

Life-Seeker

Wong Ho Ching

Jan

WAID

Shorty Ringo

The Child

The Father

The Fool

The Pretender

Public Enemy #1

Traitor of Humanity

The Abyssal Celebrant

The End of Decembers

God-maker

That Weird Looking Guy Who Always Wears The Same Black Coat

In an interrogation room there are two people situated across from each other. One being a standing, angry looking old man with a moustache in suspenders, and the other being a younger adult in a grey coat, sitting with cuffs on.

“Tell me, boy. What is our duty? What is the duty of us Narration Detectives? Hmm? Tell me!” asked the old man.

“I know full well what Narra-tives do, L.,” responded the other man.

L:

“I want to hear you say it out loud, Ehmmer. Now!”

Ehmmer:

“*Sigh*. The Narration Detectives act as the guardians of the Holy Plot Device, and are to deal with characters that have gone rogue, so that the integrity of every story to ever exist may be maintained.”

L:

“That’s right. Very good, you got it... THEN WHY THE HELL DID YOU LET THE ROGUE ANOMALY GO?!”

Ehmmer:

“It’s more complicated than that, sir!”

L:

“Look, Ehmmer. Ever since I found you abandoned on the Holy Plot Device twenty something years ago, I’ve treated you as my own son. I couldn’t just leave you there when you were just a child, especially when you’re the offspring of fellow Narra-tives. I’ve trained and taught you everything you needed to know to become one of us. I even let you keep the preassigned badge and Plot-hole Transportation System Device (PTSD) you were holding when we found you, and assigned you the role of Narra-tive M, as intended by your parents I’m sure.”

Ehmmer furrowed his brow, closed his eyes, looked down and faced slightly away from L.

L:

“I have put up with your antics. I have enabled you. I have faced the consequences of your unprofessionalism as your supervisor. I even backed you up in your argument about how shooting and murdering Bambi’s mom in front of him would bring about balance between despair and bliss in children’s stories! Do you have any idea how much paperwork I had to do to make killing a deer canon?”

Ehmmar hides his chuckle with a cough.

L:

“I endured all of it. But this draws the line, Ehmmar. What you did this time isn’t just a slight mistake, nor is it an unconventional way of doing things. It is a direct violation of our code of conduct. The literal opposite of what we’re supposed to do!”

Ehmmar:

“Like I said, it ain’t that simple.”

L:

“Let’s hear it then. I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt. Explain to me how and why you thought not eliminating the rogue character was a good idea. This will be taped and transcribed, so spare no detail. I want to know EVERYTHING, from the very beginning, to every action you took, every thought you had and every word you spoke.”

Ehmmar:

“Alright. It began when I was on my way to the designated story, riding...

The Holy Plot Device. An impressive mechanism that resembles a train and is designed to simultaneously transport characters to where they need to be, keep track of and push forward every story to ever exist. An ever-expanding continuum of consistency and logic that plummets straight into post-post-post-post-modernism, till a singularity brings the train all the way back to the origin of stories, a time when storytelling was simpler and straightforward. And it maintains its course in a perpetual loop, coming and going, coming

and going, expanding, maintaining order. Without it, all the stories people know and love will literally crumble to dust or collapse in on itself. Without the Holy Plot Device, the continuity of stories would be obliterated and logic and sense will cease to be, and so will life.

I was on this train when I was on my way to my mission. But the alarmingly small number of passengers was of bigger concern. I was sure I was the only passenger left. Which reminds me that this is exactly how Narra-tive L found me. On the Holy Plot Device, alone, at the beginning of the loop, somehow holding a Narra-tive M ID card and PTSD. I found it strange how the beginning and the end of the loop would feel so similar. I can understand why the end of the loop would have no characters, since any modernism story beyond the third post doesn't need any characters apparently, and any character who stays while the train enters the singularity gets their character development and history reset. But, wouldn't the beginning have more characters on? Isn't the beginning usually where everyone gathers?...

Choooooooooooooooooooooo!

Before I could even finish them, the train's haunting scream of the horn pulled me away from my thoughts.

I checked my continuity meter, and I was on the post-postmodernism zone. I thought I had some time to go over the files again, and so I did.

[Anomaly Type: Rogue Character]

[Threat Level: Extremely Dangerous]

[Casualties: 56+ Billion Characters]

[Location: Last seen causing large anomaly waves between zones 2nd postmodernism and 3rd postmodernism.]

[History 1: Infiltrated stories with the setting reminiscent of the daily life on Earth, caused the apocalypse of said stories, and repurposed the ruins into their own nonsensical meta story, twisting the very fabric of reality.]

[History 2: If not causing the apocalypse, they would instead cause a mass brainwashing in a specific area according to what story they're telling at the time, manipulating other's lives to fit the narrative.]

[History 3: Takes up the form of multiple characters, but they all share the same omnipotent, 4th wall breaking qualities, if not completely nonsensical or insane.]

[True Name: Unknown. Name has been erased in all stories involved with said character.]

[Titles: Destroyer of Worlds, Existential Wanderer, The Meta Nuisance, and...]

Ding Ding Dong!

The next station is:

[LIFESEEKER]

[The Mission: Find and eliminate this rogue character so that their destructive influence may not expand beyond anything before postmodernism, or there will be a great imbalance in the continuity and the repercussions might even derail existence entirely.]

[Notes from Character Psychoanalysts: Meta narrative could be a form of escape. A way to avoid something. To avoid getting too close to the event/emotions and to maintain some distance/ detachment from it.]

The door on the side opens up like a book, but instead of there being an actual exit to go through, there are sheets of paper instead, and those are the pages of the corresponding story of where the train stopped. It's basically an entire library contained in a singular, humongous, door sized book, that can show you any story you want. If one were to be a character that was supposed to be in the designated story, they could just walk right through. For characters who are NOT supposed to be in the story, it is not recommended for them to enter, otherwise, they will be treated as an anomaly. For us Narra-tives though, that's where the PTSD comes in. If a Narra-tive utters any one-line story with a plot-hole, it creates a literal portal, or hole, that allows the user to transport to anywhere in the story, without being registered as an anomaly.

So, I held up my PTSD, and said, "Adam and Eve were the first two humans to ever exist, and they gave birth to three sons, Cain, Abel and Seth. And they are the origins of mankind."

Plot hole detected.

And soon enough a plot-hole appeared. You ever noticed that Adam and Eve only had sons? Then where did all the other humans come from? Did the sons reproduce with each other? Is male pregnancy real? Or, since Eve was the only female out of the 5 humans in the world, did they... You know what? Never mind.

I went through the portal, and was greeted with...

An ordinary world.

"How strange." I thought to myself.

According to the information on the files, any story this character infiltrates would either be a world of complete nonsense or completely destroyed.

So how is this world intact? Did I get off the wrong station? For once I was confused by the sense of normalcy. Pedestrians were roaming around, going about their day. Buildings were standing tall and firm. The sky wasn't the wrong color, nor was it a TV screen.

I refused to believe it.

People being normal wasn't normal.

If not the outer material world, then what of the inner mental world? The anomaly does tend to brainwash other characters to forcibly alter their characterization and motives to fit their meta narrative...

A distant burst of laughter brightens up the mood of the average day, like condensed youth injected right into my brain and spread temporary nostalgia. It also turned my attention to a school about three buildings across and over the other side of the road.

A school?

That could be a good first place to start. Schools are a place of gossip and drama after all, if not learning.

The reception area was the first thing I saw when I entered the school building. Naturally, everyone in that immediate vicinity was intimidated, because with the help of the Narra-tive badge, I would automatically have the appearance of the local authorities of the story, despite what I wear. So, to them, I was not a guy who's wearing a grey coat looking like a suspicious and out of place individual. To them, I was the police using my authority to question the students and staff of the school, in hopes of scouting out gang related activities in the local area.

Of course, that was a fabricated lie. There were no gang activities, at least none that I know of. I just wanted to talk to the characters.

At first, I was feeling the futility of the search, as there was nothing special about the students. Went from Class F to A on every floor, starting from Form 1. They were all just

having lessons, learning about History, Math, Science, Economy and playing with their phones under the table thinking they couldn't be noticed.

The interviews weren't of much help either. When asked if there were any weird activities going on around the school, they all just shrugged and gave me a confused look. Except for a few juniors who mentioned a charismatic and pleasantly weird senior they knew who was their guide on their first week of school. They said though the time they spent together was short, it was a good time nonetheless and made school life less intimidating.

Nothing out of the ordinary there, just because someone's weird, doesn't mean they're an anomaly.

Until I met the class of 6A. The very last class I would check up on. Of course.

But oh boy did I hit the jackpot of anomalies.

Ignoring the fact that there are a few objects resembling blades stabbed into the blackboard, while the rest of the school was regular, there were a few colorful characters in 6A, with most of them having objects or other things as heads, rather than a human head.

The first character I questioned was a female student with a chicken head who had a squeaky and high-pitched voice. She also had an ear-piercing laugh. She was also very feisty when approached:

Chicken Head:

"Huh? Who the heck are you? What do you want?"

Ehmmar:

"Hello there. I'm investigating gang related activities on school grounds. Have you seen any suspicious behavior from other students or any weird happenings lately?"

Chicken Head:

"The fuck are you on about copper? Does it look like there are gangs in this place? This is a school! Not a damn triad hideout! Piss off creep!"

Though her attitude and mannerisms suggest otherwise.

Chicken Head:

“But... if it’s weird shit you want, I have a friend who might interest you. We hang out sometimes, but whenever we do, he would always close his eyes while we eat, and I remember he would just laugh or chuckle to himself from time to time. He’s also a really silent eater, like... too silent. He’s weird but can be fun to have around because of it.”

Ehmmar:

“I see... Where can I find this friend of yours?”

Chicken Head:

“... I think he’s absent today.”

Ehmmar:

“Oh, that’s alright then.”

Yet another uninformative chat about one of their friends. Though this was the second time a weird friend or acquaintance was mentioned...

The second character I questioned was T-Man, a fierce looking guy with a husky dog for a head. Wears a normal school uniform just like everyone else, but wore an armband with a metal plate that has “0226” imprinted on it. Though, when I look closely, I think there’s a face under the husky dog head...

T-Man:

“There ain’t no gang stuff happening around. But I can tell you about this peculiar friend and our encounter. I remember about one or two years ago, we were going up the stairs after a lesson. We were only acquaintances then, didn’t know each other too well, but I decided to do a playful One Thousand Years of Death on him. Basically, I shoved my fingers up his arse at high speed, a technique that really hurts the victim. I just thought it was funny at the time. But instead of returning the favor or fighting back, he didn’t say a word and just left in agony. And when I got home, I got a text message from him saying ‘Just because I don’t bark, doesn’t mean I don’t bite. Do not do that ever again.’ I was inspired by how someone

was physically hurt by me, and yet he was able to find the strength to give me a second chance without causing conflict. I found that weirdly admirable. Most people I would have a fist fight with if they don't like what I did. He must be one of the first who didn't. Since then I've grown to have great respect for this person, I apologized and we've become good friends. I even learnt a few things about kindness, dignity and fairness from him, how some things are just not worth to be worked up for or how people can just be ignored. Though he may seem like a crazy and insane villain sometimes, he's a good guy at heart."

Ehmmar:

"Are you still in contact with this friend?"

T-Man:

"Yeah. We hang out with a bunch of other people in our little friend circle every once in a while. Just last week we went to watch a horror film before going to the water park, then rushing to get ramen for dinner before the shop closed. It was a pretty fun weekend."

Ehmmar:

"Does your friend by any chance eat with their eyes closed and chuckles to himself sometimes?"

T-Mam:

"Yeah... Like I said, might be insane, in a good way. He also closes his eyes throughout the entire duration of horror films. He's essentially listening to a horror audio book."

One's a random occurrence. Two's a coincidence. Three's a damn pattern. Every character I've spoken to so far had mentioned a friend character they have weird but fond memories of. They're eager to talk about him too. They didn't need to talk about him, they could've just said they didn't spot anything weird just like everyone else in the school and moved on, but they shared extra information specifically about this character of their own volition. And only the characters with non-human heads do this... Are these the characterizations of the anomaly's friends? While people he doesn't know are unaffected?

T-Man:

“If you’d like to know more about him, I can take you to our friend group and you can ask them yourselves. What? You think he could be a gang member? Well I can vouch for him that he isn’t.”

You all are the ones who brought him up in the first place, I didn’t suspect anyone to be... You know what? Whatever.

Ehmmar:

“That’s for me to decide.”

T-man took me to the back of the classroom and introduced me to Deekson, Thyme, Grome and Hare.

On the left is Deekson, a chubby character with an Iron Maiden head, studying biology.

In the middle is Thyme, a character with a jet-black motorcycle helmet and of below average height, but extremely muscular.

On the right is Grome, a 6-armed mannequin with a top hat and hyper realistic features drawn all over the wooden body, messing around with a Gundam model building kit.

Sitting on the lap of Grome is Hare, a female character with a rabbit party mask on, holding a bazooka and aiming at Grome’s head at all times.

Ehmmar:

“Okay, tell me more about this friend of yours. Anything significant or out of the ordinary with him?”

Grome:

“Oh, he’s extraordinary alright. Probably the only student in this school to get full marks in a composition exercise. I remember while everyone else was trying to do a literal one

dimensional story, he did a story within a story, something like an old man in a kindergarten classroom telling a story about how he had an eye opening moment with a delinquent and learnt that stereotypes are just not real, then revealing that the homeroom teacher was the delinquent all along at the end, supporting that he was in fact a kind person and capable of taking good care of children.”

Likes meta narratives, eh? Bingo. It's a proper story though, nothing world ending. Probably one of his early works...

Thyme:

“He's god damn brilliant mate! I remember he took me in when I had no friends when I first transferred to this bloody school. People can't speak English well and were just not that interested in cars. Buch of cunts they are. But not him! Not him! He's a coolest man there is. He lets me in his classroom to hangout even though it's one of the major school rules, while still holding the title of the Chairperson of the Student Union no less. The balls on the guy! And I do appreciate the time and effort he put in treating me as an equal and teaching me life lessons that don't really make a lot of sense but it somehow works. See those makeshift swords in the blackboard? He made those.”

One was a katana handle with a pointy end of a walking stick lodged into it. One was a plastic sword wrapped in tape. One was a blade of a katana but the lower part was wrapped up in plastic, string and tape to act as a handle. And one was just an extendable metal rod.

Thyme:

“He made those things just so we could entertain ourselves with a spot of sword fighting during recess. I have no idea how we were not caught, but I had a shit ton of fun doing it. Good workout too. You might be thinking that he's crazy to do all this shit and risk his school career, and his methods of “having fun” are outright insane sometimes, like bringing a frisbee to school and simply started a frisbee war in the classroom. Broke the class clock, but we had a lot of fun. His intentions are always good, and he made sure that I was not lonely. Kinda sad that he's not here today...”

Has crazy or insane antics. Check. Also, where could the anomaly be? They say he's not here... But he usually likes to put himself at the center of the story... So, where was he?

Deekson:

"He is indeed a very kind person. I remember back when I was... accused of an indecent act that I did not commit... Looking up girls' skirts... He was one of the few who believed I didn't do it. And the only one who actively approached me to talk about it. Believing is one thing, actually talking to me and hearing my side of the story is another. For a time, he would go home with me to make sure I was alright. And he was an excellent listener to my, at the time, hateful ramblings. A very understanding and patient fellow. I'm honored and glad to have a friend like him."

His friends might have seen him as kind, but I saw through his lies and deceit. I'm certain the anomaly was using kindness as a form of manipulation. After all, who would suspect the good guy?

Hare:

"Yeah he's a pretty chill guy. Usually quiet on his own, but when asked, he's a pretty easy guy to talk to. And he agrees to try stuff and plays along whenever we ask to. I remember I once asked him to try on some wigs for me for a fashion show I was doing in another class, yes, I'm from another class, I'm only here to spend time with my beloved Grome, anyways, he agreed to try on the wigs but he said he would be doing a correction homework he missed. So, I just casually put wigs on his head while he was concentrating on his work. Haha! I did see him smirk a bit a few times though, couldn't keep a straight face, him."

Borderline nonsensical. Check.

Hare:

"Oh! I know! You should interview his girlfriend! I'd imagine she'd know a lot more than us, right? After all, they do tend to be all lovey dovey in the classroom. Like me and Grome! Those two are always helping each other out at school! She's right over there by the corner."

Ehmmar:

"Ah, I see. Thank you. By the way, before I go. Your friend does have a name, right?"

Hare:

“Of course. Everyone has a name. That’s a weird question to ask. His name is [REDACTED].”

And there we go. The nail in the coffin. His name was blacked out. That’s when I had enough evidence to be absolutely sure and confirmed that the person they were all talking about was the anomaly I was looking for.

Ehmmar:

“Can you spell it out for me?”

Grome:

“Are you illiterate? How are you a police officer? It’s [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED].”

Dammit. At least I knew it’s a three-letter name.

Ehmmar:

“...Got any clues or riddles that can be deciphered as his name...?”

Thyme:

“Mate, we already told you his name AND spelt it out for you. What more do you want?”

Ehmmar:

“Please?”

Deekson:

“In a rambling session we had before, we were talking about the possibility of alternate versions of ourselves. I talked about how I wish I would be the version that didn’t get bullied and accused. He on the other hand said something like, ‘In another universe, I might just kill Saint Nicholas and mark the beginning of a new age!’. I hope this helps.”

At least I had a clue. I don't have all day and I wasn't about to ask them more about something they've already canonically told me. That would annoy the characters. So, I kept the riddle in mind and went to talk to his girlfriend.

She was sitting alone at the corner of the classroom, away from everyone else, and had a flower for a head, but the center of the flower was a singular eyeball. And her name, was Iris. How fitting. But, when I approached her and asked her about the anomaly, she gave me this terrified look on her face... eyeball? Before promptly pulling me into the cabinet to hide from the other classmates. And yes, it was big enough for the two of us.

Iris:

"Please sir, you have to believe what I'm about to say to you."

Ehmmar:

"Is this about... him?"

Iris:

"Here's the thing. I don't know who 'he' is. I don't know what any of my classmates are talking about. I don't have a boyfriend! Never have!"

Ehmmar:

"What? What do you mean? You two broke up or something?"

Iris:

"Okay. Let me rephrase what I just said. This guy? The person who everyone claims to be my boyfriend? Doesn't fucking exist. How can you break up with someone who isn't there!"

Interesting. How was it that other non-human head students all have fond memories of the anomaly, but the one theoretically closest to him had such a distaste for him that she would go as far as saying he never existed?

Ehmmar:

"Huh... I just had the impression that, you two love each other..."

Plot hole detected.

The PTSD responded to that sentence and a plot hole appeared underneath in the cabinet and dropped the both of us from a high place. I blacked out when I landed. But when I regained my consciousness, that's when I kinda messed up a bit...

Raindrops were giving rhythm to the dead of night, inspiring me to focus on the job that's in front of me. My first assignment as an official Narra-tive. A girl who fell off a building and took her own life, with withered irises in her left hand. A shame. If only someone were to walk by the staircase that's right next to the building, she might've had a chance to be saved from the injury... But... the blood... Oh my head... I could have... What?

That's when my assigned partner caught me before I could faint.

???:

“Whoa there, partner. Can't be fainting on the first day of the job, now can we?”

Ehmmar:

“Ah thanks... Could always count on you.”

My partner was in the same training class as me. He's really smart and capable, he's also very perceptive. He's an expert in catching the devil in the details. Full glad am I to be able to get to know him and have such a reliable partner to train with.

???:

“Hey, Ehmmar. Take a look at this. Her other hand.

Ehmmar:

“Oh damn. She's holding a note... Can't see anything at this hour.”

???:

“What does it say?”

[I'm not here to take your life.
Nor am I here to end it.
I'm only asking you to share your life with me,
for I have none to call my own.]

Ehmmar:

“Huh. Some cryptic stuff.”

Argh... Another headache... but what's this lingering urge to ask something...

Ehmmar:

“Speaking of cryptic messages. I have this another riddle I'm struggling with. You think you can help me out with it?”

???:

“We're on official business here, Ehmmar. This isn't time for games.”

Ehmmar:

“This won't take long, I promise. Plus, should be a piece of cake for you.”

???:

“Alright, fire away.”

Ehmmar:

“I think it's a riddle for a name. It goes like this: I shall kill Saint Nicholas and mark the beginning of a new age.”

???:

“Saint Nicholas is just another name for Santa... Santa is associated with Christmas... So, the end of Christmas... December... new age... The first month?”

Ehmmar:

“The first month? That’s January... 3 letters...”

And finally.

Ehmmar:

“Jan? Jan! Get out of my head! I never had a partner!”

The rain paused. The moon spun away. And the sun exploded into a giant flashbang. The man who was supposedly my partner, a person who I’ve seemingly known for years, changed from a regular looking Narration Detective with a long coat, to a man with a full pink suit, wearing a huge grin on his face, and wearing a pair of rose-golden heart-shaped sunglasses. Clapping his hands.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Jan:

“Marvelous! Narration Detective Ehmmar Jaye! Wohoo! You did it! Ya found me! A jolly good job!”

And with each clap, the surrounding area started to crumble away. A perfectly standing building, torn to pieces, leaving only the base intact. The staircase on the slope, decayed and cracked over the instant of decades. The corpse of Iris, faded away. Clap. Clap. Clap. Until the surroundings got transformed into one of his famous malformed, apocalyptic settings. Another world gone to his whims.

Ehmmar:

“What did you do to my head? My memories?”

Jan:

“You’re no fun are you? So straight to the point... I didn’t do much, nothing harmful anyways. I just tweaked your memories a bit. As if I were a person you knew on a personal level, and somewhat shared a life with. In this case, I implemented myself into your memory of your very first job, investigating the death of a female character who killed herself when she shouldn’t have. I just swapped the victim with Iris, and I assigned myself to be your

trustworthy partner, and voila! I'm a major part of your past and made it fit into the narrative of THIS story!

Ehmmar:

"Just like you did with those 56 Billion characters, huh? They're all stripped of their characterization and died just to fit your stories? Just playthings to be altered and fiddled with however you want, whenever you want? How many more did you kill off this time? Huh?!"

Jan:

"No, quite the opposite this time. The one before? Those '56 billion' characters? Those people were disposable. Inconsequential to the plot. Besides, could they really be considered to be alive if we don't even see them live? And killing something that's not alive can't be considered as murder, right? Haha."

Ehmmar:

"Shut your trap and quit the bullshit Jan. You're nothing but an egotistical scum who has an utter disregard for life..."

Jan:

"DO NOT assume that you know what LIFE means to me."

He's irritated. Good.

Ehmmar:

"Then explain why you're manipulating your friends into thinking that you're this great guy? Hmm? I can't imagine someone who forces their friends to like them would be very deserving of such a title?"

Jan:

"Ugh... I know you're trying to get to me, and it's working... No, you idiot. The stuff my friends said were all real and that's how they genuinely felt, I fact checked. The only person's memory who I truly messed with was..."

Ehmmar:

“Iris... Poor girl...”

Jan:

“Can you not interrupt? Even if it’s in text, it’s still annoying.”

Ehmmar:

“Sorry. Why am I apologizing?”

Jan:

“Yes. I took her memories of me away. Since we ‘separated’, the life that we shared was at an end, and it was time to cash it out, as they say.”

Ehmamr:

“So, you’re cultivating shared life experiences?”

Jan:

“In a way. But without dire consequences. If people are friends with me, I will continue to live in their memories, and they will continue to share their life with me. Every moment in their lives they think they’ve spent with me, I will have experienced them. As if I was existing parallelly across space and time and memory of everyone who remembers me.

And if I find someone to be less desirable than I thought, or vice versa, I could just cut ties with them and take away all the memories we shared together up until then. Making the memories my very own source of life, without having them to remember me. They’d be none the wiser, and they get to go on with their life without me. A win-win I’d say. Ah I can show you.”

Jan pulls out a globe like object that’s glowing crystal clear, yet fluctuating like liquid.

Jan:

“This is Iris’s memories of me, moments that we shared. It’s brimming with delectable and complex emotions. The simple joy of sharing a drink. The warmth of a hug. The sweetness of a kiss. The pleasures of lips running against necks. The bitterness of arguments and misunderstandings. The tension of dealing with her seasonal depression. The fear of dealing

with a potential suicide attempt. All condensed into this self-contained story. Mine. All mine.”

Jan walked towards the staircase, sat down and looked at the completely dark sky.

Jan:

“You know. One might think that a boyfriend would feel completely defeated and depressed when he got dumped or breaks up with his partner. Well, I did, but at the same time, I had never felt more alive when I knew that our story was over. Like, I have this sense of wonder and excitement coursed through my very veins!”

Ehmmar:

“Why is that?”

Jan:

“Because I was able to see the end of a story. A chapter ended is another begun. I was excited to start a new life. Though the story ended in a kind of a darker note, but the potential was promising. ‘What would come after the pain of having to deal with a breakup and the fear of her killing herself? What would I become?’ I thought to myself. These experiences, these emotions, positive or negative. That’s LIFE. The life that I was seeking. The life I never had...”

Now’s my chance.

Ehmmar:

“You say you seek life. And yet you avoid writing about life in a proper way. Like you’re somehow avoiding direct confrontation with certain events and emotions through your meta narratives.”

Jan:

“... It’s none of your business...”

Ehmmar:

“Oh, it’s absolutely my business. I’m a Narra-tive and you’re an anomaly. The way I see it. You’re detaching from your own reality with these comedic self-mockery routines and witty self-awareness that you’re just in a story. You’re aware you’re just in a story, and yet you desperately try to connect to the reader, every time, almost like you’re reaching out, a cry for help. And the omnipotent all powerful schtick? It’s just a strong eagerness to seize control to me. What’s the matter? Can’t control your real life, so you go around and controlling reality in stories? But still want to maintain a connection to the real world? What exactly are you expecting to achieve with this behavior? What are you running from?”

Jan just sat there with his eyes closed. But he wasn’t eating anything. He was just, staring, beyond the ground, beyond the page.

What are you running from? Running from? Running from? Running from?

Ehmmar:

“Enough games. Enough lies. Let us cast away titles and pretense! Reveal your true form to me, anomaly!”

That’s when I took out the Erasure, set it to “Reveal Mode”, and swung it to split the skies. Everything dissipated, the staircase, the building, the entire apocalyptic framework. Leaving only darkness, and...

A teary-eyed child.

Buried under a pile of books, schoolbags and instruments, while two adults stand on both sides of the pile. On the right is a woman holding a whip, hitting the child’s arms and screeching her lungs out. On the left is a man holding a bag of money and stepping on the child’s legs, emitting uncomfortable amounts of negative energy. On top of the books, shadows of other children jumping up and down on it.

I’m not sure why, but something stirred in me when I saw that this is the true form of Jan. He was just an abused child... I had nothing but sympathy for him, as if I had felt his

pain and frustration all at once. At first, I thought it was another one of his tricks, but no. It was genuine, I could tell, I could feel it, my cells, they remember... Weird. So, that's when I decided to switch my Erasure to "Eliminate" and erased the pile of books, schoolbags and instruments, along with the heads of the adults and shadow children. The spirits of the past laughed mockingly, as if knowing they would be back. Because somethings can never be truly eliminated...

The child slowly got up from the sideways brace position, and wiped his tears off. Still sobbing though, sitting in defeat.

Jan:

"Now do you see? Is it so wrong for me to want a better life? A life that I can control and have fun in? Real life sucks! Of course I would fabricate weird realities! Of course I'd rather live in an apocalyptic world! Because at least I wouldn't be tortured by self-righteous adults who push me to my limits for their own means, and terrible people who bully you because they can!"

Sniffle

Jan:

"That and I'm running away from the truth... The terrible, terrible, possibilities of truths. Did I mess up? Was she blackmailed? Was I cheated on? Am I that worthless of a person to be just abandoned without a care? It was all too sudden... I wonder... I still do... Meta stories trivializes it, reduces the pain..."

Jan:

"But, I'm not so delusional to not notice that these are in fact just scenarios I made up. However, that's exactly why I'm trying to reach out to the readers. Even now. The people who diligently read till the 15th page of this supposedly 12 page life story, I want to reach out to them and tell them that although the fabricated realities are merely stories, they're all I have! I want them to think that I have lived a colorful, whacky, nonsensical and funny life as a character and share it with them!"

Jan took a moment to breathe, and had a little smile.

Jan:

“Though it’s not all bad. I did manage to meet some real good friends throughout the years. I appreciate them and enjoy our time together. I’m sure you’ve heard before, Ehmmer. But I’m only asking them to share their life with me, because if they didn’t exist, or if they weren’t friends with me, then I might as well not exist. What would I live for without my friends? I am not an ‘individual’, no, an individual is able to do things on their own, by themselves, exclusively singular, where they are all that is needed for a story to move on. I’m nothing without other people. I’m as bland as they come without an audience, without companionship. So, in the end, I still technically do not have a life of my own... I’ve never worked, I’ve never travelled freely, I’ve only ever done what I was told... I’ve never lived a life to call my own... Hence, I’m only living in my friend’s memories. And that’s good enough for me, to be able to share their life, their love.”

At this point there was a strong urge telling me to give this kid a hug. A memory long forgotten reemerged from a geyser of emotion. Bursting forward and redirected into performing an action that both Jan and Ehmmer needed; that He needed.

And that’s what I did.

Jan:

“... What are you...”

Ehmmer:

“Giving you and myself an overdue hug. It’s okay...”

Ehmmer’s chin rested softly on top of Jan’s head, while maintaining a firm embrace. Like a father reassuring his son’s worth in existence.

Ehmmer:

“You’ve suffered enough.”

Jan was caught off guard by this sudden act of kindness, while all of his mental defences were down too. Causing him to have the saddest bawl of his life, yet somehow

liberating. The echoes travel freely into the dark, telling, without words, that this was what he wanted all his lives, what he needed; A simple, caring, hug. One that was denied of him for so, so long, by the ones who should give it the most, but didn't. This simple yet devastating act of negligence instigated a life confound within walls, and that lead to the growth of an imaginary world, one that would come to expand into multiverses, bigger than any boring old reality could contain, where he could be free, where he could be himself, where he could thrive. Where he could pretend to live. To live as different characters whom had live different fulfilling lives... Lives of absurd adventures...

That's when everything clicked, connected, merged and remembered.

Ehmmar:

"Oooohhhh... I think I get the idea. Hehe. Hey Jan, here,"

Ehmmar takes out a pen and scribbles on a piece of paper and folds it in half. Where did the pen and paper come from? Don't worry about it.

Ehmmar:

"I want you to have these."

Jan:

"You're giving me your badge and PTSD?"

Ehmmar:

"No. I'm giving you a chance to live your own life. Okay, when I say go, I want you to say something that would create a plot-hole alright? And don't open up that piece of paper until I'm gone, okay? Get ready. According to the continuity meter, the train's close to the singularity..."

L:

"No... Don't tell me..."

Ehmmar:

“Now!”

Jan:

“Icarus’s wings burnt up when he flew too close to the sun.”

Plot hole detected.

Ehmmar:

“Ooooh, clever! Because air gets cooler the higher you go! Not many people know that! You know I... Ah right, train incoming. Alright kiddo, good luck!”

And then I shoved him onto the Holy Plot Device, with my Narra-tive badge and PTSD in hand, plummeting straight into the singularity.

L:

“You... You! It was you! What... No! I won’t allow it!”

Narra-tive L took out his own Erasure, set it to “Eliminate”, and swiped at Ehmmar without hesitation.

Ehmmar:

“Ha ha ha... Marvelous... Ah, right, L, before I fully disappear, notice how throughout the entirety of my recounting of the events, not a single plot hole appeared in the interrogation room?”

L:

“Wait...What...? You mean all of this was supposed to happen? Are we... just in a story?”

Ehmmar:

“Ha ha ha... At the end of the day, we’re all just little stories in each other’s memories... That’s life, baby!”

And everything fades away.

Chooooooooooooooooooooo!

A blinding light.

A burning headache.

A fading memory.

And a fresh beginning.

On an empty passenger section of what seemed to be a train, a child sits alone and confused, holding an ID badge, a strange looking device, and a folded piece of paper. It smelled of old paper.

A kid without memory of anything in a strange and unfamiliar place, plus the weird cosmic purpley and golden rays of light dancing outside the window, tends to be susceptible to panic attacks, especially when one of the doors on the side suddenly opens up like a book, with pages and all.

A middle-aged man with a moustache walks through the pages, fiddles with his suspenders, and looks around, eventually discovering a poorly hidden child in the train like vehicle.

It was weird to find a child at the beginning of stories, but it happens more likely than you would think. This was no exception.

The moustache man asked if he could take a look at the badge the kid was holding, only to be dumbfounded by what this mysterious child is, while recognizing the familiar device that he too uses.

Ehmmar Jaye

Narration Detective M

Indeed. It is a beginning...

While the adult was taking some time to decide what to do with the child, the child was curious as to what was in the folded piece of paper. And when he did, it read:

“Live.”

The beginning of a new absurd adventure.

(Ehmmar will return in *Unreliable Narratives*.)