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THE ANTHOLOGY 2016

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FOREWORD

Every year at Clonkeen College, we create, publish and sell THE ANTHOLOGY. THE ANTHOLOGY is a book, with several stories and poems that come under a range of different topics, emotions and themes. We've had stories that cover Romance, Adventure, Sci-Fi and Personal Essays as well as many others. The project has seen many submissions from all six years at Clonkeen College.

However, we all must thank Mr Toomey as he is the driving force behind the project and helps us with our ideas, the editing and promotional work. The original idea for creating THE ANTHOLOGY was his and he has put in an astonishing amount of work every year to keep the project running and publish a book every year. A huge thanks is also due to Clifton Lewis, who designed the excellent cover for this year's ANTHOLOGY. Lastly we'd like to thank every student from around the school who submitted work for THE ANTHOLOGY and every student in our Creative Writing class.

We would also like to give a special mention to our past pupil, Adrian Matthews, whose last submission into THE ANTHOLOGY was the very first story in the very first book almost five years ago. We hope you enjoy the book and happy reading.

Liam Bradley & Conor Leon

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**THE
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STORIES

Sam's Story

Sam Gallagher

My name is Sam. This is my third year in Clonkeen. I am 15 years old. My birthday is on 5th May. Andrew is my older brother. Lauren is my little sister. Katie is my big sister. We all live at home with my mum and dad. I love them. My mum works in the office. My dad works in the office.

I go to Clonkeen College. I wear my shirt, tie, and my shoes. My tie is stripy. It is yellow, white and black. I play games. I like spike ball with Mr Howley. I punch the ball with my fist. It flies. I do money with Mr O'Brien. I go to the shops to buy a drink and count my change.

I play with my toys in my house. My favourite toys are Woody, Buzz Lightyear and Mr Potato Head. I watch movies in my tv room. I watch Shrek 1, 2, 3 and 4. The Lion King and Beauty and the Beast. I also watch the Little Mermaid, Toy Story 1, 2, 3, Alice in Wonderland and Shark Tail. I have 4 teddies on my teddy bear shelf. I love music from

Disney. My favourite song is 'Be a guest' from beauty and the beast. I sing in my house and in my church. I am in the choir. My cousin and my sister and my friend Conor sing in the choir. It is in Mount Merrion Church. I play rock music. I play the drums.

I like Christmas. It's about giving. I learned that from my brother, Andrew. I'll give my brother a truck. I'll give Lauren a toy elephant. I'll give my big sister a tennis racket. Our Christmas tree in my Mum's TV room. I like to decorate the tree.

In my school we are getting a new room next year. There might be games. It will be warm. We can put our work on the walls. We'll have songs.

See you later.

Love Sam

My Story

MacDara Lambertini

My name is MacDara. This is my second year in Clonkeen. I am 15 years old. My birthday is on the 4th of March. I have one sister. Her name is Sofia and she is 11. I have one brother. His name is Samuel and he is 3. My Nana lives in Bologna. She makes delicious bolognaise. My mum's name is Maura and she likes to Hoover and mop and iron. My dad's name is Max. He works in Blackrock. My dog's name is Roxy. He lives in the kitchen. He eats dog food.

I go to Clonkeen. I wear Trousers. I wear a stripy tie. I Have a Black Shoes. I play The Ukulele. Ukuleles everywhere!!!!!!! My Favourite Song is Fireman Sam. Mr McGloughlin plays it on the Guitar. I like doing Writing on the Computer. I Send emails to Mum and Dad. I come to school with David and Sam in the Taxi. David drives the taxi.

At home, I Have Friends everywhere. Samuel My Brother Roxy My Dog and Sofia. Roxy barks everywhere. I Play With My Book and Trains. My favourite Book is Sharks. I like watching The All

Blacks. They do The Haka. Richie McCaw is a Funny Name. Ben Smith and Dan Carter play for the all blacks.

I am going To Bologna to see Nana on the Ryanair Plane. The Wing and Engine are blue and Yellow. I Love taking off.

My Mum Sits beside Me on the Plane. I Fly To Bologna.

We Hire A Ford Mondeo. I Stay in the Front Room. Nana Makes Delicious Lasagne.

I like Christmas. It's about giving. I gave a plant to Daphne. I am going to give my Mum a book. I'll give my Dad a big hat for walking. Last year Santa brought me a Ukulele. My Mum decorates the tree. It's big.

Next year we will have our new classroom. It will have a rest room. The cooker will work. I like cooking. It will have a bathroom.

See you later on.

MacDara

My Greatest Achievement

Cormac Spain

'Life isn't hard when you have nothing to lose'

– Ernest Hemingway

At 6:32 AM, on the 25th of June, 2013 I stood 5,895 metres above sea level, on top of Mount Kilimanjaro. My greatest achievement...

Twenty years before, my Dad climbed Kilimanjaro. I had seen the pictures of the mountain, he had told me the stories, and the idea of me climbing it was something I dreamed of. At the same time, I never really thought I would be attempting it at the age of 13. My dad had reached Gilman's Point. This is two-hundred-and-something metres short of the summit of Uhuru peak.

It was around September 2012, that we decided to start contacting different climbing groups. The subject of actually climbing Kilimanjaro came up all of a sudden at dinner.

'Would you climb Kilimanjaro?' he asked. I said of course. My Dad is one of those people who, once he gets an idea into his head, will get it done. No matter what.

By December the trip was planned out. My Sister, my Dad, my Mum and I were going. My other sister decided it wasn't for her. We would go with a group called Kilimanjaro Achievers and would be led by Ian McKeever, a man that had climbed the 7 summits of the world faster than anyone else. He had also attended Clonkeen, like myself, and I had met him a few times.

Unfortunately, on January 2nd, 2013 while climbing Kilimanjaro with another group, Ian was struck by lightning and was killed. One of the best climbers in the world was killed by a freak accident. I had met Ian before. He came and talked to my class when I was in primary school. He himself had brought his twelve-year old nephew up Kilimanjaro. He was a really good guy with great character. Someone had to take over from Ian. Mike O'Shea, a Kerryman, has climbed Kilimanjaro more than enough times to say he was experienced. We knew we were going with one of the best once he took over from Ian.

It was June 16th when we arrived at Nairobi. We travelled out as a group. There were seven of us. My family, Mike, Michael and Elaine. Michael and Elaine both came into the trip by themselves. Elaine from Limerick, and Michael from Wexford. I always

find it difficult to talk to people I've never met before. Luckily they were both really great people and we all got on really well. My family still keep in touch with them. Getting along with everyone and being with the right people made the trip a lot easier.

Four days later we started our ascent of Kilimanjaro. We would reach the summit by the 25th and it would take two days to get back down. Our bags were inspected the night before by Mike to make sure we all had the right amount of food and gear. We were introduced to the local men who would take us up the mountain. The men were all from Kenya or Tanzania and this was their full-time job. Nearly all of them had come from poor backgrounds and without a good education. Saying that, they were probably the greatest people I've ever met. Every morning, just before we set out up the mountain, they would sing and dance as if no one was watching them. They were incredible. These men will be happy no matter what life throws at them. I took a particular fondness to one of the men, who was called Baboon. Baboon is from Tanzania and is a single father to, at the time I was there, a two-year old baby boy. Of course, Baboon isn't his actual name. It was a nickname given to him by his mother when he was a young boy. I stuck with Baboon for most of our time on the mountain and was awoken by the sound of him singing every morning. He was a brilliant character.

The first three days were brilliant. I have a good level of fitness so I didn't find it too strenuous. Most people don't find it too hard. (It's summit night that's the real test.) The scenery is spectacular. The first two days are spent in a rainforest. You walk along a clay path and are surrounded by trees and wildlife that are thousands of years old. The walking itself wasn't too tough, so we could enjoy what was around us. It was also warm, so you could walk in shorts and a shirt. I got to know Michael and Elaine better as well as Baboon and the other local men. Chris was the leader of our group. He was also from Tanzania. His job was to be out in front of us, and he would tell us to pick up the pace we were walking at or to slow down. His name wasn't Chris but I called him that because he looked remarkably like Chris Rock, the actor. I don't think he knew who that was. I also got to know Sam better. Sam was the *veteran* of the group. He could walk up Kilimanjaro backwards and blindfolded. He knew Ian very well and was training with him weeks before his death. They were planning to run up Kilimanjaro together and break the fastest summit record.

The day before we reached base camp was my favourite day. We walked up through the clouds and we were overlooking the African landscape. It was amazing. The best part about it was the camp we arrived in. It was beside a huge V-shaped valley that dropped several hundred metres. There was a hanging boulder overlooking the valley a hundred metres away from the camp. I sat there for an hour, looking over the landscape. I couldn't hear anything

except for my own thoughts as I watched the sun go down. It was the best place I've ever watched a sunset.

It was 11.30PM on the 25th when I was awoken by Baboon. We were at base camp and would make our final ascent to the top after we were checked by the team doctor and ate. It was sub-zero temperatures and I couldn't feel my feet. We began walking.

Pain. That is the only word I can use to describe it. I was five hours in and felt like I had been walking for fifty. It was horrible. You walk through the night to try and catch sunrise at the top. I couldn't see anything besides the stars above me. When I realised that the stars were actually people's head torches above me, I wanted to cry. My feet were so numb from the cold it felt as if I had lost all my toes. Baboon tried to distract me. He talked about his son and his beloved Manchester United. I don't know how I remember what he said because I know that I wasn't listening to him. My mind was all over the place. Every step I took got heavier and heavier as I went. It was as if someone was putting rocks in my bag after every pace. Turning back was turning into a reality. I considered it more than once. I realised that the odds of me ever getting the chance to do this again were too slim to throw the opportunity away. It would have been arrogant of me to turn back. I was getting to the top, no matter what.

A person's character changes on summit night. I now know why. You're just in so much pain that you don't care what else is happening. You don't listen to what others are saying. You don't mean to ignore them but you do. You're trapped in your own thoughts. All you want to do is lie down and never get up.

It was an hour later that I wanted to vomit, but there was nothing in my stomach. Over and over I said to myself, 'Just think about the view from the top.' At 5.30AM we reached Gilman's point. The thought of turning back from here was a real possibility and I finally understood why my Dad decided to turn back from here all those years ago. I wanted to lie down and never get back up. We sat down for a few brief minutes. Even though Uhuru peak is only a few hundred metres away it feels like an eternity. My legs felt like jelly. My back was aching. My mind was scattered. I had never been so tired before in my life. We weren't going to get to the peak in time for sunrise but that was the last thing on my mind. I knew what the sun looked like. I was barely able to lift my feet off the ground. To the left of me as I walked was a glacier that looked as if it belonged in the Antarctic. You could just picture a polar bear sitting on it. It was surreal.

From what I saw, you don't need to be fit to get up Kilimanjaro. Of course it helps but once you have that strong mind-set that says 'I don't care what it takes, I'm getting to the top, even if it's the last thing

I do,' you're practically halfway there before you even start walking.

Eventually I made it.

The night taught me something that will always be embedded into my mind. It showed me that no matter how hard something is, my own willpower, my own pure determination, will get me across the finish line even if it feels like my body might just lie down and give up. At 6:32 AM, on the 25th of June, 2013 I stood 5,895 metres above sea level, on top of Mount Kilimanjaro. My greatest achievement. Something I'll never forget.

The Voice

Joe Clarke

Conor Hayes snapped out of his trance just as he nearly walked into a co-worker. He barely registered the dirty look from her as he stumbled down the hallway towards the meeting room.

‘Phew, that was close,’ he thought.

‘Yeah, that WAS close. For a second there you almost didn’t hit anythin’,’ replied his head.

‘Shut up. You know I’m busy.’

He heard laughter. *‘Yeah, I know. That’s the funny bit.’*

He rolled his eyes at no-one nearby as he turned the corner into the room. Empty. Great. His subordinates were at least as late as him. He began to set up the presentation he was due to give.

‘Y’know half these idiots won’t be paying attention, right?’ the voice muttered.

‘Yeah, yeah, but that’s not my problem.’

Laughter again. *'Buddy, it's nobody's problem BUT yours.'*

Conor scoffed and mumbled, 'Let's hope one of them is an exorcist eh?'

'Shut up. You know you'd miss me here. Besides, I'd be glad to get out of here by now. The amount of mental rants you go on is enough to drive anyone out.'

Conor ignored this and continued assembling his projector and connecting it to the laptop. A few of his employees had entered the room and were sifting through some papers or idly swiping at their phone. How few would be paying attention mattered shockingly little to him. He didn't even care about this presentation. He was just passing on a message from his bosses. Not that he would even understand the message had he read it. The company he worked for was shrouded in mystery. Ana although he didn't care, every so often curiosity nagged at him until-

'Hel-lo? Snap out of it buddy you have a presentation to give, remember?'

Usually, voices in someone's head are meant to be telling them to kill people, not helping them, he thought. He had found himself diagnosed with mild schizophrenia a year ago, and at first the voice he heard in his head was sinister and violent-minded. But, astoundingly, it had grown tired of constant talk about murder and burning things, and became

sarcastic and humorous instead. If he were tangible, Conor would call him a friend.

'I can hear your thoughts, genius. Even when you ain't thinking at me.' The voice had a heavy Southern American twang, in contrast to Conor's mild D4 accent.

'Duly noted,' Conor replied. 'Now let's get started. He spoke the first few words he had said out loud all day, although he didn't realise it; 'Alright lads, here's the latest from the big guys...'

'That'll be €4.99, thanks.'

Again, the woman's voice snapped him out of his daze. The barista in Starbucks. How long had he been standing there?

'Relax, dumbass. You were out for like ten seconds. You gotta watch out for that.'

'Yeah, yeah,' he responded, not even registering the advice. He made his way out of the shop and towards his apartment building, still half-daydreaming as he did. As he reached the lobby he spotted his best friends and neighbours, David and Ava, who were probably arguing about something fictional. David saw Conor from across the hallway and slightly altered their path to bring the two of them by Conor's side as they walked. They matched his pace and David gently elbowed him to get his attention.

‘Wakey wakey, Inky,’ said Ava, smirking. ‘You’re sleepwalking again.’

Conor had earned the nickname Inky from many places. It was partly because of his hair being as dark and greasy as old ink, or because he favoured handwriting over technology (at the expense of many others) and often had pen on his hands. But the name stuck and wouldn’t go away as long as Ava had a say in it.

This contact finally allowed Conor to wake up. ‘Wha- oh, hey, how are yis?’

‘Awake,’ David replied. ‘Unlike some people.’

Conor rolled his eyes as David continued. ‘How’d today go for you?’

‘Not bad, just relaying info as usual. Nearly speared some poor one in the halls earlier.’

Ava stifled a laugh. ‘Seriously? Jesus, you’d swear you’re never awake.’

‘Hey, hey, that’s a little overboard now,’ Conor said, defensively. ‘I’m awake long enough to be above yous, anyway.’

‘Wipe the smirk off your face, Inky, it’s no competition. Besides, that’s only because the boss pays less attention to his surroundings than you do.’

‘No competition, eh?’ David mumbled to himself as Conor continued.

‘I’m sorry; I wasn’t the one on tinder during that presentation was I?’

'Hell, you may as well've been, for the amount of people you got through to with that,' Ava laughed.

'Oh ha ha. Cheers for that. Dave, how was today for you so? Hopefully less material to slag me with yeah?'

David glanced over Conor's shoulder to see Ava dramatically feigning hurt, clutching at her chest as if she had been stabbed, and he tried not to laugh out loud before he replied. 'Yeah, not bad. Actually have the report finished too.'

'Oh, thank the Lord himself,' Conor breathed. 'McCarthy can finally get off my back about it.'

'What are you thanking the Lord for? Sure he didn't write anything,' David said with a smirk.

'If He had, it might've actually been finished on time.' The voice was awake again.

He tried to act as if the resulting laugh was a slow reaction to David's retort and not that he talked to himself in his head. Well, that wasn't accurate, it definitely was something else, or someone? Conor had never properly-

'Y'know you haven't spoken in about fifteen seconds. Start talking buddy.' Damn.

'Right so, I'm off,' Conor said quickly.

David paused. 'Ah, you're not gonna come get a coffee or nothing?'

'Nah, I've just been,' he said over his shoulder.

'Well, physically. Not so much in spirit.'

He was already walking to the lift- no, the stairs. He shouldered the door open as he took his notepad out of his back pocket and the pen out of his shirt pocket, and made a note of David's completion of the report that had been due for three bloody days ago-

'Jeez. Why'd you get out of there so quick?'

'Ava was right,' he thought in reply. 'I need more sleep.'

'Alright then. Want me to shuddup?'

Conor was nearing his apartment. 'If you can manage it. Can't exactly sleep with voices in my head, can I?'

'Hurtful. You've managed it before. Have a nice nap, Inky.'

'Oh, don't you start that too.' He finally reached his front door, room 951, and hastily unlocked it before nearly falling in the door and throwing himself on his bed, barely even acknowledging that his work clothes or shoes were still on. He was out like a light.

'Night night, buddy. Time for a walk.'

Eyes still shut, Conor suddenly sat upright and stood up.

When he woke up, he felt much better. No longer tired, he got out of his bed and stretched. His greasy hair was pointing in all directions and he was plagued with morning breath. Another thing he

noticed with alarm was that he had no longer wearing the shirt, tie, trousers and shoes that he had been wearing before he went to bed. He was wearing grey tracksuit bottoms and no shirt, his usual bed clothes.

'Mornin', sleeping beauty. Don't forget-'

'Why am I wearing different clothes?'

A pause. *'What?'*

'I went to bed in my work clothes. Why am I wearing differ-'

'No, y'didn't...?'

Confusion seeped into his mind diluting the alarm. 'Sorry?'

'You came in, barely able to walk straight from fatigue. You didn't get nothing to eat or whatever, but you just sat down on the bed, got changed and boom. Lights out for Conor.'

He remembered too little of the past night to verify this. 'Oh, okay, grand so.' All suspicion left his mind, and he got up. Due to his perpetual disorganisation he never had time for a proper meal in the morning, so he put a bit of bread in the toaster and got dressed in the space of time it took to toast. When it did, he ate it quickly, no butter or anything else, and brushed his teeth while preparing things such as documents for work. Ensuring that his phone and computer were charged; phone used very sparingly, and computer only ever used in work, he then left his apartment for work. His disorganisation

was compensated for with an incredible ability to multi-task.

His office building was within walking distance of his apartment building - *'Everything's walking distance if you have enough time'* - turn left out the front door, go down to the end of the road, turn the corner, cross the road and go through the alleyway where he always found the big black Labrador, Dusk, who he'd play with for a while before continuing to the end of the alley and there it would be, the fourteen-story building in which he worked. An Irish company - IAT Ltd. Had Conor paid attention in business studies he'd probably know what 'Ltd.' meant but it didn't bother him. He quickly crossed the road, smiling at the woman who let him pass in her car, who gave him the two-fingers-off-the-wheel greeting in return.

He walked through the revolving door and nodded at the receptionist, who smiled back at him. His boss, Mr, McCarthy, stood across the room from him, speaking to a man he didn't recognise. Conor kept his head low and quickened his pace, hoping to avoid him until he could track down David with the report. However, he was spotted and called over.

McCarthy was a man of average height, with slightly greying hair that was receding as if it was afraid of his forehead. He was middle aged, but his eyes were young. He wasn't overweight but he was big, and always wore suits that may have once fitted him but no longer did. In Conor's eyes, his most notable feature was that his face gently shook when

he spoke, which was mildly entertaining. He had a light Wexford accent that had been eroded by years of speaking other languages for the company. He had been a star employee in his day, and had retired to a desk job when he no longer was able to travel from place to place almost weekly. He was a likeable man, but in work he expected of everyone what he once accomplished. For the average worker this was difficult, putting aside Conor's immensely cluttered mind. But it was hard to hold this against him due to how good-humoured the man always seemed to be.

'Hayes! Just the man I wanted to see,' he called across the room as he strode over to Conor, who stiffened up and plastered a smile on his face. Then man McCarthy was speaking with wordlessly turned and walked away. 'D'you have the report for me?'

'Sort of, sir,' Conor replied, 'I mean, it's done but I don't have it on me. I've to get it off Dave- er, David, I was on my way there just now.'

'Grand so. Back here in ten minutes, alright?'

'Got it, sir.' With this, Conor turned and made his way to the lift-

'Stairs, dumbass.'

Right. The stairs, to track David down and grab that report off him. He would usually be just coming in the same time as Conor would, often resulting in them seeing each other at the door, and Conor was always the later of the two men. So David had to be at his desk. Six floors up. Joy of joys.

When he eventually made it to the top, he wasn't even tired. Must have been making a dent in the whole fitness thing at long last. David's cubicle was down the hall from where he was standing; he'd grab the report off him and chat for a while, seeing as he had ten min-

'Conor?'

The voice behind him startled him, and he quickly turned around. A woman from his division, another project manager. Hannah was her name. She was barely taller than Conor, but only with her heels on, and she had strawberry blonde hair and dark blue eyes that often appeared to blend into her pupils which, combined with an omnipresent smile, gave her a very friendly disposition in contrast to her often-used sarcasm. She had been wearing a navy blue dress with white polka dots on it and was holding a tablet in her hand.

Her smile appeared again. 'Hi, I have the- um, there's a file here for you? I received it this morning, hadn't opened it 'cause it had your name on the front- d'you want a look?' She always sounded somewhat nervous in her speech, but her body language seemed utterly self-confident.

'She's waiting for a reply, moron. Stop staring at her.'

'Oh- great, thanks Hannah,' Conor stuttered. He gained his composure quickly and went to take the tablet off her, but she moved her hand away accordingly.

‘Ummm, I can just send it to you if you’d like?’ she said with a smirk. She was fully aware of Conor’s disdain for technology.

‘Ahh, yeah just send it to Dave, he’ll take care of it okay?’

‘Yeah, gotcha.’ She smiled and turned back to a nearby desk as Conor returned towards David’s desk.

When he finally arrived, David didn’t even look up. ‘Report?’ he asked, as if he had been waiting. Realistically, he probably had been. David was the tallest of the three friends, and the only one with blond hair. It was very short on the sides and back of his head, but at the top it was longer and wild. He was always clean shaven and usually wore a tie at any given moment. He leaned back in his chair and grinned at Conor, his green eyes smiling with him.

‘Please,’ he responded, and David handed him a stack of papers. Conor hurriedly looked for a stapler, but there were none to be seen. ‘Why don’t you have a stapler?’ he asked.

David rolled his eyes. ‘Cause I’m not you, dumbass. Computers do-’ He froze mid-sentence as he realised what he was saying.

‘And what do you do when you want to print things out from your magical computer and keep them together?’ Conor asked in a patronising tone.

David mumbled the reply, knowing that he had been beaten. ‘A stapler.’

‘Good boy!’ Conor retorted and David hit him in the leg. ‘Alright, cheers anyway for this. The boss just caught me on the way here asking for it.’

‘Late again? Tut tut, Inky.’

Conor stepped towards him. ‘Don’t start that too.’

David chuckled. ‘Aren’t you forgetting where you’re meant to be?’

Conor quickly shook his head and hurried back down to the lobby, where McCarthy was waiting. He handed over the pile of papers, still unstapled, and they exchanged words before Conor hurried over to his desk, two floors below David’s. He was also on the same floor as Hannah and Ava’s desks, but they were not to be seen. He sat down at his desk and reluctantly checked his email. David had sent him the file that Hannah had talked about- either he was trying to spite him or the file couldn’t be printed. Most likely both. He checked the file type and didn’t recognise it, but then again he was no tech wizard. Quickly, he sent a PM to Hannah asking what it was. The little chat box appeared in the bottom-right corner of his browser.

‘Here, Han, that file you showed me. What’s in it?’ the message read. Shortly after came the reply.

‘i told u, i didnt open it, its a drive sheet tho. maybe sum business stuff r sumtin?x’

It subconsciously bothered him when Conor read text talk such as this. He was a bit of a grammar

policeman, in contrast to his disorganisation. But he didn't mind much, he just smiled at the text.

'Grand. I'll keep you updated. Cheers.' He stuck one of those built in emoticons on the end, which was very unlike him.

'np.xx' was her response, and she went offline. Conor shook his head to himself and the voice spoke his mind for him.

'Well, she's a lil' cutie isn't she?'

'Shut up,' he thought back. He absentmindedly opened the file and the screen went bright white for just a moment, and Conor lost consciousness sitting upright in his chair

Late at night, a year earlier, a man was sitting at his desk in an apartment. He was speaking to his computer; he might have been on a call of some sort, but the video was rough and the only thing that could be seen was a grey outline on a black background. Like the default avatar for an online chatroom, but moving. Blurry and undefined.

'Why him?'

'He's the most suitable candidate. No one else came as close to the original,' the man said.

'Why not just use the original? He was doing well.'

'He couldn't keep travelling like that. He was getting old. We need a replacement and he is the best suited. Admit it.'

'What makes him any different to the others?'

'His Briggs-Myers test was a perfect match, down to the percentage. Plus his actual personality makes him ideal. He hates technology. He's absent minded. He has no close family, few friends, and no known love interest. And we both know he would sprint with the chance to travel abroad, even if it meant a little illegal behaviour - not that he'd be aware of it. We couldn't find a more suitable match if we tried.'

It lowered its head, sulking because it knew he was right. The man continued. 'We have no other choice, let alone a better one. Our operatives are ready. He is quite literally our best and only option. You must do this. Do you understand?'

There was a pause. 'But I don't wanna go inside his head.'

Again, Conor realised he was in another world as he was walking down the hallway. It was 17:10; he had recently finished work and was leaving the building.

'Nice of you to finally join us,' the voice remarked.

Ignoring the quip, he spotted his friends walking ten feet away and jogged to catch up with them. He moved silently in an attempt to scare Ava, but she sensed him coming and said, loudly, 'I sure

hope no pale-ass Amish fella is sneaking up behind me right now, because that would definitely scare me!’

David tried to contain his laughter and failed, and Ava slowly turned and looked up at him triumphantly, pleased that she had made a fool of Conor in front of nobody. She was shorter than Conor but he felt oddly small. She too had dark hair but it was very long and fell down her back, and it had been dyed navy blue a long time ago, so her original brown colour was slowly battling its way back in. She had freckles- *‘What the hell sorta adult has freckles?’*-and light blue eyes. At that moment she had her arms folded and stood defiantly, as if prompting him to make his next move.

As if it would make any difference, Conor weakly muttered ‘Boo.’

Both of his friends instantly lost their composure and Conor soon joined them. The three fully grown adults were there, laughing their heads off at a stupid joke in the middle of their place of work.

‘Children. All of you.’

‘Quiet you,’ Conor mentally snapped back.

That night, he woke up with a start somewhere in and around the 3:40 am mark. He couldn’t see much; the lights in his apartment were off. The moonlight from outside, filtered through leaves and branches

and the shutters over his window, scattered light grey shapes across parts of the room that slowly waved back and forth. It was this that allowed him to realise he was standing up.

Confusion hit first. He called out to the voice but no reply came. Instead, once he focused, he noticed two things: he couldn't move and he could hear a conversation with impressive clarity. Three voices; two he didn't recognise and one he knew far too well. The voice. The conversation was in his head.

Of course, to some extent it would make some sense that he would hear more voices. The schizophrenia may have been getting worse, in any case. But the voices were talking to each other, ignoring Conor. Once he started paying attention, he noticed that of the two voices he didn't know, one was male and old and one was female. He hoped they wouldn't notice him suddenly listening.

'...idea will be proposed to him. There's no way he'll refuse.' said the male voice.

'You've been awfully quiet, Shaw,' interjected the female voice. There was a pause, and finally his companion spoke.

'I don't like the sound of it, s'all.'

'Don't tell me you've grown attached to the man?' the male said. 'He is a tool, a pawn; you knew this going in.'

'Y'know what? You spend a year in a guy's head, share his thoughts, even control him on occasion and tell me what happens then.'

When he spoke, the male's voice was harsher. 'This is far from the time for-'

'Gentlemen?' the woman interrupted, again. 'He's awake.'

His voice spoke quickest. 'Conor quick, you need to get out of here.'

The female voice came next, mumbling something about protocols and overrides and other things which made no sense, and the male voice said 'I'm taking over,' and both of the others were silenced, mid-word.

'Hello Conor,' he said. 'We're going for a walk.'

Conor started forward without meaning to. His leg went to take a step and he was three paces forward before he tried to fight it. He tensed his leg as hard as he could manage but the man made his other leg buckle and he lost his balance, and the other foot moved underneath him to prevent him falling and he was brought forward further. Slowly, Conor was forced out of his bedroom, down the short hallway and into the kitchen. He was fumbling trying to regain control of himself but the man inside his head was whistling a tune under his breath, as though inhabiting and controlling another person was child's play.

The sun was yet to come out for hours, but the moonlight barely illuminated the apartment, making it harder for Conor to resist as he wouldn't have been sure where he was resisting to. Every stubbed toe in the dark, every trip, every corner of a countertop in the hip slowed his progress as the man gained further control of him. He fell forward, grabbing the handle of one drawer and sliding it out of its slot, spilling the various cutlery onto the tile floor. In a panic, he began sifting through the stainless steel looking for something specific - the panic came from his sudden realisation of the man's intentions. He spoke inside Conor's head as he worked.

'No hard feelings, boyo, you were just at the wrong place at the wrong time.'

He was sweating profusely and tried to move his hands away from anything the man could use as a weapon to harm him. He was on his knees and shaking, which made it harder for the man to find a knife. His hands were slippery from sweat and tears were streaming down his face. Fear mixed with confusion blurred his judgement and his vision.

Eventually, his hand found a blade and he fought against himself to keep it away from him. It was inching closer and closer to his chest and, to anyone who might have been watching, it would have appeared as a normal suicide. The perfect crime.

In a last ditch attempt to save himself, Conor threw himself sideways from where he was

crouched. He hit his head off the door of his cooker and dropped the knife as he lost consciousness.

'Dammit!' the man yelled, sitting at his computer. He slammed the keyboard in a rage and stared at the static on the screen. The test subject had knocked himself out. Smart or desperate, he didn't know. But he had damaged the chip in doing so. They couldn't get inside his head anymore.

He was sitting in a small room with two others, one of whom was also at a computer. He turned his chair around to face them and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. The woman at the computer had strawberry blonde hair, tied back in a ponytail, dark eyes, a purple and black dress and a look of fear across her face. The man not at a computer, but rather lounging on a sofa at one end of the room, wore a white shirt with a black leather jacket and faded denim jeans. He had meticulously untamed brown hair, stubble, and aviator sunglasses. He also had a smug look on his face which the first man addressed instantly, fuelled by frustration.

'What are you smiling about?' he raged.

The man grinned. He spoke with a thick southern-US twang. 'I must've left the mic running by mistake. Whoopsies.'

'Are you happy now? Your little pet is out of his cage?'

'Well, if ya think about it, technically he opened the cage and kicked us out, 'cause we were in his head before-'

'Stop talking! Enough of your damn tangents, you're stalling, Shaw! You meant for this to happen.'

Shaw was perfectly collected while the other man fumed in his seat. 'An' how do ya figure I did that? You're writin' my paychecks here, what reason have I to go against you?'

'I will take none of this insubordination-'

'It ain't insubordination, big guy. It ain't attitude or disrespect or 'I don't like your tone, young man'.' He spoke in a mocking tone and waggled his finger, imitating the parent of a disobedient teenager. *'S'a straight question, McCarthy, and if you have no answer...'*

'You'll what?' McCarthy asked, but Shaw was already getting up. He nodded his head at the woman at the computer, staring in both fright and disbelief at the man's sheer gall. 'Pleasure to meet ya, Ms. Wales. Sorry our first meeting involved ol' Baldilocks here shouting his head off.' He seemed oblivious to McCarthy now, as though he was simply done with him. *He strolled over to the door and exited calmly, and McCarthy took out a walkie-talkie and boomed into the receiver, 'Shaw's trying to leave. Stop him.'*

He wasn't sure when he woke up, but when he did, Conor's entire skull ached. He had a huge migraine in a very specific part of his head, different from any headache he had had in the past. The cutlery drawer and its contents were still spilled on the floor, but the sun was now up and light had flooded the apartment while he was unconscious. He shakily got to his feet just as there was a banging coming from outside. He groaned and slowly moved to the front door of his home.

When he opened the door, the man on the other side strolled in like he had been there a hundred times before. He spoke before Conor had a chance to turn his head. What he said, but not the words he spoke, frightened him as realisation swept over him in an instant.

'Mornin', buddy. We got a problem.'

Conor stared.

He slid his hands in his pockets. 'Jeez, you really ain't a morning person are ya? It's 11 am and you're still in the ol' PJ's?'

Conor still stared.

'Well, anyway, we can address your pre-coffee manner another time. Got bigger problems.'

Conor's first words -or word, more accurately, was shaky.

'Y-you.'

'Me.'

'I know you.'

'I'd be scared if ya didn't. Want coffee? Might as well make some, seein' as you're frozen on the spot 'nall.'

'You were in my head.'

'That's about as close as you're gonna get, so I'll grant you that. But I can explain later-'

'Who are you?' Conor was usually pale, but there and then he was as white as chalk.

The man stared at his feet. His shut eyes were visible behind his sunglasses. 'Right. Left out that part. Guess we never were formally introduced, huh? Name's William Shaw. Billy to my friends. I work for the same place you do, 'cept you're in the not-shady-as-all-livin'-hell department. I am. D'you have any idea what your company does?'

When Conor slowly shook his head, Shaw continued. 'They ain't as big as you let on. The company doesn't stretch outside Ireland-least, not yet. Some of the staff, such as myself, are from other countries but usually they go local. They're the good ol' 'make-as-much-money-as-you-can-as-illegally-as-possible-and-see-what-happens' group of capitalists. It's been entertaining working with them, tryin' out all this new tech, such as this here one you're most familiar with: artificial schizophrenia.'

Conor's stomach lurched. 'Not...possible...'

Shaw spread his hands wide and laughed. 'Well boy, I sure as hell ain't in your head now, so how d'you explain that?'

Conor nearly fainted and Shaw quickly put the coffee pot down, nearly spilling its contents, and went to catch him. 'Not lights out just yet, buddy, we need to move. You can't trust anyone here but me.'

Conor strung together his first coherent sentence in minutes. 'How can I trust you?'

Shaw grinned. 'I've been inside your head, remember? Let's go.'

Conor quickly dressed and the men left his apartment. Shaw was explaining his plan- that McCarthy would probably send someone after them, because Conor now knew too much and Shaw had betrayed them. He stressed the fact that he absolutely had to keep it secret, as he would endanger anyone he told. Reluctantly, Conor agreed.

They got to the lobby of his apartment building, which was completely deserted but for one person pointing a gun in their general direction.

'Move and everyone in this building dies.'

Both men froze, instantly recognising their attacker.

'Baldilocks,' Shaw said with a little smile.

'Shaw,' he replied contemptuously.

'Sir,' stuttered Conor.

'Conor, young man, you don't know what you're getting into. You-'

He interrupted. 'Getting into? I'm already in it. You brought me into it. Artificial schizophrenia? What the hell sort of idea is that? How many drugs were you on when you thought that was a good idea? A chip in someone's brain- if I had a week I couldn't list all the ways that could go wrong.' His voice was rising as anger seeped into his words, but then he faltered and his voice broke with emotion. 'I just have one question. Why me?'

The gun didn't waver, but McCarthy softened. 'Nobody would suspect an ordinary worker. The whole part of the business you're familiar with is a front. Most of our official dealings are illegal. Hitmen for hire, mainly. A lot of double crossing. Nobody worries much about the Irish, not when you have your Mafias and your big gangs abroad, so we slip right under the radar. But we needed someone safe. Someone who, if caught, wouldn't even know he did something. Lie-detector proof. That's where the idea was born, not because of some drug-spurred rage.'

Shaw broke in. 'You're right, Christopher, you'd never do anything like drugs; that'd be illegal.'

McCarthy angled the gun in his direction. 'I will not hesitate to drop you like a bag of spuds right here.'

'How can you get away with this?' Conor asked, afraid of the answer. But none came. When

McCarthy went to open his mouth, they heard a click behind them and a voice saying 'Drop the gun. Now.'

McCarthy paused, and then visibly conceded and put the gun on the floor. Behind him stood Hannah, in what looked like gym gear with her hair in a plait down one shoulder and defiance written across her features.

Shaw leant over slightly and mumbled to Conor, 'I forgot you were acquainted with Ms. Wales here. You can trust her s'well.'

Conor breathed a sigh of relief and mumbled back, 'Glad she's on our side so.'

Shaw elbowed him in the ribs jokingly. 'I been in your head, remember? I know what you think of her. Well, it's about to get a whole lot better.'

The other two had been talking and Conor had barely any time to switch his attention to their conversation when McCarthy whirled and slapped Hannah's gun out of the way. He threw a punch but Hannah wove underneath and put a right hook to his ribs. He doubled over and, with the same arm, she hit him in the chin with her elbow. As he staggered back, she shot him in the chest. He fell to the floor and she mumbled something that sounded like 'Do *not* try that with me.'

After a pause, as she stared contemptuously at the man on the ground, she glanced up and flashed a smile at the men, making her way over to them. 'I presume you already explained it all to him?'

She was speaking to Shaw, but Conor was quicker to the punch. 'Most of it, yeah, but I don't think he caught on.'

Hannah laughed and Shaw gave him a sly look through the lenses of his sunglasses. 'Excuse you?' and with that Conor laughed for the first time in hours. 'Jeez, we have guns, violence, and old white guys tryin' to get their hands on more money than they'll ever need. Feels just like home for me, huh?'

Another gunshot. Everyone froze.

Shaw arched his back, his mouth wide open. 'That bastard,' he breathed, and fell to his knees before landing on his front on the tile floor. Blood seeped from a wound in his back and soaked his shirt.

Conor's heart leapt into his mouth. All sounds were muted, all he saw was McCarthy on the other side of the room pointing his gun in their direction, finally dropping it and breathing his last. Hannah was frantically trying to help Shaw, which became increasingly hopeless. The first sounds that pierced his thoughts were the words 'Hayes. C'mere.'

Conor turned and knelt beside him, still in shock. Finally he realised what had happened and he began whispering 'No,' repeatedly, slowly gaining volume and speed until he was shouting.

Shaw smiled sadly and said 'You really are slow, aren't ya?'

'You're not going anywhere.'

'I've got a hole in my back that's makin' a pretty strong argument.'

Conor couldn't speak. His mouth was bone dry and there were tears in his eyes. Shaw spoke again.

'Listen to me. You need to stay outta trouble, ya hear me? Leave this job and bring her with you.' He nodded to Hannah. 'Bring your little friends too. Get as far away from here as possible.' His breath was coming shorter now. 'Just stay safe, okay?'

Conor slowly nodded, and Shaw died with a smile on his face.

The lobby was deathly silent. Whatever McCarthy had done to clear it out, he was grateful for. Anyone else nearby would probably have caused Conor to break down completely. It had all happened too fast. The voice he had in his head for the last year was suddenly a real person, and just as suddenly he was gone. His thoughts were deafeningly muted compared to how they once were. Hannah's words halted his silent mourning.

'Conor?' No answer. 'Conor, we need to move. They're gonna find out what happened. It's too much explaining. Get Dave and Ava and tell them it's an emergency. We need to go.'

He couldn't stop staring at Shaw's body. He didn't move a muscle. Hannah tried to draw his attention away by snapping her fingers across his line of sight and waving her hand up and down, but nothing happened. He was frozen in shock. She

simply kissed him on the forehead and stood up, and began calling his friends herself.

That time the next day, they were in a hotel three hundred and fifty kilometres from their old apartments. They decided to simply wait to be evicted instead of trying to go through the various traceable paperwork to sell the apartments. The four of them were staying in two rooms, trying to figure out what to do. Against Shaw's advice, Hannah and Conor explained to David and Ava the entire story—Shaw inside Conor's head, McCarthy's plan, and the true intentions of their place of work. They were speechless. They would have been afraid of what would happen next if Hannah had not assured that she had everything carefully planned out.

'Myself and Shaw had this in the pipeline for months,' she said. 'We weren't huge fans of Christopher. But above that, we were against the company's dealings. I had been made into a weapon and Shaw decided to help use it against them to prevent the same happening to Conor.'

They discussed their plans for the near future until the sun went down, and finally decided to get something to eat.

While on the way there, Conor walked behind the rest, lost in thought. Hannah slowed down to meet his pace and walked alongside him.

'How are you doing?' she asked.

'I'll be okay,' Conor replied. 'It's so quiet without him.'

'I don't think I'll ever understand what you're going through. I'm not gonna pretend I do.' The barest hint of a smile tugged at the corner of her lips. 'It's actually, like, a really really specific case. You're Patient Zero. I'm not sure anyone has ever felt what you're feeling. You should probably get a medal of some sort for dealing with it.'

Conor laughed, and she continued. 'But you see them?' She gestured up ahead to Ava and David, who were fiercely debating the logic of Ant-Man's ability to shrink. 'They're your best mates; they're here for you. That's what they're there for.' She took his hand and said 'And for what it's worth, so am I.'

'It's worth a lot,' Conor finally replied. 'If all else fails you can just beat up anyone causing a problem,' and he smiled.

She looked at her feet, and then back at him and winked. 'Don't get ahead of yourself, Inky. Now come on, we have a nerd debate to not listen to.'

He laughed and she led him forward, and their words were slowly becoming audible: '...changes the space between the atoms then he'd just get denser, not smaller, like he'd have the force of a bullet when he punches someone, how is that even feasible...'

A Deal with the Devil

Luke Kenna

It had to be today. The day that I was getting a promotion. I'd been working on Wall Street for the past four years now, never late, not one sick day, and I was finally getting what was coming to me. But no. On the exact same day, a choice I'd made some fifteen years ago had come back to haunt me. That's right. Fifteen years ago I made a deal with The Devil.

I was twelve at the time. Not a care in the world. I had lived a safe, untroubled life in rural Arizona. I was an average twelve year old boy who went to school, hung out with friends and played soccer. Life was great, until March 13th 2000, my Dad came home with the news that my Mom had pancreatic cancer. At first, I didn't understand what was happening. I couldn't comprehend what everyone was talking about. The idea that one of my parents might not be around in the future had never crossed my mind. You'd always hear of it happening to a friend of a friend, or someone who lives down the road, but no one ever thinks it will happen to them.

Nobody took the news well. Out of the four of us, my Mum took it the easiest. Not to say it was in any way easy on her, but she knew she had to stay strong so we would too. My sister, who was four, was too little to understand what was happening. My Dad was a classic 'show no emotions' kind of guy. He began to drink. A lot. There would be cans all around the house and he always reeked of alcohol. But my Mum and I never talked to him about it because we never had the courage to confront him. As the weeks went on, he only got worse. He would sit at home, alone, and drink until both his mind and body felt numb, so he could escape his life if only for a few hours, and forget the ever-lasting pain that plagued him. To my Mum, however, very little had changed. She carried on as if nothing had happened and was always positive and upbeat about how her treatment was going. I would get angry at how carefree she acted and how selfless she was. She never wanted to talk about her cancer and would always change the subject after five minutes. Now that I'm older, I see that she only ever cared about us and that she gave little to no consideration about herself. I also now see that she was by far the most selfless and by far the strongest out of us all.

It was a Tuesday when I met the Devil. It was a particularly tough day in school. There'd be days when I would forget that my Mum was dying of cancer, and days when it was the only thing on my mind. I hate to say it, but I enjoyed the former much more. I came home from school, walked past my Dad who was passed out drunk, and went to my

room. I threw off my shoes, tossed my bag across the room and dived head first into my bed. I lay there for a minute or two until I noticed a painful edge piercing my side. As I sat back up a sharp, red-coloured envelope caught my eye. As I picked it up I noticed how heavy it was. It was in pristine condition and the edges were a sharp enough to slice bread. It had my name on the front along with my address. The handwriting was immaculate. Each letter was given its right amount of space yet they joined together gracefully, all in unity. The stamp was an odd shape and featured a colourless snake with its tongue out. I pulled out the letter, assuming one of my parents had left good news for me for when I got home. The letter read:

George,

I have been made aware of the problem that is tearing your family apart. Your Mother has cancer and I can tell you now she will not live to see the year's end. She is as strong as they come and will not let her misfortune pour out onto the ones that she loves. But I can help. I want to help, I have the powers necessary to ensure that your Mother survives and that her treatment is one hundred percent effective. All I need from you is a name. A signature. I've left a space below where you may sign. This isn't any ordinary contract and must be signed with a drop of your blood. For your sake, and your Mother's, do what has to be done.

Yours Sincerely,

Lucifer

Lucifer? At first I was confused. Nobody played tricks on anyone since the diagnosis and the handwriting was too good to be a forgery. I sat on my bed, staring at the letter. I looked over at the envelope which I'd left on the ground, but which was now on my bed next to me. I picked it up, and with a mixture of desperation, emotions and curiosity, I slid the side of the envelope across my hand and watched as the drop of blood splashed on the page near the area which was designated. Nothing. I squeezed my hand closer over the area marked to sign but still nothing. I could feel the sting of the cut begin to set in. I stood up to go to the bathroom to clean myself up but noticed as I stood up the stinging had stopped. I looked at my hand and the cut was gone. Had I daydreamed the whole incident? When all of a sudden, a crimson mist began to form around my room. I began to cough loudly and swatted the mist away. I couldn't believe what I saw in front of me.

A tall, skinny man with a gleaming bald head was staring back at me. His skin was dark red, blood-like. He had a designer beard and a purple suit with pink lines shooting downwards. He wore a white shirt and bright red tie along with brown leather shoes. He stood up straight reaching over 6'6" in height. He also held a black and gold walking stick with a decorated skull for a handle. The skull had two glistening rubies for eyes. As the last of the smoke cleared he began to speak.

'Sorry I'm late, traffic is terrible around this time,' he said as a grin spread from cheek to cheek, cracked across his face, like when ice begins to split.

He began to laugh, as though it was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. I stood there in awe.

'What?! You're not laughing?! Come on that was a good one!' he exclaimed.

'You're the...Devil?' I asked, completely unprepared for his laidback attitude.

'Well I'm not Father Christmas! Who did you think I was?' he said sarcastically.

'I just didn't expect to see you. I didn't even know you actually existed,' I said still trying to see the connections between the man in front of me and the stories that tell of his cruel, malign nature.

'Yeah well, here I am. Here to fix your problem. Which is?' he asked attempting to sound like he cared but failing.

'But you know what my problem is, you wrote it in the letter,' I responded.

'You don't think I actually write those do you? I've people to do that work for me,' he said sounding disgusted. 'Anyway, they send out letters every few years when we begin to run out of souls in Abaddon, or more commonly known as the well of souls, so that we can restock for lack of a better word,' he explained. 'Anyway, your problem?'

'My Mum has cancer and she won't live if you don't help,' I quickly explained.

‘Ouch,’ he said, as his face winced. ‘Cancer’s a mean one, and that’s coming from me. Listen, I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine.’

‘I don’t think I’m tall enough,’ I said, immediately regretting what I had said.

I expected a look of pure disapproval but what I received was quite the opposite. He burst out laughing.

‘Yes!’ he shrieked ‘Now you’re lightening up,’ he said, as his shiny white teeth lit up the entire room.

‘So, what do you say? Your soul for your Mother’s health?’

As you can guess I took him up on his offer, and surprisingly he came through. My Mum began showing us her PET scans which showed how the cancer was becoming smaller and smaller until almost a year to the day that I signed the contract, the doctor told her it was safe to say that they’d beaten it. All of us were overjoyed. My Dad stopped drinking and got his act together, I started to excel at school and soccer again, and my sister would now have a Mum to grow up with. Life had returned as normal. Until, two years later when my Mum, on one of her monthly check ups at the doctor’s was diagnosed with leukaemia. They’d caught it early, but they said that they’d never seen such an aggressive and fast acting cancer as this one. Just as it had before, the family collapsed. My Dad returned to his old habits, never leaving the house

and rarely speaking or eating. My Mum had ran out of energy at that stage. She always seemed distant, and would often stare morosely out the window. My sister and I were the only real people living in our house, alongside two empty shells of people who now just sat waiting, hoping for things to change. But they never did. I would rush home from school and run into my room hoping to see the red, tall man who'd stood there all those years ago. But he never came.

And now, the man who'd tricked me, taken advantage of me as a kid, was standing right in front of me with his mean, deceiving eyes glaring into mine, and he was asking for a favour.

'Hey Georgie. How're things? It's been awhile since we've last seen each other. What, fifteen years?' He asked, as he grinded his teeth together.

'Yeah, fifteen years,' I responded.

'Wow. Look at you now. You've changed Georgie.'

'It's just George,' I interrupted.

'Okay, George. When I first met you, you were a sweet kid who was looking out for his Mother. Now, you make a living by talking people into giving you money. Is that really any way to live?' he asked, playfully.

'You're judging me?' I asked. 'You tricked me into handing over my soul to you in exchange for my Mother's health, which you gave to her for the better

part of two years. Then, the cancer came back. You never said that the cancer would come back. You tricked me!' I roared.

'I mean I did give your Mother's health back. Didn't I?' he replied.

It had been years. I didn't expect him to bring her back nor did I necessarily want him to. I had come to terms with the choice I'd made and my Mother's death long ago. I knew I had to move on.

'Okay. What do you want now?' I asked wearily.

'Ah! A man of honour, I like it. Keeping up your side of the deal,' he said complimentarily. 'What I need you to do is to bring me my son, Mephistopheles, but everyone calls him Jason.'

'Your son!?' I almost shouted.

'Yes, my son. He's been living in Jenkins Institute for Children for the past few years. I need you to bring him to me for midnight,' he said without an ounce of silliness or immaturity in his voice.

'Jenkins Institute for Children. Where's that?' I asked.

'South Carolina,' he responded.

'Midnight tonight!?! Are you kidding me? I won't be able to make it there. I don't get off until five,' I explained.

'Listen, if you want your soul back meet me on the coast of the Savannah, east of Georgia. I can

maybe push for one or two in the morning, but I've some important work in Turkey which I simply cannot miss,' he replied, beginning to enter back into his comical self. 'Do you understand?'

'Yes,' I said.

Then he stood there, smiling at me as though he were waiting for me to say something.

'What?' I asked, perplexed by the stare that I was receiving from this tower of a man.

'Well, do you notice anything different?' he asked, almost giddy with excitement.

'New suit?' I asked.

'No, you idiot. Look at my new walking stick!' He laid it out flat across the palms of his hands. The new stick was jet black from top to bottom. Closer to the top there was a red snake which wrapped around the handle until resting its head on the top.

The intimidating look its eyes gave you almost made it appear alive. You could tell just by looking at it that it too was truly evil.

'Why do you even need a walking stick?' I asked.

He turned away from me, disappointed that I didn't share the same joy he got out of his devilish walking stick. He began to walk towards the wall.

'You know Georgie, when you're three thousand years old you'll find things don't work as well as they used to,' he replied before walking

confidently into the wall leaving nothing but red dust behind. I grabbed my coat and headed straight for the door.

Time to meet The Devil's son.

I was about two hours into the trip when a lot of unanswered questions started making their way into my head. Like, how old was the kid? Who was the mother? Why couldn't he just pick up his own son since he could seemingly teleport anywhere he wanted in an instant? And also, why did I need a soul? I mean, I lasted fifteen years without it, what was its purpose? Did they actually exist? I started to wonder whether he'd even taken it or not. There wasn't any ritual or anything, he seemed to have just snatched it without me ever realising. All this thinking started to give me a headache. I cleared my mind, faced forward, and continued going forward.

It was just past four in the afternoon when I arrived in Myrtle Beach. It was a nice town. The roads were smooth and silver and the buildings were all different shapes and sizes. Each building was brightly coloured which meant on a nice day, like today, the town practically glowed. I saw the orphanage and pulled onto the gravel road. It seemed vacant, rundown. The brown leaves swooshed across the drive, dancing along with the wind. I turned off the keys in the ignition and waited, listening to the old, worn Ford Contour purr before becoming completely silent. I waited patiently for a few seconds, observing for signs of life, but the only reaction I received was that of a nearby cat which

glared at me disapprovingly. I lifted myself out of the car and walked towards the door. The house was huge, probably an old rancher's house. As I was about to knock, I heard an old woman's voice call over to me.

'Hello,' she said as she began walking up the porch. 'Who are you?' she asked politely.

'Hiya, I'm Carl Smith, and I was wondering if I could have a word with one of the boys who lives here,' I answered, knowing that what I was about to do meant having to give a false name.

'Oh, and which boy would that be?' She asked suspiciously, scanning me from head to toe.

'Jason,' I replied.

'Jason?' she retorted. 'Why would you want to speak to Jason?'

'I think I know a relative of Jason and would just be wondering if I could have a word with him and try piece things together,' I explained.

'Oh right,' she said, still sounding unconvinced.

'We usually don't allow people to visit the kids unless we've made plans with them first, but, I suppose if it's only a quick word I'm sure nobody would mind.'

'That would be great thanks. Where is Jason?' I asked.

'He's over there with the other kids,' she pointed with her withered finger.

‘Thanks again,’ I said as I turned around to go in the direction she was pointing towards, but I could still feel her piercing glare watching me from behind, fully aware I was up to something.

The kids were playing chasing. I thought it would be easier to distinguish between which one was an innocent seven year old, and which one was the Devil’s son. I asked one of the girls who was sat down drawing a picture of what appeared to be a princess riding a unicorn, which one of the boys was Jason. She didn’t even glance at me, continuing to colour vigorously, but pointed towards a large bush which seemed to have been stripped bare, as it was missing almost every leaf on its body. I left the young girl to her own devices and made my way towards the bush. As I walked behind to the back of the bush I found a small boy, probably ten, picking leaves off of the cylindrical bush in front of him one by one. It didn’t seem that he was getting any satisfaction by doing what he was doing, nor was he feeling any remorse for the now decimated plant.

‘Are you Jason?’ I asked trying to get his attention.

He continued his onslaught, ignoring everything I’d just said.

‘I’ve got some good news for you buddy, I found your Dad.’

He stopped picking leaves and looked at me blankly. The stare he gave left me feeling alone and

worthless. All he needed now was some red skin and a big grin and he was sorted.

'You can bring me to my Dad?' he asked.

'Yeah. We can go now if you like, it doesn't look like you're having much fun here,' I said fully aware I now had less than half a dozen hours left to bring him to the Savannah.

The leaves began to rise from the ground, levitating by themselves. The other kids began to notice so I nudged Jason slightly to try and catch his attention again. The leaves all floated back downwards. I knew I had the right kid.

'So, you ready?' I asked, becoming anxious.

He nodded. I put my hand on Jason's back and we walked swiftly to my car. I could see the other kids were becoming aware of what was happening and were beginning to call for the woman. I speared the keys into the ignition and immediately started the engine. It bellowed with excitement. I could now see the woman was on the phone, most likely to the police. I knew we had to get out here fast. I slammed down on the accelerator and listened as the gravel began being flung across the drive and as the wheels started to spin with energy. The car darted out onto the tarmac and with that let out a screech which echoed throughout the surrounding ranches. I could hear the engine burning with joy as we rushed through the trees and the houses on either side of the road. I'd never done something as dangerous or lively as this and I could feel the adrenaline pumping

around my body. I glanced over at Jason who was sitting there with the moody face he had when I first met him. He looked disinterested and overall bored with what had just happened. I began to feel stupid and embarrassed. I lowered the speed, put on my seatbelt and settled down.

We were about a half hour's drive to the Savannah with roughly three hours to spare. Jason was a quiet kid, quite the opposite of his boisterous father. Although he wasn't ordinary by any means. He rarely spoke, could keep his calm in the most chaotic of moments and always seemed to be in a world of his own. And of course the telekinesis was a little off as well. I began to stare at the setting sun in the distance as we approached the coast. The orange glow radiated across the sea, glistening whenever the waves would gently glide across the ocean. It even caught Jason's attention, who was now transfixed on the beautiful scene that was taking place ahead of him.

I then noticed in the rear-view mirror, flashing red and blue lights. I knew we weren't going to outrun them, especially in an area that was unfamiliar. I indicated right and pulled over. Jason noticed the change of direction and looked in the side mirror. In an instant, Jason kicked the front passenger door off the car, thrust himself out of it and was now walking steadily towards the oncoming cruiser. I braked, hard, and leapt out of the car but I knew nothing I did or said could prevent him from being run over. When suddenly, the two wheels on the left side of the police car were pulled out to the side and

rag dolled into the fields on the left hand side of the road. The driver tried to get control of the car but in doing that it caused the car to flip and lift off the ground. The spectacle that unfolded before my eyes was breath-taking.

The car started to spin countless times over and over as pieces of metal were bashed off the tarmac and propelled in every direction but ours. As the car came to halt, it was raised about three feet in the air, allowing the driver and passenger to escape. They both scurried out of the car, bruised and bloodied. Jason, who I could only presume was behind all of this, catapulted the wreck into the horizon, and before long it was completely out of sight. I looked at Jason, shocked at the feat he'd just achieved. He stared back, this time with a grin stretching across his face. We turned together and ran towards my car, but we weren't fast enough.

I heard a loud crack, then a bang, as one of the policemen's guns were fired. I immediately looked over to Jason, who was now facing the policemen. He was fine, but staring at something next to me. I turned to my left to be greeted by a levitating golden bullet, inches away from my face. I looked back over at Jason, gratefully. He acknowledged my thanks but before we had time to recover, several more shots were fired. I closed my eyes, not by choice, but by instinct. I only opened them when the shooting had ended. What I saw was truly amazing. Fifteen 9mm bullets hovering around me, scattered in no particular order. The policeman who'd fired the shots remained in place, eyes shut tight, still pulling the

trigger, but only making a faint clicking noise every so often. Before the policeman had the chance to open his eyes, Jason lifted up a piece of scrap off the ground and whacked him over the head with it. He fell down to ground, out cold. The other policeman seemed unable to lift himself off the ground but after taking in the whole scene, fainted on the spot. A sense of relief came over me, and then a sense of dread. How was I going to cover this up? What would people ask when they heard these cop's stories and a car wreck two miles away? I then asked myself who would believe such a story. A boy who could throw a car into another state and stop bullets? The answer was nobody.

It was five minutes to midnight and we were approaching the seafront near the Savannah. Jason was now sitting in the backseat, possibly now regretting kicking the door off the car. I could see Lucifer waiting on the dirt road, looking on into the distant Atlantic Ocean. Even his tall, dark silhouette gave off a vibe of impending danger. I pulled over and stepped out of the car. So did Jason.

'Beautiful night, isn't it?' he remarked.

'Yeah, I suppose it is,' I answered, beginning to feel the effects of the day I'd just had.

'So, where's Jason?' he asked before being greeted by the ten year old boy who now was clinging onto his legs. 'Hey buddy, it's great to finally see you again, how's my little trickster?'

Although they were by far the most deceitful, dishonest, selfish family to inhabit the earth, there was still that nice tingling feeling I got when they were reunited. I waited momentarily while the two chatted and hugged.

‘So, about keeping up your end of the deal,’ I interrupted.

‘Of course, your soul,’ he said checking his pockets before picking out and revealing a small vial he had kept in his trouser leg pocket. ‘Ah-ha,’ he said with triumph. ‘Here it is!’

‘That’s it?!’ I asked, surprised at the way it looked.

‘Yep.’ he responded before tossing the small tube in my direction without any heads up or warning. I attempted to grasp it as it started its descent towards the brown dirt at my feet, but I missed entirely. The vial crashed down and smashed into hundreds of tiny pieces of glass right in front of my eyes.

‘Are you kidding me? I clamoured. That’s it?! Gone?!’

‘You should have seen the look on your face!’ he proceeded to erupt laughing at my misfortune. ‘No that wasn’t it, but wouldn’t that have been even funnier!?’ he added.

‘No! Not really!’ I replied still getting over the hoax he’d just played on me.

'Don't worry, you have your soul back,' he said, still recovering from his laughing fit.

'So we're quits?' I asked

'I guess we are,' he responded sounding surprised.

The next few minutes were some of the most peaceful, stress free I'd had in days. I sat upright, resting on the bonnet of my car looking onto the sea letting go of everything that worried or bothered me. Lucifer and Jason were making up on lost time by telling stories of how Jason almost took off the arm of one of the other kids at the orphanage or how Lucifer conned a man into handing over his soul for the newest iPhone. They laughed and smiled at each other's stories until they finally started to head home.

'Well, we better head now, long day tomorrow,' Lucifer said, with Jason by his side.

'I'd say 'see you soon' but, well, I don't know whether that'd be a lie or not. Now don't get emotional on me Georgie, but... this might be our final goodbyes.'

'Well for my sake I sure hope so, but it sure has been a hell of a ride,' I replied.

'It sure has,' he added.

Both him and Jason turned around and began to walk towards the cliff. As they started to approach the, Lucifer shouted over his shoulder.

'Stay classy Georgie.'

'It's just George,' I playfully responded, no longer mad or frustrated by the name.

He and Jason walked off the cliff and evaporated into a crimson cloud. It was swept away by the wind in a second, and all that remained was the pure moon, soaring in the midnight sky. I turned and looked at my car, and was reminded of the journey that took me here. I smiled to myself, realising that mightn't be the last time I'd see Lucifer or Jason again.

The Accident

Pearse McGrath

It had been a long, cold winter but spring had finally arrived. It had been a particularly hard winter for Simon Rowntree. He had recently moved to London from a small town in Cornwall and was finding it hard to adapt to the city lifestyle. He was a budding journalist but no matter how hard he tried he could not find work anywhere. He had had numerous job interviews but none had been successful and he didn't think that today's one had been any better. The Forest Green Echo newspaper had a very good reputation in London and seemed to be getting more and more popular by the day. Simon felt that a newspaper of this calibre was probably out of his league and was nervous before the interview had even started. He felt even worse after the interview. He didn't feel like his potential employer had liked him at all and he had stumbled over his words countless times.

As Simon made his way to his small flat downtown he couldn't help but wonder how he was going to keep on paying his rent and buy enough food and drink with no real source of income. He was on social benefits but this was barely enough for anyone to live on, let alone in London, and the money that his parents had given him had dried up two weeks ago. He had considered asking his parents for more money but he felt like they had already given him enough. When he got into his apartment he collapsed onto his bed and dreamed about how easy life had used to be.

A few days later Simon got a letter from the Forest Green Echo newspaper. He didn't get excited as he had received rejection letters from other employers too many times before to believe that he had actually been successful and secured a position. However, as Simon began to read the first few words of the letter he began to feel elated.

'We are pleased to inform you that your application to become our junior football correspondent has been successful.'

The letter began. Simon could not believe what he was reading. He was sure that his eyes were tricking him. He had a job, he actually had a job! The letter continued,

'If you wish to accept this position you are required to show up at our headquarters tomorrow at 9 a.m. sharp. We look forward to seeing you.' Simon had no doubts in his mind. He had to go for this.

It was now almost 2 years since Simon had become the junior football correspondent at the Forest Green Echo newspaper and he had not looked back since. He was on a decent wage and was just about to move into a new apartment right in the centre of London, the type of place which he could only have dreamed about living in not too long ago. He had also met many new, interesting people through his line of work and he had also found a group of friends with whom he was now very close to. He was even going to live with one of them in his new apartment. This particular friend was called Declan Kent and he had been Simon's first real friend in London. Above all else, he was doing what he loved, writing about the game that he had adored for as long as he could remember. The only thing that could top this job, in Simon's mind was to actually play football professionally but that dream had ended for Simon when he had broken his leg playing football 5 years ago.

Today was an important day for Simon. It was the 15th of April 1989- in other words his 23rd birthday. He would also be covering the F.A. Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough today. Nottingham Forest had been his boyhood team so today really would be a special day. He had been allocated a place in the Leppings Lane stand which would mainly be filled with Liverpool supporters. It was a fairly long drive from London to Sheffield so Simon had had to get up at 6 in the morning and was feeling very groggy.

As Simon began the long drive on the M1 from London to Sheffield at 10 in the morning, around about the time he usually woke up, he couldn't help but wish he was back at home in bed. He knew, however, that missing a match of this magnitude, which he was trusted by his employers to report on, could be detrimental to the rest of his career as a football journalist. In an attempt to wake himself up fully he rolled down the windows of his Ford Fiesta and turned on the radio. He started to look forward to the day ahead and the match itself.

Two hours later and this excitement had vanished completely. Simon had been stuck in traffic for at least half an hour and was beginning to lose his patience. The worst thing about it was that he could see his exit 200 yards down the road but the traffic would not budge. Simon poked his head out the window and saw to his great annoyance that the opposite lane was completely empty as far as the eye could see. A sense of daring came over Simon and he pulled out into this lane and began to drive quickly towards his exit. He felt a sort of smugness as he looked at the idiots who were still stuck in traffic who stared back at him with a look of shock and annoyance. When Simon diverted his eyes away from the cars and back onto the road his heart skipped a beat. There was a car directly in front of him that was heading straight for his car. Simon jerked the wheel sharply to the left and his car veered off the road straight onto a fairly large hill. The last thing Simon remembered before passing

out was intense pain as his car rolled over and over until it hit the wall right at the bottom of the hill with a sickening crunch.

When Simon woke up next, he was lying in a hospital bed with bandages on both of his legs and on his left arm. His body was aching all over and he had a pounding headache. He could remember vaguely what had happened earlier but he couldn't focus on it too hard because of the pain in his head. He could hear a phone ringing in the distance and the radio on his small bedside table was playing a show that Simon was very familiar with. It was his friend, Declan's' show, which Simon himself had appeared on numerous times. He listened to this show every day on his way home from work so he was familiar with the format of the show. It was a mix between a serious football debate and a comedy so the atmosphere was always upbeat. However, as Simon listened to his friend speaking he noticed that he sounded deadpan and very sombre. Declan was a Liverpool fan so Simon thought that he may just be upset because they had lost their match.

As Simon began to focus on what was being said he heard something that made him sit up attentively. Declan was talking about the biggest tragedy in English football since the 1958 Munich air disaster. Simon had no clue what he was talking about. Then, Declan said something that cleared up exactly what had happened.

'Reports are emerging that there have been 96 fatalities at today's F.A Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest,' he said. 'These deaths were caused by overcrowding in the Leppings Lane stand and it is believed that over 500 more people are injured.'

Simon could not believe what he was hearing. This was simply impossible. How could this great tragedy have occurred at such an event? Surely there had been children there, so does that mean that innocent kids had also been killed? Simon could not imagine the pain the victims' families must be going through at the moment, not knowing whether or not their loved ones would ever return home. Then Simon realised that his friends and family must surely be going through the same thing wondering if he was dead or alive. Suddenly, a great sense of gratitude came over Simon. If it hadn't been for his car crash then there was a very high likelihood of him being dead right now. He felt relieved that he, at least, was still alive but he still felt a gnawing pain in his stomach. 96 people had woken up this morning and left their houses to go to a football match, but they would never return home.

Years later, Simon would look back on this day as a turning point in his life. He realised that any day could be your last and he learned to live life to its fullest. Every night he would think about the 96 who had died that day and would pray for them and their families. He also prayed that nothing like this would ever happen again.

Kingdoms of the Stars

Declan Cosson

Many centuries had passed since Sola had become queen after Saruk's death. She had her warriors explore the stars in search of new homes. She wasn't the same brutal monster that her father Saruk had been yet she kept well away from mankind. She stopped studying them after her last science expedition had been taken out by a squadron of F-18 hornets over Iraq. We are now deep into the future and her people were at war with a very vicious enemy that had no soul, an enemy that the humans called Daleks.

One day, Sola was exploring with her people when their ship landed on a barren wasteland, which had once been a sophisticated city by the looks of things, as various remains of advanced vehicles littered the area. Sola's lizard-like nostrils twitched with the smell of corpses as she looked at a tattered

signpost saying 'New Dublin: established 5540 AD,' when a voice called:

'My queen, we found something!'

She turned around to see her warriors peering down at what seemed to be a humanoid creature in a dark blue armoured space suit that was sprawled on the ground. She went over to take a closer look as the sun shone down, causing the golden visor to gleam in the sunlight. She looked closer and took off the helmet and gasped. What she saw was the face of a handsome, pale skinned being that had green eyes and dark brown hair. She felt the suit; the creature was definitely a human being but far more handsome than any fully grown human she had encountered before!

'My queen!' said a warrior as he peered down. Sola looked up.

'Is this the work of your father? Will the white apes retaliate?'

Sola said 'No! This is the work of the cowardly demons that hide behind indestructible shells and purge anything that moves!'

From behind her, a voice shouted 'My queen!' He was cut short as she heard that disgusting mechanical voice state 'Exterminate!!!'

She immediately told her warriors to fall back as she took up the plasma launcher of the fallen warrior. She approached the Dalek and fired at its eyestalk, in turn killing the monster. But she then

returned to the ship knowing that if she died, the people might lose the will to resist. The ship flew off as what looked like saucers pursued. As they fled, her son Tars Kelus questioned her.

‘Mother, where are we going?’

She responded, ‘To the humans! They beat my father when they were at Civ Level 2: Primitive. Maybe they have a way of beating these monsters!’

Tars’ yellow eyes looked nervously as he stated, ‘Humans aren’t perf-’

He was interrupted as they were abruptly dwarfed by an enormous battleship that was of human design. It was shaped like the hull of an enormous nuclear submarine. Extending from either side of the stern of the craft were two enormous triangular wings. Large disciplined arrays of missiles, half the size of skyscrapers, protruded from underneath the wings of the vessel. Large plasma weaponry stuck out from various parts of the ship. On either side of the middle of the ship were two big fat coal black missiles that had ‘Q-Bomb’ etched on them. The whole vessel was coal black (probably for camouflage purposes) but had light blue spotlights lighting up the area. On either side of the bow of the vessel were smaller triangular wings which had lights at their wingtips. Etched in white on the side of the ship was ‘USS Valiant’. Suddenly Sola got a message as a powerful radioed voice spoke to them in a human language (English), but in an American accent:

‘Unidentified ship, this is the USS Valiant, please respond and identify yourselves!’

But at the same time, a man with an English accent spoke the same message. This caused Sola and Tars Kelus to turn around and see a similar ship, called the HMS Tungsten.

At the bridge of the HMS Tungsten, the captain ordered ‘Computer, repeat what I said to this ship in their native tongue!’ He had realised that they didn’t understand English. Soon the computer responded.

‘Sir, I have translated their reply,’ the officer answered. ‘They say that it is their queen who is seeking help.’

‘Got it. Tell Lance and Bruno to escort them into the Valiant!’

Tars Kelus peered through the force field window as he saw two very small delta-winged spacecraft, much like little wasps when compared to the mother the ship they had deployed from. They were dark blue in colour and had smaller wings near the nose cone. They ejected from the enormous vessel like bats would fly from a tree. The ships zoomed quickly, much to the anxiety of the reptiles who thought they were going to be attacked, until a British accent sounded through the radio stating:

‘Your spacecraft needs proof of identity. We will escort you into the ‘USS Valiant. Prepare to be boarded!’ An AI voice translated his message. The reptile ship followed the two fighters into the HMS Tungsten, where it entered the ship’s docking bay.

Solas and her son immediately found themselves as outlanders in a world of metal, bright lights, and unknown languages, as their ship landed in the docking bay where the drop ships were stationed.

Once they landed, their vessel was scanned and because their innocence was proved, they were given the green light: they were free to leave the ship without soldiers to escort them to a cell. Solas and Tars Kelus suddenly found themselves in a buzz of activity as UEF soldiers were preparing themselves, clad in their dark blue powered combat suits. They made an intimidating impression as they grasping their plasma rifles or pistols. Some of them only had dark blue patrol caps on. Not a single human in the area had beards, but they all had different skin colours and eye colours. Preparing the drop ships in the hangar were men clad in orange coats and yellow helmets. They were also the ones who directed the vessels to a free landing spot. The two reptiles looked around nervously at all the glaring human faces (or at least the ones they could see), yet Solas was somewhat hyper because she had never seen living humans so close. Tars Kelus looked amused as he saw two marines: One tall, muscular, ginger-haired and green eyed marine giving out to a small brown haired and blue eyed marine (the younger one didn't seem intimidated).

However, Solas continued on through this world of metal, computers and suspicion until they got to the control room, which was also a hub of activity. Men and women in smart blue uniforms were either talking to each other or operating the

touchscreen devices and radars of the mighty vessel, as well as issuing orders to the troops via radio. The captain was pale skinned, had blue eyes and very dark brown hair kept very short. He had barely a trace of facial hair. He looked like he was in his late thirties, yet he was probably way older due to genetics that make mankind look younger. He seemed to be only human not to look at Solas with hostility and suspicion, so she got a chance to explain what has been happening. This man, Captain Powalski, explained that the humans have been taking heavy losses fighting the Daleks. They have lost entire frontier colonies as well as cities, but have been holding their ground. Suddenly an Asian officer nervously reported unexpected signals on the radar. Appearing in front of them was an enormous reptilian vessel that was bright green in colour, which boasted wings shaped similarly to those of a dragon. There were three wings on either side of the vessel, the middle wing being the largest. It had a very slender and organic shape and was quite elegant in contrast to the two human ships it faced. Powalski immediately stated

‘Computer, tell these reptiles to stand down, we have Queen Solas and prince Tars Kelus on our ship!’ A radioed voice reacted angrily in the reptile language.

The computer translated ‘You will return our queen to us, or you will be destroyed!’ Powalski, who didn’t want to blow up the reptile ship, asked Solas if her people had teleportation systems so that he could send her to their ship. Embarrassed, she said

no. He understood, and allowed her and her son to get back to the reptile ship via her own vessel. She was ashamed because she realised that the humans were ahead of her civilisation, despite all the setbacks they had had. As soon as she returned to her people, a Dalek fleet arrived. They broadcasted their message of extermination, a message that only caused the two races to team up and fight them.

They travelled to an asteroid field, where they deployed their troops to take cover among the asteroids. This was the first time Homo sapiens and reptiles fought alongside each other against a common enemy, but their tactic worked. What came next was a laser/plasma battle as the homo-reptilian troops battled against the Daleks, sniping the eyestalks of the creatures. Tars Kelus drifted from his asteroid uncontrollably, trying to dodge the shots, when he bumped into a human soldier whose name was Romeo Willard. After a brief conversation, the two lock feet and join hands so that Romeo can catapult him across the asteroid field. During this more efficient drift, Tars Kelus grabbed onto two UEF plasma pistols, turned them to snipe mode, and sniped the eyestalks of every Dalek he encountered. Eventually after a long period of fighting the Daleks they had lured out of their spaceships, the alliance won the battle.

Wisdom was learned by the two races, they headed for the planet Pandora and when they fought the Daleks again, they would work together.

Zeppelins and other Technology in an Alternate Universe

Declan Cosson

The first thing you will probably notice about the stories I write is that there are things and items that are not recorded in your history books. This is because they take place in an alternate universe where certain events happen differently to how they happened in reality. For example, there were two world wars before the war against Hitler. The first war was between the colonial empires of Germany, France, Britain, Austria and Russia just like the historical First World War (It even started for the same reasons.) Only that this war started in 1905 and ended with the Russian revolution in 1917. The ending of this war made way for what is famously known in my world as the Bolshevik War. It is known as this because it was waged between Russia and the west (mainly France). Due to the sturdy and well-

built Maginot Line they laid waste to the charging Russian forces.

Airstrikes were also sent to halt The Red Army. This meant that the French economy was unscathed allowing for a renaissance to take place at the same time in Paris. This war was famous for its use of unusual weaponry in battle. This involved tesla rifles, zeppelin aircraft carriers, and land ships as well as sentinels. Sentinels were remote controlled two legged walkers, bristling with machine guns, missile pods and gas canisters, these metal monsters were created upon a floating fortress used by the Soviets and were unleashed in their hundreds on Britain. This brought massive psychological trauma on the British people as their gas could penetrate gas masks and the machines themselves could tear entrenched troops to pieces and shatter their bunkers and artillery pieces. However, the Anglo Irish armies fought back with airstrikes and mechanised infantry: heavily armed troops in APCs and tanks.

However, the machines malfunctioned and turned on the Soviets. They had no souls and massacred millions indiscriminately until the red army put them down with unexpected aid from the French and English who took advantage of the situation. Traumatized and short on resources, the Soviets surrendered in 1927 but the iron rule of Stalin kept them going and they recovered at the price of millions of lives. Only a year later the Wall Street crash occurred and widespread poverty struck the world. However that isn't the only

difference in this universe. For centuries, mythical beasts have plagued the world and are a constant threat to it. Monster hunting orders around the world have been fighting cults and monsters. Due to the daily threat of monsters and a gory death, Humans have grown physically strong, hardy and are expected to use some form of weapon from a young age.

As well as this, armies have been using airships since the Napoleonic wars. Zeppelins are used for commercial and security purposes. The police use blimps in the same way we use helicopters today. Unusual weapons include battery powered electric guns and rapid firing pistols, flying submarines and giant battleships have been built in well-known harbours such as Belfast. Tanks that launch missiles or drill under the ground are common sights in this world. Jetpacks have been used by the monster hunting group known as Pratiniski's Marauders who are American. Other monster fighting groups include The Society of St Patrick, The Knights of the Holy Order and the Union of Brahma. Various fantasy stories and some science fiction stories have taken place in this world yet as this is an alternate universe, you might expect differences.

The cities of Europe all seem to have different outcomes based on their recent past in this world: Paris is glittering with wealth and beauty, London has a very dangerous balance between wealth and poverty, Dublin struck badly with poverty due to being ravaged by war, Berlin is wealthy but it is a dark and sinister place due to the terrifying rule of

Hitler. There are no parties at night in Germany because everybody is terrified of the SS. There is endless violence in Dublin due to the large presence of monsters and monster hunters as well as gangs. London is not that better, and only the larger number of aristocrats tells the difference. Paris is the least violent of these cities but it still has its dark side of poverty and crime. Night clubs, restaurants and wealthy apartments decorate the city that claims to hold the key to your heart. (Paris)

Some facts about this universe:

1. This world is not for the soft hearted: It is infested with racism and national pride. Due to the wealthy and elegant lifestyles of the rich in Paris, French are commonly a topic of discussion (negative discussion). In fact, in my world: Indy, Rick, Evelyn and Alex (From the mummy franchise) are the only non-French people not to criticise the French at some point in their life.
2. Every child in this world seems to grow up surrounded by some form of racism. Whether they stick to it and use it themselves depends on the character of the person exposed.

Going Under

Alex Cooper

It was a nice clear day. The soft white clouds were drifting across the azure sky without a care in the world. A light sea breeze caressed the face of the boy as he stared out to the sea. His name was Nicholas Silver, he was a tall, stocky seventeen-year old with blond hair. He looked back at his friends, three of them had accompanied him on this venture. There was James, Emma and Colm. They were all the same age as Nicholas. They looked excited and nervous at the same time, for the most part. Colm was pacing, Emma was wringing her hands but James seemed to be calm. He was looking back at Nick with an eyebrow raised, a question in his eyes. Nick nodded 'yes' to him as he strode back toward his friends.

It was go time. They started walking to their destination, trying to act casual. Nick was walking

with a swagger as he reached the gate and scanned the card he had taken from his father. He then pulled the gate open and sauntered on in. They continued on their way walking across the quay, the sun warming their backs as they walked.

No one gave them a second glance even though the average person in the yacht club they were at was older than them. One of the men they were walking past nodded to them and wished them a good morning. Needless to say they reached their destination and Nick stood in front of his prize and chuckled.

They were standing in front of a yacht named 'Gulfstream', owned by Nick's father, John. It was 7 years old. It was a pleasure yacht and its name was on the hull in dark blue letters. The boys explored the yacht.

His father had never given him any affection. Instead he only left him with broken promises and sadness.

Nick had snuck into their room in the middle of the night taking what was needed. He looked at the yacht, and then back at the club, and then he made a decision. He called down to his friends, putting his mask of confidence back on. 'Get up here. Let's get this show on the road.' They came up on deck, there was no more fear in their eyes. He got two of them to get off to release the yacht from the quay. Nick turned the key in the slot to start the inboard motor.

The motor whirred to life and settled into a comforting rhythm beneath Nick's feet. Even as he guided the yacht out of the harbour he found himself being taken with the simplicity of it. He himself, and three friends had sauntered into a yacht club with little to no resistance. Even if he hadn't had the card key, Nick knew that someone in the club would have opened the gate from the inside. And without asking any questions either. From there it was more or less a security-free walk to where the yacht was. The only thing that could stop anyone from just walking up to any yacht and taking it was a key. A key to enter the cabin and a key to start the engine. 'It's ridiculous,' thought Nick. 'The only security on a boat that costs forty thousand euro is a key. Alas, was that any different to a car? Not really. But then you can't go to another continent in a car, unless your name is James Bond, that is.'

Nick steered them out to the sea as they chugged along. The entire point of this venture was to take a luxury cruise to somewhere nice and get away from all the crap in their lives. The kids were enjoying themselves as they cracked jokes and played cards. Nick had folded and was watching Emma and Colm with interest. Colm was much more sizable than Emma and when he lost the round, and ten euro, Colm tackled Emma and lifted her over his head like a weightlifter, and, ignoring the frantic cries of 'Stop, please stop,' he threw her overboard and into the frigid Irish sea.

Emma thrashed in the water, gasping for air as the sudden cold put her into shock and her

waterlogged clothes weighed her down. Nick, Colm and James were laughing, ignorant to the plight of the girl in the cold waters below.

It took them a while to realise that, as they were still moving under power, they had left Emma in the water with no chance of keeping up with a yacht at full throttle. By the time they circled back, the boys were beginning to realise how much distance even a few minutes put between them. The boys didn't realise how lucky they were that the sea was calm and they could spot her bright pink t-shirt. When they pulled her aboard she was pale and shivering as water dripped off her body. Nick got out the shower hose in the back of the boat and sprayed her with hot water heated by the engine. Then he got her one of the towels they had brought with them and told Emma to go change. The mood on the yacht had become quite solemn.

Nick took out his phone and felt a pang of regret at all the missed calls that were there. Emma came out sullenly with a change of clothes on.

'Why the hell did you leave me behind like that, man?' She shouted angrily. She then mumbled, 'I was scared.'

'We didn't realise how fast we were going, I'm sorry', responded Nick.

'Yeah we're sorry, Emma', said Colm with his head down.

James just sat there in silence until he stated, 'I'm going to bed, see you in the morning.' As they all

prepared to go to sleep Nick turned off the engine and checked their course, they were heading to France, straight through the open sea. He fell onto his bed and succumbed to his fatigue as the light faded outside.

As the sun came up, the children's spirit rose once again as they thought of the heat that awaited them in the future, in France, the land of romance or so they say. They were jovial at breakfast and the ill will between them seemed like a thing of the past. They were flying across the water until without warning, the engine spluttered and choked and, to their dismay, it died. Nick leapt over to the wheel and looked for the problem. They had run out of diesel, having only been moving on engine power for the last two days. Nick cursed his own stupidity and hit the wheel with his hand out of anger. He bit his tongue to hold back his anger as he told them with an irate voice, 'we're out of fuel, now what're we going to do?' The others were not pleased with this latest development and said things that need not be mentioned here in their rage. When they had got it out of their system they sat in a circle in silence.

Emma was drumming her fingers upon her leg, Colm was tapping his feet and Nick was chewing on a pen.

Then James said 'Why don't we sail? It's not like we have a whole lot of other options.'

Nick responded distantly 'Because, only I know how and even I wouldn't trust myself with it. Still I guess you're right, we've got no other choice,'

Then he sighed, resigning himself to the task. 'Alright, let's get going,' he asserted himself again, a little of his old confidence returning to him. Nick ordered the others around and, with a lot of confusion and disorder involving colours of ropes, they became a decent crew and started moving towards their destination again in a quick enough fashion.

Nick took out his phone and saw that there were twenty missed calls from his mother and he felt a pang of regret being plucked on his heartstrings. He texted her saying '*Taking a quick holiday to blow off steam, be back in no time*'. As he put away his phone he lay down on deck, feeling the warmth of the sun upon his body. 'This is great' he reassured himself. 'This is what the entire point was, to relax and enjoy the sun.' After a while his eyes began to feel heavy, he resisted for a moment until they felt like they weighed thirty kilograms, and then he gave in, closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Nick was awoken by the first drop of rain hitting him right in the centre of his forehead. He was quite peeved, as he had been having the nicest dream. A dream where they had reached France, and he was chatting up a nice looking girl, and then Nick and the girl had been- well you get the picture. Such a rude drop of rain to ruin such a dream. Nick opened his eyes to see that that magnificent, azure sky without a cloud in sight had been replaced with a malevolent, evil one as dark as night.

It was then that the rude raindrop's friends came to back him up, and in no time it was lashing rain and Nick scrambled to get back to the wheel over the now slippery deck. The wind suddenly picked up and became stronger than Nick had ever seen. It howled in his ears and it felt like it was trying to push Nick away from the wheel. It almost worked too. What's more the sudden strength of the wind made the boat, which had only been slightly tilting before, go at an angle where the top of the mast was only six meters away from the water. The boat was almost horizontal.

Nick fell and almost went into the water due to the sudden slope, but he grabbed a handrail and kept himself on, he regained his footing, standing on where you would put your back on the seat. He heard the shouts of the others, who had been sleeping below deck, as they were thrown about. Nick grabbed the wheel and turned them into the wind as Colm managed to get on deck. The yacht crashed back down into the water without the force of the wind keeling it over. With footing back to normal Nick fell face first onto the floor, the boat had changed its tilt by ninety degrees again. A sharp stinging pain coursed through Nick's arms as they slammed into the floor. Nick panted from the exertion and got back on his feet.

'You alright?' he asked Colm, straining to be heard over the screeching wind.

'Yeah, I'm grand,' he shouted back as the storm raged on around them, then the rain changed

into hail and it was like the wind was firing tiny bullets at them. Their faces stung from the force of the hail hitting them at gale force speed. Nick got his crew up and he made them reef the sail. He then started sailing again but this time, though the boat did keel over, it was nowhere near as bad as it had been before. Nick beckoned to James, calling him over through the roar of the wind.

‘Can you take over for a bit?’ he asked. ‘I want a break, I’ve been helming non-stop.’

‘Alright, have a good one,’ said James after Nick had instructed him in matters of steering. Nick walked down into the warm, dry cabin and lay on his bed in the main bedroom, shutting the door behind him. He dozed off thinking that he would continue his previous dream. He submerged himself in the comfort of sleep...

~ ~ ~

James adjusted the wheel again, shivering with the cold. He was wearing a jacket but it did nothing to stop the icy water dripping down his neck. Everyone else had gone inside to get out of the storm, so he was alone but for the screeching wind and the hail. This trip had not been going quite the way he had thought it would. He had just thought it would be a gentle cruise over to France followed by a few days lounging about in Brest, before returning home and getting back to their lives. So far, they had almost lost Emma to a watery grave, the journey had been stormy, rocky and just plain dangerous, and what’s more they hadn’t even gotten there yet! And here he

was steering a boat in the worst storm he'd ever been in. 'No,' thought James, 'This was not what I had been expecting of this trip, not one bit.'

James was brought out of his thoughts by a flashing light. It had gotten dark and the light was all he could see of the object. He was going to pass the light with it on his right side. James noticed that it flashed nine times and then stopped for a few seconds, and then it repeated. It was quite close to him. He didn't think much of it other than that. It passed him on his right side and as it fell behind him he promptly forgot about it.

Time scraped on for a minute and with no company other than the wail of the wind, James retreated into his thoughts once more. 'I wonder if the rest of this trip will go we-' James was abruptly jarred awake once more, but this time it was to a crash as the boat was brought to a stop. Then there was a raucous snapping sound and they lurched forward again. James knew something had gone wrong and locked the wheel in place to go get Nick.

As James walked towards the door to the cabin, he wasn't aware that the boat's keel had broken and so was unprepared when a sudden gust of the wind capsized the boat entirely and he fell over the safety bar into the chilly waters. The bitter water engulfed him in an instant, shocking him, and when he broke the top of the water he started flailing about, taking quick, panicked breaths. It took him a while for him to calm down and when he did, he noticed the boat slowly sinking into the water.

~ ~ ~

Nick awoke once again to the cold of water on his body. He had failed in his mission to re-enter his last dream and so it was with a bad taste in his mouth he got up. And then he noticed it. He was sitting up on the wall- which was now the floor. He was up to his waist in water and the level of it was still rising. Nick leaped out of bed with a splash, suddenly fully alert. He waded through the water towards the door. It was groaning under pressure and water was splurging out from the sides. Even knowing how dire his situation was, Nick still found the horizontal door mildly amusing.

Absentmindedly Nick reached out and turned the knob on the door and pushed. The force of the water behind it pushed him back as the door opened outward a small amount, and then slammed shut again, resuming its gush from the edges. The water was up to his neck now and Nick was in a wild panic, but no matter how hard he pushed the door the sudden onrush of water would force the door shut. Nick tried over and over until he was exhausted, but to no avail. Nick had to swim to stay above the water now, his head touching the roof. Nick gave up, breathing in his last few breaths of air, savouring the feeling as he knew that each breath he took, might be his last.

The water was at the top of roof now and Nick took the last breath he could, feeling it's gentle cold caress the inside of his throat .There would be no more chances to take a breath in that cabin. Nick

tried to hold his breath because he, just like almost anyone else would be, was afraid to die. Nick's last minute alive felt like an hour to him. At first it was calming, floating in the water, all Nick's problems no longer mattered, so in a way you could say that the trip's purpose had been fulfilled. How ironic.

Even so Nick felt a gnawing on his heart because of the pain this would cause his family. Then Nick's lungs began to burn, and then that burn turned into his lungs screaming for oxygen. Nick's vision started being invaded by darkness, it started on the edges, and then it slowly crept in until Nick could see nothing at all. The last thing Nick saw was Death's pale hand reaching out for him in the centre of his vision. Then Nick gave in to the dying of the light.

~ ~ ~

James reached out for Nick, his lungs beginning to ache, he grabbed him and lifted him out the door of the cabin, pushing off the wall to propel himself forward. He glided through the water gracefully, with Nick in his arms. As he left the cabin, he glanced at the hole in the floor which had caused all this. It must have been widened by the force of the water coming in. James kicked his legs as hard as he could, determined to reach the surface. He had long since run out of oxygen and was fighting on through sheer willpower alone.

He saw the darkness in the edge of his eyes closing in on him. Just as he was about to faint, James broke the surface of the water, taking in a deep, well-

deserved breath. He looked all around him for something, anything he could use. The life ring that had been on the back of the yacht was a few metres away. James grabbed it and put Nick in it. Then he saw a trawler coming towards them. James was filled with relief and began swimming for the trawler, dragging Nick along, shouting for help...

James was lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling, all of the bumps and trapped air within the paint captivated him. Nick hadn't survived, despite James's efforts. By the time he had gotten medical attention, it was too late. Divers had gone down to recover Emma and Colm for a burial on Irish soil.

They had found them, cold and lifeless in their cabins below deck. James had been silent since he had gotten back home and solemn at the funerals of his friends. And it was all his fault. James sat up to look at the other thing on his ceiling. It was a large amount of fibres woven together, tied in a simple loop. James made up his mind. James got out of bed.

Space Travel

Alex Flynn

I've walked. I've ran. I've cycled. I've fallen. But I've never done what I did today. I travelled. Space and time morphed around me, and I was traveling through dimensions unheard of and unfound. No living human apart from me has seen what I just have. This is the story of how I changed the world.

Sarasota Florida

I'm a seventeen-year old boy, I don't particularly have many friends, other than my cousin Rodney and best mate Leon. He's a Spanish exchange student in my class for the year studying English.

Late 2015

What all scientists would love to think is that they can do and what they actually can do has been nothing

but myths and it's the border between what defines someone as motivated or having been insane. So one day I was trying to build a machine to propel my bike faster. What happened that day was nothing short of a miracle. I mixed all chemicals under the sun to create an energy that powers itself. It's not like standard radiation which fades this was what I was working on for my space project for the 'today's youth scientists' competition.'

What I didn't know about what I was doing when combining all these chemicals in such a ridiculous dosage was that I could actually jump through time itself, I only needed a small portion such that it could fit in a watch and could keep the watch powered for ever and you'd never have to change the battery in your watch. I realised that I could possibly move this to the next level on a larger scale. So I joined the dinosaurs, watched the gladiators fight, partied in Long Island, stood at the top of the pyramids and sailed the Caribbean on the Queen Anne's Revenge. I felt like a made man doing what I couldn't in my own dimension of time.

Surfing a Pterodactyl

When I first put on the watch I didn't know I was about to be taken on the ride of my life, upon turning the watch on light flashed before my eyes and I was blinded. I found myself reliving my life backwards at high speed barely able to pick out the events, I wasn't sure what was happening at this stage in the

travel, all I knew was what went down that day was revolutionary.

I stopped at the top of a pterodactyl's nest in a mountain range. Suddenly, the mother came back to the nest so I went and hid. She was no larger than a cow so I wasn't scared. I felt in control and that it was friendly. From what has been told to me growing up as a kid about how vicious these creatures were, I realised that's a myth in its own right, after a while it screamed and I was caught out so I came out from behind the cliff's edge and it started to flare its wings. Soon it found out I wasn't a threat, put its head down and opened its wings as if to say 'Come along.' To my amazement I took a leap of faith and trusted everything which had happened so far so I never thought about it. We soared for miles. It brought me through the canyon and down by the river, up trees larger than cities wide and tower blocks high where worlds survived on branches, I saw creatures from history books everything from the notorious T-Rex to exotic butterflies.

The Party

All of a sudden the hands on my watch started to spin rapidly, next thing, I'm standing on the beach in long island, watching people stand off their boats. I turned around and there was a mansion, it was the 1950s, as the party went on I drank more and more. I was too intoxicated to know what I was doing. I fell off the second story balcony but that was sooner

over than I thought because the watch started to twirl again. Only God knew where I would end up.

The Moon

Apollo 11 was the first spaceflight that landed humans on the moon, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, on July 20, 1969, at 20:18. Armstrong became the first astronaut to step onto the lunar surface six hours later on July 21 at 02:56am, I was waiting in the shadows a stone's throw away, and I had changed history. I became the first man to walk on the moon. It was as if I was immune to the circumstances of which I travelled; as long as I had the watch on, I could breathe as if I did on a normal day, without question. My head didn't explode on the moon and I could breathe air. The watch left me in some sort of bubble; it protected me wherever I went- that's probably why the pterodactyl didn't kill me, and probably why it didn't let me fall to my death at the party or didn't let my head explode on the moon. Some things I put down to a miracle.

I was worried about my own time, home and family, but what I didn't realise was in my time I am not alive, I am not born.

As the Days Passed

I visited the Grand Canyon before it was grand, I stood on the Great Wall of China before it was great. I sat in the hand of Christ at the top of Christ the Redeemer in Rio. I did everything I ever wanted to do or could ever dream of-the Egyptians found me at the top of the first pyramid and I was zapped instantly. I did all this without anyone knowing I was gone; things people only wish they can achieve in their lifetime I did before I was born.

I started to feel sad, I got lonely of traveling the world. Once you see everything, it's very hard to re-join back to normality, and at this stage I wasn't totally sure how to go back home. But I didn't know where I would go next, or who to talk to, because I didn't want to change the future, my biggest fear was I'd be left in a loop.

Home

I took the watch off and I was teleported back to the exact place where I left from, but my house wasn't there and neither was my family. The world was a different place; wars were still happening, communist leaders ruled, and the allies never won the war. The pyramids never got built. A Statue of a traveling male was built instead of 'God'.

The Americans worshiped aliens instead of god. Hundreds died in search of what appeared to be an alien standing behind Buzz in the picture of the first man on the moon; classic photo-bomb. The

dinosaurs never became extinct and global warming was a myth. This is my story for why the world is the way it is. We live in one dimension of the truth; the truth can take many forms in other parallel universe alongside ours. This is proof that one man can change the lives of many like a god, good or bad.

Everyone who was surviving this apocalypse had ID chips, and you couldn't have children due to the possibility of a short life.

My potion was never created because I was never born; what people did and why they did it was because of me, and as a result of that my parents never met. I started to slowly disappear day by day, in the following days completing this paragraph.

If the Germans Won the War

Ryan Curley

Harvey Wilson woke up with a start. A bird had attempted to fly into his bedroom through the window and had therefore received a large bruise on its' temple, as well as making a small dent on Harvey's bunker. The year is 1948, three years after the Americans had surrendered to the Axis forces and the president had been shot dead in an execution authorised by the Führer himself. Harvey got dressed. Today he would wear his standard clothing on the way to the office, complete with a stamp he has to attach onto himself every morning so that when he passes the border, the army will easily recognise him as an ex-British citizen. The stamp is red in colour and is always applied to the left hand. It's always a number that is seven digits in length. It is known commonly as a PIN (personal identification number).

Harvey travelled past the high speed train station and entered a long line of workers attempting to pass through control undisturbed. Harvey had his

stamp checked by a man in Nazi uniform named Gunther who had been stationed in Greenwich, (Harvey had picked up that he was from Frankfurt). Harvey entered the I.C.R. building. The acronym stands quite simply for the Institution for Civil Rights (something Harvey rarely witnessed these days.) As hard as the office workers tried with their new technology using things like the new computerised screens and mobilised telephones, they were unable to give dark people equal rights or for women to be on equal wages as the men around them in the workplace.

The Nazi party were ruthless criminals and would continue to be unless the Freedom Fighters had anything to do with it. Who are the Freedom Fighters that I speak of, you ask? They are a small militia group composed of people who use guerrilla warfare tactics on a weekly basis more or less, carrying out attacks on various Nazi generals and other important figures. They have attempted (unsuccessfully) to bomb the Reichstag and also the buildings of parliament in London and even the White House in Occupied Eastern America. However, the Nazis were simply far superior with their machinery. The Freedom Fighters who had carried out the actions had been arrested, tried for treason and finally 'sent to the chair'. The group had claimed they were twenty five thousand strong, but alas, nobody these days believed this to be true.

'Gutentag Harvey' said Luna, a fellow worker in the office. Luna had just delivered Harvey his mail and had noticed he was in a state of trance. Why,

Harvey hadn't even started to write his morning letters to the council.

'Guten Morgen Luna,' he replied

After the Germans had claimed victory in France, they had made every single country that they had occupied use Deutsch as their official and only language. Hitler was not going to stop until every corner of the globe was speaking Deutsch. Harvey got to work. It was almost impossible at times for Harvey to put pen to paper and this morning was to be no exception. Outside the trees were blowing in the wind, making a soft gentle noise like that sound of a car passing nearby on the motorway. Only German cars were allowed these days, the Volkswagen Beetle proving to be the most popular. Almost everyone had one at the office, (Harvey preferred to cycle when he could but used public transport otherwise).

Being under the control of the Germans wasn't all bad. They were brilliant with technology. Lots of modern advances had been achieved because of them. Transport (on roads, rail, boat and aeroplane) were as fast as they had ever been. Hitler had been pouring lots of money into the military for a while after the war to ensure any revolution would be put down easily but now, his main focus was on advancing the technology for other uses. There were cameras everywhere, watching people's every move (well, almost everywhere). Harvey had spotted a few areas naked to the eyes of the cameras on the streets, where certain people could easily go about

unspotted, as long as the various patrols around London didn't catch sight of them.

CRASH!! A loud noise near the window to the far corner of the room had turned everyone's attention to it. The glass was now shattered and on the floor, and an alarm above Harvey's head had begun to wail. Several men clad in black clothing had stormed through the window and were now reaching for the machine guns they had strapped to their shoulders. The men had covered their faces with balaclavas so the only skin Harvey could make out was of the slits between the eyes and the forehead. They opened fire. First they had aimed at the roof but thankfully Harvey had guessed their next move in time. He jumped down behind his desk and lay on the cold, granite floor and listened as his co-workers' screams became quieter as they dropped to the floor one by one being taken out by the rifle bullets. The men fired on Luna, poor helpless Luna. She was dead within seconds and had fallen right in front of a petrified Harvey. He watched as a new river of blood that had been formed as a result of the bullet hole began to ooze down her left cheek and on towards her neck, disappearing under her green jacket. Harvey lay perfectly motionless. The last of the used bullet shrapnel had fallen to the floor. He could hear the men creeping slowly towards where he lay in search of any survivors. It had all happened so very fast. One of the men had barred the office door closed with a nearby desk but not before throwing a tear gas bomb down the corridor of the Left Wing. Harvey pretended to be dead. He had spread his

arm out on the ground. He fancied himself to be a good actor, sadly the Freedom Fighters (or whoever the mysterious men were), had not been under an equal influence. Harvey had taken an extremely deep breath amongst the panic and one of the men had spotted his chest rise by at least two centimetres and had raised his gun shouting something in what sounded like a French accent. Before he could pull the trigger, shouting could be heard from the corridor outside and had immediately caused panic amongst the men. The one who had been about to shoot Harvey took hold of him instead shouting in broken English 'I want to go now!' He grabbed hold of Harvey and dragged him along. They got to the window with the others just before the door to the office had begun being demolished by the Nazi soldiers outside. There had been some Nazis waiting on the street in case the fighters were to escape, however the Freedom Fighters had been quick to eliminate them. One shot of those long range guns of theirs would probably reach Cornwall in a matter of minutes. The men threw a rope down and began to descend the building, four floors up.

They reached ground level and immediately began to sprint, the man making sure to keep hold of Harvey, maintaining the firmest of grips on him as the squadron entered a back alleyway. The laneway smelled of urine and other human excrement with no thanks to an open drain leading to the London sewers below. The troop emerged from the alleyway onto Himmler Street (what Harvey once knew as Oxford Street). The troops kept running aware of a

newly formed sound, the noise of heavy machinery on tank tracks. The Nazi Panzer unit liked to use Tiger tanks as they were agile in almost every way. Harvey described them often as 'Super Tanks'. 'Come on' shouted one of the men, this time in what sounded like an Italian accent or at least, his voice had the flow of an Italian man. The troops (about six in total), rounded another corner and jumped down behind a large wooden crate with a stamped 'fragile' symbol on its lid. They listened as at least two tanks rolled on past, searching everything visible to them. Everything had happened so fast, in a matter of minutes, Harvey had been taken from his original workplace by men who he did not know and was now being forced down a nearby manhole. Harvey descended the ladder slowly, being careful in the process. The sewer to which he and the troops after him had been climbing to was murky and damp and gave off a smell similar to that of the back of a truck of waste on a summer's day and, if you do not know what it is that I am writing about, you can count yourself very lucky indeed. Harvey held his breath, apparently the other men had been used to this scent as neither of them had made a squeal quite like Harvey's. In fact, Harvey had only just realised that the men had been wearing small, white apparatus in front of their mouths, probably to prevent being affected by their gas bombs. Even though Harvey could not see their faces too well as they regrouped at the bottom of the once golden and now mossy green ladder, he could tell that the men's faces were more or less expressionless. 'It would appear we have some explaining to do, partner'. The

man, the tallest of the group was almost certainly American. He stepped forward, gun in hand and aimed it at Harvey. 'However, we ain't got time for ya'.

'Wait!' screamed Harvey knowing that he would spend the final moments of a rather short-lived life (considering he was thirty), inside a damn sewer. The man did wait. He pulled his gun (a large handgun) away and listened.

'I could be of some assistance to you, perhaps.' The man was clearly considering this. To have taken Harvey from a top research building on Oxford Street must have meant that he had some form of intelligence that would be of value to them.

'How?' said the American, the others listening in attentively. Harvey's whole life began to zoom at supersonic speed like something out of a picture show flying right past his eyes. Harvey saw his wife, Mary, being taken from their old home in Kent. The Nazis had raided their home and taken her away as she screamed to be brought back to her husband. It had been something she had said while teaching her class of primary school children at the local school (The Goebbels Elementary of Kent). She had said something, something to her class about how Hitler had been ruling the country in a cruel manner. Being an Aryan she may have been given some leeway, however it was not to be. A boy from her class had run home after school to tell his mother the news. Hoping for a reward to help purchase more rations, she telephoned the local SS station. Later that night,

the Gestapo (the secret police), had raided their home and taken her, possibly to the extermination camp in Manchester, either way, never to be seen again.

'I am good at code-breaking and- and stuff like that,' exclaimed Harvey nervously, thankful he had been given at least a few more moments to live. He had been telling the truth. He had practiced breaking codes on the back of the local newspaper, *Deustch mail*.

'Well alright then, but seeing as you ain't got no proof, partner-'

The tall man was interrupted. A large explosion which had sounded like a bomb outside had gone off destroying everything in its path, including the manhole above them as well as leaving a few newly formed cracks in the surface and also allowing a flood of light beaming down to where the ladder descended along the red brick wall.

'Run!' shouted the American, and apparently just in the nick of time too. A Nazi had already begun to climb down the ladder, followed closely behind by another man. Harvey didn't dare look back once more. He followed the small trail of light leading the way from the supposedly Frenchman's torch. The group, now seven in total hurried down the sewer, Harvey being extra careful to hold his breath.

They ran for what had felt like hours but was really just about ten minutes. Harvey had realised that he was slowly falling behind. The troop were

quick, far too quick. He was being shouted at by the Frenchman, who was saying 'Quickly, Quickly. Late'. Harvey knew that the Frenchman probably hadn't been studying English for very long. Finally, the troop spotted light at the end of the murky tunnel. They kept running, soldiering on. They emerged from the tunnel, unfollowed. On the ground beside them where the strangely coloured water had been flowing slowly, lay a very rusty drain, Harvey had presumed it had originally been black in colour rather than its new, brown coat. A small sign at the bottom of it had read, for His Majesty the King of England, 1933. The drain had been lying there for some time, coming into battle with Mother Nature, a fight which it would never win. They had emerged by the Thames, but well out of London. Harvey didn't even recognise these areas, probably because of the bomb sites.

'Follow me!' said one of the men, clearly in a hurry. The troop rushed Harvey to a rundown building soaring into the sky, at least six stories tall. The building was of limestone structure and had something written in Latin across its wooden doors. The windows had been either smashed with rocks by passers-by or merely abandoned to become laden with dust and grime so that it was impossible for Harvey to make out the murky building's contents. They opened the wooden doors with ease before the final troop clambered in. It took three men to close it once more. Lights had been on in what looked like a basement, lying under a half-opened trapdoor, which had blended in with the oak wood floor around it.

'Well', said the American. 'Why don't you climb on down and meet our comrades, sir? I never did catch yer name'.

'It's Harvey....Wilson'.

'Nice to meet ye Harvey, my name's William, but people just call me Buck'.

'Thanks for not killing me earlier' Harvey said, hoping he was in the clear.

'Oh don't worry 'bout it, I knew you might be of some sort of assistance to us.'

'I hear you're speaking English. I haven't spoken English to others in quite some time. In fact, I've been speaking Deustch for so long that every time I think to myself it is in German'. Harvey could tell that Buck was smiling. Harvey was still full of questions. Had he been having a conversation with terrorists? And did he like their ideals after all? The others had begun to take off their clothing. For the first time, Harvey could see their faces. The Frenchman and the Italian clearly looked like they had indeed been from those countries. The Frenchman had a wispy moustache and a slightly worn mid to late thirties face, whereas for the Italian was of a darker skin tone with a long, black moustache (apparently moustaches were in fashion, as the American had one too), but the Italian's hair had clearly been combed, even though it had been affected by the balaclava. The American had grey hair and looked to be the oldest (and tallest), of the group. His face had been wrinkled, like the

Frenchman's. The other men appeared normal (possibly Eastern European judging by their buff appearance.) Before Buck had begun to descend the stairs with the rest of the troops, Harvey asked him one final question.

'Where are we?'

'I would have thought, with brains like yours, that ye might figure that one out for yourself'. He looked around the room. Seeing Harvey's puzzled expression, Buck gave in. 'We're the Freedom Fighters, you idiot!' he said it with a smile on his face, and that proved to be enough for Harvey to know that he was in the right place and he climbed down the ladder. The light was dim but supplied enough for Harvey to look around.

'Oh my word!' he exclaimed as he climbed down the final section of the ladder, remembering it had been the second time he had descended one today. There must have been fifty or possibly sixty men wearing multi-form down there that day. When Buck had descended the ladder, the congregation rose, bowing their heads. Harvey found a spot around the dim room and did the same. The men had been gathered around a small table where the only supply of light, the green lampshade beamed, reflecting its shadow on the table. 'Thank you for coming out here today men' started Buck, the freedom fighters raising their heads to listen to their leader speak.

'It would appear we salvaged a new recruit today from our raid of the government building on

Himmler Street. Would Harvey Wilson please raise his paw?’ Harvey did as he was told putting his right hand in the air, almost reaching the ceiling. It was only then Harvey had realised that the men around him, who were now looking in his direction had been, more or less crouched. ‘There he is’ continued Buck. ‘How ‘bout we give our new technology man a round of applause?’ No sooner had Buck said this than for the hall to erupt with applause. Harvey had almost been deafened by the time the final clap (by a small man wearing spectacles in the corner), had been produced. Buck began to share his plans of strikes and what not with his troops. He had given a great speech although it seemed to go on for hours. Buck clearly knew what he was talking about and had probably studied previous war tactics well. In fact, Harvey was glad to say he was on Buck’s side.

The meeting finished. The men began to ascend the ladder and then disperse from the old building one by one until Harvey and Buck were the only remaining people. ‘So, what do you think?’ asked Buck.

‘Well I am certainly fond of your ideals, but I am sorry to say that I wouldn’t have been much use to you out there’,

‘Don’t be too hard on yourself partner. Besides, you’re are tech guy. You’ll know what to do when the times right’.

‘I just hope we get these fools sooner rather than later, for the good of the world.’ ‘We’ve started to recruit in other countries’ said Buck ‘and it’s going

well too, So far, we've recruited over 5,000 new members in the past few weeks alone. I'll tell you somethin'. We gon' beat these God damned criminals, and we gon' beat 'em soon, just you wait'. And so, he strode away into the distance like the rest of his merry troops, until he merely became a dot on the horizon. Buck was a noble man, and even walked as if he meant severe trouble to those who opposed him. Harvey was left to himself in the derelict building, and so he walked back home knowing he had found himself a new job as police cars raced past him, in search of his new co-workers who were already miles away ,about to cause mischief elsewhere. For the benefit of the people of course.

Super Bowl 50: Green Bay Packers VS New England Patriots

Liam Bradley

‘On February 7th 2016, the Packers will play the Patriots at Levis Stadium in Santa Clara, California. The game has been highly anticipated for months. The Patriots are easily favourites after going 11-5 in the regular season’ announced the smiley news reader. ESPN and many other sports channels all had the same idea. Get dozens of retired sportsmen and pundits of the game to discuss tactics and present useless facts that will have no factor in the outcome of the game. However, that’s the usual conundrum and hype that happens in the days and weeks leading up to the game. Although this year was slightly different as it was Super Bowl 50, the fiftieth year of the Lombardi trophy being fought, tooth and nail, on one green field in one stadium between two 25 man teams and their respective dozens of backroom staff. My name is Liam Bradley and I am the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers

and I will take you through the role I played in the most important game of my career.

First of all we had to make it to the Super Bowl to begin with. In our Divisional playoff we knocked away the Minnesota Vikings who had a surprisingly strong season. We beat them 28-16. Then in the Conference playoff, we played the Seattle Seahawks who had taken some shocking losses over the course of the season. We only barely escaped them after having to go to overtime to win. We sneaked away with a 36-28 win. It had been a tough season for us, we had been hit with many harsh injuries but we were pumped and ready to go. There was also a huge amount of pride amongst our squad and our fans as we had been one of the teams back in the first Super Bowl all the way back in January 1967. On that day we beat the Kansas City Chiefs 35-10, however the game was very different back then and we knew it would not be as easy this time round.

Our squad landed into Santa Clara on January 31st 2016 so as to access the training facilities and get ourselves comfortable in this new city. We arrived at San Jose International Airport mid-afternoon and so we got some time to ourselves before we had to head back in for curfew. Curfew was set for 10 o'clock as we had an early and long training session tomorrow morning.

So with my free time I began to go out and explore the city with a few other teammates from the offense team. We walked through the city streets,

admiring the pretty views and noticing how different California was to Wisconsin. One thing that we particularly enjoyed was taking in the warmth of sunny California, something we weren't used to up in Green Bay, Wisconsin. We ended the day of exploration at a small, homely cafe where we just had some general discussion and voiced our opinions on the big game and other talking points throughout the season. We got a taxi back to our hotel and the majority of us decided to hit the gym for about an hour just so we could prepare our bodies for tomorrow's gruelling training session.

After I was finished at the gym I grabbed something to take up to my room with me to eat while I watched some TV to unwind before I slept. I watched about an hour of a boring reality show about real estate agents in New York City before turning off the light and going to sleep for 11:30.

The next morning the whole team had to be down at the breakfast buffet for 9:30. It was like any other breakfast buffet with what seemed like hundreds of sausages, bacon and several different types of eggs. There were large containers of about seven different cereals and huge vats of apple, orange and grapefruit juice. Finally, there were loads of different fruits and natural yoghurts for people who preferred those things. We were told that we could eat whatever we wanted but to remember the fact that we would be having a very, very long session today, and that they trusted us to make the right call about

our diets. After breakfast we all piled onto the team bus and headed off to the training grounds. A local college team, the Santa Clara Broncos, were kind enough to let us use their facilities for the week. The pitch was immaculate and the dressing rooms were spotless, and so after a few minutes of putting on our training gear we headed out. We started off with some stretches to get the muscles going and then we got straight into circuits. There were two different circuit routes laid out, one for offence and one for defence. The circuit for offense consisted of things like mountain climbers, squats, sit ups, push ups, lunges and planks. There were short sprints and ladder shuffles and a few weights to work with. Both squads did five laps of their respective circuits with about two minutes or so being spent on most exercises. We then did some more stretches and did more push-ups, squats and sit ups as a team, with each person having to count out ten of each simultaneously. Then we split into our two squads and had a match of sorts, however it was non-contact with tags being used instead of full force tackles to avoid injuries. This gave us an opportunity to test the defence out to make sure they were still sharp but also so as to make sure that we the offence knew what was going on and to take any and all rust off our plays and receivers. The training session then involved the kickers, making sure they could kick from different positions and angles on the field. We had a quick cool down and wrapped things up on the session which lasted just over three hours. We all got changed and headed back home to the hotel, we were told on the bus that we were to report

to the Physio once we got back in case of any injuries or tweaks.

This timetable was followed almost every day with everyone being given free time in the evening. The only exception to this was the few interviews that were required off us as a team but also individuals. The usual questions being asked such as 'How are you feeling going into the match?' and 'Who do you think are the most dangerous players to come up against from the Patriots?' After all of this it finally rolled around to match day. I stood in the dressing room, all my gear on and looked at my jersey with its number 74 printed on the back and thought 'This is finally it, everything I've worked off pays off now'. At exactly 5:00 the kicker of the Patriots launched the ball down to us to start the game.

The first quarter was a scrappy one, with both teams trying to find their footing by making various drives up the field but not finding much success at all. Several fumbles and interceptions were made by both teams during the first ten minutes or so.

However, with about five minutes left in the quarter we managed to make some serious progress up the pitch after I managed to throw some clever plays by making it look like I would pass to one player and then actually pass to another. This worked quite well and we managed to push very far up the field, unfortunately we had to opt to kick a field goal as the timer was running out for this quarter, this allowed us to go into the second quarter with a lead of three points to nil.

When the second quarter began we had to kick in down to the Patriots who managed to make a good ten or fifteen yards as their player had some good pace on him. The Patriots offensive line managed to push up the field rapidly, their play book was clearly well adapted to many, many different forms of defence and they definitely started the second quarter with a bang.

Unfortunately, we couldn't quite hold up and we conceded an early touchdown with the one-point conversion field goal added one making it 3-7 at roughly four minutes into the second quarter. We knew that to swing things back into our favour we would have to play some smart football and mix up our style so as to have the advantage of surprise. We decided to make a fair catch when we received the ball meaning that we didn't start running once we received the ball, we set it down and made a play instead. One big advantage we had was that one of our wide receivers was very agile and pacy so I made the call that we should try utilise him by allowing him to slip through both our defensive and their offensive lines. We used a play that made it look like I was to throw the ball hard and long but in reality I was to hand it off to our receiver, the number 34, Owens and allow him to slip through a small gap in the defence before rushing to block for him so he wasn't flattened by a tackle from one of their bulkier tacklers. This strategy worked brilliantly on our first try and Owens managed to not only slip two defenders but he also managed to rush several yards. Both myself and the coach were so happy

with this we agreed to try it again on our next drive. Unfortunately, their defensive line was much more wary and only allowed Owens a few measly yards before absolutely bulldozing him. This meant we had barely made any progress into the required ten yards and we only had two drives left, so I made the choice to go for a long pass up the pitch, this did carry a risk as I had less control of where a long pass might go but I decided it was our best option at that point. Seconds after the ball was snapped towards me I was scanning the pitch, looking for the best option to pass towards, after less than fifteen seconds of deliberation I skyrocketed a pass up the field towards our number 88, Hart.

Myself and every other Packers fan had their heartbroken as he was swamped by three defenders and my pass was intercepted with the Patriots defensive end rushing up the pitch, trying to recover as many yards for his team as possible.

As I turned to walk over to the side-lines so the defensive squad could take their place I could see the Patriots quarterback, Tom Brady, having a last minute tactical talk with their coach and my disappointment in myself grew stronger. Brady was one of the best ever and there would be no doubt he'd capitalize on my mistakes.

There were only a few minutes left in the quarter but that was all Brady needed to add another seven points to contribute to the growing gaps between us. With only about thirty seconds left in the quarter, the Patriots sat roughly five yards from our

end zone, they had scored a second touchdown but were trying to go for a two-point conversion instead of the normal one point, and all they had to do was get the ball into the end zone one more time. The ball was snapped, but suddenly the biggest tackler on our team, Perry, crunched Brady with a killer tackle which caused the fumble and the ball to go dead. It was a massive relief as the Patriots could have gotten a twelve-point lead if they had succeeded there. The whistle blew for the half and both teams marched into the tunnel for some gruelling and tactical team talks as the audience and organisers got ready to set the pitch and stadium up for the halftime show, performed by Coldplay and Beyoncé. There was also a hustle of reporters gathered around to get prime positions at match side to give updates and easily fifty or sixty TV stations starting their halftime analysis. With the retired pros picking apart pros and cons in both teams and offering suggestions on how to continue.

The two team talks that happened in the Packers and Patriots dressing rooms respectively were probably very different, we were being rinsed through for making sloppy plays and not using our skills or time on the ball well, whereas I imagine the Patriots were feeling happy as Larry and knew they had complete control going into the second half. Unfortunately, this situation felt pretty familiar. As a professional athlete you can't always lead the game or the pack, and so there are times when you go into halftime trailing, and it is a frustrating experience. However, I was the captain and I couldn't let the

team get too down about themselves. I rallied the guys around me and I spoke with pride and passion about not just the ups and downs from the season just gone, such as close losses, edgy calls that didn't go our way, injuries to people who did nothing but work hard for the team but now couldn't play their hearts out to see their hard work pay off but I also talked about all the heartbreak from past seasons, with our playoff hopes being shattered with bad performances or being beaten at the last hurdle and some of the struggles we'd helped each other with through the years.

Finally, I reminded them all of all the years they'd devoted to the game from their years in high school or even before that to this moment right here. I reminded them how much they had dreamed, hoped and worked for this one opportunity. I gave it everything I had and could only hope that it had resonated with the lads. Plus, I also reminded them that if we won, we could party until we couldn't even walk right, let alone win a football match. We marched out onto that field in California with our heads held high and our hearts and minds filled with steel. We could and we would win this match, and nothing would stop us.

Straight from the kick-off of the third quarter we immediately started running up the pitch, making maybe fifteen yards before being stopped, but we were happy with that. We instantly started our first drive so as to not lose any momentum, and quickly used a simple play so I could reel off a quick short

pass up the pitch, which just about took us over the required ten yards.

Things were going well as we used a mixture of both running and passing plays to make our way up the pitch. The Patriots' defence tried their best to stop our totalitarian march up the pitch, but couldn't seem to handle our new found passion and determination to win this game. We made quick work of the whole process and with barely any time off the clock I threw a pass over the top to Hart for the touchdown. With this and a well-placed conversion kick from our kicker we brought the score to 13-10 in favour of the Patriots.

I was secretly a tad worried that our defence wouldn't be able to handle the offence of the Patriots, but my words of motivation must have stuck with them because they played a hard game. It was like an iron curtain had gone up in front of the Patriots' offence, and no matter how hard they ran at it, it just wouldn't crumble. In fact, our defence did so well that they caused a turnover on downs and allowed our offensive squad to come back on much quicker than anticipated but it also meant that we could score again straight after the Patriots had failed to capitalise. It was almost as if we'd been sent a signal to make this one count. As we had gotten the ball due to a turnover on downs, there was no need for a kick and we got to start playing about three quarters of the field away from their end zone. We used the same tactics as last time, playing good, simple, flowing football to quickly make our way to a few yards from the end zone.

However, instead of passing it into the end zone, I myself went for the touchdown by slipping through a gap in the Patriots' defence for a rushing touchdown. We felt courageous and so made a two-point conversion to make the score 13-18 in our favour. This was exactly the type of play style we had needed all along and we now had a good five-point lead to protect. Once again our defence was like an unmovable wall, but this time we started to crack, and while we still prevented them from scoring a touchdown we unfortunately conceded a field goal which made the score 16-18. Then the buzzer sounded - the third quarter was over. I was relieved as it gave us a chance to gather our thoughts before the final quarter, where we could either defend our lead or fight to extend it.

As we chatted as a team during the break, all I could think about was how close I was to winning the Super Bowl. Despite having a relatively successful career in terms of League titles and being mentioned in MVP discussions, I had never won a Super Bowl. This was my third attempt. I had lost to the Patriots last year and to the Baltimore Ravens in 2013 but I had still managed to keep the support of the fans through all of this. I knew that this year would be different though. This year, I would do it. We put our hands into the team huddle one last time and after a count of three we shouted "Go Pack Go" and threw our hands into the air one final time. Our defensive squad jogged out onto the pitch and launched the ball down the end to the Patriots. They made some good yards before being halted, however for the next

few drives they made steady progress up the pitch and after a while of this I began to get a little antsy.

Suddenly there was a quick snap on their play and a long ball was sent up the pitch by Brady. It was caught nicely and the receiver jukeed his defender to run into the end zone. Our whole team was distraught, and we couldn't believe we'd slipped up for just a fraction of a second and paid such a costly price. Suddenly a mountain of pressure fell back onto my shoulders, I knew I had to score a touchdown and also risk going for the two-point conversion due to the score now being 22-18 to the Patriots. I began to plot on how to make up the deficit with my offensive line when I had an idea, what if we utilized the quick running play using Owens the receiver that had worked so well earlier.

We lined up slightly different this time with Owens received the ball on the other side of the offensive line. He was now coming in from the left and a different player was blocking for him but it would hopefully work to the same effect. We quickly snapped the ball and I handed it off to Owens who immediately set a blistering pace after having the tackle blocked for him. He proceeded to rush a further thirty-two yards before just being caught by a nimbler member of the defence. We knew not to make the same mistake as last time though and I threw a quick, short pass over the top and thankfully Hart was there to receive for me and took the ball another twenty yards. These were two excellent plays and had brought us much closer to the end zone than expected. I decided one long pass would

just about do it and sent it up the field where it was caught gracefully and brought into the end zone. We added the two-point conversion to go back to the side-lines with a lead of 26-22.

Our defence, determined to make it up for their mistakes stood tall, once again allowing only a field goal bringing it back to 26-25. But for once I wasn't worried and felt confident we could manage another touchdown, which we did with relative ease and kicked our one-point conversion too. I sensed that the Patriots defence was really tiring and despite their best efforts just couldn't stop us. We swapped squads once again and this time our defence held strong and forced a turnover on downs once again for the Patriots. With only a few minutes left on the clock we decided to play it slow and let it all wind down a bit. We finished the quarter and the game off by kicking a field goal which left the final score 34-25 to us. Even though the game ended with a fizzle the second the buzzer marking the end went off there was carnage.

From various points around the stadium, cannons shot out gold, green and silver streams of confetti and our whole squad and coaching staff and swarms of photographers invaded the pitch to celebrate and snap photos of the moment and the emotions felt. I wasn't even aware of this, I sat on the ground with my helmet at my feet and head in my hands, and I was trying to keep tears of happiness away from the surface. But out of nowhere I heard my name being called and Owens came over, pulling me up and embracing me in a bear hug, he

whispered ‘ We did it homie’ in my ear and gave me a beaming smile. I nodded silently, no words were able to escape my mouth. I turned away from him though and walked over to the opposing team’s captain and quarterback, Tom Brady. I shook his hand and we grinned and exchanged some compliments about each other and the game, he told me I was a superb player and I deserved this. We promised to speak after the game and I went off and celebrated with my teammates but I also offered commiserations to other Patriots players. After about ten minutes of these celebrations we all gathered round a podium and I was handed the Vince Lombardi trophy. Everything I’d ever wanted since I was a small child was in my hands and I couldn’t be happier. I raised the trophy into the air and we as a team paraded around the stadium a bit more. It was going to be a long night of partying that’s for sure. Although a part of me didn’t even care about this. I was just happy to finally have accomplished my dreams.

The Elite

Peter Hackett

The Empire has expanded beyond the borders of reality. Its infinite quest to conquer all of reality had brought destruction of countless lives, planets and entire star systems. Wars have broken out on the empire's own worlds. When this starts, the Elite are sent in to 'deal' with the problem. The following events took place on Hercules 16, a small mining colony on the outskirts of the CG empire border line.

0543 Hours. 7526.

Planet: Hercules 16

[Classified]

The Drop ship was flying at an altitude of 5,000 feet exactly, and it was buzzing with the sounds of the engines. It was a bumpy ride down but the drop ship held in one piece. The rest of the Elite were sitting down checking their own ammunition, some of them passing the time by playing poker amongst themselves. The pilot said that we should be at the

drop off point in 3 minutes. We came roaring down and the hatch opened. We jumped out: Sgt. Mcree, a Veteran from the First Human CG Infantry. Cpl. Verana and J the Silent, who were twins, and were part of the Shadow Division. And finally myself, Pvt. First Class Frank. The five of us had a mission and we would complete our objective.

0621 Hours. 7526.

Planet: Hercules 16

[Classified]

We had set up camp in a small cave about three miles from the nearest settlement. It was early in the morning, and the little town was hard to spot even with sixteen-times magnification scope attached to the sniper. After we checked out supplies we went down the hill. We didn't talk during missions, but we knew we all had one to complete, and we all knew what we were thinking. I was near the edge of a cliff when the ground made a cracking sound and gave in. I began to plunge, but my gun's strap thankfully caught on a branch, Verana quickly grabbed me and pulled me up. Though I was thankful, she always gave me the chills; her helmet had a smiley face sprayed on to it, and her brother had a sad face sprayed onto his. They never spoke to us, only to each other.

0854 Hours. 7526.

Planet: Hercules 16

[Classified]

We were walking down a narrow road, when we came under fire just south of the town. We were whizzing between street corners and parked vehicles. We needed to find out who shot at us and where they got weaponry from. As we headed down the street, it was quiet. We saw an animal every so often. We had our M16's at the ready, anyone armed or with a motive to kill us was to be put down. Permanently

1032 Hours. 7562

Planet: Hercules 16

[Classified]

As we made our way to a small warehouse we noticed some people loading some SPNKR rockets into an armoured vehicle. A SPNKR rocket could be used to take down a Phantom drop ship. We had our evidence that the planet was armed and was hostile towards members of the CG Empire. We took some old warehouse parts and started boarding up the building. We were spotted. They knew where we were and they would be coming for us. After a short while we had blocked all but one entrance which we lined with explosives. We then piled up the ammo. Mcree then spoke.

'We need to prep' for combat. The insurgents spotted us and they are coming to hunt us down. We will fight to the last ounce of lead and steel, we have

the ammo to tear them to shreds. I radioed for air support, and they said that they are under heavy assault from insurgent Battle Cruisers. This whole damn thing was a trap. They knew we were coming. Verana take a window and pick off anyone you see in your line of sight. Twins guard the entrance and private stay with me near the radio'.

I went with the Sarge and began prepping for combat.

1142 Hours. 7562

Planet: Hercules 16

[Classified]

The armoured cars smashed through the defences only to be devastated by the explosives we lined up. The twin's tore through anyone who ran into the room. Verana reported sightings of light armour approaching from down the road. The wall exploded as a small tank drove in and started blindly shooting up the place with its 50 calibre machine gun strapped to the barrel of the tank. I slid two grenade's underneath it's tracks. The grenade went off and reduced the tank to fiery scrap metal. More soldiers streamed in nearly overwhelming us. My M16 jammed leaving me to use a M1911 pistol which I rarely used. I then noticed that all my other squad members had reverted to handguns as well as their weapon's had ran out of ammo or jammed. I could hear the round's in the gun empty as I fired upon the men who were charging me. CLICK. The pistol went dry...I threw the gun at the crowd and drew my

knife. I charged them and stabbed and sliced my way out of the crowd. There must have been hundreds of them. Mcrecree was punching and kicking as they pulled him away, the twins were going mad with machetes and Verana had climbed onto the roof only to be shot by enemy snipers. I fell to the ground in pure and utter confusion.

1921 Hours. 7562

Planet: Hercules 16

[Classified]

I awoke to see hundreds of dead soldier's scattered around the warehouse. It was pitch black outside as the sun got blocked by the massive space station around the orbit of the star, Chiron 7. I limped over to the badly built M16 rifle covered in spray paint. I slung it onto my back grabbed a medical kit and some ammo. I walked out onto the empty street. The town was abandoned. I walked out and spent a few hours heading to the rendezvous point.

2132 Hours. 7562

Planet: Hercules 16

[Classified]

I arrived at the point and found the twins sitting down and just watching the sky above. I asked how they survived and they just stared at me with those helmets they never took off. In that second a CG Battle Cruiser came out of down from above. A Phantom Class drop ship whizzed to our location just when the cruiser bombarded the planet with plasma. I watched as the planet burned. I wondered if Mcree escaped. I was sent to A&E to hear that I had a broken leg and a collapsed lung. I was then told to take a four-month break from military service till I healed. As I walked out Commander Rugnof stood there.

‘Pvt. you have shown honour to the face of death. You held your ground against all odds. You have proven your leadership to me and when you return you shall not be a Pvt. no more.’

He handed me uniform that was commissioned for Sergeants. I got the first drop ship home.

2253 Hours. 7565

Planet: ----- Battle Cruiser Osiris

[Redeployment]

In the years that followed I had climbed the ranks and had been given the honour of being part of Crazy General’s personal task force on the Cruiser Osiris. I lead my men with honour, as Mcree did before.

Crazy General Laboratories

Peter Hackett

As I walked out of the car parked in spot C0942 I realised how dull this planet really was. Its surface was brown and sturdy, yet dark and empty, and the only thing that stood out was a huge white building surrounded by lights that led to the words centred on the top reading 'CRAZY GENERAL LABORATORIES'. I had been stationed at this new and fully operational lab after Chrous 153 was taken over by insurgents a few months ago. The Empire refused to risk taking it back as it was too close to the front lines near their Battle Fleet. Everyone who was moved here got a small house built near the main building.

I walked into the building. Its white walls gleamed in the lights yet there was no one here, save for a simple maintenance drone which was repairing some visible wires hanging from the wall. The drone was a box shape that was the size of a man, and had a robotic camera for an eye. It had an anti-gravity generator to give it movement. It had the

words 'Bubblegum' on the side implying its nickname was Bubblegum. Its friendly name was questionable, however. It was armed with two .50 calibre machine guns and a blade used to cut through walls to get at wires. As I approached it the drone made a ninety degree turn to face me and it seemed to 'stare' at me for a bit. After a moment it spoke in a robotic voice.

'Hello and welcome back to the facility, scientist [15305]. Please continue to [experimental department 032] and remember: science is more important than your life'.

The drone then returned to its job and I continued to the elevator.

It took me a quarter of an hour to reach my position. The laboratory was built underground stretching from the surface to the core where the backup generator was storing radiation from the core to power the lab if the nuclear reactor was damaged or destroyed. The lab took two years to build as the entire crust layer and below was converted into buildings or test chambers. As I looked up I saw thousands of drones zooming into vents and buildings, moving to different areas and completing their duties. I proceeded to my department when, near the exit, I was stopped by two guards who, to my relief, simply told me that the equipment I had ordered had arrived and they had dropped it at my desk. Those guards were the things of nightmares. They wore helmets with glowing red eyes and they had lines on their armour marking their amount of kills in combat. Their rifles were hanging over their

shoulders. I entered the area and found my colleagues working hard. The sound of chatting filled the room, giving an atmosphere of success.

I walked into my office and found the package I ordered sitting there. I began tearing it open with joy as if Christmas had come early. As I cleared away the bubble wrap I saw it: a picture of my family that I had in my old office on Chrous. I told the Empire I would continue my work if they sent a taskforce to get me this back. Of course they obliged. As I looked at the picture I saw a letter in the box. I began to look at it - it had my name written on it - and then opened the letter. I was completely blown away. It was written by Crazy General himself. Not typed. Written to me, a single scientist deep in Experimental Department 32. I quickly ran to the door and closed it; I did not want to be disturbed while I read this. I turned the lamp on, sat down and pulled the letter up. It read:

Dear Mr McCoy

We hope you enjoy this item the task force of Orion was able to retrieve from the abandoned facility on Chrous 153. It was a strategic effort that was able to take the facility back and retrieve the item. Though we took the facility back, it was not for long. Three days later the facility exploded due to the insurgents' lack of mechanical skill the facility's nuclear reactor detonated, killing most of task force Orion. We were able to get a drop ship and pick up the soldier responsible for retrieving this item and getting

it to us as soon as possible. We hope that you continue to please us and hope that you will be more 'acceptable' in the future.

Crazy General
C.E.O of Crazy General Laboratories
Ruler of the CG Empire

I threw the note in the bin, it was a surprise to receive a letter from the highest ranking member within the Empire. I continued out of my office into the workplace. There was work that needed to be done. I marched down the endless doorways and corridors. I was told to meet someone as they had made a breakthrough. As I arrived at the area I noticed a massive mechanical object hanging from the ceiling being held together by wires and parts, I instantly knew who this thing was.

Over the course of years, Crazy General Laboratories were trying to copy an Artificial Intelligence Unit similar to the other CG labs and although we were close, we always made mistakes. This was the 24th attempt at making it,

'So, you think it will work this time without attempting to kill us?' I asked.

But I didn't know who was talking to. From the darkness, a figure walked out. He had a plague mask on and blue and yellow robes. This was Crazy General.

He simply stared at me and stated:

'Well, let's just say that I went and made a copy of the original file from him in the other CG labs.'

Crazy General never made sense. He was a military officer and leader, but it was always his commanders who ran the show. The suit he wore was made to hide him from the universe and the laws of time itself. As long as he wore that, he by the laws of reality did not exist here.

After a cough I managed to stammer out,

'Well Sir, I think we should leave it alone. After all, we don't want the same incident like the Mark 1'

'Nah, let's turn it on now!'

With those words a drone came in and turned on the machine. A few seconds later the AI's core lit up, and its blue eye turned on. Then we heard the Security AI speak.

'JeRaid online...power up complete'

Suddenly the AI began moving and stared right at Crazy General.

'Sir? When did you arrive in Crazy General Labr-

'Wait a second, this isn't my facility?' Crazy General spoke.

'This is the Empire's Crazy General Laboratories, but this is your facility. A new CG Lab so that you can continue researching'

'More science? Yes, I love science'

The laboratory began moving; JeRaid was reconfiguring the facility to his liking.

After a few days the facility was completely computer automated, He controlled everything in the laboratory. The drones were under his control and he built more and more test chambers. After a few weeks we soon noticed that the scientists were disappearing. Then it hit me. We weren't using test subjects. We were the test subjects!

It has been three weeks since JeRaid was put online. The laboratory was fully automated. I could hear the sounds of the factories producing more and more weaponry, armour, and most of all, test chambers.

These tests were pointless and had no meaning behind them, except maybe one or two new things in each new stage. JeRaid had turned it into a sort of competition. Each person got points for doing something during the test. I was coming 1st as the other scientists were dead, and a giant X was spread across their picture.

But the test chamber's kept building up and up until, by complete chance, the test I was in collided with an office section, completely breaking the wall. I seized my opportunity and jumped through the hole that was made from mangled wires and broken column's. JeRaid spoke:

'Escape is not an option. Please return to the testing track immediately.'

I walked around the office looking for supplies, I just ignoring him. I found a lab coat that just so happened to have a card for accessing restricted sections of the facility. Then I realised it wasn't a lab coat but a CG Elite Officer's trench coat. You would think that the Elite would have put up a fight. They survived for three days once the laboratory was put under JeRaid's control. He made sure escape was impossible by crashing the elevators.

'You're a man among the dead Richard. Come back to the test, it's where you belong now.'

I ran out of the office into the endless corridors that weaved and curved throughout the facility. Cables and walls were smashed and laying all over the place. The place was in ruin. I gathered up some supplies as much as I could carry, duct tape, glue, a bit of food. Anything that could aid my survival. I wished I hadn't left the portal device in the test chamber now that I think of it, we didn't even make the damn thing we just stole the blueprints from Aperture in a different reality. I hadn't heard from JeRaid in a while, I was beginning to think that he had just given up hunting me down. I needed somewhere to stay the night. I was about to settle down for the night, when suddenly the floor collapsed into a dark abyss below.

When I regained consciousness, I was surrounded by puddles and tilting ruins of buildings. I looked around, all I saw was old destroyed buildings. I had only heard of the Underground once or twice, but this place was huge and forgotten.

Though Crazy General Laboratories was nearly a million years old, it kept the Underground a secret. Some people say it's because of the Mutant Hybrids that were created to aid the war but instead killed most of the scientists. I wandered around hoping to find aid of some sort. All I found was junk and some old science equipment. After an hour I came across a very old machine. Though its name I did not, all I knew was to stay away from it. It looked like it had a plunger and some sort of ray gun. It was bronze and had a weird eye stalk. It looked damaged beyond repair, the main casing was blown open with wires and cables sticking out and it was covered in claw marks.

I began to wonder where I was to rest. I found an old desk and some chairs. I hid my supplies in a locker and pulled the chairs and desk over to make a bed. I found some old files and read over them. So much interesting stuff, information on the weird robot I found, mech suits, and a weird chemical. Before I finished it, I passed out and fell to sleep.

As I stood up my back ached from laying down for too long. I began to walk around the ruins of this once great place. I found an old pipe that read 'Emergency Pipeline', which meant an Elevator was close by. I followed the pipe for ages. It cut through buildings that had collapsed under ruined test chambers. I saw loads and piles of forgotten robotics. The files were everywhere. After a long painful walk I found the elevator shaft. I searched for an emergency elevator. I found it, but it took a huge amount of pressure from my foot to bring it down.

'FOR HELL'S SAKE, WHY CAN'T MY LIFE BE SO MUCH EASI-'

I then spotted a thing popping out from a pile of wires. It was an aircraft hangar sign.

'What? There isn't a hanger down here? Oh My God' I saw huge hangers doors. I climbed a pile of ruined buildings and jumped into a command centre and hit the big button that read 'open' and the door's grinding on the ground slid open to reveal to the ship that brought General here. The Battle Cruiser OSIRIS. I jumped onto it and went into its Hangar. There were four elite soldiers sitting down playing Poker as if nothing had happened. I heard the soldier saying,

'So you got a flu- HEY THIS SHIP IS OFF LIMITS TO YOU NERDS!'

I responded by saying

'EVERYONE IN THE NEW FACILITY IS DEAD AND YOU'RE PLAYING POKER?'

The officer remained quiet for a few moments, then shook his head in disbelief.

'Yes everyone in the new facility was killed by that blasted AI. Can you drive me out of here?'

'Well yeah, but the surface is dangerous'

Ten minutes later the crew had powered the ship up and we began smashing through the lab to the surface. I saw the entire lab. Pipes and wires covered the place. They put me in a drop pod and

kicked me off while the hovered above orbit. I ran over to the entrance to the lab took the elevator right down to the devil himself. I stepped out of the elevator and stared right at his Single blue eye, which stared right back at me. JeRaid

‘You should have stayed down there!’ a familiar voice called out.

Crazy General walked out of the shadows.

‘Why do you try so hard to stop me and my empire you insurgent! All you want to do is ruin my fun.’

He drew a Desert Eagle Magnum and blew my left arm off

‘You will know death like no one else, I may be crazy but I’m not stupid’

I stared at him ‘Well at least I have a plan B.’

I pressed a trigger. With a pained smirk I said

‘Oh you don’t think I was busy down there? I found some explosives and strapped them on your precious Chemical X. Right now it’s going through the vents and onto the surface. You have lost General. I blew up the dimension cannon in this dimension and maybe the laboratory’s nuclear reactor. You have 5 minu--’

I stood there, the gun smoking. He was annoying me, so I shot him in the head.

‘JERAID, DEACTIVATE THE NUCLEAR REACTOR!’

‘Sir? But-’

‘NOW!’ The Reactor stopped. ‘WARNING - REACTOR OFFLINE POWER DECREASING 50% - 49% ‘

‘JeRaid, shut that off and revert emergency power to a Cryogenic bay’

‘Sir? When do you wish me to wake you up?’

‘When the power goes dry’

‘Sir.....That could be thousand or hundreds of years as a cryo bay takes so little power.

‘JeRaid, go to sleep...’

JeRaid shut down as I removed my General outfit and stepped into the pod. The door closed and ice covered the glass.

I woke up when the door swung open. I took one step and saw the place was completely destroyed. Ivy, plants and dirt were covering the walls and floor. My uniform was gone. I ran in my undies to a small room and I saw a blue and yellow costume.

‘Well it’s the only thing I can wear, everything is destroyed. I had better check.’

BARDO

Adrian 'Christopher' Mathews

'This story is dedicated to all who see light and dark, especially those who see it sooner than others' - Christopher Pike

Part I: Entry

I died; it was as simple as that.

An illness of the blood, my sickness was long and arduous.

Yet, I never gave much thought to what lay behind the black veil of death. My mission in life was to revel in the short time the universe had given me. I remember during those long hours in hospital I had come across many motivational speakers giving their spiel of life from the comfort of YouTube. Most were two wings loose of an aeroplane and some were just plain bonkers. Yet, there was one phrase that stuck with me during the dying days of my life on earth.

'When life shovels shit on you, shrug it off, tread it in, and you will always stand higher in life.'

We all are the accumulation of all our past deeds and future aspirations. But given that the latter in my case was in short supply, the pile of crap would only go up so far. Yet, I took store in what that brown robed monk said. What's the use in complaining, for sure everyone must meet the unaccountable unknown.

I knew I was to die. It comes to us all eventually. I can be glad, proud even, that when I did see my parents for the last time and closed my eyes on the world I did so without fear, without hate, greed or envy.

I faded.

I didn't fight.

I let go.

But...I didn't expect the light.

Part II: In-between

The light was soothing, warm.

It carried me on, tossing and turning until I reached my destination.

My back touched down on a hard plastic like surface. The warmth faded as I blinked in the apparent darkness.

Sitting up, I reached for my head and found that although I was still bald, the tubes sticking into my neck and shoulders were gone. Indeed, I sensed no pain. I felt very little. Even looking down at my body I couldn't sense if I was clothed or not.

Peering out, trying to cleave open the gloom, I stood on somewhat shaky feet and gathered my thoughts.

'Well, Richard Dawkins was wrong,' I said aloud, laughing as I added, 'Oh, I kinda wish I could go back and haunt him.'

I expected an echo to my voice, but it was lacking. So too was God, or Jesus, Mohammed, The Flying Spaghetti Monster, even Dumbledore. I was alone.

'Could this be hell,' I asked, 'I mean to say, if I am to be bored for the rest of entirety then I expected my Geography teacher to turn up. You could've at least tried!'

Nothing.

'ECHO!'

'...'

'Apparently the afterlife has no sense of humour.'

'Oh I wouldn't say that.'

I jumped or rather I floated up into the blackness. Swirling upside down, I caught a glance of my new found companion.

He was middle aged, bespectacled. He wore a plaid cotton shirt tied up at the craw with leather and matching slacks that half covered his bare feet.

Smiling he reached out and stalled my rotation, guiding my form back to Earth or whatever it was.

‘That was rather impressive. Most people shoot off into the mid-distance. You actually got a little twirl going. Very good.’

‘Who are you?’

‘I?’

‘Well yes.’

‘John Smith.’

I scoffed, ‘Come on.’

He laughed again, but didn’t answer my question. Instead he began to stroll on ahead, calling out to me, ‘Well come along now. I expect you’ve many questions.’

I caught up to him with ease, ‘Can you tell me your name then?’

‘Tell me...’

‘He’s ignoring me again.’

‘Where do you think we are?’

I took one more look around and found myself puzzled. The space, which until now had been a veiled black, was pulsing with flickering lights. Orange, Purple, and Dark Green orbs were floating

throughout the scenery, at some points colliding and fashioning increasingly multifarious geometric shapes.

‘It feels like I’m in limbo.’

I rounded on him, ‘Like I am stuck. Is that right?’

‘In manner of speaking,’ he said, matter-of-factly. ‘Look at the lights. Aren’t they similar to what you see when you’re drifting off to sleep?’

‘But this is...’

‘Heaven? Hell? Heh, well some people think like that. They like to imagine that everything is definite. That when this world ends another begins. When in fact, Death and Life are so utterly linked it’s hard to say, really, when one is dead and one is alive. I like to think of this space as part of you, but the same as everyone else. In essence, this is your holding spot as you reflect on what you are and where you want to go next.’

Stunned, I bit my lip and deliberately picked my words, ‘Where I am going?’

‘Very good, you’re catching,’ he grinned, ‘Indeed, you are quite sharp unlike many people who I see. Some people come and they see things in the light, past deeds, past actions and by those reflections they either break down or become *more* than they were. Tell me, what do you see now?’

Glancing at dancing orbs, I saw many come together and coalesce into a faint image. A scene

from four years ago, as a bearded doctor explained my illness to my weeping parents.

‘I remember this,’ I whispered, ‘He was so aloof. So cold. He didn’t even try to comfort my parents. He died soon after, I always felt like he deserved it.’

‘Some people lose their emotions in the face of great pain,’ the man spoke, resting a hand my shoulder, ‘I think that when one is faced with death, and sadness, on a 24-hour basis it becomes so easy to desensitise oneself. I expect it is natural to a point, but I wouldn’t hold him to that. His coldness is conditioned, not who he is or was. However, I find it strange that your parents are crying and you are not.’

‘I was only 12 at the time. I had no idea what was going on.’

‘You see that’s great fallacy in life,’ he carried on along the mass of swirling images, ‘We always have some idea. We’ve all been sick many times. We know how it works. We live, we get sick and die. It’s how we face that cycle which determines our future. For example, you faced that condition in the same manner that you passed into this place. Fearless. Someone else may have broken down and faced his sickness in misery.’

I stopped, ‘Look, what is this place?’

‘This is Bardo,’ he tidied his glasses, ‘This is the bridge between one life and the next.’

‘You’re talking about Reincarnation?’

‘Exactly.’

There was no denying it. I mean if this was the other side of the veil I would’ve had a different opinion. But it was hard arguing with what was before my eyes.

‘So...what happens next?’ I asked.

‘Coffee.’

Before I could register the thought, the two of us sat before a spindly table with two porcelain cups filled with deep amber liquid.

The man took a sip and I followed his actions. For a while only the ebb of the lights rung out, displaying more of my past actions and life. I saw some of my proudest moments, some of my worst. Times of great joy, others of great sorrow. I felt tears well up and rubbed my eyes against my arm to shake away the sadness.

‘I’m not going to see my family again, am I?’

The man sighed, and shook his head, ‘What we leave behind we cannot go back to. Of course, you may be chosen to be reborn as ghost, and if so you may return and spend a while with them. But from what I hear, the higher ups call those beings ‘Hungry Ghosts’ as they are still attached to some part of life and cannot move on.’

‘That must be hard.’

‘It is,’ the man nodded, ‘Compared to some however, that suffering is but a fraction. As you may

know, it is possible to reborn as slug, or flea. And I will not detail the levels below that. Look...'

He pointed and a figure appeared. Dressed in deep black, his eyes were hollow and his skin mottled. He looked around dazed and lumbered away, dragging a clubfoot and a tree like arm.

'What you just saw is the accumulation of a bad life,' the man said, 'Greed, Anger, Hate they all come back such is the cyclic nature of life. Yet, pity him. He like you has every chance of coming back and being a great man. But, and this is key, it is not just our past actions that dictate our rebirth but how we lived. Did we bring to joy to those who had none? Did we care for those whose life was harsh? Did we see suffering and engage actively to stop it? In essence, living by a code, religion or even the belief in nothingness is all well and good but when you come here, no amount of money, chanting or prayer hides that what lies inside. The person who, and who alone, chooses their rebirth.'

'I can choose?'

The glasses jumped as the man clapped his hands together, 'Oh course. Why not? You must look at the menu, and see what's on offer. I recommend human with a bit of spice.'

A simple paper menu, adorned in faded black print hovered before me. Reaching up to take it I felt its age and saw that many hands had held it before.

On it read.

Human

A Balance life of Pain and Happiness (To seek out new life...)

Hungry Ghost

Return to your loved ones (Warning, stay away from Gypsies)

Animal

Become a cat or dog (Suitable for those who enjoy running in circles)

Hell Being

The hottest place known to man (Please bring your own damnation)

A God

Bring peace to mankind (While living in blissful unawareness of suffering)

‘I added in the little remarks,’ the man chortled, ‘I’ve seen many people come through here, so I scribbled in a bit of humour. It helps the transition.’

‘So, are you a god?’

‘Oh God no,’ he shook his head, ‘Gods are only gods because they are above the law, or above suffering. Their position allows them certain avenues to escape the mundane issues that the average being has to endure. But their time too comes, they too must come here. And that is why I, and people like me, remain here. To guide beings on...to wherever ‘on’ is for them.’

‘Do you get reborn?’

‘Ahh,’ he tossed his hands up in the air playfully, ‘If I told you that I didn’t...you wouldn’t believe me. If I said, ‘Yes,’ then I’d say that you are rather gullible. I am here for now. You, however, need to choose.’

There wasn’t much choice. I had no intention of becoming a God, it seemed rather pointless if I was going to be reborn again. And I had enough of suffering. I wanted to live again.

Part III: Here we go again

‘Human,’ I said, ‘I want to be human.’

‘On earth, or would like our special offer?’

‘Which is?’

‘It’s a habitable moon in what you call the Triangulum Galaxy. Its home to a group of humans. I think it is called Teraus, if I remember correctly.’

‘Is it like Earth?’

‘Oh not at all. It’s a wonderful place to be human. They have their own Space Armada and there are stories of powerful beings that protect the planet for imminent danger. You’ll love it I’m sure.’

Raising an eyebrow, I made to stand. The man followed suit.

‘Is that true?’

'Well, you're going to find out are you not? Why are you asking me?'

'Good point.'

The mist of images, memories and shapes faded. The empty void solidified and as I glanced down at my body I saw that it was fading away. Like I was a shadow, the sun was slowly creeping in.

'I'd like to be a girl this time,' I pondered aloud.

'That is not in my remit.'

'I know, but I'd like to be.'

I saw the man smile once more, and I couldn't help asking, 'Don't you get lonely?'

For an instant the ghost of surprise crossed his eyebrows, but he laughed and said, 'We are never alone. For if we were truly alone then existence would end on its own. Sometimes, life may give the impression of emptiness but in essence, we all share in one existence. I mean we regret a lot of things, I remember in my last life I was a cold, harsh and callous man. I saw so many young children like yourself dying and while I yearned to show compassion I, I just couldn't show it. I was too afraid of my own sickness. So when I died I decided to help people transition between this life and the next. Hoping one day to meet that young boy and ask forgiveness.'

I let out a long, deep sigh. 'You are forgiven, you now that?'

The Doctor smiled, tearfully, 'Aye, I know. Best of luck.'

'You too. Oh, and don't worry about writing,' he called as his form ebbed away into nothingness, 'We'll meet again, that I am certain.'

The blackness came, and I was no more.

New life was breathed into me.

I became someone new.

They called her Amaya and she was renewed.

...Not the end...

The Deal

Conor Leon

It must have been the most run-down hotel room I had ever seen. To even call it a hotel room was generous. Cockroaches and woodlice scuttled over the warped wooden floor. Through the chipped and filthy window, nearly opaque through the grime, I could see a few shady characters converging in the car park. No doubt to steal some unfortunate soul's car. Their hoods drawn up, their faces illuminated from the soft glow of the lit cigarettes hanging from their mouths. I didn't care. My car had been auctioned off weeks ago. With a heavy sigh, I fell onto the old, suspicious-smelling mattress. I heard the clank of glass as my numerous empty spirit bottles tumbled to the floor. I brought the nearly empty bottle of Jack Daniels to my mouth and took another swig.

I had only managed to sleep for an hour or two before my stomach decided to empty its copious amounts of alcohol. As I was hunched over in the corner, a horrific taste in my mouth, it was hard to

believe that I was an upstanding family man up until a few weeks ago.

I had suspicions of cheating in our relationship for months, but always gave my wife, Moira, the benefit of the doubt. However, I was unable to deny the evidence in front of me when I found e-mails sent to my wife confirming my suspicions.

The court case was long and drawn out. It resulted in me losing nearly everything, thanks to the army of solicitors at the disposal of the man my wife had fallen for.

His name was Damian Harley. A fast-talking snake of a man, with slicked back hair who talked in such a way that you always felt he was hiding something (which he usually was). He ran a small empire of airline companies, and was decadently rich. My wife had always had a weak spot for material wealth, and so I suppose it was no surprise that she was attracted to him. He lived in a huge estate to the north of town, with a private army of security guards and rooms bigger than average sized houses.

And so, after months of court cases, I was left penniless with no family, my wife and children with another man.

Despite my dire situation, I began to laugh uncontrollably in that dark hotel corner. At what, I am not so sure of. It could have been how quickly things had changed. Or it could have been that my incredibly drunk mind found everything hilarious. My

fit of laughter was cut short by something I was not expecting. A knock on my door. Stumbling up, I walked towards the door and opened it a crack. Nothing.

‘Great’ I thought. ‘Just what I needed. Some kids to knick-knock me’

Frustrated, I slammed the door, returned to my mattress and screwed the top off of another drink.

More knocking. In a fit of annoyance, I threw my bottle at the door.

‘LEAVE ME ALONE’ I yelled at my door, now dripping with whiskey.

Five minutes later I heard it again, but this time I was prepared. I pulled open the door and was met with the face of my tormentor. A short, stocky teenager laughing himself to tears. His jet black hair came down over his left eye, and his clothes had an odd sense to them, very old-fashioned.

Muttering profanities under my breath, I began to close the door. A foot stopped it and I heard the teen telling me something in between fits of laughter.

‘Oh-oh-oh man you should’ve seen your face’ he said before bursting out in laughter once more.

His accent was odd. It had an American twang to it but it was very old-fashioned. Like something you would hear in an old Clint Eastwood film. His eyes were black as coal, and darted quickly around the room, as if looking for something. His head

barely came up to my chest, so I was half- tempted to punch him in his stupid grin.

‘Oh now Gary, aren’t you going to let me in?’ he said with an acid tone, dripping with sarcasm.

His mouth twisted into a smile. There was something off about this kid, but I couldn’t place exactly what.

Rolling my eyes, I started ‘No I’m not going to let yo-’

I stopped.

‘How...how do you know my name?’ I asked confused and slightly worried.

‘Listen man, I’ll tell you everything, I just wanna talk. Now, can I please come in?’ the teen said.

‘Get lost kid,’ I said, and began to close the door.

My surprise visitor had other ideas however, and he ducked under my extended arm, with speed I wouldn’t have guessed his stocky build could achieve. And so I found myself in a run-down hotel room with a teenager I did not know, barely able to stand and surrounded by empty bottles. Great.

‘Now I believe I owe you some answers Gary. You’re probably wondering how I know your name for example. Well, let’s just say that I probably know more about you than you do. Alright?’

My brain kicked into overdrive. With all of the intelligence my intoxicated brain could muster I stated,

‘...huh?’ before promptly getting sick on the floor. Classy.

I heard a tut-tutting coming from the kid.

‘My my, you really are in a bad state. Hang on, let me fix that’

He extended his hand and placed it on my head. I had just begun to question why, when my head suddenly became clear again. Seconds ago I was drunk as drunk could be, and now I was completely sober.

‘Now’, the kid started again. ‘Now that you’re no longer falling over in front of me, can we have a proper talk?’

I was still shocked.

‘How did you do that? Make me not drunk I mean’ I stammered out quickly.

A smile stretched across the teens face, and he chuckled to himself. That’s when I realized what was off about him. His smile was slightly too wide, too many teeth, slightly sharper than usual. His eyes were not staying the same colour for long.

‘Ah, you want to learn how to do it I assume. I’m afraid that’s just not happening’. It takes certain kind of someone to do it. It took even me years, and that’s saying something.’

I couldn't help but feeling a little offended at this point. Was he insinuating that I was not good enough for him? That I was inferior? And as for the 'taking years' remark, he couldn't have been more than fifteen years old.

'What do you mean years? You're just a kid. And you better tell me what you want with me or I swear to God I'll call the police.'

'Oh believe me I'm much older than I look. Much older than you. As for who I am... well that's a bit of a longer answer. I've had dozens, hell, hundreds of names over the years. I've been anointed a prince and also branded as a beast. I've got different names all over the world. Some call me The Father of Lies, while others call me Lucifer.'

I stood there frozen and sceptical. What this... kid was claiming had to be false. There was no way he could actually be Him. Could there?

'Are you suggesting that you're, eh, y'know. Satan?' I stammered.

A vicious smile spread across his face.

'Ding ding ding, we have a winner!' he exclaimed.

None of this made sense to me. This kid looked like your typical suburban teenager. With his grey hoodie and low-riding tracksuit bottoms. And yet he was claiming to be the Antichrist, The Devil.

'If you're the Devil, then how come you look like you're fifteen years old?'

The kid sighed deeply as if he was asked the question frequently. Then he looked at me with a slightly annoyed expression.

'Did you expect me to arrive in a ball of flames? Horns poking out from under my hood? Souls of the damned swirling around my feet? Please, I can look whatever way I want.'

At that point I was having no more of his lies. I began to open the door.

'Listen kid, you've had your fun but now it's time for you to-'

An unbelievable pain took over my entire body. I fell to my knees, my head feeling like it was about to burst. Tears began to form at the corners of my eyes. I saw the shoes beside me begin to walk closer.

'Oh this isn't about fun Gary' I heard from over me.

However, the voice I heard was not the voice of a fifteen-year old kid. This voice sounded like three voices speaking at once. It drilled into my head and I couldn't escape it. The pain then stopped as suddenly as it had started. I stood up slowly my knees weak. Standing in front of me was now a middle aged man. A crisp black suit complimented the inky black hair perfectly. His eyes seemed

slightly off, an unnatural colour. I now knew that the claims were true. I stood before The Devil.

‘Now that you have decided to pay attention to me, I can tell you my proposition’

His American twang had been replaced with an icy cold tone, his accent now something I could not quite place. It was to say the least, intimidating. He now stood well over six-foot tall, with a slim frame. I was terrified out of my mind.

‘Now Gary, I’ve been observing you for quite some time, and you’ve been dealt out a pretty bad hand, and I’m here to offer you some conciliation, in the form of revenge. I know how it feels you know. To be thrown away. To be replaced by another.’

That’s when I first felt it. An odd feeling unlike any other I had experienced coming from the pit of my stomach. An odd mix of fear and aggression. It then quickly subsided...

‘How-how would you do that’ I stammered

The Devil stepped back and extended his arms wide and opened his mouth to reveal a mouth that had too many teeth. His eyes changed colour erratically. Black, then purple, then red. A black mist had begun to swirl around his right hand.

‘Why, by killing your cheating ex-wife and her new husband, of course’

There was the feeling again. I knew I was being manipulated but I didn’t care. It wasn’t like this was

the first time I had thought about revenge. But now the opportunity was being handed to me.

‘But how would I? I’m no murderer’

The mist around his hand began to collect and take shape. Soon a shiny revolver was in his hand. He walked over to me and placed the cold metal to my hand.

‘Now Gary, we can’t have that kind of negative thinking. I’ll help you’

A manic smile was plastered on his face. This guy was a complete psycho. I began to panic. I never wanted any of this to happen. And so I decided to shoot Satan, The Lord of Darkness, Lucifer, Father of Lies, whatever you want to call him, in the face. Probably not one of my better ideas.

His head whipped back, blood spraying all over me. His head quickly jerked up to face me again. A large hole could be seen in the place of his right temple. He sighed deeply, and I saw the bullet hole close up before my eyes.

‘Well that wasn’t very nice now was it?’

He reached over and placed his hand on my shoulder. His touch sent shivers all around my body. His hand was ice-cold. I could feel it through my clothes.

‘Now are we going to try that again Gary?’ he asked in a venomous tone.

I was about to say something when suddenly I was outside in the biting cold outside my car. I stood around confused for a second or two, thinking it was all just a very vivid and odd dream. That's when I saw the kid standing just outside of the car park watching me. He gave me a quick thumbs-up and a smile and pointed to his hand. I looked down. The revolver was still in my hand. I opened my car tentatively and began to drive towards Damian Harley's house. Whenever I began to question whether I should do what I was about to do, I always seemed to see the kid out of the corner of my eye. The feeling was overwhelming now, unescapable. Before I knew it I was at the front gate of a rather large house with 2 armed guards standing outside. I was approached by them at once and they demanded to know why I was here so late and who I was. Flustered, I reached for the pocket with my new gun. Just when I was about to take it out, I heard footsteps from behind me.

'Wait! There has been a misunderstanding.'

An elderly man was hobbling over. He began to talk to the guards. I couldn't hear what was being said. When the man stood back both guard began to cough violently, their faces turning a horrid shade of purple as they fell to their knees. I looked over toward the 'old man' who was now standing upright. I saw his eyes changing colour and his slightly pointed teeth. He melted before me and then reappeared again as the middle aged man wearing a suit.

'I see you've found your way here just fine. That's good.'

I saw the two bodies before me begin to fall into the ground, until they were gone completely. The Devil waved his hands and the gate swung open. We both began our walk up to the long driveway up towards the house.

When we reached the door the feeling was unbelievably powerful. I felt so full of rage, it was unlike anything I had ever experienced. When we reached the front door, a quick flick of the wrist from my new-found partner was all it took to make it come crashing open. I heard a commotion upstairs. I took my gun out and began to walk upstairs, The Devil standing right behind me. It was time for revenge.

Five minutes later and I held an empty gun in a room with the murdered bodies of Damian Harley and my ex-wife. The feeling I had for hours had now subsided completely. It was now replaced by a feeling of dread and guilt, and above all fear.

'What have you made me do!' I asked tears forming in my eyes.

The Devil got that wide-eyed expression back with his twisted smile.

'Well Gary, I've got you revenge. It was really entertaining thank you so much. I'm sorry to have to leave like this but I've got places to go and people to see. Ta-ta'

Red and blue lights could be seen flashing outside. Dozens of police cars could be seen outside.

‘What? No- no! This wasn’t part of the deal! I trusted you!’

He began to melt away again. A smile now stretching from ear to ear. And then he was gone. I began to panic, desperately looking for a way out. Out of sheer desperation I flung myself from the window to try get away. I heard a sharp crack as I landed and both my ankles broke underneath me. My screams made it easy to locate me, and I couldn’t exactly run anywhere. And so I found myself in the back of a police car, ten minutes after murdering two people, their blood still on my hands. I broke down into tears right there and then.

The police car was eerily quiet on the way to the prison. It was just me and the driver, a steel mesh separating the front and back seats. I broke down and sobbed for what seemed like hours. When I looked out of the car, the countryside spread out as far as the eye could see.

‘It’s not personal you know. I’m just doing my job,’ the driver stated.

I maintained my silence.

‘It’s the big man who makes me do it. Tempting people to test their faith I mean.’

No. No it couldn’t have been.

'Unfortunately for you Gary, you failed my little test. You're not a very good person are you? Guess it's time for that other part of my job now. You know, the part of damning sinners to an eternity in Hell yadda-yadda-yadda'

Panic took control of my body. Why The Devil had chosen to torment me like this was beyond me. I kicked the glass window with all my might. All I got for my trouble was my ankle sending a new wave of pain up into my body. The car then slowed down. A field in the middle of nowhere.

The door whipped open and I was flung outside. I tried to scramble away, eyes locked on my tormentor. I saw him melt away into the form of the middle aged man again, his mad eyes darting quickly over every inch of my body.

As the ground opened and I began my slow, painful descent into Hell, the last thing I saw was those colour changing eyes, and that maniacal wide grin.

A Grave Discovery

Joe Clarke

My routine had always been fairly simple on a Sunday. I'd usually get up around the 9 o'clock mark, unless I had been out the previous night. I'd get up and get ready even though I'd have nowhere specific to go. My roommate, Cian, would most likely not get up for another few hours. He was such a heavy sleeper that I never needed to worry about being too loud. Hell, once I was installing a new set of shelves on one wall. Halfway through, I realised he slept through all the drilling. Anyway, I'd be free until about noon to do whatever I wanted while it was still early. This usually meant going for a run and getting food for breakfast, because we both ate like horses. When Cian did wake up, and this would be late, he'd want to hang out for a bit. So we would grab a football and go to the pitches by a neighbouring apartment block. This is where most of our other friends lived; Jack, Saoirse and Harry. More often than not, they would see us and come out and join in. This would go on until about two, when Jack and

Harry's shift started in Tesco for the day. They'd leave and we'd probably not see them til Monday. Afterwards, I'd split off to go visit my grandfather. Going straight from the pitch, it was a relatively short walk. I'd pass the school Saoirse worked in and the house of an old man named Tom. He always stared at me through the window until I was thoroughly crept out. I had never determined what sort of stare it was. After a few shortcuts through alleys and estates, I'd arrive at the graveyard at around half past.

This was where I was at the time. It was standard enough. I'd visit him after work every Thursday and during the day every Sunday. Usually it was busier on the latter day, due to the various masses and such being on. But my granddad was laid off in the far corner. The area was usually undisturbed, bar the odd vandal or anyone actually visiting a grave. I'd spend a half hour at least there, sitting by his plot and telling him any news I might have about the guys or myself. Something Saoirse's students did. My team winning a match. Any jokes Cian might have come out with recently that absolutely floored me. I had known Cian when my grandfather was alive; back when I still lived with him, and he liked Cian. Mainly because of his jokes, but also because he actually gave a damn about me. I did football training with Cian but he was on another team, and we got on well. I didn't have a whole lot of other friends, and the loss of my granddad was a big hit. He was there to comfort me, and he even

introduced me to the others. This was about four years ago and now I'm as close with them as can be.

That day, I was sitting next to his grave, speaking quietly because there was no need for anyone else to hear. There were people I recognised and knew from my frequent visits, and they smiled as they walked past. But this time there was a man there who I had never noticed; and yet somehow I remembered him always being there. He was tall with blond hair and fair skin. Definitely wasn't Irish. He was wearing a long beige coat that stretched to around his knees. It had a high collar that might have covered part of his jaw if I was looking at him from the side. Beneath his coat he wore a blue jumper and darker blue jeans. He had been either staring at me or the grave, but he didn't look away when I caught his eye. Instead, he spoke, and he said something that sent chills up my spine.

'You're Kevin's grandkid, aren't you?' His accent was Australian, confirming my guesses of him being foreign.

'I- yeah, how did you know?' I replied with caution.

'I was an old friend of his. He was a damn good man.' He seemed to then get lost in thought, finally diverting his eyes from me. Soon enough he snapped out of it, and strode forward. 'Name's Andy,' he said, reaching down and offering his hand to shake. At first I didn't take it, but after staring at it, and then him, for a few seconds I grasped his hand and shook it. I went to stand but he stopped me with

a gesture. He sat down instead, folding his legs underneath him and mimicking my position. Finally, he continued speaking.

‘He always talked about you, you know. Your parents, his daughter and son-in-law, he only mentioned them twice. He was ashamed of his daughter’

I winced in my head but maintained a straight face. Images and memories flooded into my mind of when my parents kicked me out a few years ago. I think it was because I apparently didn’t fit the bill for their child. I didn’t want to be made to be Catholic, I didn’t want to be a doctor or something as mundane and high-paying. (Of course, so I could have bought them stuff, no less. Always thinking about myself, they had told me.) They were simply sick of me. Had it not been for my grandfather, I would have been without a place to stay. He had taken me in and angrily broke off contact with my mother as a result. I hadn’t heard from them since, and I didn’t want to.

In the end all I said was ‘Could it have been justified, maybe?’ I wasn’t sure what side he was on with this affair.

‘Nonsense, of course it was. I believed he was being soft by only dropping contact with her. I’d have made a show of them if it was my only grandkid. Can you imagine? It was just preposterous. I’d never heard of anything like it. But, that’s not the point.’

‘What is?’

He paused again. 'To be honest, I'm not quite sure. I saw you by his grave, and I spoke on the off-chance that it was you. The way he talked about you, I had always wanted to meet you.'

A tear came to my eye and I smiled and looked down. I couldn't maintain eye contact with him. 'It's been an honour,' he said, standing up. I rose with him. Without a word, he turned and strolled away. As he did, the grey clouds that lined the sky finally began to give way and release the rain they stored. I glanced up at the heavens as they emptied and flicked my hood up, and when I looked back Andy was nowhere to be seen.

The events of that afternoon had completely made me forget my usual routine. I forgot about going to get something to eat with the guys and went straight home, bewildered. Surprisingly, Cian was also at the apartment. He was on the couch on his tablet but he stood up when I walked in.

'Jesus, mate,' he said, mild alarm on his face. 'When did you get in?'

'Ten seconds ago,' I replied, still staring into space as I threw my keys towards the counter. They missed by a few inches and skittered noisily across the floor. Ordinarily, Cian would have laughed, but he stayed still. As a result, I took it upon myself to lose my composure at the small failure. I doubled over laughing, having to sit down on a stool to prevent falling down. Cian moved and picked up my

keys, and put them where I had been aiming to throw them. I took a deep breath and let out a final chuckle before saying 'It wasn't even that funny.'

Cian raised an eyebrow. 'Okay,' he said, drawing the word out to display his lack of understanding. He went back to the couch and resumed his normal position, tablet in hand, but still looked at me. 'Coming out later?'

'Dunno,' I said. 'Not sure if I'm up for it.'

'Saoirse will be there'

'Actually, y'know what? I think I'll survive a few hours.'

Cian grinned. 'Figures.'

'Where to?'

'My bet's on Nando's.'

'Ugh,' I said, still on the stool, rolling my eyes. 'Pier or town?'

'Pier, probably. You can race Harry again.'

My hair had fallen over my face, so it hid my half-excited-and-half-evil smile. 'Excellent.'

I got changed from tracksuit bottoms and a t-shirt to a flannel shirt and jeans. I brought my hoodie just in case the Dun Laoghaire winds went through me like they always did. We walked instead of getting the bus, as it was a short enough walk. We moved in an

ever-shifting crowd, never stopping and never silent. A good humour was building momentum like a ball rolling down a hill. We finally reached Crofton Road, and turned right by the Dart Station and went up the hill. When we got into Nando's, the smell of cooking chicken hit me like a punch and we relaxed even further. I wasn't a vegetarian but I wasn't much of a carnivore either. Yet the food there always got through a crack in my guard and improved my mood. Despite being rather overpriced, it was somewhere we'd go fairly often. Not to celebrate anything in particular, but just to have a good meal. Jack was constantly referencing 'cheeky Nando's' and it took my full resolve not to punch him. After we had eaten, and Cian had had about six free refills of 7up, we left and headed towards the pier. I met pace with Harry but he knew I was coming and spoke.

'Looking for a rematch, kid?' Harry was the oldest of us, at twenty-seven years, and I was the youngest at twenty-three. As a result, he always called me kid in that deep, gravelly voice of his, much to my annoyance. But now, all I did was smile, and not answer.

We arrived at our destination; a brass statue of a cannon that could once have been an actual cannon. With the pier to our left, the five of us stood facing the rocks. We gazed at the steps and paths of a concrete area between where we were and the ice cream shop down the road. Harry and I stepped forward, and Jack made a low 'Ooooh' sound to signify the tension that wasn't there. Saoirse elbowed him.

After a second of silence, Cian finally spoke. 'Alright lads, yis know the rules. First to Teddy's and back. Say when you're ready.'

The entire pier was silent for a moment, as if it was holding its breath. Harry glanced at me, and I grinned but didn't turn my head. With no warning, Saoirse shouted 'Just go already!' and Cian laughed.

We both stumbled and ran, jumping from the ledge and landing metres below. I rolled and he dashed forward instead, so that he was ahead of me, and he started sprinting down the arced path. I took a shortcut across the rocks, hopping from boulder to boulder but not slowing down. I reached the path where our courses met and we both bolted. I kicked up off a low wall and vaulted onto the one parallel to it, and ran along the top. The path to my side narrowed until the opposite wall was in reach. I turned and jumped, kicked up a couple of feet and grabbed the handrail at the top and hopped over. I turned towards the ice cream shop- it was in sight, but so was Harry. And he was at the front counter. He ran past at a light jog as I sprinted in the other direction. I tapped the top of the table as the woman behind the counter didn't even glance up at me. I made my steps as silent as possible as I approached Harry from behind. I hopped the fence to our right as I neared, avoiding him completely. I slid down the grassy hill, back onto the tarmac, and he spotted me. I heard him swear from metres above and I laughed. Then, from nowhere, he dove *through* the gaps in the bars of the handrail. He landed in front of me, rolling twice to prevent injury. Not didn't even looking

back, he just ran and I followed. The others were in sight now and they were cheering. I took the same path across the rocks as before. I began climbing the wall I had jumped before; Harry once again took the long route around. He left my sight as I kicked up the wall and got my fingers to the top, hauling myself up. When I got to the top, panting, I rolled over onto my back to see Harry smirking down at me.

‘Lost again, kiddo.’ He offered his hand to me and I took it, pulling myself up. Once standing, I clasped his hand and smiled.

‘I’ll get ya one of these days’ I said, still somewhat out of breath. He raised an eyebrow and was about to come out with some witty retort, probably, when Jack caught him in a bear hug.

‘Good on ya, mate, you kicked her ass once again!’ he said with enthusiasm. I laughed aloud and glanced away. On the other hill, near the first railing I had climbed, Andy from the graveyard stood, watching us. I stared back but my focus was taken away as Saoirse embraced me with similar strength to the hug Jack gave. She didn’t say anything, but Cian met my eye and winked at me. When I looked back, Andy was gone.

He was on my mind the entire way home. The sun was on its daily trip back down below the horizon. The sky was bathed in a mix of reds and oranges that made what few clouds present in the sky stand out even more. I was almost completely silent, which

Cian didn't mind. He stopped trying to provoke conversation when he spotted that I was deep in thought. Yet once we got home he broke the silence.

'You gonna tell me what's up with you then?' he said, looking at me.

I didn't reply at first, keeping a straight face, but then grinned and said 'Nah.'

He rolled his eyes, not willing to play along. 'Mate, I usually don't pry with this sort of thing-'

'Usually you don't have to.'

'Exactly!' he said, louder but not shouting or angry. 'The only emotions I've ever seen you express are happy, tired and hungry. So of course I'm gonna feel concerned when you shut up for the first time in weeks.' He grinned at last when he said that, breaking the sombre tone he had maintained. 'So I'll ask again; what's the story?'

'Nothing,' I said, drawing the word out.

'Is it cause Harry beat ya?'

'Nope.'

'Is it 'cause we went to Nando's *again*?'

'What, am I six? Nope.'

'Is it 'cause of your granda?'

'Nope.' I prayed he didn't notice the slight pause but he completely skipped over it.

'Is it anything to do with Saoirse?'

I realised I'd need to tell him *something* to get him to drop it, so I made a show of caving and said

'Fine. Ya got me.'

He sat down on the couch and propped his feet on the arm of it. 'Talk to me, so. *Cad a tharla?*'

I was on the spot. I had to think of something.

'That hug she got me in. I know it was probably a pity-hug, a sort of 'Ohhh hard luck dude' hug-'

'Did you hear her voice in your head when you said that or was it just me?' Cian muttered, and I smiled mid-sentence.

'Anyways, I know it wasn't significant but it felt good - and pretty crappy at the same time.'

Cian shook his head. 'You're gonna have to ask her out sometime.'

'Or maybe I could completely bury my feelings and act like no such thought never occurred to me.'

'Where's the fun in that?' Cian responded, grinning yet again. The serious tone that was present at the start of the chat was long gone.

'End result will be the same though.'

'Don't be hard on yourself, mate.'

'It's not even that. I haven't begun to factor that in yet - it's the circumstances that are stopping me'

'What, you're afraid of messing up the friendship? Splitting the group up?'

‘You know exactly what I mean.’

Another pause. I was beginning to wonder if he did, but then he exhaled and shook his head. ‘It’s worth a shot, bro, that’s all I’m saying.’

I strolled over to the fridge and grabbed a bottle of water before making my way to my room. As I did, I called over my shoulder, ‘Don’t bro me, mister.’ I didn’t need to be looking at him to know he was rolling his eyes and smiling.

Monday came and went with little to nothing important happening. Tuesday, conversely, had been eventful. The first half was unexceptional, and I had completely forgotten about Sunday. It was on my way home from work when it all went to hell. I walked home from work when I was fit to walk, because it wasn’t that far away from my apartments. I had the bag over my shoulder with the stuff I took to work every day, and I was alone as the sun was going down. The streets were empty but for one person roughly ten feet behind me. A man, barely taller than me, with broad shoulders and his hood up. When I glanced back, he tilted his head down to mask his eyes. I took a slight detour and went through a nearby estate in a loop, to see if he was following me. Sure enough, he matched my path and kept his head low the whole time. A situation that would terrify any other girl; I was just uncomfortable above all else. I decided to go where he couldn’t follow and broke off in a run at a ninety-degree angle. The man sprinted after me and I left the estate I was

in. I came out on a main road with the ice cream shop from my race with Harry in sight. I passed it and matched my path from the day before. I dashed over the railing and dropped several feet to the floor below. I glanced up to see if he had tried to go the long way around. After a second of stillness, I saw him jump and clear the railing completely, and land with a roll a metre beside me. A mild panic began to set in and I bolted again. I traced my path from the race, hopping from path to ledge to stone to path again in the hopes of evading the man behind me. He didn't follow me step for step but I couldn't lose him. I decided to go up instead of forward and ran straight for a high wall. I kicked up and grabbed the top, clambering onto the platform. I glanced down and couldn't see or hear him, despite the dark and howling sea breeze. Once I was sure I had lost him, I exhaled and stood up, shaking. I turned around to move off and the man was standing at the edge of the platform, not even tired.

A scream escaped me and I stumbled back. I was a mere foot from the God-only-knows-how-high drop I had just scaled. I scrambled over onto my feet and tried to make myself look as big as possible. My hair was whipping across my face, which hopefully hid the look of fear I probably had.

'Who the hell are you?' I shouted. I was unsure of whether he could hear me, but either way he didn't move. He just stared. I went to move past but he stepped in my way. I spun around the other side of him and got past. I made about three strides before a rock the size of my fist hurtled past an inch from

my ear. Again, I jumped from fright and turned to face him.

‘Did you just throw that at me? Did you seriously just throw that at me? That was an awful shot, man. I mean, I know it’s windy and all, but seriously.’

He didn’t move.

‘Lose the hood, will you? I want to be able to point you out in a line up. How is that even staying up, anyway? It’s blowing a gale here. I’ surprised you’re even standing up straight.’

Nothing.

The next words I heard were neither mine nor his, but still familiar.

‘Eve? What the hell are you doing out here?’ Saoirse. Damn. The only party more screwed than one girl being followed at night is TWO girls being followed at night.

The man turned on the spot to face her and I used this time to rip his hood down. He staggered, clutching at it for a few vital seconds as I glimpsed his face. My blood turned to ice. It was Andy.

I had to react quickly. ‘Saoirse, come on. We need to leg it right now. Move!’

She didn’t question me, and we ran. She wasn’t as fast or as fit as I was but she kept up from sheer adrenaline. Andy didn’t seem to be following us. We were approaching a streetlight-lit area when Saoirse

finally ran out of breath. She sat down onto a bench and I sat on the backrest. Andy was nowhere to be seen.

When her breath was finally under control again, Saoirse spoke. 'I have questions.'

'To be honest, love, so do I,' I replied, 'and I'm fairly sure they match too, but I'll answer as many as I can.'

'Who was that fella?'

'That I can answer. His name is Andy something. He was a friend of my granddad.'

'Wait- you know him? You've met him before? Sound, we can just go straight to the Gards then!'

'You're quite right. Where's the nearest station from here?'

'Haven't a clue. There's a map over there.'

'Let's go so.'

The next moment was a bit of a blur. We stood up and went to cross the road. She was a few strides ahead of me, so neither of us saw what grabbed me from the back of my coat and threw me over the railing. I knocked my head off the topmost bar and plunged into icy water. After seconds I blacked out completely.

I had absolutely no idea what happened between then and when I woke up, but when I did I was in hospital. Shocking. The room was lit by sunlight that filtered through the curtains and the hall.

A bald nurse with a crooked nose was staring at me, holding a clipboard. He noticed I was awake and called for a doctor. I blinked and sat up, but a hand gently moved me back onto the bed. The doctor was a dark skinned man with long dark hair tied back in a ponytail.

‘Ms. Crosse? Can you hear me okay?’ he said, his voice deep.

‘Yeah, grand, I’m fine. What the hell happened?’

‘You have a mild concussion and you may have inhaled seawater. Please, lie down.’

‘Well I feel fine. No headaches or nothing. When was this?’

‘Last night. Please, miss, I must insist. Lie down.’

I stretched out and propped my feet up on the board at the base of the bed. The doctor rolled his eyes and began flashing various lights and asking different questions. I was mainly focusing on how comfortable the bed was. When he finished, he spoke. ‘We will need to keep you here overnight to ensure you’re not further incapacitated. You will be free to move around the facility if you wish.’

‘Sound out,’ I said. ‘But this yoke is better than my bed at home so I’ll just stick around if that’s fine with you.’

The man shrugged and went to walk away but he faced me again. 'Oh, there are some people here to see you. Two young adults.'

'Well, at least they're not my parents. Tell them to get in here.'

After ten seconds or so of silence, Cian and Saoirse popped their heads in the door. Their worried faces contrasted my huge grin. 'Sup?' I said, and they rushed in. They hugged me on either side and Cian kissed me on the forehead.

'Jesus H. Christ, don't ever scare me like that again,' Saoirse said, still hugging me.

I threw an arm around both of them and laughed. 'Yeah, grand, I'll do my best not to be thrown over a railing from now on.'

'Funny, I thought that would have already been something of a priority,' Cian said. With this, we burst into laughter. They slowly stood up and I said 'No need to be gentle, I'm fine. Watch.' I threw the blankets off the bed and rolled onto the floor, falling on my front. Saoirse screamed and Cian gasped, and I slid under the bed and grabbed Cian's ankle. He jumped out of his skin, swearing his head off. Saoirse screamed yet again as I fell into fits of laughter from under the bed. I slid back out the other side, still roaring laughing, and he just glared at me.

'It's a good thing we're already in a hospital, mate,' he said. I winked at him and turned to Saoirse.

'So what happened in the end?'

'You wouldn't believe it. Once he grabbed you, I was screaming and crying and panicking because I didn't know where you were and I saw someone in the water and then-'

'Slow down. Take a breath. Breeaaaathe.'

'Right...okay. So he faced me, and I was so scared, Eve, I had no idea what to do, but then a Garda car showed up.'

I blinked at her. 'Seriously?'

'Yep. They just talked to me and took him in, and sent for an ambulance to get you out of the water. Someone saw and rang the Gards themselves. They have him now.'

'Well, that's kinda anticlimactic.'

'What were you expecting? That I fought him in a valiant final battle and he finally gave in and admitted defeat, turning himself in?'

'No, but you've a mad active imagination.'

She laughed. My chest did that thing it always did when she laughed. Cian joined in from nowhere. 'Do you want any food? I'm heading to the canteen now I may as well save you the trip.'

He was trying to get me alone with her. 'Nah, I'll join you, I'd be glad of the walk.'

'I'll go too, seeing as there's no point in me staying,' Saoirse said, and we left the room. At the next turn Cian ducked into the bathroom with a 'Be right back.' Before he did he was mouthing three

words at me and making finger pistols. *Ask her out.* I had an entirely separate gesture as a reply. But I was still in shock, not that I'd have ever admitted it, and my thoughts were scattered anyway. I went to speak but Saoirse threw an arm around my shoulder and hugged me to her side, and I shut up.

'So you're alright?' she asked.

'Yeah, yeah, I'll be grand'

'You sure? I think you'll be staying away from the pier for a while so we'll have to find a better place to go, eh?'

I smirked. 'Yeah, I don't see that being too big a deal to be honest, it wasn't that bad.'

She looked at me like I had another nose on my forehead or something. 'You're kidding. You were chucked into the freakin' sea, dude!'

'Don't *dude* me,' I retorted, smiling and trying hard to change the subject. She was having none of it.

'So you're telling me you're not even a little bit affected by that?'

I paused. 'Well, I didn't say that.'

'You don't have to pretend to be your usual jovial self, y'know,' she continued. 'You took a hit that would leave most still panicking in their hospital beds right now.'

'I wouldn't blame them. It was a nice bed.'

She laughed. 'Stop it!'

'Stop what?'

'Stop telling jokes and being funny; I'm trying to be sincere here.'

I grabbed her around the waist and mimed tackling her. 'Never!' I said, drawing the word out like an evil villain. I lifted her up (by like a foot and a half, I won't lie) and she burst into giggles. We got a stern look from a nearby nurse. I put her down and plastered an expressionless look on my face until she passed. When she was out of sight, we fell into laughter again. Cian approached with a broad smile.

'So, did you--' he began but I cut him off.

'Get food? Nah, we got distracted. Let's go.'

We made our way back to my room and I hurried in ahead of them. I dove into my bed and made a cocoon from the covers. I was suddenly immensely tired and the bed was comfortable. I saw the blurry edges of the two others coming in as I drifted to sleep. The memories of the temporary break in routine already fading from my head.

A Hopeful Young Boy

Ryan Healy

This story is about a skinny young boy who loved football with all his heart his name was Lionel Messi. Practice after practice, he eagerly gave everything he had. But being half the size of the other boys, he got absolutely nowhere. Lionel was small boy, even as a man he is only 1.7 metres tall. At all the games, this hopeful athlete sat on the bench and hardly ever played. This teenager lived alone with his father, and the two of them had a very special relationship. Even though the son was always on the bench, his father was always in the stands cheering. He never missed a game.

This young man was still the smallest of the class when he entered secondary school. But his father continued to encourage him, but also made it very clear that he did not have to play football if he didn't want to. But the young man loved football and decided to hang in there. He was determined to try his best at every practice, and perhaps he'd get to play when he became a senior.

All through secondary school he never missed a practice or a game. He remained a bench-warmer for four whole years. His faithful father was always in the stands, always with words of encouragement for him.

When the young man went to college, he decided to try out for the football team as a walk-on. Everyone was sure he could never make the cut, but I did. The coach admitted that he kept him on the roster because he always puts his heart and soul to every practice, and at the same time, provided the other members with the spirit and morale they badly needed.

The news that he had made the cut thrilled him so much that he rushed to the nearest phone and called his father. His father shared the son's excitement and received season tickets for all the college games.

This persistent young man never missed practice during his four years at school, but he never got to play in a game. It was the end of his Junior Football season, and as ran onto the practice field shortly before the big playoff game against Boca Juniors in Argentina, the coach said

'You are a very persistent person for showing up for the match under these circumstances, but unfortunately you will benched today.'

The game was not going well. In the first half when the team was 3-0 behind, he quietly slipped

into the empty locker room and put on his football gear, hoping to get on in the dying minutes.

As Lionel ran onto the side of the field stretching, the coach and his players were astounded to see their faithful team-mate back so soon.

'Coach, please let me play. I've just got to play today,' said the young man.

My manger pretended not to hear me. There was no way he wanted his worst player in this close playoff game. But he was determined, and finally, feeling sorry for the boy, the coach gave in. The coach took off player 22, and Lionel Messi ran onto the pitch. The coach, the players and everyone in the stands could not believe their eyes. He was a little, unknown player from Argentina who had never played before, and yet he was doing everything right. The opposing team could not stop him. He ran, he passed, blocked, and tackled like a pro. His team began to catch up with the opposition. The score was soon tied.

In the closing seconds of the game, Lionel intercepted a pass and ran all the way. With a powerful kick, he scored the winning goal for his team. The fans went crazy. Messi's team-mates hoisted him onto their shoulders.

Finally, after the stands had emptied and the team had showered and left the locker room, the coach noticed that the star player of the match was

sitting quietly in the corner all alone. The coach came to me and said,

‘Kid, I can’t believe it. You were fantastic! Tell me, what got into you? How did you do it?’

He looked at the coach, with tears in his eyes, and said,

‘Well, you knew my dad died, but did you know that my dad was blind?’

Lionel swallowed hard and forced a smile,

‘Dad came to all my games, but today was the first time he could see me play, and I wanted to show him I could do it.’

Repayment

Dáire O'Neill

Chapter 1 - Thursday

Tommy sat at his desk, deep in thought. Recently he had set his hopes and dreams on buying a van, but he didn't have nearly enough money and he had no way of earning it. He had had a job in a local shop, but he got bored of it, stopped doing work and was promptly fired. When he had approached his dad about borrowing two grand to buy a van he found cheap on the internet, his dad laughed in his face. So, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

He remembered a few years back his dad had helped out some guy named Michael who ran some sort of gang, so he decided to sneak into his dad's study to try and find some way of contacting this Michael. When he found nothing, he waited for his dad to fall asleep so he could look through the contacts on his phone.

He took his dad's phone and unlocked it. His heart was beating fast as he scrolled down the list of his dad's contacts, worried that he would be caught. When he found all the Michaels he wrote down their numbers.

Tommy was extremely nervous the next day in school. He was going to ditch school after lunch, which was nothing new, because he ditched all the time. But calling the possible leader of a criminal organization...well, that was new.

'Hey man, you alright? You seem on edge.' asked Tommy's best friend, Joey, as they walked towards their lockers.

'Yeah I'm good.'

'You're not ditching this afternoon again are you?' asked Joey in a concerned tone.

'Yeah. Why? You finally gonna join me?' retorted Tommy.

'No way. you got me into smoking already, and you are not going to ruin my education.'

'How is ditching school ruining your education? We don't even have any important classes after lunch,' asked Tommy, opening his locker.

'Do you even know how far you are behind in all of your subjects? I'd be surprised if you knew what subjects we did, let alone where we are on the curriculum.'

'Hey, that's harsh,' exclaimed Tommy as he slammed his locker shut. 'Well I gotta run, talk to you later?'

'Yeah, whatever,' replied Joey, shaking his head. Tommy raced out of school and back home. He rushed into his room and grabbed the list of numbers. He decided to start with the Michaels that didn't have surnames. Picking the first one, he came across he dialled the number.

'Hello, Michael here.' came a slightly scruffy voice from the other end of the line.

'Hi my name is Tommy, and I'm looking to-'

'Damn-it Sam what is it now...okay, just- agh, just tell Dom to look after it...' Tommy waited in awkward silence with bated breath. He had a feeling his first pick was correct. 'Okay, you can use John as well then. Sorry about that...Tommy was it?'

'Yes...sir.' replied Tommy nervously.

'No need for formality kid, now what is it that I can help you with?'

'Well, I was looking to borrow two grand so I could buy a van.'

'...Right-, and what makes you think I can help you with that?'

'Well I think my dad helped you out a few years ago and-'

'OH! You're Damien's son.'

'Yes.'

'Sure, I'll help you out. I presume you want to keep this just between us right?'

'Yeah, if possible.'

'Ok, meet me at the warehouse on Baleins street on Saturday at...let's say five o'clock.'

'Really? Cool, I'll see you then,' exclaimed Tommy as he hung up. He ripped the list he had created, and went downstairs to take a beer in celebration. He tried to call Joey but his calls went straight to voicemail, so he spent the rest of his day sitting around the house doing nothing. His dad came home around ten and went straight to sleep.

Chapter 2 - Friday

Tommy groaned as he woke up at eight in the morning to go to another day of, what he viewed as worthless, school. However, when he remembered he was finally going to get the van he'd wanted for months, he cheered up. When he made it down to the lobby of the building about a half hour later, Joey was there waiting for him.

'Why are you in such a good mood?' inquired Joey when he saw Tommy.

'I'm finally getting that van I've wanted for ages,' explained Tommy.

'Really? How? I thought your dad wouldn't give you money, and I can't imagine you getting a job.'

'Hey! I could get a job.'

'Really? After the last one you had?'

'Well, I probably could, but in answer to your question, I am borrowing the money from an old friend of my dad's. At least, I think they are friends.'

'That sounds a bit dodgy...' said Joey cautiously.

'Ah, it'll be fine. Come on, let's get to school,' replied Tommy as he grabbed Joey and pulled him towards the door.

'When are you getting the money?' asked Joey stubbornly.

'Tomorrow, why?'

'Well how long do you have to repay the loan, and how are you going to get the money to repay the loan?'

'Stop worrying about me Joey. Let's get to school before we're late.'

'Fine,' said Joey as he gave up in trying to make Tommy see how dodgy and dangerous this loan sounded. 'But I don't think you should go through with this.'

As the two made their way to school, a car pulled up across the road from the apartments.

After a few minutes, a tall man exited the car from the passenger side, and walked across the road into the apartment block.

After what could only be described as an extremely boring morning by Tommy, he realised he didn't want to stick around in school for the entire afternoon. He decided he would leave after lunch and started talking to Joey on his way to his locker.

'So, you wanna come along tomorrow?' asked Tommy

'No. I really don't think you should do this Tommy,' replied Joey.

'Would you ever give up, Joey! I'll be fine.'

'Okay, suit yourself.'

'See you over the weekend maybe?'

'Yeah, bye.'

Tommy rushed home from school and had some lunch. Afterwards he decided he would go around to the game shop around the corner. As he left the apartment building and went around the corner, two men exited a car, one tall one short, and began to follow him.

Tommy entered the shop and looked around for about fifteen minutes trying to find something that he would enjoy. He could've sworn some guy was following him, but he ignored it. When he started to get bored he went home.

He texted Joey on his way home asking him if he wanted to hang out, and then entered his apartment, went to his television and watched some random program that was on. As the hours dragged on and night fell, he became more and more annoyed at Joey who seemed to be ignoring him.

He went out onto the balcony to have a smoke before he went to bed. He took cover from the rain under the balcony of the apartment above his. Sighing as he flicked the end of his cigarette onto the street below, he went back inside and went to sleep.

Chapter 3 - The Weekend

Tommy woke up late on Saturday, half two in the afternoon by his clock. He groaned as he woke up in his messy, personalised room that was littered by his worn-in, unwashed clothes. He looked at his phone and saw Joey had texted back, saying that he had been busy.

Tommy sighed. He didn't believe Joey's excuse, but he replied that there was no harm done. He put his phone down and had a rejuvenating shower, and then got changed.

As he returned to his room he realised that he had no idea how to get to Baleins street. He sent a hopeful text to Joey asking for a lift, though he was doubtful that he would receive one.

He sat down at his desk and attempted for a few minutes to catch up on schoolwork, but he couldn't concentrate so he shuffled out to the balcony to have a smoke. After a few puffs his phone buzzed, and he exhaled as he looked at the message on his phone.

He laughed when he saw that Joey had agreed to give him a lift to Baleins street, but he wouldn't go in with Tommy. Tommy replied saying thanks, and went back inside.

Tommy left the apartment building about half an hour later and ran across the road. He hopped into Joey's car and they drove off.

'Hey, thanks so much for this, man,' said Tommy

'Yeah, no bother. But this doesn't mean I want you to go through with this.'

'Yeah I know, but thanks.'

The two remained in an awkward silence for the rest of the trip. Tommy felt a little guilty as it was his fault this void between them had occurred. Tommy was about to say something when Joey brought the car to a stop.

'Well there you go. Hope you don't get the money,' said Joey.

'Thanks,' replied Tommy laughing, 'I'll see you in a bit.'

Tommy walked down the road looking for the warehouse where he would be meeting Michael. He saw an old dilapidated building. It had broken windows littering the side wall like freckles. The paint of the wall looked like it was damaged, Tommy guessed from exposure to acid rain and sunlight.

Tommy assumed that this was the warehouse he was meeting Michael in, so he crossed the road and walked into the car park. It was littered with beer bottles and glass shards from the windows. The surface was plagued with gaps and potholes, which were full of water and waste.

Tommy approached the front door. He went to knock but found the lock was broken. The door creaked as he pushed it open. He peered inside, and saw a rundown building that must have been abandoned many years ago.

'Hello?'

'Ah! Tommy is it? In here.' replied an unknown voice. Tommy followed it to the left of the door and saw a large empty room. There were three men standing in the middle. Two of them were standing about a step behind the man in the centre, so Tommy guessed he was Michael. The man behind Michael on Tommy's left was a tall man and the other man was short enough.

'Tommy, come here.' said the man in the middle.

'Michael, I presume?'

'Yes.'

'So...the money?'

'Ha! No formality, just straight down to it, eh?'

'I-well-'

'It's fine, don't worry about it. So you want to borrow two thousand, correct?' asked Michael.

'Yes, I-'

'So when will we say you have to repay the money by, three weeks?' interrupted Michael.

'I guess yeah, I hadn't really thought about-'

'Great. Now what do we get if your fail to repay the full sum of money?'

'I don't know... maybe-'

'How about the van?'

'What?'

'If you fail to repay the loan, we take the van which you are going to buy with the money.'

'I guess that's fair,' said Tommy slowly.

'And you will have to repay two thousand five hundred.'

'Okay,' replied Tommy nervously.

'Perfect. Seán get the money.'

The shorter man left- he had seemed a bit agitated. 'Dom, get the documents.' The taller man

also left. They both returned after about two or three minutes. The shorter man was still acting nervously.

'Here you are, Michael.' said Dom as he passed Michael a pile of sheets, Seán silently laid the bag of money beside them.

'So, Tommy, sign here and the money is yours.'

'What is that? A contract or something?'

'Just a bit of security. It states that if you fail to repay me, I can take the van.'

'Ok...!' Tommy leant down and slowly, carefully, signed the paper.

'Great. Here is the money,' said Michael as he handed Tommy the bag of cash. Tommy took the bag gleefully.

'Thanks. I guess I'll see you when I have to repay you,' said Tommy as he started to leave.

'Unless we have to track you down when you fail to repay,' retorted Dom.

'Yeah...!' said Tommy nervously.

'Ha-ha, stop panicking the poor kid Dom. See you around Tommy,' said Michael.

'Bye,' replied Tommy, he backed out of the room nervously and slowly, when he neared the door he spun on his heels and walked briskly away from the warehouse and back to Joey's car.

'So, how did it go?' asked Joey.

'Great! I got the money, and there was no trouble at all,' said Tommy proudly.

'When do you have to repay the money?'

'In three weeks.'

'THREE WEEKS?' exclaimed Joey, keeping his eyes on the road, 'Is there much interest?'

'Five.'

'Five what?' Joey asked, Tommy sunk a little in his seat, Joey's eyes quickly strayed from the road and gave Tommy a stern look. 'Tommy?'

'Five hundred.'

'What? Come on man, how on earth are you supposed to buy your van and get two thousand five hundred to pay them off?'

'I haven't really thought about it yet.'

'Damn it, Tommy,' exclaimed Joey as he pounded the steering wheel with the palm of his hand. 'I told you it was a bad idea.'

'Relax Joey, I'll sort it out.'

'I hope so, because you can't not pay these sort of people.'

'Can we just drop it?'

'Whatever. Where do you want me to drop you off?'

'On Fitzgerald Drive, by the graveyard,' replied Tommy 'Thanks,' he added meekly.

After a short drive Joey pulled over to the side of the road. Tommy climbed out of the car onto the pavement. Joey drove off without saying goodbye.

Tommy looked around at the houses until he saw the house with the van he was about to buy parked outside. Grinning he walk over to the house and knocked on the front door. Heavy footsteps approached and after what sounded like the fumbling of a chain, the door opened. An old scruffy man stood at the door.

'Are you the guy that wants the van?'

'Yeah, I've got the money here.' replied Tommy as he passed the man he bag with the money. The man opened the bag and looked inside. He nodded and went back inside, returning with a set of keys.

'Here's the keys, the tank's full. Well, I suppose that's it. Enjoy the van.'

'That's it?' asked Tommy hesitantly.

'I thinks so. Have a good day.' The man turned around and closed the door behind him. Tommy, felt a little confused, but he turned around and went to the van.

Chapter 4 - Three Weeks Later

Joey was smoking a cigarette in Tommy's van. He sighed as he exhaled. He didn't want to get tangled with Tommy's mess, but Tommy was his best friend. He was the one who got Joey into smoking, and Joey was worried that he would get dragged into Tommy's drug consumption too.

Joey saw Tommy come around the corner. He took one more drag, then threw the fag on the street. Tommy hopped into the driver's seat.

'Okay. You ready?' he asked.

'Yeah. But I'm only helping you this one time, and that's it,' Joey replied.

'Okay, let's go.'

Tommy pulled his hood up, and wrapped a scarf around his face. Joey copied him, then put on gloves and opened a bag that was on the floor. He pulled out two paintball pistols, painted black and handed one to Tommy. 'I brought my own.' said Tommy as he pulled out a pistol.

'What the- is that a real gun?!'

'Yeah. I took it from my dad. Pretty cool isn't it?' said Tommy with pride in his tone.

'No! It's not,' replied Joey frankly in a frightened tone.

'Relax, I'm not going to shoot anyone.'

'It's loaded!' exclaimed Joey.

'Yep, now let's do this.'

Tommy burst out of the van, Joey followed suit. They ran around the corner into the newsagent.

'Everybody over to the counter!' Joey yelled as Tommy shot all of the cameras. Joey went to the till. 'Give me all the money and no-one gets hurt.'

'Yes sir, please don't shoot,' replied the cashier in a quavering voice, as he poured all of the money in the till into a bag.

'Don't forget the other till,' ordered Joey.

'Yes sir, sorry sir.'

Joey looked back at Tommy who was taking money from the customers. 'Here sir.'

'Did you get the safe?'

'No sir, sorry sir,'

'And twenty Marlboro red while you're at it,' shouted Tommy.

'Dude, we've got to hurry!' exclaimed Joey.

'I need a cigarette man,' Tommy replied.

'Tommy...is that you?' the cashier asked cautiously.

'Just give me the money,' said Joey as he ripped the bag from the cashier and they darted back to the van. Tommy started the van and drove off.

'Why on earth would you rob a shop that you used to work at?' roared Joey as soon as they got going.

'It felt like a smart idea, I mean I know all the codes, and where all the cameras are.'

'Yes but they know you! Now when the police get there, they'll know exactly who to look for. Ugh, you're such an idiot.'

'I'm sorry, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.'

'Yeah, well it wasn't,' replied Joey bitterly. They drove in silence for a few minutes before Tommy broke the silence.

'So, how much?' he asked. Joey glanced into the bag.

'I don't know, maybe three thousand.' Joey estimated.

'Sweet. Let's drop it off.'

'Can you drop me off first?'

'No, come on, it's just twenty minutes away.'

'Fine, whatever. I'm already going to jail.'

'No you're not. We'll be fine, trust me.'

'Trust you? You just robbed a shop to repay some criminal for money that you borrowed to buy this stupid van!'

'Maybe I've made some bad choices but you've nothing to worry about. No one knows that you were there.'

'Whatever, just drive.'

About Thirty Minutes Later...

After what seemed like a long twenty-minute drive, they pulled into a dilapidated warehouse. They got out of the van and went inside with the money.

'Ah! Tommy, do you have the money?' said a man, who was standing between a short man and a tall man.

'Yes Michael, it's right here,' explained Tommy, holding up the bag. 'Hi Dom, Seán,' said Tommy, acknowledging the tall and short man.

'Who's your friend?' Dom asked.

'This is Joey. He helped get the money.'

'Hm. Seán, take this and count it,' ordered Michael. The short man, Seán, obeyed. 'So Joey, why help Tommy here?'

'Well, we're friends. Friends help each other right?' Joey explained meekly.

'You seem nervous. Don't be. Tommy's the one who'll be in trouble if it's not all there,' remarked Michael. As he said this Seán returned.

'It's all here boss.'

'Good, how 'bout a few lines?' Joey was confused for a minute until he saw a table being brought out, and realised Michael meant cocaine.

'No, I'm-I'm okay-' Joey began to say.

'Are you refusing my hospitality?' Michael demanded.

'No I-'

'Good. Go ahead, guests first.'

Joey stepped forward nervously, with Tommy egging him on. He lifted one of the straws to his nose and prepared himself, he leant down and-

'What was that?' asked Michael suddenly.

'What was what, boss?'

'I thought I heard a car outside,' replied Michael as he went to look out the boarded up window. Joey subtly dropped the straw as Michael was distracted. 'Is that a-'

'This is the police, we have you surrounded. Come out slowly, with your hands first.'

'Did you call the police?!' roared Michael as he drew his pistol and pointed it at Joey.

'No! No I didn't! Please, I-'

'Michael, calm down! Why would he call the cops?' reasoned Dom.

'It must have been one of them!' retorted Michael. He turned the barrel of the gun to Tommy. 'How did you get the money Tommy?'

Tommy began to mumble and stutter as he tried to cower from the gun.

'WELL?'

'I robbed a shop.'

'So that's how they found us,' said Michael as he pulled the trigger with no hesitation. Tommy's body fell limply to the ground. Michael turned to Dom and Sean. 'Grab the money, let's go.'

'Wh-What...Oh my god, Tommy!' cried Joey. Dom and Sean followed Michael out of the building.

'What was that Michael? You didn't have to kill him!' stated Dom.

'He was a liability and a snitch, he led the police straight to me,' replied Michael.

'He was just a kid!'

'That doesn't change anything. He had information about me that would lead the police straight to me. I couldn't let him live,' snapped Michael as he opened the door and stepped outside.

'Come on, we have to get out of here.' Dom and Sean hesitated to follow as the door closed behind him.

'I don't know how much longer I can do this Dom. He's crazy!' said Sean.

'I know, he's getting worse. Hopefully we won't be here much longer, but we'd better go before he starts to question our loyalty too.' replied Dom. 'and we don't want to be here when the police flood the building.' The two left, following Michael.

Outside

'Was that a gun?' asked Adam, the man in command.

'Yes sir'

'Right, that's it. We're going in. Let's go. Breach the door.'

A policeman went to the door with a shotgun, took aim and went to shoot out the hinges, before noticing the lock was broken.

'It's open sir.'

'Okay, let's go.' He led the team into the building. The team split up into three groups of three-one team went up the stairs, another right, and Adam's team went left.

'Clear!' reported one of the teams. Adam's team entered the main room. The air reeked of gunpowder. The team split into two lines and walked down the sides of the room. Adam saw Joey crouched on the ground and began to approach him.

'Sir, we're with- Oh god,' gasped Adam. He grabbed his radio and said 'We need an ambulance ASAP. Priority Two!' He continued to approach Joey

who was weeping over Tommy's motionless body. 'Son, I'm sorry but you have to move, or I won't be able to help him.'

'No, just leave me alone.' moaned Joey.

'Simon take him away,' said Adam. Another member of the team took Joey away from Tommy's body. Adam then turned back and examined Tommy's body. The bullet had passed through his head. He realised that there was nothing that he could do for Tommy. He turned back to Joey, who was pale, red-eyed and sweaty. Adam knew that Joey knew Tommy was gone.

Simon stopped restraining Joey and he fell to his knees, dazed, confused. His world had just fallen apart. Simon tried to help him up but Adam raised a hand to tell him to leave Joey be. The other teams filed into the room and reported that there was no trace of Michael. They then sat aside in silence to show respect to Joey and Tommy.

The silence was pierced by the wailing of a siren that came from the ambulance that was pulling up to the building. Paramedics rushed from the ambulance into the warehouse. Adam pointed them towards Joey and Tommy.

The paramedics rushed over towards Joey. One looked over Tommy's body with a grave look on his face. He stood up and walked over to Adam.

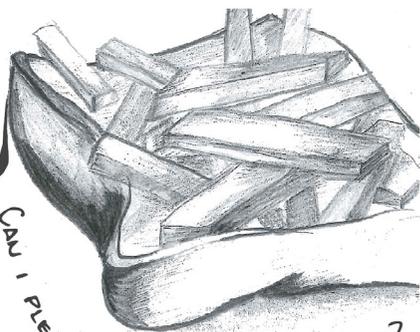
'He's dead, nothing I can do. I need to go call for a Medical Examiner.' he explained. Adam nodded

in approval. The other paramedic began to guide Joey to the ambulance.

'Ok guys, we're done in here for now. Let's set up a perimeter outside and wait for C.S.I.' announced Adam. His team moved outside the building, and began to set up a crime scene.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Let's Eat

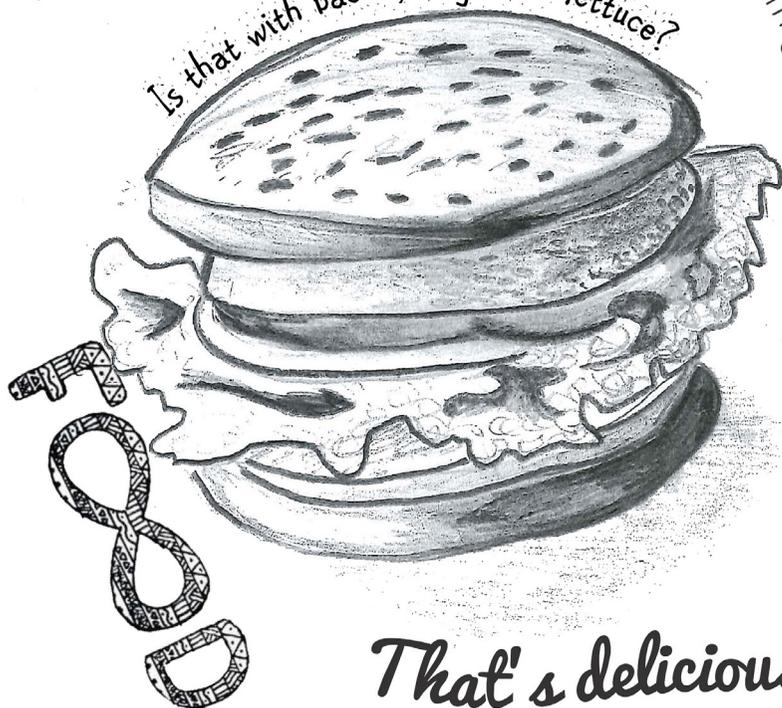


WHEN'S DINNER GOING TO BE READY?

CAN I PLEASE GET FRIES WITH THAT?

Is that with bacon, mayo and lettuce?

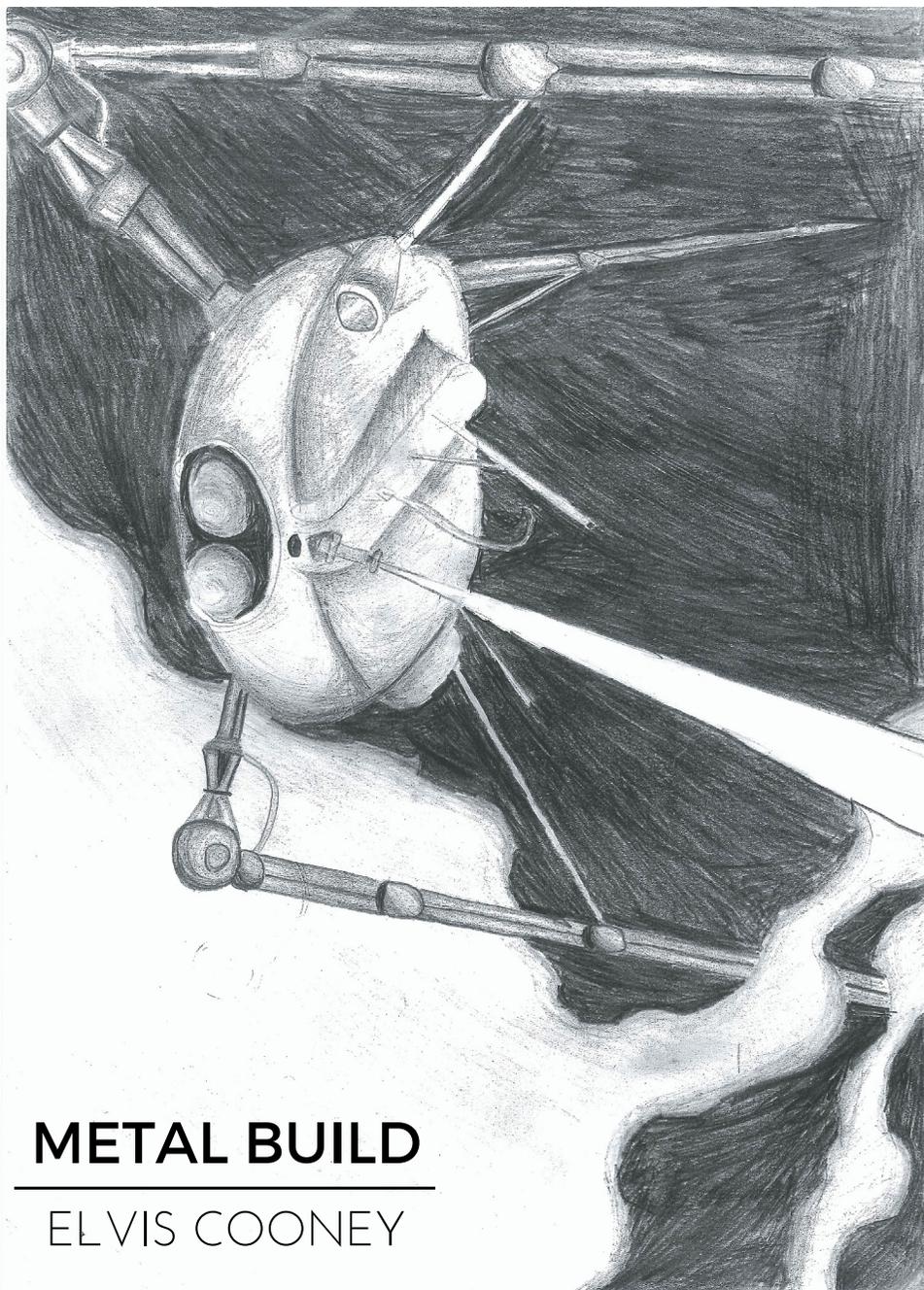
I would also like a medium Coke. if that's OK?



That's delicious!

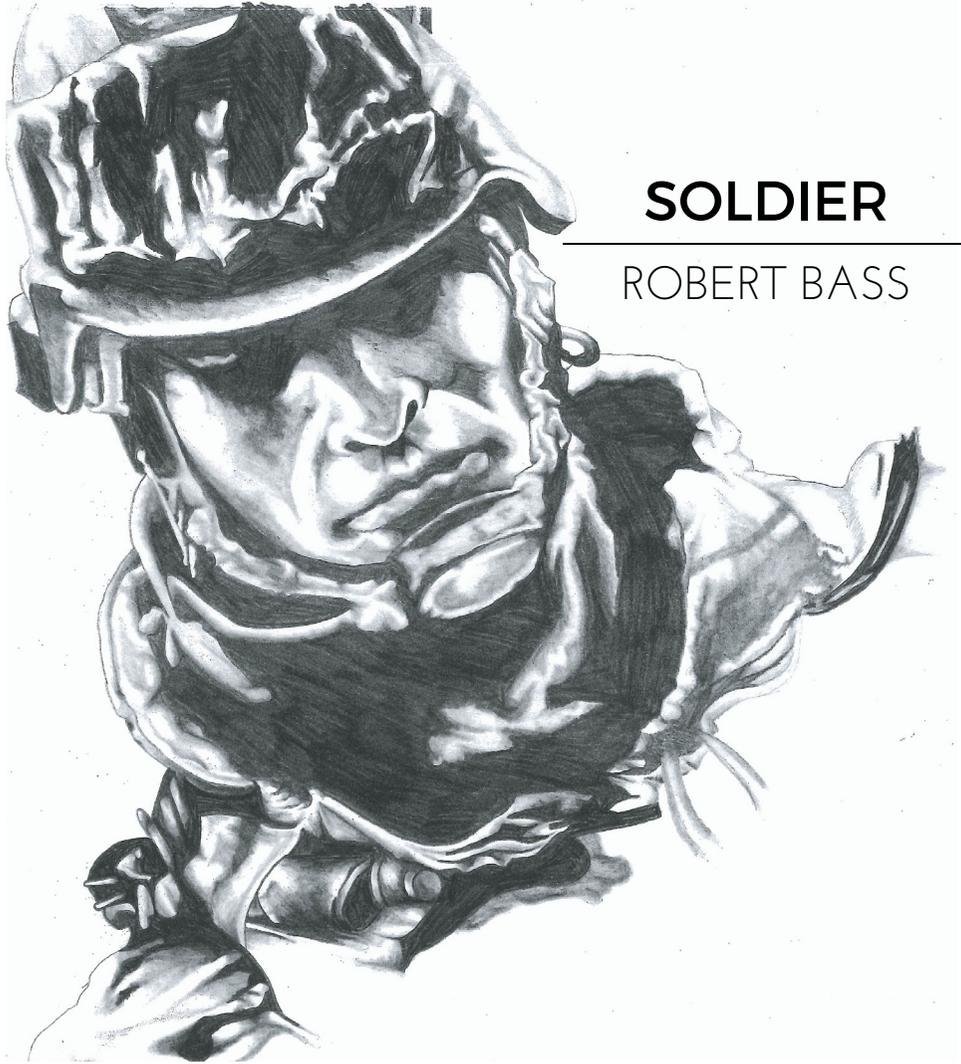
LET'S EAT

ROBERT CURLEY



METAL BUILD

ELVIS COONEY



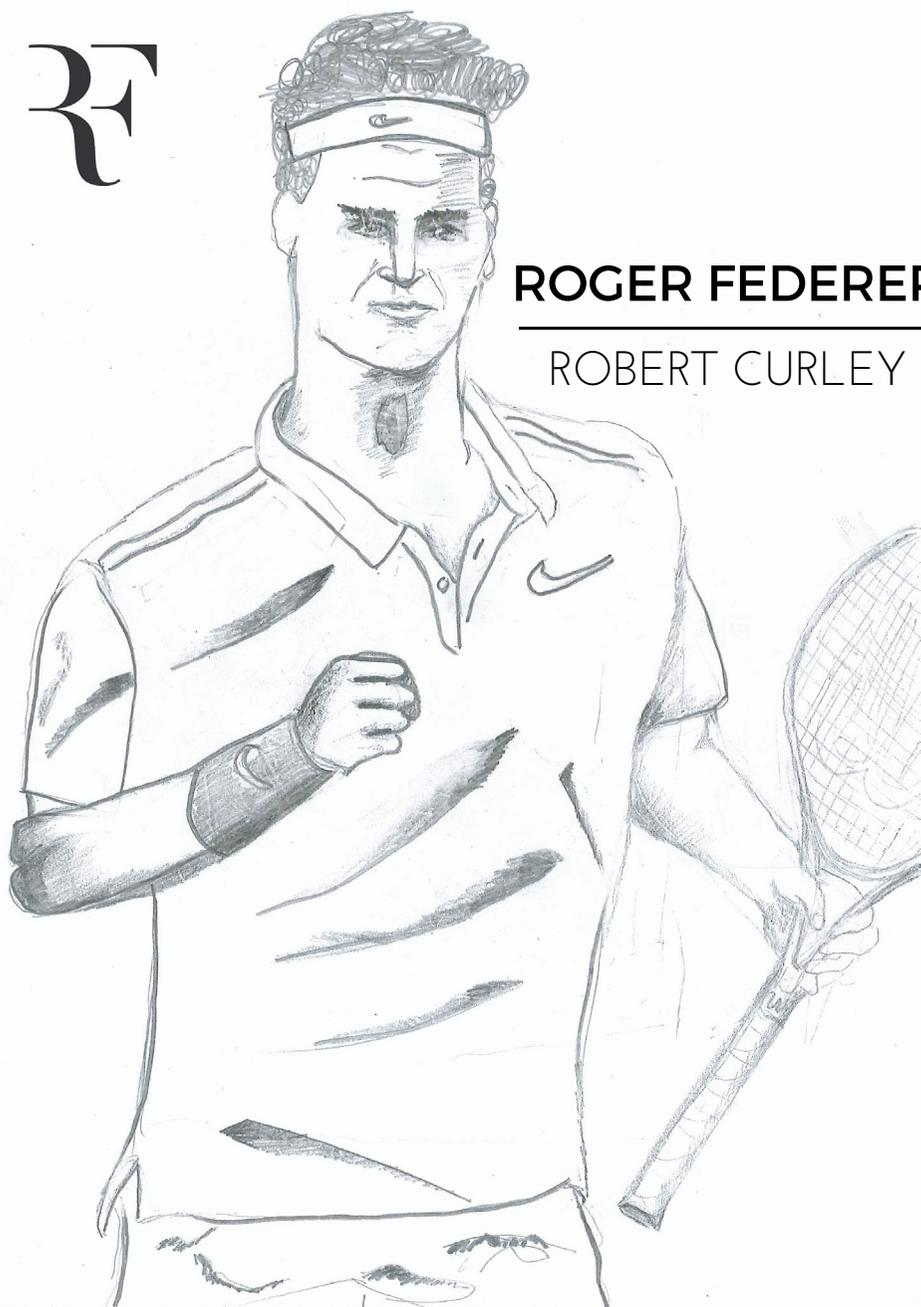
SOLDIER

ROBERT BASS

F

ROGER FEDERER

ROBERT CURLEY



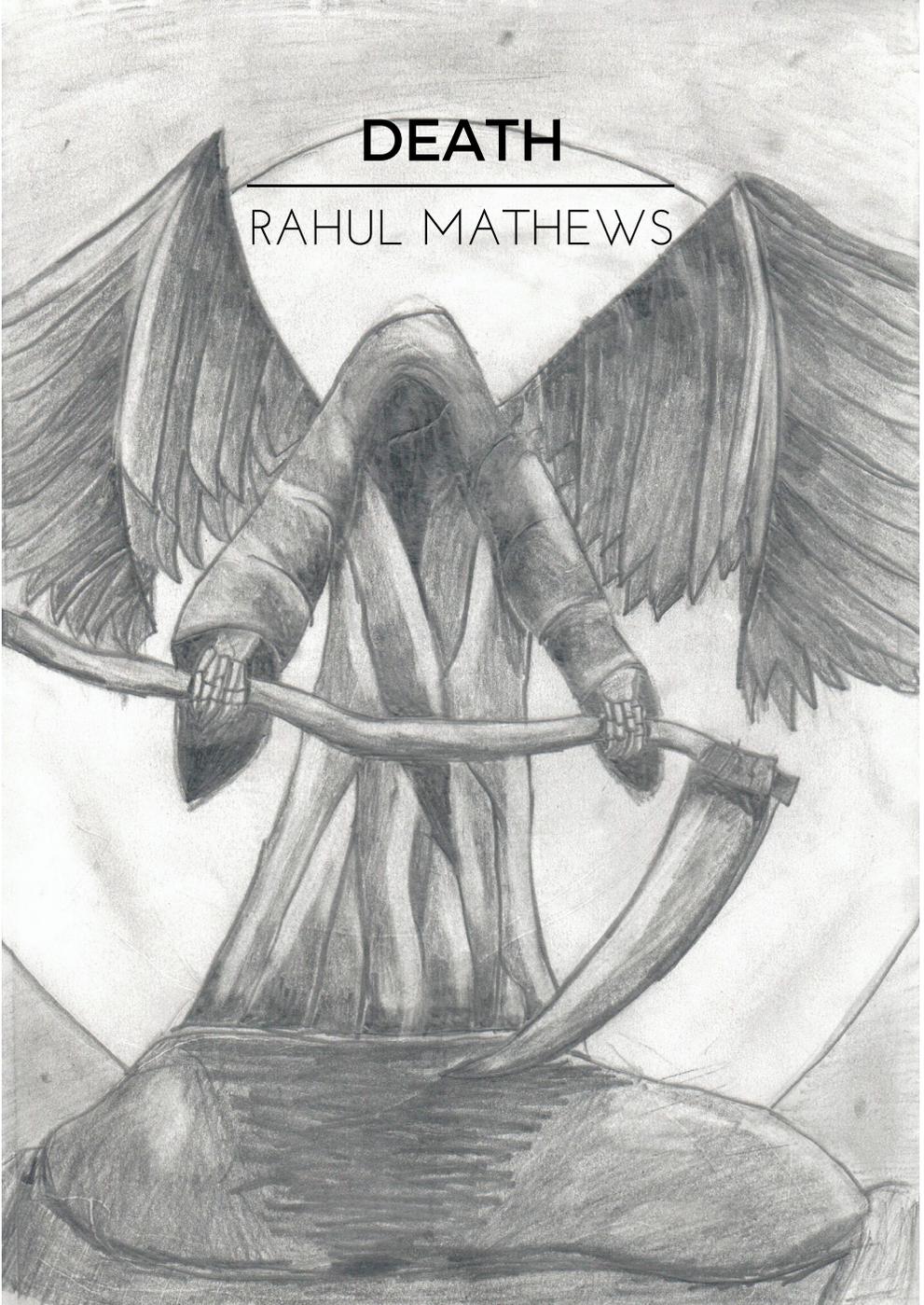


THE DARK HUNTSMAN

TADHG O'SHEA

DEATH

RAHUL MATHEWS





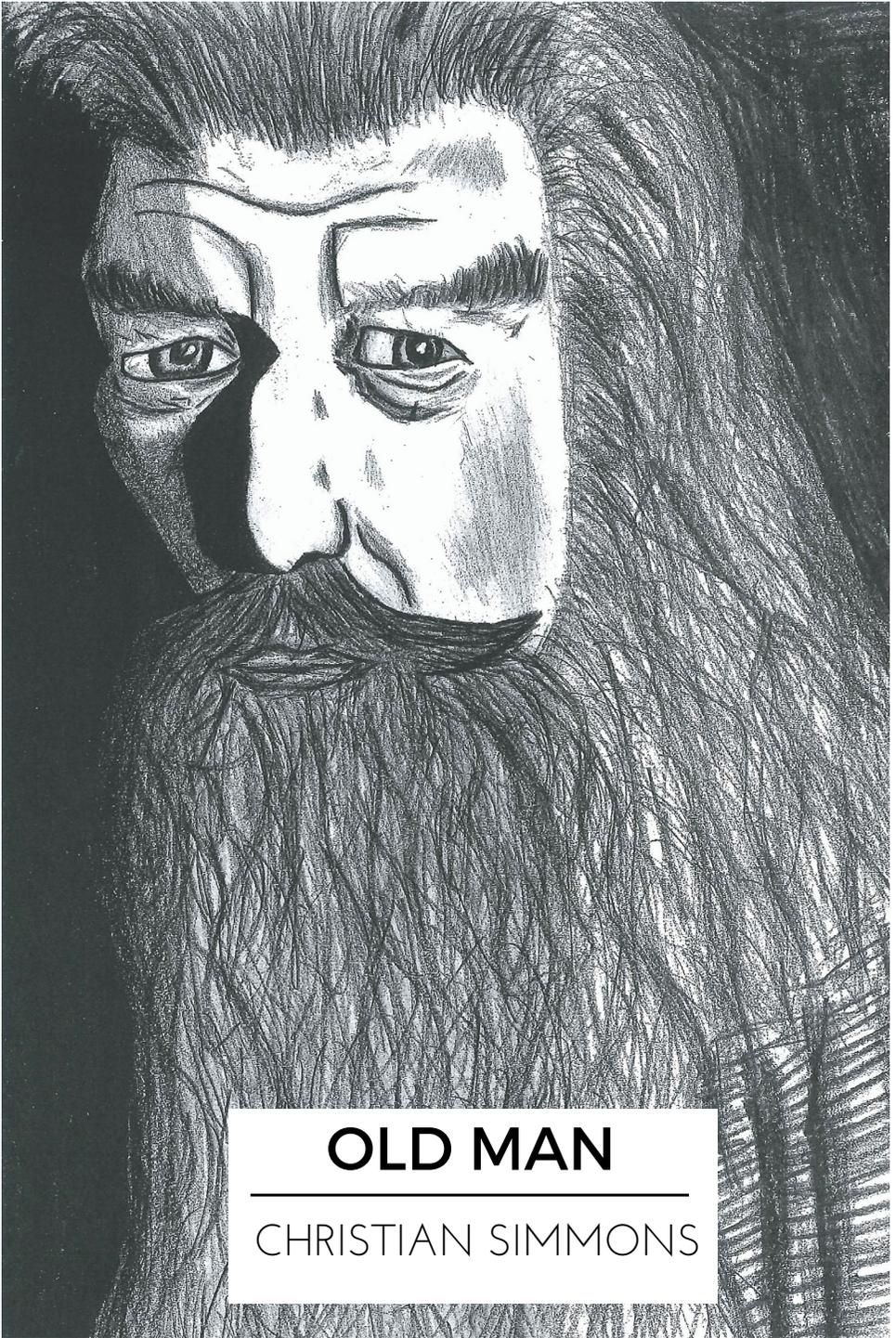
LA MORT CHARMANTE

LUKE GILROY



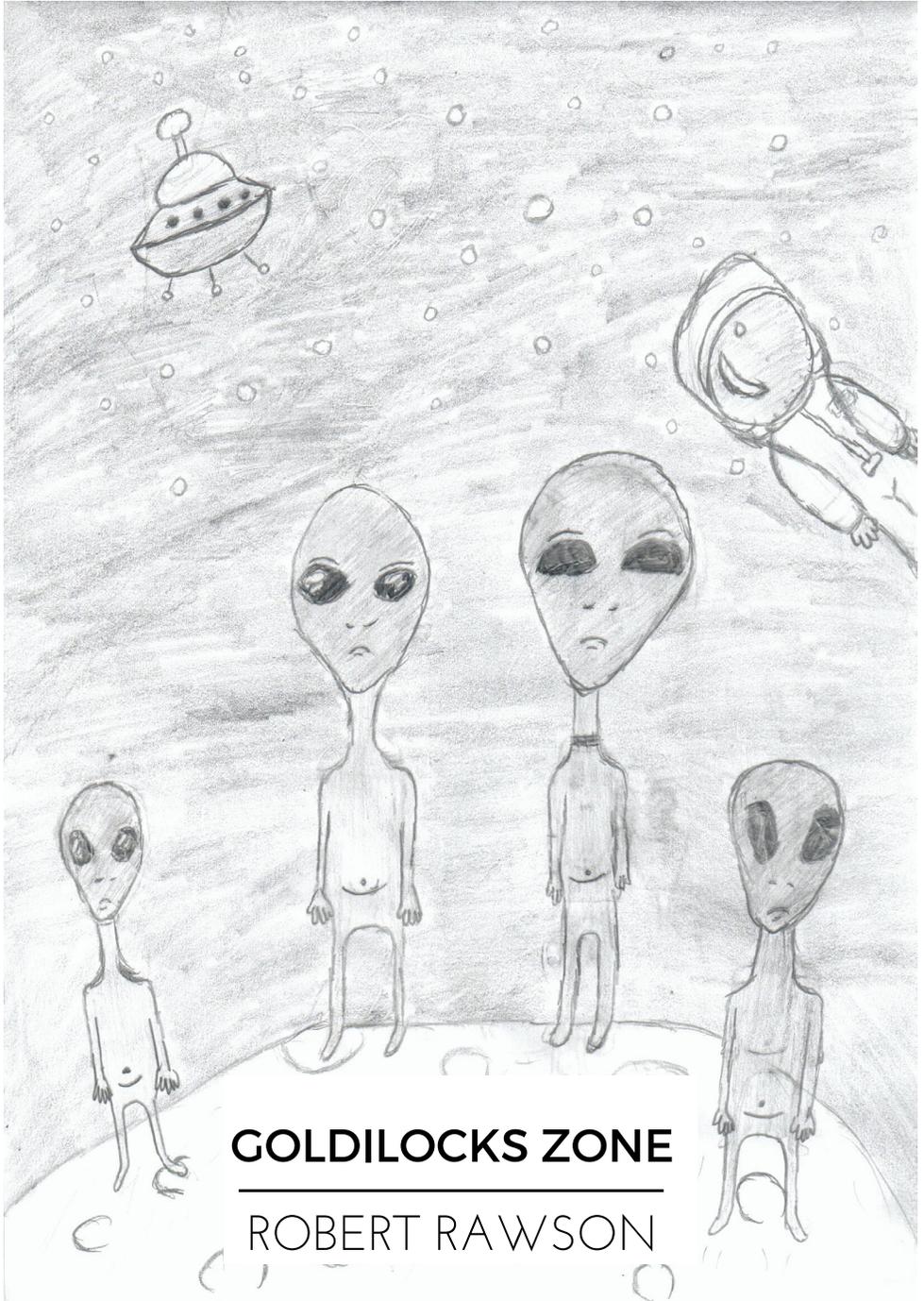
THE KID

LUKE GILROY



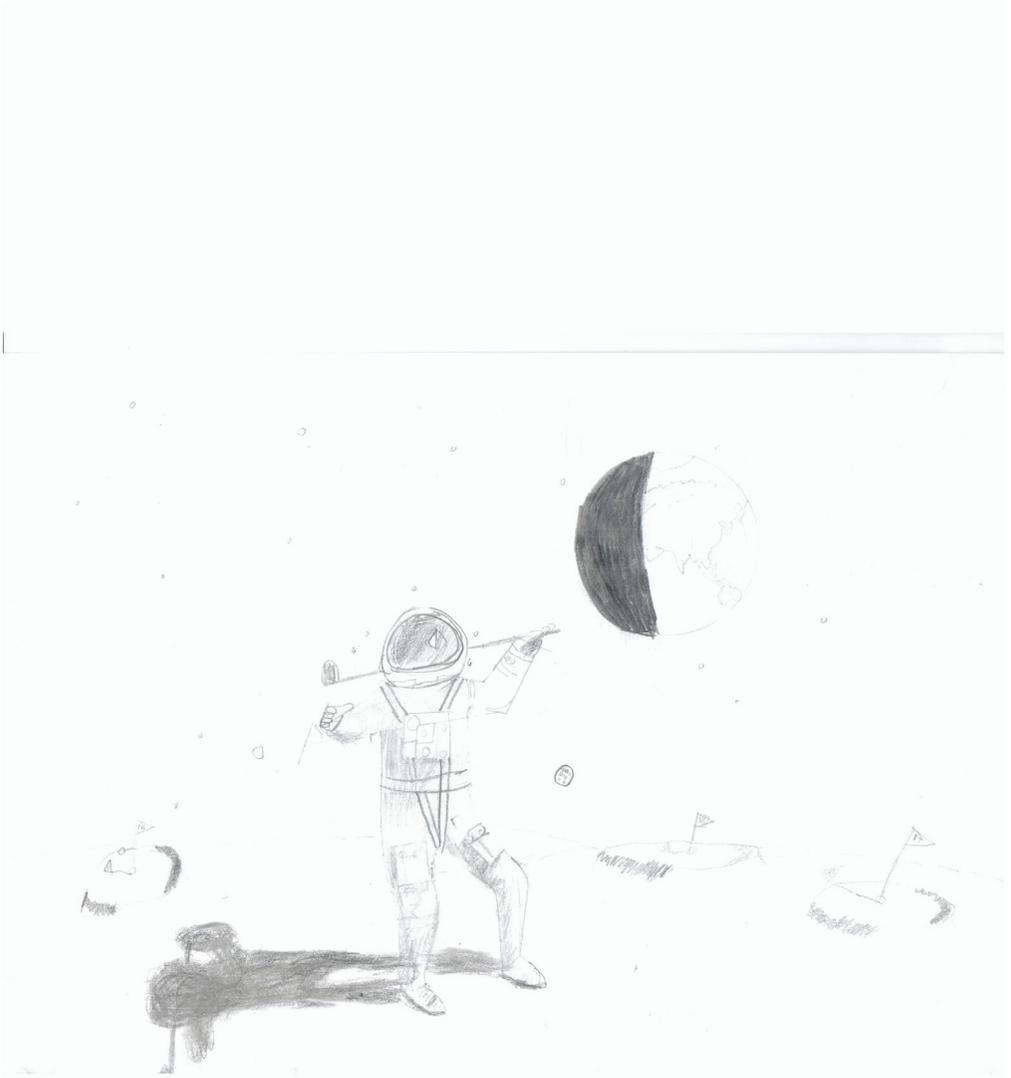
OLD MAN

CHRISTIAN SIMMONS



GOLDILOCKS ZONE

ROBERT RAWSON



THE LUNAR COURSE

KEVIN SAUREL

POEMS

France 1916

Dáire O'Neill

France, July 1916,
Soldiers trudge,
Through the sludge
Approaching the frontlines,
Wishing for better times.
Away from France,
Where the birds can hum.
Away from the horrors,
Of the River Somme.

Reaching their destination,
A place scarred and deformed,
Littered with soulless victims,
Reeking of gunpowder and infection.
They plunge into the trenches,
Leaving their lives behind
To the hell of this planet,
Their new accommodation.

Now at the mercy of a dictatorship
Ruled by their commander,
All they know is what they are told
And all they are told is:
Entente est bien.
Allianz ist schlecht.

So they take their weapons
And their orders,
As millions have before.

Surrounded by blood and gore,
Deafened by gunfire and mortar,
They take their place in History,
The nameless role of a pawn.

Early Days

Conor Flannery

That damp and cold September morning,
Was when it all began.
I walked to school. Felt all the nerves.
Not my exact game plan.
It was when I reached the school front door,
I was sat amongst my peers.
Waiting to hear my name be called.
And my class for future years.

Each day I faced a set of tasks,
That I had to overcome.
From getting to my bottom locker,
Or solving that maths sum.
Finding my way
With a bag of books,
Proved to be very tough.
Being bottom of the school food chain,
Made things extremely rough!

A class without a teacher in sight.
An opportunity!
But games concluded as the teacher approached,
To our seats we would flee.

The teacher would have the class controlled,
Until he turned his back.

I didn't see that paper ball fly,
Until I got a SMACK!

I've had many lessons in my year,
From poems to history.
But the most important thing I've learnt,
Is to try my best and never give up.
In six years I will see!

The Beast

Dáire O'Neill

The protectors of this door
Guard a terrible beast
That hails from the cursed shore.
Come famine or feast,
They must ensure,
That the beast behind the door,
Stays forevermore.

The door, centuries old,
Has remained shut for fear
Of what people would behold
If the beast were to appear.
For tales have been told
Of what will unfold
Should the beast escape its hold.

A fateful day would reveal
That the door had a broken seal
Now the beast could reveal

What the people had been told to fear.
Scales, a deep black obsidian,
Teeth, as sharp as tempered steel,
Eyes, sharp and observant,
Claws, curved like scimitars,
Wings, the embodiment of oblivion.

There was no hope
No chance for success
How does one fight,
When you are fighting fear itself.

Heuston 2015

Conor Spain

A station is not stationary.
Conversely, it's quite fluid
Arrivals and Departures
to rail, they're best suited

Seated beside the Liffey
Old Kingsbridge Station rests.
Now named Dublin Heuston,
It faces the same tests

Dealing with early risers
And late-comers too
The masses of humanity,
simply, pass through

Ignorant to the fact,
that they have just passed
a station that has seen
the wonders of the past.

From the age of steam
with coal a-plenty
with fire and smoke galore

To the modern age
with electricity
and always wanting more.

This technology, two centuries old
is under supreme duress.
So if your train is delayed,
Relax, breathe, de-stress.

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