one." she laughs an annoying laugh before walking past him. "Rrggh." he shoves his hands in his pockets, buries his face into his coat, and walks inside. It wasn't anything special, really. There were three aisles, made up of black racks you'd see in a gas station. There were the modern classics: Hershey's, Reces, Kit-Kat's, etc. This shop, however, was probably the only place you could find some original candies based off some cancelled favorites from the past. Cocoa-Raspberry Ropes, Crunch-Berries, Georges Tart Tails, and that's only a few of what's there. A wave of nostalgia flew into Ralph and he gave a big, goofy smile that was thankfully hidden by his coat collar. "What the heck?!" he looked to his right, seeing a row of arcade machines. Pac-Man, Galaga, and Poli-Holly, a game that had vanished from most other arcades. Chris placed two quarters inside the slot and hit the shoot button. The title screen faded out into a colorful landscape with weird ships entering the atmosphere. A tank rolls onto the screen and the game begins. Tilting the joystick would change where the tank was aiming, and the shoot button, well, attacked. "Come on." Chris and the boy from the shop, who had later introduced himself as Terry, were leaned over the game, watching in awe, Terry's hat bells making for one hell of a distraction. Ralph changed his attention to the cabinet next to it. He reaches into his pocket and grins. He pulls out a small black bag, filled with quarters. He walks over to Galaga, placing two quarters inside the slot. Sitting on the stool, he begins shooting the strange looking aliens, moving and praying he didn't get hit. "Wow, you suck at this." he jumped, losing his last life. "Dang it!" he turned to the girl determined to ruin his day. "What, you wanna try? This game ain't for kids, you know." she glares. "I'm not a kid!" she shoos him off the stool, placing two of her own quarters in the slot. "Show you what you douche." she mumbles. The boy watches from over her shoulder. She was doing much better than he had been, completing the first two waves in only a few minutes. Her playing was a lot more smooth, unlike Ralph's twitchy, herky jerk reactions. He complimented her in his head, as she completed the third wave with no lost lives, far better than him. "Wow, you are good at this." she cackles evilly in response. Wave 4 began, and her originally smooth motions were slowly turning into closer and closer calls. Her palms were growing sweaty, and she took deep breaths. Despite her efforts, however, she lost her first life halfway through the fourth wave. "Dang it!" Ralph nods his head. "You're doing good. Just keep the smooth reactions and you'll be golden." she nods her head. "Yeah, got it." the wave restarts. She takes a deep breath and watches the screen intently. Tap tap, dodge dodge, tap tap tap, this rhythm repeated itself as she immersed herself deeper into the game. As he watched the screen, he watched as a random enemy appeared. "Left!" Ralph warns, and she dodges. "Right! Left! Both!" she twitches the joystick in every appropriate direction, tapping as fast as she can. "Left! Left! Right! Both! Both!" After 2 stressful minutes, the level is cleared. "Yeah! High five!" the two share a high five in celebration. "O-oh right! It-Left! Right! Right!"

The two lost their last two lives in a matter of minutes. “D-damn.” the two sulked. “Well, I still did better than you! I even got the high score!” despite her loss, she was determined to claim her superiority. He scoffs. “You wouldn’t have gotten anywhere without me!” Ralph replies. “Oh, really?” the two stew in playful rage. “The best player at Pac-Man has to buy the other sweets!” Talia challenges. “Fine then. Prepare to get-

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Ralph stares at his empty wallet and pouch in disgust. “H-how?” he turns to look at the small girl, beaming with pride, holding a plain paper bag filled to the brim with a large variety of candies. “Clearly I was at a disadvantage. Must have been the reflexes.” he moans about his defeat to no one in particular. “Here.” he looks up in shock to see the girl holding out a cocoa-raspberry rope. “Well fought, my friend. You’ve earned the most basic of respect.” he grips the candy, holding it in his hands almost like it couldn’t possibly exist.. “Um, thanks. I respect your ability as well.” her cheeks turn red, and she nods her head. “You better.” she turned and ran to catch up with the others. He looked down at the plastic wrapped candy in his hand. He smiles. “Well, looks like you aren’t as bad as I thought.” he ran to catch up as well.

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The two had walked a good distance from the shop, when Chris had them change course into a random neighborhood. Ralph didn’t say anything at first. It had been a while since he’d gone past the library, so who knows, maybe he didn’t remember the way there well enough...or he forgot on purpose. He was extremely confused, however, when Chris stopped and started giving orders. “Everyone, side objective! Capture evidence of strange activity around this house. Talia, get your laptop, Griffin, get your iPod out.” Ralph watched in shock as the entire group got everything together for a stake out in mere seconds. “Naturals, right?” Chris appeared at Ralph’s side out of nowhere, leaning on his shoulder. “What are you doing? I thought I was showing you where that shed is.” Chris shakes his finger at him. “Tut-tut-tut. Ralph, not everything’s about you.” Chris pushes off him and walks over to the two twins. Ralph follows. “Alright, aim it at the window. If nothing shows up, aim it at the side of the house. Switch between the two every five minutes.” one of the twins hold up their iPod and watch the window. “What do you think you’ll find?” Chris looks over at Ralph. “Some kid emailed us about how this house was where his grandpa used to live. About three months ago, the man died. Recently, when he visited the house he felt a presence inside, and he’s concerned his grandpa hasn’t moved on. So, we’re here to set him free.” Ralph pretends he finds it heartwarming. “So what, FX, something like that?” Ralph chuckles, but Chris shakes his head. “You wouldn’t understand. I’ll show you not everything is how it seems. I want to prove to people ghosts are real, that they’re all apart of the scientific world, and not stuck in the realm of fiction.” Ralph quits his jabs. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to upset you.”

“Chris!” The boy next to Ralph runs over to the twins. They point up to the attic window. “Yep. Hand me the iPod.” The twin hands it over. Chris hits record. “Hello. My name is Chris, and I’m part of the New World Conspiracy Club. I’ve come to you on behest of your grandson. His name is Charles, right?” Ralph stares at the attic window. No one appears to be there. “He’s worried about you. He wants you to move on. And I understand it’s tough. I’ve been in his position before, though. It’s heartbreaking, knowing that someone you care for is trapped on this plane of

reality. One where no one can acknowledge you. Where you're eternally alone. He wants better for you. I want better for you. Please, move on. While you still can." a few seconds later, Chris stops recording. "Sending it to you, Talia." Talia nods, turning down to look at her MacBook. Chris throws the iPod back to the Griff's and tells them to get back to travelling. Ralph walks over to Chris. "What?" Ralph nods his head. "I still don't believe, sorry." Chris slumps his shoulders. "I understand. I don't expect you to." Ralph adds, "But, I think I can respect what you're doing." Chris looks at him. "Well, I guess for now, that'll be good enough."

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Finally, they all arrived in front of the park gate. The gate doors are chained shut with three padlocks, and sturdy ones at that. "Lol, like that'll keep us out." Terry grips the gate bars and begins climbing. He gets over the gates relatively quickly, landing on his feet and turning to the rest of them. "Well, come on! No time to lose." Chris nods his head. "After me everyone!" Chris goes up next. Then Chloe, then Ralph, then the twins, and..."Talia, come on!" Ralph yells. "I-I can't!" Chris comes up to the bars. "Don't worry. You won't fall if you keep a good grip. If you do fall, though, and you won't, I'll catch you." The girl visibly gulps. "P-promise?" Chris nods. "Promise." the girl takes a long, deep breath. "Okay!" she grabs the closest bar and starts her ascent. "You're doing good! Just keep going!" the girl starts sweating profusely, doing her best not to look down. "Alright, I did it!" after a minute of her slowly making her way up, she reaches the top of the gate, and the group applauds. "Coming down!" she turns herself around and starts her climb down. "Hey, hey, no!" she attempts to go down a bar, but her boot slips on the ice that had grown on it. "I got ya!" Chris yells, pushing Ralph forward. Terrified, Ralph instinctually puts his arms out. She falls into him, causing them both to fall into the snow. The girl laid across Ralph's stomach, and the boy's body was aching. "Hey, you two okay?" Chris walks over to them with a concerned face. The both of them looked at Chris with a look of distaste. . "Ahhhhhhhhhh! My legs!" they both yelled. "Ehhhh?!" Chris went pale and jumped. "Ahhahahahahah!!" The two laugh at his reaction, helping each other up. "H-hey, jerks!" the two walk past Chris, still trying to recollect himself "Alright then, to our destination!" Talia yells. Left flustered, Chris was forced to the back of his group as Ralph led them into the White Wolf Forest.

CHAPTER 5

“Momma!” The boy screamed, jolting up in his bed. The boy breathed in a panic, holding his chest. “Mommy!” He cried out again, hoping she'd finally come to his aid. He looked down at his pants, stained with...“Eww.” He runs over to his dresser, grabbing a fresh pair of pajama bottoms, throwing the old ones into the linen basket. Again, his mother hadn't come to him. Flicking on his rooms light switch, he cracks open his bedroom door, peaking out into the hall. “Mom?” No response. He takes a step into the hall. The atmosphere changes almost instantly, a wave of dread washing over him, and his whole body tenses up. “No...everything's okay. Okay? Okay.” He takes a deep breath before moving on. He flicks on the light switch, bathing the hall in a hopeful light. He feels his shoulders relax under this bright light as he walks over to his mother's bedroom. “Knock, knock, knock!” he knocked on the door, waiting for a response. “Mmm...!” He opens the door without asking permission. Inside the room was pretty much untouched. The bed was still made from that morning, and even the folder she'd dropped during the scuffle that morning. He feels tears starting to form in his eyes. He walks over to the dresser, where stood the house phone, sitting on a charger. Grabbing it, he types in his mother's number, and brings the phone to his ear.

“*Ring! Ring! Ring!*” He heard a loud ringing coming from the floor below him. He looked to the stairs, hitting the ignore button on the phone. At the bottom of the staircase was his mothers cell. He rushes down the stairs, grabbing the phone and hitting the power button. The screen lights up, showing him a missed call notification and a text message. “Hey.” The boy looks up from the phone. A man was standing in the kitchen doorway, wearing a black cloak that covered his entire body. His hood did well to cover his face. “Have you...seen my mom?” The man turned to his right, staring in that direction for a long time, before turning to the boy. The man walks toward the boy, stopping right in front of him. “Do you want to see something beautiful?” The boy felt like he was supposed to be scared, but, he wasn't. The man gave off a feeling of familiarity. The man took his hands out from under his cloak. The hands...were nothing but pure white bone. The boy looked at them with intrigue rather than horror. The man put his hands together, shook them, and held out his right hand. Inside the hand was a beautiful, shiny white flower. “Do you want to hold it?” The boy nodded, reaching out to the item. He picked it up gently. The small petals were extremely soft, like a blanket, but thick enough that even when he gripped it tightly he couldn't pull the petals apart. “What do you think this is?” He looked at the man. “A flower?” the man chuckled, pulling back his hood, revealing his plain, clean skull. He looked at the boy, two small blue lights deep inside his dark holes where his eyes would be. “This is the body that supports life itself.” The boy looked at the flower once again. “All life?” The skull nodded. “Yes. It is what keeps all life afloat. And, sometimes, It can be the reason some people are taken from this world, but it does more than enough to make up for that. Something, I believe, is beyond human capabilities.” The boy watches the flower disappear from his hands.

“I am the grim reaper, boy, and I suggest you hear my words.” The atmosphere changes to a threatening chill. “You will be the reason that all those around you die slow, painful deaths, and

if you are not strong, you will perish in your efforts to prevent this.” The weak boy expected this statement would bring him to tears, but to his own surprise, he was able to compose himself. “Are you strong?” The boy stepped back. “Hmm...” the man gets up, and under his breath, he states, “Worthless,” and in a blink of an eye, the man disappears. The boy walks forward, stopping in the kitchen. He turned to his right, and the image of what he saw was burned deep into his mind. “Mommy?”

P.P.F RE

CHAPTER 5:

HER WARM SMILE

February 15th, 2012

Crunch, crunch, crunch.”

The teens walk through the snowy forest, Ralph leading them along. “...maybe he just needs to be there...can’t make up my mind...Ralph, buddy!” Chris slaps a hand on Ralph’s back. “How ya doin!?” “Erh, fine?” Chris nods his head. “Good, good. Hey, we almost there yet?” Ralph groans. “Yeah, nearly there.” Chris nods his head. “You feeling alright?” Ralph shrugs. “Ready to admit this is all stupid?” The boy chuckles. “I don’t give up. Don’t be stupid.” Ralph gives a half grin. “Alright then, whatever you want.” The two continue walking. “Do you do anything besides this occult stuff?” Chris ponders the question. “Not really.” He refused to meet the other boy’s eyes. “Well, now you have my attention.” “Really, my whole life is ghosts and demons and stuff...” Chris peaks at Ralph, who was staring at him with a judging smile. “Screw you.” The two share a laugh as they reach their destination. “You sure this is the place?” Talia mutters, giving the place a disapproving look. “Of course. How many abandoned shacks in the middle of the woods do you think there are?” Talia points a few feet away. “Oh.” There was another shack close by. “Well...it could be THAT one.” Chris slaps Ralph upside the head, walking up the shack.

“Rattle rattle!”

Chris attempts to turn the door knob, realizing it’s locked. “Oh, my turn!” Chloe slams her foot into the door, sending it flying open. “Sweet. Moving on.” Chris walks inside, immediately beginning to look around. Ralph makes his way to the door frame. “Ralph?” The boy gulps. He could still see the scene from all those years ago, of his best friend slumped lifelessly in a chair, a bullet through her skull. He hadn’t even questioned what he’d do when he actually got there.

“Ralph.”

He stepped inside. Immediately, a powerful dread overtook him, and he fell to his knees. "Wh-what the hell?" Chris had come to his side with a quickness, telling him he'd be alright. "I'm fine, just a little light headed." Chris nods his head, helping the boy up. The group begins exploring. The setting sun shines through the many cracks and holes in the walls, making it easy to see. There wasn't much to search. Just a bookshelf and a couple books filled with random toys, books, and candy wrappers. "Why's this stuff here? Isn't this place supposed to be abandoned?" Chris nods. "Yeah." Chris taps his foot. "Hmm."

"Bash! Bash! Crash!"

The whole group jumps at the sudden appearance of a dark hole in the middle of the floor. "Chris?!" Ralph stares down the hole. "Chris!" Chloe yells. No response. The group looks at each other. "I'm going." Chloe proclaims, preparing to jump down. "No, wait!" Ralph looks down the hole. "I'm going." Talia grunts. "God awful idea. You'll probably see a spider and die of a heart attack. We need somebody useful." He clenches his teeth. "This is the one thing I can do, okay? It's my fault we're even out here, so at least let me do this. Just get me some rope and I'll be good" Talia tries to think of another rebuttal, when, "Kay." One of the twin's shoves him over the edge. They hear a scream and then silence. "Idiot! How could that have possibly been a good idea?!" The twin shrugs his shoulders. "He needs to find out eventually, right?" Talia tries to think of a rebuttal, but can't, and turns back to the hole.

"Ahhhhh! Oh god, ow!" Ralph yells in pain, his arm cracking beneath him. "Oh god...why?!" He looks up at the bright light above him. "Hey, douchebags, tell me you have some rope!" No response. "Guys?!" He yelled. "Shh!" A hand covers his mouth, and Ralph freezes. "Just a moment. Wait just a moment." Ralph recognizes the voice, and relaxes his shoulders. After a moment, the hand moves away, allowing Ralph to move back a bit. "Shh!" The figure behind him turns on a flashlight, lighting up the area. "Better?" Ralph nods. The boy was Chris, looking surprisingly dirty for how long he'd been down there. "What happened?" Chris shakes his head. "Come with me." He whispers, walking over to an open door. "Wait, why? You want to be down in some dusty old...bedroom?" Upon further inspection, he notices the bed sitting to his right, with a desk and chest to his left. "Yeah, this is weird. Let's go before we get bitten to hell by some spider mutant or something." Chris groans. "Worthless. Fine. Have fun trying to get up there with nothing." Ralph looks up at the hole high above him. The distance clearly was an impossible jump. "Oh, almost forgot. There's something down here, and I would pay anything to be with someone who knew how to avoid it...well, see ya." Ralph's face goes pale. "W-wait!"

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The woman stood over the countertop, mesmerized by the twirling coffee in her cup. The man in front of her was drinking his own cup. While she was still in her t-shirt and sweatpants, he was dressed in a black suit, his hair a short, beautiful white, his yellow eyes pondering her with purpose, and a black cape hanging off his neck going down to his knees. "Ah, yes, your daughter." The man mumbled, putting down the cup. She got a small smirk on her face as she brushed some of her luscious blonde hair out of her eye. "What else?" The man chuckled. "Fear not, she is in good hands...not that her own hands aren't good enough." The woman let out a relieved sigh, finally sipping from her mug. "I don't understand..." "What isn't there to understand?" The woman tapped her chin. "Why someone would want to protect me. I've never

met a gas mask wearing weirdo in my life.” The man clicked his tongue. “He has a lot of reasons, but none I can tell you, I’m afraid. Speculation is the brain’s meat and potatoes, after all.” She responded, “God, you sound like my son.” he sipped from his coffee with a playful glare. “How much do you know about him?” She shook her head. “No idea. I don’t remember Origin very well. No one does but you.” He nodded his head. “Me, and her. I think she doesn’t like that very much. She misses her friend.” The woman groaned. “That sounds so sad. How long till she finally gets her friend back?” He shook his head. “No clue. Everything is pretty wishy washy.” the woman raises an eyebrow. “Maybe soon. I hope.” He put down the mug. “A pleasure, Jessica.” In the blink of an eye, the man disappeared. “Don’t let her die, and we’re cool.”

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The two had been tip toeing through the halls for a good ten minutes now, checking every door to see if it was locked or not. “Did you know this was here?” Chris shakes his head. “No...not at all.” Ralph ignores the hesitation in the other boy’s voice, figuring it would be ridiculous. The two continued down the hall, the end seeming so far out of reach. The bright light guiding them began to flicker. “Ah, damn you.” Chris whispers, smacking the object. “Gee, you’d expect to find ladders and rope in abandoned catacombs. This is just disappointing. 4/10.” Chris slaps Ralph’s shoulder. “Don’t pretend you’re funny.” Ralph slaps him back. “Don’t be a-”

“Scratch scratch scratch!”

Chris throws Ralph against the wall, holding him there, watching in front of them with the flashlight pointed down. Ralph feels his throat close up and his legs tighten. The sounds we’re coming from just down the hall.

“Scratch scratch...rip!”

Chris takes a deep breath, bringing up the light.

Ralph feels his mind stop for a moment. He couldn’t process what was happening before him. A beast, covered in long fur was eating a fox. The beast was almost the size of both boys combined. It’s eyes were two glowing red orbs, fixated on the life it had taken. Even Chris who, throughout the whole trip, had been relatively chill, looked like he was about to vomit. The beast stopped, it’s eyes moving...across it’s head to look at them. Chris pushed Ralph harder into the concrete to keep him from moving. The thing stared for a good, long while, it’s stare starting to bore through the boy’s minds. Ralph felt as though it was ripping his brain apart. Eventually, the beast turned its attention back to the meal in front of it, grabbing the Fox’s lifeless tail and dragging it off. The two stood there for what felt like years, their mind’s entering a sort of fever dream phase. “Chris...what was that?” Chris didn’t answer. “What the hell was that?” Ralph repeated, poorly hiding his panic. “J-just calm down, okay? You’re gonna be fine. Do you understand? Ralph, shake your head if you understand.” Ralph shook in his boots, nodding his head. Chris looked around. “Okay, come on, let’s try this door.” Chris released Ralph, walking over to a door just next to them. With a single turn, the door opens up. Inside is a room just like the one they’d fallen into before, with a bed, desk, and chest placed in the exact same positions. There was one thing different about it though. “Chris!” Ralph points to something at the far wall. “Awesome. We’re out of here.” can Ralph covers his own mouth, hushing his sounds of excitement. Chris walks up to the ladder. It was wooden, and looked rickety. “I’ll go first.” Ralph nods, leaning against the wall. Chris begins climbing, and soon, the sounds of his climbing

subside, leaving Ralph to his own thoughts. Ralph gets back to thinking about before. "What was that thing?" He whispers. "Those eyes." A low, deep voice begins to echoing in his head.

"Where is your mother, boy?"

Ralph looks at the outside of the door. He saw a shadow in the door window. "Ch-Chris!"

"Is she somewhere inside this head of yours? Oh my, she is."

"Hey, stop! Get out of my head!" The voice laughs at him.

"Oh my, what a way to go. At least she was honest! You didn't have to spend your life worrying about the why and what you could of done."

"Shut up! CHRIS!" He hears the ladder start to shake

"Does it hurt?"

"...please stop." her hanging body comes to the forefront of his mind

"It does, doesn't it?! Tell me! TELL ME!"

"STOP!"

"OH YES. OH YES OH YES OH YES! OPEN UP BOY! LET ME INTO YOUR MIND!"

He slams his fists into his head.

"ARE YOU SCARED?! OH, SUCH A GOOD BOY!"

"Shut up before I claw you out of me!"

"Bang!"

Ralph jumps. Something was banging on the door.

"Ralph...are you REALLY a bad boy?"

"Go away! GO AWAY!"

"BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANGBANGBANGBANG!"

"AHHHH!"

And then...silence. "Ralph, it's safe! Get up here! Ralph?"

"...honey?"

Ralph stopped shaking. He looked up at the wooden door. Tears started flowing from his eyes.

"Mo-mom?"

"Don't you wanna say sorry? Sorry for what you've done?" He screams, falling to the the ground.

"Ralph, get up here!" Ralph didn't hear Chris over the banging. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry I was so bad! I'm sorry I made you leave! Please forgive me mommy!"

"BANGBANGBANGBANG!"

"Mommy!" He yelled at the top of his lungs. Snot and tears were mixing together as the door slammed to the floor. A low breathing mixed with the cowering, disgusting mess on the floor.

"Don't you want your punishment, honey..."

Ralph's mouth morphed into a pitiable smile as he looked up to the figure calling itself his mother. But, it wasn't her. His smile fades. It's disgusting teeth revealed themselves to him, dripping drool onto him. "You...you aren't my mom...where is she? What did you do to my mom?!" "Ahhhhhh!" Chris lunged onto the beast, bashing at it with his flashlight. "What are you doing?!" Ralph yelled, picking himself up.

"Damn it, Ralph!" The thing rammed it's head into the wall. "Ralph, please! I need you to think of Sarah!" Ralph's eyes widened. "Ralph, please! I can't hold this thing off much longer!" The beast launched the boy into the wall, Chris making a strange sound as he collided with the concrete.

"S-Sarah..."

He closed his eyes

Her kind eyes...

Her warm smile...

"Ralph!"

"My mom is so weird sometimes..."

Her soft voice.

Her caring tendencies.

"Ralph...please..."

"I'll be your Valentine."

Her...her...

"Do you feel it boy? The courage welling up inside of you?" he heard the voice of death once more. The boy clenched his teeth. "Do you know what you're fighting for? Are they worth fighting for?" his voice was pleading with him. Begging him.

"Hey." The beast turned to look at him. "Don't...lay another one of your disgusting feet on him!"

The beast turned to look at him, opening it's mouth, revealing it's teeth again. "Are you willing to die for them?" The guilt built inside him. Of everyone who died because of him, and with this false courage, he yelled out, "Come on...COME ON!" the beast charged at him, biting into his arm. His body felt a powerful shock, and he fell to the floor as the beast devoured his right arm. He wasn't even able to scream. Before he can even defend himself, it bites down onto his head. His consciousness fades. And then...

"Ralph?" He opened his eyes to a beautiful sun, gleaning down on him. He couldn't move. He felt a terrible pain in his abdomen, but he didn't wince. He felt tears falling from his eyes. And her soothing voice.

"Do you see what you've made?"

He feels himself start to smile, ignoring the nagging feeling that something was wrong.

"It's...Spring."

He gives into the warm feeling, and falls into a blissful sleep.

Chris watches in horror as the thing still sucks on the new kid's face. "Ha...ah." guilt was slowly filling him up. "No...no." and then...Ralph's hand rose up, gripping this beast's face. It grips down, ripping out a piece of it's hairy body.

"Raaaaahhh!" The beast jumps back, screeching in pain. The boy started getting up. The boy was breathing fast and deep, almost animalistic. The boy held his face, giving a loud, inhuman yell. Chris watched as Ralph hid his face while a dark aura started flowing around him, forming a long dark cloak, hiding his entire body. This form was quivering, mumbling under a soft voice, while the beast watched with rage.

"Raaaaawr!" It lunges forward, and then...the hood fell, revealing a bleached white skull. The jaw falls slightly, letting out a soft breath. It takes out one of it's skeletal hands, and the same aura from before was forming around it's hand. The lunging beast turned to the side and skidded out the room's door, running somewhere deep into the catacombs. The aura formed into a long, sharp scythe. "Ralph?" Chris calls out his name. The skull turned to look at him. Deep in those empty eye sockets...were two dim, blue lights.

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“Ahh!” Ralph jolts awake, grabbing his left arm. His whole body shook as he felt all around his body. “Was that a dream?” he laughed at the top of his lungs, falling onto whatever he was laying on before, laughing and laughing and laughing. “Sorry, bud. Not a dream.” Ralph stops, staring at the foot of his bed. There stands a man, wearing a black suit and black cape. “Um, who are you?” The man grins.

“I am god!” The man strikes a pose, laughing with undeniable joy. “Damn, well, I’m gonna wake up now.” Ralph tries to pinch his cheek, but a strange wet feeling was all he felt. He looked at his fingers, horrified to find they were all long, living worms. “Ah! Turn them back, turn them back, turn them BACK!” The man chuckles, snapping his fingers, and just like that, Ralph’s fingers were fingers once more. “Ready to believe in my greatness now?” Ralph looked at the man with a horrified look. “Was...none of that a dream?” The man shook his head. “How...am I not dead?” God grinned. “Because...your soul has been merged with death.”

EXTRA CHAPTER

The moon shined down on the town's center. The beautiful water in the fountain reflected the light to the environment around it.

“Raaaaahhhh!” The same could be said for the large beats' fangs, red liquid dripping from each one. “Hmm...so this is how you see yourself? Well, no one can fault someone for too much honesty.” the beast dropped the creature it had been biting into, turning to face the cloaked figure. A skeletal hand snapped it's fingers, summoning a black aura from thin air. The creature tilted it's head as it formed a long dark object. “Well, what are you waiting for?” The creature growls, crouching down. Despite that, it was still towering over her. It's pupils were changing shape, growing and shrinking. It's mouth was dripping dark red blood, it's teeth as sharp as a finely sharpened dagger. It stood on four limbs, long and slender. It lunged forward, attempting to stamp this figure into the pavement.

“Rrrh? Raahr!” The figure vanished. It swiveled it's head about. “Hey.” The creature looks to the top of a nearby building. There this figure stood, hood blowing in the wind, as two red lights in a white skull stared down at it. The creature jumped into the building. **“Crash!”** The building begins to fall apart, the roof sliding off and flying through the air. Soon, the building is nothing but a pile of rubble. The creature turned around, it's disgusting mouth forming into a vile grin. “Oh, so close.” Before the creature can even process what's going on, something punctures this thing's neck. **“Graaaa!”** The figure falls off this thing's back as it falls to the ground, holding its neck, choking and coughing. The figure stood up, brushing the dust off it's cloak, as a black dust envelops the creatures body. The figures holds out its hand, summoning the item back into its hand. When the dust vanishes, all that's left is a man, with a muscular stature, a fancy haircut, and wearing a black suit. “Your name...speak your name.” The figure demands, holding the item out to the man. A large, curved blade is connected to the end of the dark wooden stick. “I...I'm Gregory Frillin.” The figure holds the blade against the man's throat. “Tell me. What sin have you committed?” The man begins crying, mumbling he didn't want to die. “Last chance.” The man jumps back, falling onto his back. “I-I own a Relief Center! P-please, if you let me live, I'll close it down! I promise!” The man chokes this out through his tears. The figure goes silent, as if the two were having a mental conversation. Finally, it pulls the blade away. “I trust you shall keep your word. That is, if you hold even a single brain cell in that head of yours.” The figure snaps it's fingers.

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“No, please!” The morning sun shined on the bizarre town. The buildings where all varying sizes, from one story to twenty, the streets and sidewalks were lathered with advertisements for different businesses, restaurants, and party centers, and large electronic billboards displayed news channels, constantly interrupted by intrusive advertisements for the new relief center, *Pelliot*. People walked about, eyes closed, listening to music, podcasts, whatever they could to avoid the world around them. Their plan was foiled when a man fell to his knees in the middle of the street, screaming at the top of his lungs. Everyone stopped, giving him some attention, and then moving along. “M-Mr Frillin?!” Everyone stopped again, giving the situation much more attention than before. Men in blue suits went to the man's aid. “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa-I give! I'll shut

it all down! Just please don't kill me!" they dragged him out of the road, stopping at the sidewalk. One of the men start talking into a walkie talkies. Most of the surrounding people appeared to be confused, and even angry. However, somewhere in this crowd, a girl smiled, before walking away.

EXTRA CHAPTER:

ANELY

August 21st, 2018

"Quit staring, you creep." A girl whispered, in reference to her teacher, sitting at the front of the room, staring straight at her. None of the students took notice, already used to such behavior. Her toes clench up as she looks out the window next to her. Outside was a beautiful view of the schools pristine white gates. Students, janitors, and other staff walked about the school grounds, and beyond was the electronic utopia. Just outside the school was a used electronics store, pretty run down compared to the other city buildings, a small diner, and, disgustingly, a relief center about twenty stories high, with a billboard sized electronic monitor. Playing on it was a news report that she took heavy interest in.

"In other news, Gregory Frillin, the owner of The Pen, one of the most popular relief centers in the past decade, has announced his plan to close down the establishment, transferring his relievers to the newly opened Pelliot, a large center that replaced the town's old library."

"**Snap!**" Everyone turned to look at the girl, half of her pencil broken off from the other. She looks at all the other students, feeling her cheeks start to heat up. "Anely, fifty cents." the girl gets up, head down, walking over to the teacher's desk. He holds out his hand and she reaches into her wallet, pulling out two quarters. "Here. Now quit interrupting my class." She gives him a glare before grabbing the pencil in his outstretched hand. The man grabs her arm. "S-sir, that hurts." the man stared at it intensely, almost admiring it. "How can people pretend there's no difference?" He gets this scummy grin on this face. Eventually, he does let her go. "Now, to work." She clenched her fists, before doing as told. Sitting down, she glances around the room. No one had even batted an eye. "Sigh." She leans back in her seat, eyes closed. She smiles. The man sitting at that desk was involved in multiple incidents at a majority of these center's. The only place that he was yet to be banned from was *Pelliot*, probably due to him endorsing the place privately. It was unanimously agreed he was a piece of trash among those still able to think. "In other words..." a perfect target for "assassination." She grins.

The rest of class passed by with little incident, ala completely silently. No one made a peep, writing down every slide appearing on the screen. It was at times like this that Anely could see the nature of the people around her. People doing only what they're told. Unable to live their lives because the people above them showed them where they belong. "I pity them." She whispers. Never knowing what joys they could pursue if they were allowed the chance. "Ooh,

maybe they'll give me my own parade." The girl chuckles to herself as the bell for the end of the day goes off. Everyone begins packing up their stuff. "Wait for it..." a man slams his hands down on her desk. "Giggity." She looks up at her teacher, huffing and puffing like a bull. "Yes sir?" "Don't you dare look down on me." She raises an eyebrow. "Whatever do you mean?" A strange light flashed in his eyes. "You think you can judge me for taking advantage of something I have a right to?!" She takes a long look into his eyes. "No, sir, not at-" "Shut up!" He slams a hand down on her desk. "I'm sorry, sir, if I've offended you somehow." The man continues to stare at her, and, eventually, she gets up. "I need to go sir." He moves in her away. "Fifteen grand." He holds out his hand. She looks at him as if he's even crazier than she already knew he was. "Go on. Or is this a problem for the rich girl?" He pushes her, sending her to the ground. He grabs her bag, opening up. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!" He reaches inside, taking out her wallet and coin pouch. "Mmm...only 200? Well, I'm sure your card has more on it." She grits her teeth. "Empty your pockets...NOW!" She shakes her head. "You little brat, do it!" She looked out the door, at the few students who merely watched this all play out. "...screw off." She states, getting up. He stares at her for a couple moments. "Fine then. Tell you what, I'm feeling generous, so I'll give you a month to raise the cash. If not, well, I wouldn't expect to still be a student in this school. Understand?" Anely felt her mind snapping in half. "Wha-how-why?!" She yelled. He throws her the ransacked bag, shrugging his shoulders. She racks her brain... "Are you scared I'll talk about your incidents?" The man raises a brow. "Ahahhahah! You really think anybody cares about a rich girl like you?! That your opinion means more than everyone else's? God, you really are stupid. Just turn off that brain of yours and except things for the way they are. Clearly, you don't deserve the conscious thought you have." She clicks her tongue. "Like when you almost destroyed Kevin?!" The man turns to see one of the students who had been quiet till now yelling. "...". She grins. "Ooh, what did you do?" The man turns back to her. "Shut your damn mouth!"

Crack! Crack, Crack, Crack!

She felt herself getting giddy. "He almost died because of you, you bastard!" The boy yelled once more. "What do I care about a simple poor-" ***Crash!***

There, in front of her, stood a gateway. "Good work, Ben." The boy nods, his face now emotionless. "No problem, master." Looking around, she noticed everyone bit them had disappeared. "Well, shall we?" He bows his head, and the two walk forward.

...

"Bring!"

"Hrkspk- huh?!" The man held his chest, reaching for his phone. "Oh godly hell." He answers. "Yello?" On the other side, he heard strange, exasperated breathing. "Oh hell no, this is not Jimmy you damn creep, now quit calling me!" he hangs up. "Now, where was I? Oh, right." He looked down at his plate of now mashed fruit. "Aw, dammit." He looks down at his shirt, now an absolute mess, shrugs it off, mixing the fruit paste together and putting it in a test tube. "Next, adding in the mix." He grabs a pitcher of blue liquid, pouring it into the tube. After corking it and shaking it, the mix turned a bright white. "Alright, one. Next..." he repeats this process about five times before the paste is out. "Okay, looks like I'm heading out." he looks over to the small dog sleeping in it's bed, and smiles. It's fur was a fudge brown, with a smudge of white surrounding his right eye. "Aw, sleep well Brownie." He gets up, grabbing his keys and phone. "Ah, darn it!"

His phone slips out of his hand. "Damn butterfingers." He mumbles, picking the device up. "Al-wait a minute." The time was five o'clock. Three hours...since school ended.

9-1-1.

"No, crap. She probably just went out...with who? Does she have friends? No, just that puppy Ben or whatever. Rgh, just call her!"

He types in her number. "Bring, bring, bring, bring- Hoi, I'm Anely. Can't get ta ya now, but maybe later...nah, probably not. BEEP." He leaves her an angry message before hanging up. "Alright, she's smart. She wouldn't get in a bad situation. Even then, there's Ben. So...ah, why?!" he holds his head, trying not to cry. "Okay..." he grabs his phone, walking out the door. "Anely!" The girl turns away from the lady she was talking to. "W-wait...huh?!" The building she was in front of had the word *Pelliot* engraved on all sides of the stone above the door. "Y-you have to be kidding." The girl hops down the steps of the building and makes her way over to him. "Hello, Mr. Herman!" He stares at her with absolute horror. "W-why?" She cocks her head. "Oh, how could the mighty fall?! How could you give up your own morals and join such a disgusting business?!" He yells. "Ahhhahahaha. D-did you really think I-nonononono, not at all." He feels himself freeze up. "So...why?" She continues chuckling. "They needed Ben to come in for a birthday event. I was trying to talk them out of it, but she was stedfast." The man sighs. "I don't think he'll be back for a little while." Herman nods his head. "Alright. No missions until then. Can you pick up when I call you from now on?" The girl smiles, nodding her head. "Perfect. Now come on, I need more fruit." The two walked away, proceeding to have a pleasant afternoon.

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In the dark night, the only thing that lit the streets where the many street lamps, and the stars in the sky. The girl sat between both, looking down at the multiple ambulances sitting in front of the large building. Multiple people came out, carrying disgustingly mutilated people. One of them was her friend from before, in obvious agonizing pain. She did her best to smile at him. Their eyes met, and he smiled, probably to make her feel better. Even when half his body was gone, he still thought of her. She found it almost funny. He, and everyone else who was suffering the same way, was placed inside the ambulance, and they all drove away. "I'm sorry that I can't do anything." She whispers, hoping the man in the dark cape wouldn't hear her. Surprise, he did. "You care for him?" She nods. "He's almost like a child. So...ignorant." the man nods his head. "I'm sure it's painful. I know that feeling." The girl looked to the man. "Sure." "Really." She rolls her eyes. "You did good work today. Closing down a center and "dealing with" a private supporter. Surely you feel good about that?" The girl shakes her head. "Why not?" "It isn't enough." Silence. "Well, maybe your team isn't big enough?" She looks over to him. "Well, go on." He gets up. "On September 20th. He'll be ready then. I'll give you more info later." He starts walking away. "Wait!" He disappeared. "Of course." She chuckles, standing up. After one last look, she walks away.

AUTHORS NOTE

Well, I did it. After four months, I finished five chapters...(I know, kinda pathetic.) But, with school, work, and a baby sister, I'm glad I was able to get that much done. Hopefully I can start getting more done, but I can't make too many promises. I'll probably make shorter chapters to get them out more often. Worth a try. Anyways, on the actual story...well, not much to say, really. It started out as a story on my facebook account, until I realized it was awful. After this obvious revelation, I moved on to other stories for, like, two or three months. It was in October when I decided that I should remake P.P.F. I made around four chapters, and realized I was, once again, writing pure crap. I didn't do any editing, I had no idea what I was writing, and I pretty much terminated it. I had pretty much given up on writing in general. Then, sometime in either July or August, I decided to give this writing thing one more time. I had promised to make a full story outline, that way I wasn't always in the dark. After month, I posted the first chapter, and immediately after, I came across my biggest problem...writing with an outline felt almost restrictive. It was after I realized this that I began making outlines for each chapter, changing things when necessary. Hence another reason why it takes so long for me to write a single chapter. Throughout the writing of these first five chapters, my inspirations kept forming together. Occultic;Nine, Steins;Gate, Persona 3, Erased, etc, etc. I don't wanna reveal my hand too early, but all these inspirations probably have given you a good idea of my mindset when I write this stuff. The events I wanted to write, the ending I've been working toward, all of it was constantly changing. Now, I can tell you my ending is set. I know where this is all going. I hope you'll stick around to see it happen.

Griffin-gryphon

December 15th, 2018