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FOREWORD

This is the eighth edition of Clonkeen College Press' THE ANTHOLOGY series. The collection of writing in your hands is the product of the Transition Year Creative Writing module. That module, however, has always been about much more than the wispy vagueness often attributed to the creative temperament.

It has always been about facing the blank page. Trying to find out, in the unstructured silence, what you have to say for yourself. What you care about. Whether that be through fiction, non-fiction, poetry, screenplays, drama, essays, speech writing, debating, journalism, hardly matters; each and every form and flavour counts.

It is also about language and words though. Because our words, the ones we choose and the ones we don't, shape how we think and how we are thought about. Carefully chosen words enhance our stories, our opinions - not to mention relationships and our professional lives - just as careless words can damage them. So, it stands to reason that getting good with words matters. THE ANTHOLOGY is a project that tries to draw attention to the centrality of language and narrative to our lives.

And the words between the covers of THE ANTHOLOGY 2019 are the words of today's young people, young people beginning to find out who they are

and what they think, as their futures stretch out before them.

We hope you enjoy the read!

John Toomey

Feb 2019

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HOME

Allencris J.R.R.

“Who am I and where do I belong?”

Generally inspired by a rather healthy dose of mid-life crisis, this is a question that everyone will battle with at one point or another and for some, it's the entire focus of their lives. I'm sure that there's a multitude of different paths to take in answering such a broad question but starting with the idea of *Home* is as viable a beginning as any. One could say that home is where they live and that the four walls surrounding them, paired with a roaring fire is all they need to serve as a *home*. Another may say that home is where they were born. I wouldn't be able to fault either nor would I be able to disprove any other perception of “home”. I can however discuss my own understanding of what a *home* is.

My earliest memory of a home has always stayed fresh within my mind, laying dormant, and taut with expectation for a tinge of desire to tug at my heart, whenever I close my eyes, I can still feel it. A radiant sun rising over the dusty orange of the plains slowly seizes my consciousness and draws back the veil of sleep. As I get more lucid, I feel the warm air on my face and the gentle

breeze sweep through my hair as the sweet, simple smells and sounds of the countryside envelop me. It's truly an idyllic image and I'm always reminded of my hometown whenever I feel damp earth around my toes. It was a simpler time, and though I didn't know much of anything, I had a feeling that where I was, I belonged. This is a feeling shared by many regarding their hometown and I believe that anyone can relate to the childhood innocence that lets us fit into any corner of the Earth. Is it right however to imagine that a place seen in what is almost a dream to most people after they've reached adulthood, is where one belongs? I still visit my hometown and I would have to answer that yes, I do still feel a sense of belonging there. Though I may live in an urban jungle with the constant roar of commuters battering my senses, I can hear the call of the country. It's a deep longing for the tranquillity of a golden morning surrounded by palm trees saluting in the morning chill; And for the family who care for me, separated by a distance once impassable in a lifetime, or even two.

Is it family then that defines the home? Certainly, I feel most at ease when I'm with family and that's something that most people can empathize with. The comfort and safety that one feels when with family is indescribably unique and few things come close. What a family is could be an entirely different discussion topic and thus, I shan't attempt to get into the intricacies, but in essence, my view is that family is a true sanctuary for all. After all, family

members are more or less forced to become acquainted over the course of several years and one would think that close contact of that sort, whether one likes it or not, fosters a certain understanding between members of the family. Family need not be a place of acceptance, but merely a place of understanding. Acceptance may offer solace but understanding puts one at ease. This plays into my understanding of what a home is and separating the home into both a place and a feeling helps to explain it. Having people that care about you is simply a part of life and as long as one other person still exists in your life, you're connected to so much more than a single person. One connection can be traced to another and yet another and this continues through a dense web of interlaced strings, weaving the fabric of humanity together with the touch of a gentle spinner.

This is where my true understanding of a home emerges, and I can truly talk about what that elusive word truly means. Home is anywhere you are. The place doesn't matter and neither do memories and the one true constant is always going to be oneself. People have adopted a terrible tendency to flounder in a world that becomes more accessible by the day in search of the self, and it has started to seriously damage the perception of what it means to simply be. In searching for a place to belong, too often people disregard themselves and simply search for a convenient space to slot themselves into in lieu of making space within themselves for their experiences to build

them into a being greater than what they used to be. Though the world has more to offer than ever before in term of material possessions, experiences and hobbies, the choice has reduced many people's sense of self to a collection of what they do and who they know rather than an innate feeling of being. The spark has become clouded and muddled as a clear spring that takes in too much of its surroundings. The beauty and essence of a lake comes not from the lush trees around it and the fresh fertile greenery stemming from it, but from the purity of the water within. Wherever the water goes, it's likely to be valued highly, but that is only for so long as it remains as pure as its source, and so, I urge everyone to be like the silver water of a spring. If one stays true to what they are, then they will always belong.

Being true to oneself is difficult and I certainly don't expect everyone to quickly adapt, nor do I think it very realistic. An easier concept to understand however is as follows. What does it mean to be yourself? What makes you any different from the person next to you? Is it possible that, if they should have experienced all that you had, they would resemble yourself in every way but in body? I believe so. If we should presume this to be true, then are we not eternally surrounded by nought but ourselves? Wherever you go, you shall have a home. There shall always be those with your circumstances and those who share your thoughts, so if you should ever find yourself with an emptiness gnawing at your insides,

follow my advice and don't wander in search of a home.
Travel in search of people, for you are always home.

THE FIRE WIELDER

Sadhbh Lowry

I took in a deep breath and closed my eyes willing the kindling I had gripped in my hand to light. I let the power I always kept so subdued, so repressed in my chest, escape a little. My mother pushed the grey metal bucket of water closer to me, ready to douse me if I lost control. I pushed out a breath, watching as the kindling began to glitter with sparks of heat and then, suddenly, a large flame. I thrust my hands into the water. I shut my eyes sighing in defeat.

“It’s alright,” my mother said, “you’ll learn to control it.”

“How can I learn to control it if I never use it, why can’t we leave, go somewhere safe?”

My mother stood sighing. She brushed down her skirt and looked at me, “We’ve had this conversation before, Fiadh.” She turned over to the table where her healing herbs were laid out. “Go outside and take a walk, cool down.”

I huffed but grabbed my cloak and walked out of the hut.

It was nearing the winter celebrations and our village was already deep under a blanket of snow. I walked at the

edge of the woods, muttering angrily to myself. That was when I heard it - the loud, uniform stomps of hundreds of boots hitting the ground. The warning of the emperor's soldiers. My Grandfather had warned me about them before he died. I wouldn't risk them getting me, I couldn't let them feel the heat coursing off my skin. Blood rushed to my chest, fear blossomed into an unbearable heat. I had always told myself that we were too far north, too inconsequential for their raids. I turned on my heels and ran towards our hut, my boots thumping on the ground and my cloak flying behind me.

When I burst through the entrance my mother was sitting at the table, her long, greying plait tossed over her shoulder. "Soldiers," I gasped, reaching for her cloak and tossing it at her.

She jumped up, grabbing a bag, throwing cheese and bread into it. I took my small string tie bag, carefully placing our herbs inside.

Suddenly the door was knocked in, wood splinters flying everywhere. I looked up and saw a large soldier standing there, dressed head to toe in thick steel armour. Their green tunics were stamped with a white falcon, the emperor's insignia.

"Where's the fire wielder!" he yelled in a gruff voice, his beady eyes looking from my mother to me.

"I don't know of any." I could hear the tremble of fear under my mother's bravado.

The soldier strode over to me and wrenched me forward. My heart threatened to beat out of my chest. He roughly placed his meaty fingers on my neck. My stomach convulsed at the reek of stale sweat and foul breath as he slid his cold hand downwards and over my heart. I wanted to rake my nails across his face, hit him, kill him even.

“She’s hot,” he said. “Her skin is burning,” he snarled.

I took in a deep shuddering breath. “I have a fever,” I said weakly, desperate to keep the tremble out of my voice.

The soldier reached out and trapped my hands behind my back.

“No!” my mother screamed as she fell to her knees while another soldier marched in and grabbed her.

Soon we were in the village square, kneeling on the hard, cold, cobbled stone, held down by two soldiers, one either side of me. The whole village was out watching on.

There were desperate tears sliding down my mother’s face, while I remained stoic. I would not give them the pleasure of seeing them break me.

“Fire Wielding,” the general of the legion said, addressing the crowd. “A crime punishable by death.”

The crowd cheered raising their fists in hatred at us.

“All hail Emperor Alpin,” he screamed.

The crowd began to chant it, the words merging together into one noise, pounding into my head. Suddenly, my mother was pulled up onto her feet and pushed into the centre of the square.

I watched, desperation blooming in my chest as the general shouted over the crowd, “There is only one way to know for sure, fire wielders don’t burn.” I let out a scream cursing the gift for skipping a generation. The general took a lit torch from the soldier next to him and put it to my mother’s skirt. I watched as it spread on her clothes like wildfire, I watched as her skin melted and her blood boiled. I heard her screams of agony.

I watched as she died.

I was pulled up onto my feet. The fear, the agony in my chest blooming into something, something more powerful than I had ever felt before. The general held the torch to my cloak and the fire spread, but I didn’t burn. I let out a shriek so anguished, so full of grief, and I let the fire consume me. I pushed it from my body and suddenly I exploded. Fire spread out from me like a pinwheel. I looked on at the village and the people began to burn. I looked on as the metal helmets the soldiers wore melted into their skin. I listened on as they screamed and shouted. I looked on as they died. A sick sense of satisfaction began to explode inside.

I began to rein in the fire. I breathed deeply and shut my eyes imagining dousing myself in cold water.

When I opened my eyes, I stood in the centre of what was now a mass grave. I looked at the houses burning, at the charred flesh of those who hated me. I turned on my heel and began to walk.

I stood at the top of the north mountain and looked at what I used to call home, burning. Suddenly my knees buckled under me as I felt the grief and guilt overwhelmed me.

99

Anonymous

One pixel; all I wanted was a single frame to appear on my screen. That single pixel was the key component of a download bar that was sitting on my screen at a smug ninety-ninth percentile. It was jeering me, teasing me and yet it had no voice, no mind or no intuition of what psychological damage it was bestowing upon me. I slumped, beginning to face the reality that the software would remain on my laptop at a ninety-nine percentile for eternity. That reality was annihilated by the non-existent hand of a chime. The game was ready, and with haste I clicked play...

The title screen assembled before my grateful eyes. The retro soundtrack created an aural sensation enhancing a visual of a bustling arcade in the 1980's. Level one, level two, level three and level four. My mind accelerated as I passed each floor. I indulged in every puzzle, every task and decimated every boss. I was on the brink of being acquainted with the level forty-two completion screen, when my laptop screen blackened. It had run out of battery; I must have accidentally unplugged it from the adapter at some point during my play session. I soon

realised it was late, very late and I had a lot of homework to do.

Over the coming days, I blitzed through the game, but then something strange happened. I reached the end, not only of the game, being on the last level, but of my streak of success that had guided me to level ninety-nine. Granted, there had been a few levels that caught me off-guard or required a bit of thinking time with a hint of strategy, but not this one. Level ninety-nine was like no other in regard to difficulty. To complete the level, you had to kill this big, green, scale littered dragon. I tried again and again, each time more confident, thinking I had more and more strategies to bolster my chances of success. Not according to the winged reptile.

It infuriated me, the dragon. It's smug snout glaring at me in my mind, judging me. When I couldn't understand my maths homework, there it was, judging me. When I scored badly on a test, there judging me. If I burnt my toast, judging me. Let my phone die, JUDGING ME.

This game had taken over my life. Everywhere I went the dragon pursued. I was stuck virtually and realistically. I figured if I bet the dragon, he would leave me alone. I became what people called *tryhard* - a term I had previously disagreed with using, but whatever I was doing was certainly the superlative of the word *try*. I was filled with determination and channelled my focus into beating the game.

I tried, tried, tried and tried. But ended up dead, dead, dead and dead. The situation had manifested into something even more unhealthy. A few moments later when the dragon decided to have its ninety-ninth serving of roasted game protagonist, I was finished. I slammed my head against the desk- accidentally hitting the retry button on the much familiar ‘Game Over’ screen in the process. I started to cry, which turned pretty soon, into a weep. After a while, I lifted my head. My blurry face in the reflection of the monitor cleared, as I wiped away my tears full of doubt and looked at the game in astonishment. The dragon was asleep curled on the cobbled stone floor in a heap. My avatar unmoved was standing there, doing nothing. A door one of which was usually cloaked by the mighty dragon’s figure was on the back wall. I manoeuvred my character through the door with clenched breathing, after my character vanished through the door a chime played. The screen read ‘Thanks for Playing’.

I felt as though my body and mind were separated. The image of the dragon’s glare was gone, and a colossal relief overcame me. Before I knew it, I was on my bike to the game store to sell it. The thought of it gone was better than the potential trade in I could obtain. My tires screeched instantly as the thought came to mind. No. I’m not going to put this back on the shelf for some other poor soul like me to come across it. I did a U-turn and headed for the park.

When I got home, I used my laptop to skype my friends, instead of dealing emotional damage to myself. Thanks to the game, I had grown secluded from them and needed to rediscover the thirst to socialise with beings that weren't green dragons. As our conversations grew with the night's darkness, I felt happy calm and reassured. Especially with the knowledge that a certain game disc, now in half was lying at the bottom of a lake.

THE TRENCHES OF TWENTY- EIGHTEEN

Óran Keane O'Hagan

Watching the six-o clock news with my Parents, left me silently worried, I should be making a start on my English assignment, not wasting my time watching another depressing instalment of the news. But before I leave, I notice our president Michael D Higgins, our Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump, lining up in sombre mood and dress, to pay tribute to those unsung heroes of World War One.

To be honest, I feel angry.

I want to challenge those leaders of today, before they go on to commemorate one more drop of soldier's blood or celebrate the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June. Why? Because our world war is not over, not for me, and not for any of my peers. Not unless there is to be a signing of the Treaty of Versailles in cyber space, to mark the end of likes, dislikes, and all the other battles of social media we face.

Teenagers are currently fighting an “ongoing war”, far worse than that fought, from 1914 to 1918. Back in 1918 things were more straight forward than they are today. At

least the soldiers of world war one fought a tangible enemy, one they could physically see by the uniform they wore in the trenches. Back then, “Showing your true colours”, meant you knew who your comrade or foe was.

Today, social media conscripts our youth to the trenches of “Fortnite” and “Call of Duty”. On this battle ground the player never knows who to trust. Cute fluffy skins, turn into sniper carrying, trigger happy villains, thirsty for blood.

To add insult to injury, when one is slaughtered, no telegram is sent home to the veterans’ family to pronounce your heroic end, rather you are simply dropped back into the game to respawn and die all over again. So “D” day becomes Groundhog Day! The dignity of going six foot under is a thing of the past.

No wonder then, in their desperate plea for attention, a depressed teen, can bring a firearm to school, shoot their fellow students, one by one, and say fair game. The fact that their gun is real, and the dead don’t respawn, eludes them. The villain is simply whisked away by our leaders and pronounced mentally ill. That they have killed dozens of teens on their video games for years without consequence is political taboo.

Donald Trump specifically uses the tragedy as leverage for the National Rifles Association (NRA) to justify more gun provision. Proposing that teachers be armed, is not a joke but his solution! Can you imagine confessing to your

reactive French teacher, that you have forgotten your homework again, as he brandishes an AK47?

Yet this ideology suits modern day leaders of the twenty first century. Donald Trump would not be in power today, were it not for the support of the gun lobbying NRA. Isn't it just great that our young people don't get the seriousness of war, they glorify it in video games and films, while enlisting figures soar.

Back in 1918 soldiers returned home mentally and physically injured, many suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Veterans were triggered on hearing the slightest sound of an explosion or gunfire. Today's "veterans" don't even wince when their on-line character is blown into a million pieces. I ask myself which is worse, to suffer PTSD or online assassination addiction, bereft of empathy or relationships?

Instead of soldiers writing home love letters, to those left behind, we are trying to survive the online dating sites for comfort. Airbrushed profiles lie, they look younger and prettier, trying to escape the humiliation of being swiped aside, at the first sign of imperfection. A crooked nose, tinted teeth, hair or eye colour, can merit rejection. I envy once again, those war heroes, who returned minus a limb or emotionally fragile, yet were still welcomed home, to the arms of their partner, warts and all!

Frankly in comparison, I believe World War One was bliss. It was simple, straight forward, and not complicated,

it did exactly what it said on the tin. Shoot the enemy or be shot.

In this “world war three”, teens die to themselves one hundred times a day, as they make it their mission to be noticed. So, when their Instagram post doesn’t get enough likes, they feel rejected, humiliated, mortified. Others post pictures of dating and partying and win lots and lots of likes, thus ensuring others suffer from paranoia, isolation and exclusion. The modern PTSD!

I too have fallen victim to many of the pressures in this piece, I play the war games of “Call of Duty” and “Fortnite,” and believe I am numb to the reality of war, yet I am from a stable home. I have Instagram and snapchat accounts too and often I see other people on holidays, feeling jealous. Then I realise, If I were on holiday, I would be doing the same thing, posting pictures for others to envy because that’s what our society feeds and rewards.

The battle grounds may have changed from the muddy, rat infested front lines, to the invisible cyber space of the modern-day trenches, but we are still fighting, we are still cyberbullying innocent teenagers, on a quest for power. We are in a sense, covertly re-enacting the events of past wars.

We are in a war that never ends, so I ask our world leaders to do something about it. Social media is no longer a place to share and post photos or videos, it is a

battleground full of depressed teens “ardent for some desperate glory” (Wilfred Owen).

Well I have had enough. I now urge all political leaders to make it stop. Firstly, by supporting the exclusion of likes and dislikes from popular apps, and secondly by ditching the ludicrous second amendment of the United States Constitution.

I believe as a society we also need a serious shift in values. No more fighting for the media spotlight and more importantly no more in humane video games. It’s like global warming, it will continue to get worse until we get together and commit to change our constitutions and implement policies which disable the use of firearms. Then we will be safe and our crime rates drop.

The modern-day trenches are a dangerous place, and we are all on the front line, but if we commit to change, we can end the war in cyber space for those that have yet to wear a skin.

Maybe someday soon, we will look back and realise the irony of the second amendment, where, if someone has the audacity to carry and shoot a firearm, they are within their legal rights. Thanks to a constitution, written in 1791 to protect all citizens equally.

BIOGRAPHY OF DUA LIPA

Robert Devereaux

EARLY LIFE

Dua Lipa was born on the 22 august 1995 in London to Albanian parents from Kosovo. She attended Sylvia Young Theatre School before moving to Kosovo with her family in 2008. She attended a private school called Mileniumi I Tretë in Pristina. Lipa grew up listening to her father, singer Dukajin Lipa. Her first name means love in Albanian. At the age of 14, she posted covers of her favourite singers such as Pink to YouTube. At the age of 15 she returned to London to become a singer. She lived with a family friend and studied at Parliament hill school, only going to Sylvia Young Theatre School on Saturdays. At the age of 16 she started modelling. And in 2013 at the age of 18, she starred in a television ad for the X Factor.

2015-2017: BREAKTHROUGH AND DUA LIPA

In 2015, Lipa began working on her debut album for warner music group. In August 2015 she released her first single 'New Love' produced by Emile Haynie and Andrew Wyatt. She released her second single 'Be the One' in October 2015. 'Be the One' achieved success

across Europe. Lipa describes her music as ‘dark pop’. On 30 November 2015 she was revealed as one of the acts on the BBC Sound of 2016 long list. Her first tour in the UK and Europe began in January 2016. In November 2016, Lipa concluded her tour through Europe.

On 18 February 2016, Lipa released her third single ‘Last Dance,’ followed by ‘Hotter Than Hell’ on 6 May. ‘Hotter Than Hell’ became a hit worldwide, especially in the UK, where it peaked at Number 15. On 26 August, her fifth overall single ‘Blow Your Mind’ was released, peaking at Number 30 in the UK. It became the singer’s first entry on the US billboard hot 100 debuting at Number 72.

Her self-titled debut studio album was released on 2 June 2017. Its sixth single ‘New Rules’ released in the following month, became Lipa’s first number one in the UK, and the first by a female solo artist to reach the top in the UK since ‘Hello’ by Adele in 2015. Lipa performed at the Glastonbury Festival in June, attracting one of the biggest audiences at that year’s event. In December, Lipa was named the most streamed woman of 2017 in the UK by Spotify

2018-PRESENT: SECOND STUDIO ALBUM

In January 2018, Lipa received nominations in five categories at the Brit Awards - more nominations than any other artist that year. She was nominated for British Female Solo Artist, British Breakthrough Act,

MasterCard British Album of the Year, British Single of the Year. This was the first time that a female artist had received five nominations. She performed at the awards ceremony held on 21 February at the O2 Arena in London and won the awards for British Female Solo Artist and British Breakthrough Act.

Lipa announced via social media that she had begun working on new material for her second album. She is working with MNEK, who previously co-wrote her single “IDGAF”.

On 6 April 2018, Lipa and Calvin Harris released the single “One Kiss” which topped the UK Singles Chart on 20 April, making it Lipa’s second UK number one. She performed in the opening ceremony of the 2018 UEFA Champions League Final in Kiev on 26 May.

THE DEVIL'S ACE

Declan Cosson

CHAPTER ONE

In which yet another terror strikes an already war-torn London

Night had fallen over London in 1918 and a thick smog had descended over the city.

A fog that was so thick that it covered the whole region. You couldn't even see what was exactly in front of you when there was this smog.

Torches and gas lamps were lit dimly in the streets. Britain was a country at war, it had been at war for four dark years. Barrage balloons lay dangling above the city of London and anti-aircraft guns mounted on trucks were located all around the city, waiting for the next bombing run by the enemy. Even when the searchlights were switched on, the soldiers couldn't see anything that was around them. Children in London found it hard to sleep as the thundering sound of the big guns across the Western front as an allied offensive was beginning could be heard here in London. The sound of the big guns was a chilling reminder to everyone that the war could drop on them at any moment. At any moment when the great guns

sounded, wives could become widows, children could become orphans.

It was under the thick smog that a new terror descended upon London as a roar sounded across the city. One of the soldiers manning the AA guns asked his comrade, “Did you hear that?”

Waking up, his comrade asked, “Sorry what?”

“I heard a roar.”

“So what, it might be just a Lion.”

“No, it was too loud for that. We should warn command!!”

“Whatever it is, it’s not like we can do anything about it. There’s a fog here.”

The roar sounded again.

Meanwhile, at a manor on the outskirts of London, a maid was getting a fire going in the fireplace. It was then that she heard the dog barking in terror outside before it suddenly got cut short. A blood-curdling snarl occurred outside causing the maid to flee and hide.

Her skin grew pale and her heart pounded as she heard loud footsteps outside.

The song “There’s a candle burning bright” emitted from the radio.

The maid could barely move as bursting through the wall was a massive scaly two-legged reptilian shape with bat-like wings. The creature had dark green scales and blood red eyes. It had a collar around its neck. The maid

looked with terror and disbelief as it approached the radio, probably wondering where the singing voice was coming from. Smoke emitted from its nostrils and its mouth as it was looking for the pantry.

The maid prayed that the children were fast asleep as should they wake the dragon might find a new appetite.

Noticing her whimpering, the dragon turned around, its blood red eyes gleaming as its toothed mouth looked to be smiling. It opened its mouth as more smoke came out.

Later on, on the other side of London, near the docks of the River Thames, the fog was starting to clear as the tune “The Rocky Road to Dublin” blared out of a bar. It looked bright and warm inside but then the door flung open as a drunk was shoved out into the streets.

He threw up, having had too much to drink. Laughter roared from the inside as loads of soldiers and sailors clinked their glasses of beer before gulping them down. Others socked each other while they were being cheered on by onlookers. Many more of the younger ones couldn't take their eyes off the maids that worked in the bar. The more civilised customers just played pool or gambled with cards. Looking at the rowdy spectacle, a grizzled young American stood, in the process of losing a pool game. He shook his head in contempt for the rowdy behaviour. A British voice snapped

“Hey Yankee, it's your turn, don't waste time with that crap.”

Giggling, Bastian said, “Phillip Rodgers, please, call me Bastian.”

Bastian took his stick, monitored the white ball before jabbing at it. The white ball hit some others, sending them into a different direction, except for where they needed to go.

Phil then jabbed at the white ball, sending it hurtling into the black ball. This slammed the ball into a hole, winning the game.

Bastian lowered his stick, sighing as he shook Phil’s hand. Phil said

“Come on, Bastian, good game...can’t go for a rematch because tomorrow we’re being shipped off to the front.”

“I know, I have to go too. Our shift from London to France begins tonight, Phillip, enjoy your night out!!”

Phil smiled but now he needed to find his gunner, Ewan. Ewan sat at the counter of the bar, sitting on a stool as he eagerly gulped down a beer. This was Ewan’s first time at the bar and he sat there dizzy because he drank too much.

Ewan would discover that this was to be a mistake because due to being too drunk, Ewan had little control over what he was doing. As a result, he poured his beer bottle into a Guinness glass, unaware that it belonged to a short but bratty, dark-haired and blue-eyed Liverpool brute named Móchán.

Móchan took a look at his glass and looked at it. He then took a sip but he spat it all out, asking, “What the?” Looking at Ewan, he asked angrily, “What the f*** did you do to my drink, you piece of sh***!!”

“Eh sorry, what?”

Móchan spilt his glass at Ewan, causing Ewan to shake his head. Móchan yelled, “Come on you cheeky...fight me!!”

“Wait, I’m sorry, I didn’t know!!!”

Ewan was mercilessly dragged to the ring. Poor Ewan didn’t just insult Móchan, but he insulted Móchan’s entire pal’s battalion. One of Móchan’s comrades then yelled while ringing a bell

“Fight!! Alright, boys!!! Everybody come and watch, place your bets!!! There’s going to be a fight!!!”

Another drunk yelled

“Come on, Mochan, sock the sissy Scott!!”

The barkeep, looking at the developing fight remarked
“Sweet Mary Mother of Christ....I should have stayed in Dublin.”

Already this was a painful experience for Ewan as he was laughed at by the men and then he couldn’t even swing his fist straight.

He kept trying to swing his fists but he was hopeless in defending himself as he got clobbered down to the ground. If the wounds weren’t bad enough, he could see

hear the cheering and the sadistic grins on Móchan's gang as they exhausted their lungs yelling for blood to be spilt.

He tried to get up but each time, he was knocked down...because although the Liverpool brat was smaller, he was a tough and intimidating brute. Hearing the cheering, Phil gasped in horror and rushed over.

Ewan felt that these were his last moments as he looked at Mochan's icy blue eyes. He remembered now why his Mother never let him into bars, even when his father and brothers went. Now he fully understood why she never let him go to a bar.

Fortunately, a refined aristocratic voice then asked angrily

“And what do you think you're doing?”

Phil Rodgers pushed through the crowd towards Móchan.

Móchan shoved Ewan back to the ground as he responded

“I'm teaching this sissy Scotsman a lesson!!”

“You mean Ewan??”

“Get out of this fight, you blue-blooded bastard, it doesn't concern you so stop butting in.”

“He's my gunner, I need him to take the Fritzes off my back!!”

“Fight me, then you meddling...!!”

Taking off his long coat, Phil remarked, “Very well, as punishment for inappropriate retribution, I shall satisfy my honour.”

Móchan eagerly went for Phil but Phil grabbed Móchan by the arm and snapped it. This caused the chanting and yelling to stop as their champion was knocked to the ground in agony.

Phillip then said, “Good! That will teach you. Honour satisfied!! Good evening!!”

At first, the men glared angrily as Phil helped a bloodied Ewan up, but then the roar sounded again. Everything went silent among the men when they heard that roar. Taking advantage of this, Phil and Ewan left.

Phil decided to take Ewan to the hospital because of how battered Ewan was. Phil and Ewan mounted on Phil’s coal black horse as they made their ways through the streets of London.

For a country that was winning a war, Britain didn’t have the feeling of victory in its streets. Slums decorated the streets and strikes were everywhere, rampant in the city.

Military police and the volunteer training corps patrolled the streets to keep order, viciously breaking up fights if necessary. Smoke came soaring out of the funnels of the immense factories as they went to work producing tanks, aeroplanes and armoured cars. Phil’s proud stallion panicked as it heard the booming noise of a Bessemer converter and it saw the blazing sparks emitting from a nearby steelworks. Trucks and horse wagons trundled across the streets of London town. Huge bonfires were lit

by the desperate workers who huddled around the bonfires and burning bins in desperation to get some warmth. The trams in the city didn't show any signs of movement and socialists took advantage of the situation as they went bragging about how the war was a tool of the rich. The only reason why Phil would accept the communist manifesto book would be in an emergency when he ran out toilet paper.

A postman had arrived, delivering the tragic news to many families.

However, the worst part was that Phil and Ewan couldn't get into the hospital. The doctor was sweating with exhaustion because he had his hands full. The hospital was packed with people infected with the deadly Spanish influenza. It was overfilled to capacity.

Phil tried to say, "Please, my friend was..."

"Go home!! We are out of beds!! If he's wounded than he's more vulnerable to influenza...just go home, damn it!!"

A nurse then showed up to alert the doctor. He went off with her, probably because a patient died.

Eventually, Phil and Ewan had to make do with their own treatment.

As Ewan mopped himself up, he said, "Phil, I'm sorry, it was my first time in the bar, I drank too much!"

"I know, I know...it happens to everyone, Ewan, his retribution was inappropriate for your actions."

“What a mess, man, I shouldn’t have joined the RFC. I did it because some girl gave me a white feather for cowardice. Oh no, my poor mummy got heart failure when I signed up. I’m such a fake.”

Hearing this Phil snapped, “Absolutely not!! You’re my tail gunner, I’d be going down in a burning wreck if it weren’t for you. Those girls who give the white feather are the real cowards. They love to shame the boys into fighting from the comfort of their own homes. They never had to charge their horse into machine gun fire and they’ve yet to experience a plane going down in flames. Come on, Ewan, you’re no coward...not even the Baron caused you to jump out of the plane when we fought!”

However, hurtling past them were several fire engines.

Their sirens screamed as they rushed to the manor on the outskirts. Journalists rushed after the trucks. Many of them were yelling, “German attack!! Air raid!! The Boche have done it again!!”

Seeing this, Phil said to Ewan, “Come on, let’s get back to base!!”

Phil and Ewan mounted on their horse to ride back to their barracks. As the horse galloped through the streets, several trucks hurtled past them, they were on their way to the manor and they had the PEC insignia.

Seeing the insignia, Ewan said, “Oh Lord, it’s the monster hunters of Jonathan Harker!! What in God’s name has brought them here?”

The roar sounded again leading Phil to say, “Come on, Ewan, it sounds like some monster has joined the war!!”

The horse reared again as the spotlights were turned on. The spotlights aimed their beams into the air where they illuminated the dragon. Phil stared in disbelief as the giant reptile scorched a barrage balloon, causing the thing to go down in flames. Officers yelled orders as the soldiers aimed the AA guns. Phil desperately tried to calm his horse as the AA guns blasted at the monster. The dragon eventually flew away, probably hoping to make another raid the following day.

Ewan asked Phil, “Rodgers?? Did you just see that?”

“I did...if that beast strikes at us again, I’ll do my best to down it. The last thing people need is an attack by some beast. There’s not much we can do about it now.”

On the outskirts, the manor was now burning in flames, only a few servants managed to escape. The firemen took out the hoses to spew water so as to control the fire. An ambulance was there as well. Several PEC soldiers, recognisable by wearing the Adrien helmets instead of the standard helmets of the regular British soldiers stood guard. They clasped their semi-automatic weapons that most of the world didn’t have at this time. A moustached officer was talking to a dying patient, whose skin was scorched by the dragon. He said

“I swear what we say is true. Lizzie was tending to the fire, then we heard her scream. And then the next thing,

we had a fire started!! Started by that thing. The smoke had already killed our masters!!”

“Thank you for the information, sir, I’ll will see that something is done about this creature!!”

Suddenly a voice called out, “Harker!!!”

The officer turned around and sighed as he saw a large group of journalists coming towards him. Muttering, “No, no, that is the last thing we need, cocky journalists sparking a mass hysteria. Gentlemen!!! Keep those meddling journalists away from here!!”

Harker walked towards the jeep as a PEC agent asked, “Any updates on what happened, Quincy?”

The PEC soldiers went to drive off the journalists, keeping them away from the scene.

“Oh Lord, it is as we feared. This is not a German air raid, it was a dragon!!”

“Our orders, sir?”

Getting into the Jeep, Quincy said, “Come, we must head for parliament!! We’ll need the permission and authorization of the British government to deploy our vessels over London.”

Quincy was not the hero Jonathan was, but if terror reigned over London, he would do his best to put an end to it.

CHAPTER TWO

In which the terror brought will spread to the front

The following day was a cloudy day in London and life had returned to normal for now.

Barges and steamers sailed on the Thames, past the Parliament. A row had broken out at the houses of Parliament. Quincy could do nothing to calm the situation because Liberal, Conservatives and Labour MPs were locked in a vicious argument over what happened last night. Some of them were even blaming each other for the attack the previous night. A deputy desperately slammed his book against the table as he yelled, “Order!! Order!!! ORDER!!!!”

But the men drowned him out with their bickering, but fortunately, a voice then boomed saying, “Silence!! That’s enough! I thought I had formed a coalition here!”

The men sat down in silence as David Lloyd George came into the scene.

He said, “As far as I understand, we have been harassed by some sort of new terror and here we are!! Bickering like schoolboys!! Yes?”

An MP said while pointing at Quincy, “But Mr Lloyd George, this charlatan had the nerve to come here and say a dragon was what attacked us last night.”

Quincy was not intimidated by the laughter that followed the remark and he stood up saying, “Gentlemen,

you cannot deny what the people have said. Everyone, that includes policemen, workers, maids, servants, even your own soldiers, Minister, are sure that the dragon is real!! It burned down a manor and scorched an entire family. Many servants and neighbouring farm labourers perished in the fire. Unless we do something about this fiend, it will continue to scorch London!!”

Lloyd George stood up and said, “Mr Harker!! We have a war to finish and a treaty to negotiate!! If that is not enough, we have influenza to deal with. And then to salt the wounds, we have the Irish question rising again!! As you can see, Mr Harker, we do not have the time for your fairy tales!!”

Quincy responded, “Your soldiers saw the beast, they even tried to shoot it down but their efforts were not enough!! Give us the permission, we will use our resources to deal with it. If not, the beast will plague you again and again. Even if the dragon is not real, and something else like some sort of German aircraft did it, it will cause paranoia, then it will destabilize into mass hysteria. And then if the government does nothing to soothe the problem, they might even develop mobs! And we all know what happens when mobs break out. Charles Dickens told us all about how it unravels in his book “A Tale of two cities”

The men were all silent. Lloyd George then asked, “And you, Harker, do you have a solution?”

“Give us the authorisation to deploy our airships and we will find out if it is a hoax or not. If it is, we will go back to Scaw Fell, if it isn’t, then we’ll hunt it down, drive it away at the very least so that it will limp back to its lair. The costs of maintaining the defence will be our responsibility!!”

The men were confused as they whispered among each other. Lloyd George said much to the surprise of everyone, “Very well then. If it eases this new reign of terror, I will give you three weeks to deal with the threat! Case closed, this party meeting has ended.”

Quincy later left the houses of Parliament and got into his car to head back to take a train to Scaw Fell in Cornwall. From there, he would take off via one of PEC’s flying aircraft carriers to return to London.

Meanwhile, at a London station, smoke emitted from the train as Phil and Ewan boarded a train carriage. Entering its carriages were massive numbers of soldiers and sailors of the British army and Royal Navy. Many of them said goodbye to their loved ones as they boarded the carriages with their rifles and backpacks slung over their shoulder.

A regiment of Sikh riflemen also boarded the train. But unlike their western counterparts, their destination was Jerusalem to fight against the Turks. The British, Irish and Scottish troops were headed to France.

Ewan asked Phil as he boarded the train, “Isn’t it strange? We had some sort of beast attack us last night,

burn a whole family down, yet the following day, everything is going on as normal.”

“It’s war, all sorts of things happen and slip by in the chaos of war.”

“Do you think it will end? I don’t think we could take another year of this war!!”

“Don’t worry, Ewan, wars always end at some point. I’d say the Boche are starting to get fed up of fighting as well!”

A conductor rang his bell as he shouted, “All aboard!! All aboard!!”

The train blew its whistle. The train then made its loud noisy journey out of the train station and headed for Portsmouth. At Portsmouth, the soldiers left the train to board a steamer.

As they kept walking ahead, the two could hear the soldiers singing marching tunes as they went up the plank to board the steamer.

Hearing a horn, Ewan looked up to see a dreadnaught guarding the harbour.

Airships that were specialized in hunting submarines and destroyers escorted the cargo ship as it made its way to Cherbourg. When they arrived in Cherbourg, Phil and Ewan found themselves among soldiers of all nationalities boarding their trucks and heading to the front.

Phil and Ewan boarded a truck themselves which joined a British convoy that headed for the Western front where the big push through the Hindenburg was to take

place. Phil was quite excited as usual for the action. Since he was a child, he was always too stimulated for the civilised society of the Belle Epoque that he was born into. He needed action to quell this stimulation and the Great War had no shortage of that, especially among the Royal Flying Corps.

Passing by the trucks were squadrons of armoured cars. Tractors pulled the giant howitzers while horses towed the smaller guns. Tanks came trundling past the convoy as well. They were giant metal monsters that bristled with machine guns and ordnance. Phil looked oddly at the tanks, wondering what it must be like to be compressed in a giant metallic thing like that for the battle. It was a long time till they eventually reached their Aerodrome in Belgium.

Back in London, night had fallen and the dragon had returned to prey on the people below. At first, he just swooped down, terrifying anyone in the area to head for their homes. He then looked at a stable packed with horses. The perfect meal for a dragon. However, he did not have the element of surprise this time around. As he swooped down towards the stables, a buzzing noise was coming in, louder and louder till bullets hit off the wings of the beast. The dragon let out another roar as it found itself being pursued by several large heavily armed biplanes. They had the PEC insignia on their wings.

The dragon soared up shielding its soft belly with its wings as the planes opened fire on him. Its blood red eyes looked to see a light in the sky.

That light was the spotlight from a flying aircraft carrier. This vessel was an enormous zeppelin, three times the size of the German ones, it was heavily armed and it was what launched the PEC fighters. Seeing the dragon approaching, the crewmen announced through the radio, “Dragon is coming in hot! It's fallen for our trap!!”

Hearing this, Quincy then told the captain, “Captain, the dragon is on its way...alert the gunners, remember to aim for the belly!”

“Yes, sir.”

The captain announced over the intercom, “Gentlemen, the dragon is coming in fast!! Prepare the machine guns!!! You know the protocol!! Aim for the belly!!”

At these orders, the crew readied their machine guns to aim at the enormous monster. Its blood red eyes didn't strike any fear into any of them. They opened fire at it with armour piercing bullets till they wounded it in the chest.

Suddenly, the beast flew off from the airship, aware that its belly was wounded it. But the fighters pursued it because they knew that once the beast had recovered, it would start the burning of London again. The dragon swished its spiked tail, ripping off a wing and causing a plane to go spiralling down and crashing. The PEC

fighters kept up the hunt but before they could fire again, the dragon turned around and flapped its wings to disorientate the fighters. They recovered but not before one of them crashed into Big Ben before tumbling down to the ground in a burning heap. The Squad leader looked down as the fire engines desperately rushed to the rescue. The last three maintained their pursuit but then the squad leader noticed his fuel gauge was getting low.

The squadron didn't have enough fuel to continue the pursuit of the dragon so they returned to their airship. The tail gunner on the squad leader's plane kept watching as the dragon flew away from London.

Later on, Quincy was having a talk with his officers on the bridge of the airship saying

“East? That means the dragon has gone to the western front. Knowing its savagery, it will prey on all sides of the conflict!! This could lead to a giant decrease in morale and would cause confusion in the ranks.”

“What are our orders, sir??”

“Helmsman, set course for Belgium, we must signal another airship from Scaw-Fell to join us. We will need extra interceptors for the task at hand!!”

“Yes, sir!!”

The airship was an impressive sight for Londoners as it flew across the night sky towards the front.

The airship proceeded through the sea of dark clouds as it journeyed over the channel. It was pursuing the

dragon that had now set its eyes on new prey in the Western Front.

CHAPTER THREE

In which the winged terror joins the First World War

Back on the Western front, Artillery traded blows across the tattered and muddy wasteland of No Man's Land. The Howitzers opened fire on the network of German entrenchments and bunkers known as the Hindenburg line.

Unlike the British who could tow their guns via tractor, the Germans had to use teams of horses to pull their enormous howitzers into position, and they did so as artillery shells landed upon them. They struggled to pull the guns as they waded through the mud.

Formations of huge twin-engined bombers with RFC insignia flew over the Hindenburg line, dropping their hails of bombs over the supply convoys of the Germans as well as on armoured vehicles such as tanks and armoured cars.

Trundling over the muddy wasteland of No Man's land, fleets of tanks advanced, firing their ordnance at the bunkers.

Their machine guns blazed and made it impossible for German soldiers to even poke their head over the trench and fire.

Sometimes, planes swooped down to strafe the German troops.

In the British trenches, the whistles were blown. Highlanders played bagpipe tunes such as “Bluebonnets” while thousands of heavily armed British soldiers roared their heads off while scrambling over the top and charging up behind the tanks.

It was then that the German howitzers started firing upon the British, blasting many soldiers just as they scrambled over the top. The artillery blasted many British troops as they charged. Even tanks were blown up by the artillery.

Nevertheless, the attack continued as normal. Nobody was aware that the vicious bloodlust of the battle had attracted the dragon to come and try to feast.

Up in the sky, Phil and Ewan were flying a two-seater and they were in the heat of a dogfight because the bomber squadron had been intercepted by Jasta 11 led by the famous Red Baron. Although they downed some triplanes from the squad, Phil ordered Ewan not to fire on the Baron since he knew the fate of those that fought the Red Baron. The battle went on and the dogfight had gotten so chaotic that nobody noticed the dragon swooping down from the clouds. As it descended from the clouds, a gunner on one of the bombers found himself looking into the dragon’s

blood red eyes so he turned the machine gun around to fire at the beast. As he started to fire, the dragon spewed flame, setting the bomber alight, causing the plane to go down in flames. Seeing the bomber ripping apart as it burned its way to the ground caught Phil's attention as it sparked a new hunger in him, a hunger for new glory as he realised that the dragon was the same one he saw in London. Downing that monster would make him a legend.

As he flew towards the dragon, Ewan asked, "What? The dragon? The one we saw in London? What the hell is it doing here??"

"I don't know but our orders are to protect the bombers so that is what we are going to do!! Hold on tight Ewan!!"

"Oh no, we're going after it?"

"Indeed, I always had an itch for a challenge!!"

Phil strafed the dragon to distract it from the bombers. He then flew lower towards No Man's Land so that the dogfight wouldn't hinder his attempts to kill the dragon. The dragon, eager for a fight, followed him. As it followed them, Ewan got a full look at the beast's sadistic face. He had never seen something so big glare at him with such hatred. It was like looking at the devil himself.

He panicked and fired the machine gun. Soldiers down on the ground raised their rifles to open fire on the beast even though they didn't know what they were firing at. Some even wondered if they had drunk too much rum when they saw the dragon. Phil flew as low to the ground as possible so that Ewan could fire at the belly. Phil did

remember that in folklore, the dragon's weakness was its belly. Ewan did his best to keep calm and he first aimed at the dragon's eyes but before he could fire, the dragon bit off the tail fin of the plane.

This led the plane to go spiralling violently out of control. In the process, the two tried to jump out but while Phil landed face flat into a puddle in a crater. Ewan couldn't jump off. He still fired at the dragon but it breathed fire on the two-seater, leading it to go sliding down into the mud as a burning wreck which then went sliding into a tank. The dragon let out another roar as it burnt down several more soldiers before flying up into the air again.

Phil was unconscious for a prolonged period but he was woken up by the explosion of the plane when it hit the tank. He then heard Ewan burning in agony as he woke up. Night had settled and the battle was still going on. Flares shot up into the skies. A rumbling noise caused Phil to look up and see a tank that was about to come down into the crater. In a panic, Phil scrambled out of the crater before the tank could trample him underneath its tracks. He came up onto the battlefield to see a burning mess of barbed wire and burnt remains of soldiers and machines.

However, what struck him the most was the burning skeletal remains of his two-seaters. Already he was heartwrenched because he had been in that plane since 1915. For a pilot, especially an ace like Phil Rodgers, the

plane was more than just a sputtering engine and wooden frame. He frantically gasped as he searched the area for Ewan, scrambling the area like a father looking for his child and yelling

“Ewan?? Ewan???”

However, he heard a gasping voice call out, “Rodgers?”

Phil turned around and saw Ewan sprawled on the ground. Ewan’s once handsome body was scorched and tattered. The marks of the dragon’s breath. Phil then scrambled over to Ewan and picked him up in his arms.

He panted as Ewan asked, “Boss, am I hurt bad? Please don’t sugar coat the situation. Be honest with me.”

“I..I hate to say this but...”

Phil was speechless with guilt and horror as Ewan’s saddened voice said, “You don’t need to tell me, Rodgers, I can see it in your eyes. The pain, it can only mean one thing, I’m a goner.”

“Christ no, I’m so sorry Ewan, I’m such a mean bastard, my thirst for action caused me to pick a fight with this beast...and you paid the price. Come on, it was my idea to take on the dragon, your blood is on my hands.”

“No Phil, it is on the hands of the girl who gave me the white feather. I felt pressured by her words to join. I’m sorry Phil, I was weak, if I was strong I wouldn’t have ended up like this. Phil?”

“What?”

“Can you promise me this?”

“What?”

“Don’t do something just to impress a lass. I don’t want you to learn the hard way.”

It was at that moment that Ewan closed his eyes. Phil then stood up and yelled, “DRAGON!!!! WHERE ARE YOU FAT LIZARD??? IT WAS I, NOT HIM THAT CHALLENGED YOU!! COME ON KILL ME!! BURN ME IF THAT IS WHAT YOU WANT!! KILL ME AND THEN....!!!!”

Phillip Rodgers, overcome with grief and guilt broke down in tears over what happened. As a result of his yearning for glory, one of his best friends and the closest thing he had to a little brother died in one of the worst ways possible. And there was only one more year of conflict to take place.

Later he slumped down into a trench, he didn’t notice the onlooking highlanders who kept their distance because they realised he was in a messed up state.

Once he reached a bar, he threw up before going inside for a drink.

Phil silently sat at the counter as he took a gulp of his drink. He didn’t even say a word as he slammed his empty glass back on the counter. He just sat on the stool.

Several soldiers, pilots and tankers were there in the bar and they chatted to each other.

The big guns still continued to fire outside, slamming on the German entrenchments.

Looking at Phil Rodgers, a young soldier asked, “Is that Phil Rodgers? He doesn’t seem like himself, look at his pose.”

An older more grizzled soldier stood up and responded
“I know, did you see the monster?”

“The monster? You mean that fat winged lizard? I couldn’t believe my own eyes! It burnt our whole unit down!!”

The other men looked at that soldier as he stood up and proceeded to yell out, “Most of the men in my village died in that battle!! They didn’t just die, they got roasted to death like a turkey in an oven!!! Many lassies will be made widows, many children will be made orphans, all because of this ace of the devil!!! I say that when the overgrown lizard shows up to burn us all down, WE GET OUT OUR RIFLES AND WE PUT A BULLET IN HIM!!!!!!”

The men cheered and clinked their glasses together. A tanker asked, “Eh, isn’t that meant to be PEC’s job? At least that’s what the stories say, they fight monsters!!”

“Screw PEC, that company isn’t doing a good enough job!!”

“The papers say they drove it out of London!!”

“Yes, they did!! So that it wouldn’t strike the rich, the fat lazy snobs who are not fighting!! I say that we gun it down ourselves!!! FOR KING AND COUNTRY!!!”

The other soldiers yelled out as they raised their glasses, “FOR KING AND COUNTRY!!! GOD SAVE THE KING!!!”

CHAPTER FOUR

In which Philip Rodgers sets out to slay the fiend

Standing up, Phil then said to the men, “No!! I will slay the beast!!”

Surprised, the other men turned around to look at Phil. One of them asked, “All on your own, rich boy! Not bad for someone born into the bourgeoisie!”

“Do not take my words as a joke, boys!! I do intend on taking on this monster by myself! The dragon burnt down one of our bombers so I engaged with it in battle. As a result, I lost my gunner. I will not have anyone else die for something I started!!! Now if you’ll excuse me!!”

Phillip then proceeded to walk out of the bar and got onto a motorbike, the spotlight of the motorbike lit the way as it buzzed down the road that a supply convoy went on. He passed a line of supply trucks that were heading to the front. On the way back from the front was a convoy of ambulances. The ambulances stopped at a field hospital.

Phil, however, continued onwards as he had a long journey ahead of him if he wished to reach the aerodrome.

It was early in the morning when Phil arrived at the aerodrome. He sneaked past the sentry posts to head for the hangers. Most men except for the sentries were asleep at this point.

He arrived at the hangar where there were all sorts of fighters, bombers and blimps but what got Phil's attention was a Sopwith Camel. He had never flown a Sopwith camel before. It was a nut-brown single-seater that was proudly perched in its hanger. Phil mounted on the plane because even though it didn't belong to him, it seemed like a perfect choice to go dragon hunting with.

The men in their sleeping quarters then woke up at the sound of a buzzing noise of a Sopwith. Surprised they immediately all rushed out to see what was going on. One of them even yelled, "That's my plane!!"

Another one shouted out, "Look its Phil Rodgers!!! I thought he was dead!!"

Phillip ignored the yelling of the sentries to stop as he steered the Sopwith across the mud way. It then gradually soared up into the air and beyond the clouds.

A set of bombs was dangling on the side of the plane. Phil came fully prepared for this battle.

And even if the battle to push through the Hindenburg line hadn't resumed yet, his aim was to hunt and kill the dragon who unaware of him, had picked another target.

That morning, things were going as normal in the German aerodrome and Jasta 11 was preparing their

planes for battle as usual. It was then that the nearby supply column was passing by the aerodrome.

Behind the fleet of trucks and the marching column of troops, a team of horses pulled an artillery piece. One of the horses could tell that something was not right. He sniffed smelling the foul odour of the dragon's breath and then reared, beginning to panic. One of the artillery crewmen got off the big gun and rushed over, tugging at the reigns of the horse, trying to calm the horse.

However, as he did, a roar sounded up in the sky. Baffled, the soldier looked up to see the dragon swooping down towards the convoy.

Swearing, he panicked and raised his rifle. The others raised their rifles as well but when the dragon swooped down, he burnt down the whole convoy before they could react properly.

The alarm was raised at the aerodrome.

Soldiers rushed to crew the machine guns and the Baron got into his bright red triplane to do battle.

However just as the others were beginning to board their planes, the dragon swooped down and started to scorch the hangars. Bullets just bounced off the scales of the beast.

His two clawed arms took up an armoured car and flung it into a fuel depot, causing it to blow up and start another fire. The Red Baron fired at the monster and he managed to take out one of the eyes.

The dragon touched down, crushing one of the German heavy bombers in the process under its weight. The Germans didn't give up and they continued to fire, flinging grenades at the creature in a desperate attempt to kill it. However suddenly they heard another buzzing noise in the air, bullets flung into the other dragon eye, blinding it in the process. The Germans looked up to see a Sopwith camel descending from the clouds and then swooping up into the clouds.

Philip Rodgers had come to finish the mess he started. He was going to down that monster.

The dragon though blind, was still able to take off and pursue Phil up into the clouds. It snarled and roared but Philip wasn't scared.

The Baron swooped up from below the dragon, he was trying to aim at the belly but while the bullets were painful, a few bullets on their own weren't enough to down the beast. The Baron wasn't able to fire enough bullets in time before the dragon shielded its belly with its wings.

But instead of pursuing the Baron, it followed Phil further beyond the clouds.

By now, the battle was taking place above No Man's Land.

Phil circled the area until the dragon emerged underneath him, emerging from the clouds with its mouth opened, revealing razor-sharp teeth. Noticing that the

mouth was opening, Phil took a bomb from the side of his plane and said under his breath

“This is for Ewan and any other family that you’ve burnt down for pleasure. For God and Country!!”

Phil loosened his grip of the bomb sending it flying into the Dragon’s mouth. Just as the Dragon closed his mouth, the bomb went tumbling down into its belly.

It then blew up inside the dragon, severely damaging its internal organs, fatally wounding it. But Phil wasn’t satisfied, so he pursued the falling beast as its body went flopping and spiralling to the ground. He then continued to riddle its belly with bullets, this time, he got enough bullets to finish the beast once and for all. The Dragon eventually fell below the clouds and crashed into the muddy wasteland.

CHAPTER FIVE

In which Phil Rodger’s life would change forever

Seeing the enormous body of the dead monster sprawled in the middle of No Man’s Land, a trooper took a peek above the trench line.

The battle hadn’t even started yet, many soldiers hadn’t even left their trenches and the tanks sat behind the trenches motionless. The Big guns hadn’t even fired yet.

After peering through the periscopes and binoculars, the troops on both sides began to whisper among themselves, wondering what had happened.

However one of them yelled, “It’s the monster, and it looks like it finally bit the dust!!”

That trooper started to climb up the ladder much to the chagrin of his officers who shouted at him to get down. He climbed up and slowly approached the dragon.

The Germans didn’t open fire because they were as dumbstruck by the site as the British were.

The soldier touched the dark green scales, noticing that there was no heat, the beast was lifeless.

He turned back to his comrades and shouted, “It’s dead!! Come on boys, take a look!!”

Many troopers and officers started to climb up out of the trenches to look at the beast’s corpse. Several Germans came out to look at the corpse of the dragon.

A trooper asked, “Well, lads?? Whoever downed the fat bastard deserves a shot of rum!!”

But then a buzzing noise sounded in the sky. Looking up, the soldiers saw Phil Rodgers flying down. Seeing them, he gave them a thumbs up while saying, “Aye!! I told you I’d down that scaly sod!!”

At the mention of that, the troopers cheered and raised their rifles.

Many others whistled and the pipers played the tune “The Gravel walk”.

Even the Baron looked at Phil Rodgers and gave him a salute, nodding as if to say, “Well done.”

Before flying off back to his aerodrome.

Phil felt warm with pride and self-confidence. Many on both sides of the Western front were glad to see that monster shot down.

That night, the PEC airship had touched down in the aerodrome.

Quincy Harker had arrived with a team of PEC agents and got onto a car.

Curious, Quincy Harker asked the driver, “Sir? Is it true, reports say that the dragon has been killed?”

“That’s what they say sir, by Phil Rodgers.”

“Who?”

“Some pilot named Phil Rodgers. Probably in a bar near the trenches, knowing him.”

“Take us to the front, I would be most interested in meeting this pilot!!”

The car drove Quincy and his agents across the road to the front. The bar was brightly lit up near the front. A few sentries stood to watch in the trenches but most were in the bar.

The bagpipes played wildly in the bar as men chanted Phil’s name as he took a huge glass of rum. The men cheered as he emptied the glass of rum down his throat.

Phil then slammed the glass down on the counter as he yelled, “YEAH!!!”

It was in the middle of these celebrations that Quincy opened the door of the bar leading silence to invade the room.

The soldiers turned around to look at Quincy Harker, some of them were muttering, “Oh, it's a PEC man.”

Taking a breath, Quincy announced, “I have arrived to find Phil Rodgers. I would be delighted if he revealed himself.”

“Yes, I’m here, why do you want me?”

“Because you took on a dragon in nothing more than a wooden frame and a sputtering engine by yourself...and you won. Congratulations...it is why I wish to speak with you in private!!”

Curious, Phil then followed Quincy outside. Many troopers were whispering to each other.

Outside, Quincy lit a cigarette and smoked it.

He asked Phil, “Tell me, dragon slayer, what will you do after the war is over?”

“Sir, I can’t live a normal peaceful life, I’m too stimulated to settle down, I’d make a poor husband and a pathetic father. I’m a man of action, yet I like to kill monsters, not men. Germans are men.”

“So Rodgers, you like fighting but you don’t like killing your own kind. Yes?”

“Yes, sir!! But I’ll kill a monster any time. I messed up that beast because it killed my wingman!!”

“You enjoyed killing that dragon, did you?”

“Yes, sir. Strangely it was quite satisfactory.”

“I see, Philip, I have an offer to make for you!!”
Phil raised his eyebrows asking, “An offer??”
Quincy raised his cigarette as he asked, “Phillip
Rodgers!!! Would you enjoy a place in the Pellucidar
Expeditionary Corps???”
That was an offer a stimulated Phil could not refuse.

The End!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

BIOGRAPHY OF MANUEL NEUER

Robert Devereaux

My name is Robert Devereaux, I am writing a biography of Manuel Neuer because I believe him to be an idol to many people and for me personally he is my idol and that's why I've chosen to write a biography on Neuer. This biography I believe would be relevant to any aspiring young goalkeepers who want to be the best because Neuer is the best in my opinion.

EARLY LIFE

Neuer was born on the 27 march 1986 in Gelsenkirchen, North Rhine – Westphalia. He attended Gesamtschule Berger Feld. Neuer's idol was also a goalkeeper named Jens Lehmann. On the 21 May 2017, neuer married longtime girlfriend nina Weiss in tannheim Austria

STYLE OF PLAY

Neuer is widely known as one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time. He is considered to be as good as lev yashin the only ever goalkeeper to win the ballon dor. Neuer is known as being a tall, large, athletic and physically strong goalkeeper. Neuer is known as a sweeper keeper as he's

not afraid to come out of his box and attack the opposing player. Neuer loves to run out of his box and clear the ball away from any danger.

CLUB CAREER

Schalke

Neuer played for Schalke from 2004 to 2009.

He made his Bundesliga debut on match day 2 of the 2006-2007 season for Schalke. He made 27 league appearance's during the 2006-2007 season. On the 5 March 2008, on the first knockout stage of the Champions League against Porto, he almost single handily kept Schalke in the game with several saves , forcing the game into penalties. He then saves pens from Bruno Alves and Lisandro Lopez to help Schalke advance to the quarter finals. That year Neuer was shortlisted for the UEFA Goalkeeper of the Year Award. He finished the season by making 50 appearances in all competitions.

In the 2008-2009 season, Schalke finished eighth in the league table missing out on the Europa league. Bayern began to show interest in him but Schalke would not sell him and kept him for another season. on 20 April 2011, he announced that he would not extend his contract with Schalke.

Bayern Munich: 2011-2012 Season

On 1 June 2011, Neuer made his move for Bayern Munich and signed a five-year contract.

Neuer broke the Bayern record for most clean sheets in all competitive competitions. On April 2012, Neuer saved a penalty from Ronaldo and Kaka putting Bayern into the final of the Champions League against Chelsea where he saves Mata's penalty and scored the third penalty but Chelsea won 4-3 beating Bayern in their home stadium the Allianz arena

Bayern Munich: 2012-2013 Season

Neuer started this season by winning the Super Cup. During the champions league knockout phase Neuer got 4 clean sheets against Barcelona and Juventus. In the 2013 Champions League final vs Borussia Dortmund, Neuer made eight saves winning the Champions League for Bayern.

INTERNATIONAL CAREER

World Cup 2014

Neuer distinguished himself from many other keepers in the world cup as he used his sweeper keeping throughout the entire tournament. Neuer won the World Cup beating Argentina in the final 1-0. Neuer also won the Golden Glove.

World Cup 2018

Neuer became captain of Germany due to Schweinsteiger's retirement from international football. Neuer captained his team against Mexico Sweden and

South Korea losing against Mexico and South Korea and being kicked out of the World Cup for the first time in 86 years.

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY: A SPEECH

Conal O'Boyle

Hello everyone.

My name's Conal O'Boyle and I would like to thank you for being here today. Through an exchange of emails I would like to show you why you should always look on the bright side of life. The following is a real email that I sent to the office of Mary Robinson, who served as the 7th President of Ireland, and the first female President of Ireland between 1990-1997. She is a climate change activist and recently took up the role of chairperson of the UN Chair of the Elders.

Dear Mrs Robinson

My name is Conal O'Boyle, I am sixteen years old and I am from Donegal. I am reading your new book, and it is so inspiring. It is a well needed wake-up call that alerted me to our lack of climate action, and I would like to thank you for sharing the stories of

the most vulnerable people worldwide, who suffer from fellow human ignorance.

Inspired by you and others, I have decided to start a climate action-campaign that will end with a protest outside Leinster House. The protest has a twist, and it is that in order to take part in the protest, you will have to build an eco-brick seat/ sofa/ chair to bring to Leinster House with you. We are hoping to have 32 seats at the protest, one to represent each county's discontent with the lack of climate action in our country.

The whole idea is that if a small number of people from each county can come together to take climate action, why can't the Government do more to take climate action?

I would like to ask you if we could have a meeting this month in order to talk about the campaign, and how to get support from every county on the island. I feel it is essential to have you on-board with me, considering all the work you do on climate justice and climate action.

If you would be able to meet with me in Dublin around January 19th or 20th, I would be very grateful. I am hoping to stage the protest in September and I would like to launch the campaign in February.

This protest does not represent any political agenda, although the aim of the protest is to put pressure on the Government to take more climate action.

As citizens of the world, it is our responsibility to take action for our future generations, and the action has to start somewhere and with someone, and this protest is going to be the wake up call to all the people of Ireland who do not know what damage we are doing to the world.

Thank you very much for everything you have done for Ireland and the world.

Go raibh míle maith agat.

Conal O'Boyle

Aged 16

After a few days, I got a response from her office. I was absolutely ecstatic about getting a reply, and a chance I might get to meet the woman. But it was not to be. This

email came to me from Barbara Sweetman, who works at Mrs Robinson's charity offices in Dublin.

Dear Conal

Many thanks for your email, your kind words regarding Mrs Robinson's book and request for a meeting with her to discuss your planned climate action campaign. Mrs Robinson is very impressed with your idea and your decision to try and make a change and highlight the need for climate action. Unfortunately though, she will be unable to meet with you due to her extremely heavy schedule and itinerary and further commitments with her new role as Chair of The Elders.

I am sorry not to be able to offer you a positive response, but I hope you understand our position.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success with your campaign.

Thank you again and kind regards
Barbara

Now naturally I was devastated at the fact that I wasn't going to be meeting Mary Robinson. My campaign felt

like it had taken a devastating blow and a setback that meant it probably wasn't going to happen. I was not happy in the slightest.

However, after I took some time to think about it, I thought to myself, this is not a bad thing.

I might not be able to meet with Mary Robinson, but it clearly said in that email that "Mrs Robinson is very impressed with your idea and your decision to try and make a change and highlight the need for climate action." That's in the email. The woman had commended me for taking action. I thought, perhaps the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights couldn't meet me, because she was busy at meetings with the United Nations. At the meetings at the United Nations, she could be telling many important people from around the world about a campaign conceived in the mind of an Irish teenager.

This led me to believe that after her telling these people about it, they would take my idea back to their home countries, which now makes me feel like I have made a difference internationally without even knowing it. I took climate action by sending that email to Mary Robinson, and she took it with her to the world stage for me. I'll take that over a meeting any day.

MAYDAY

Shane O'Sullivan

What a mistake this voyage had been. The seemingly harmless weather forecast had predicted 'sunny spells with moderate wind.' I gazed to the heavens. Plump raindrops hailed from the sky. My vision was blurry and the thick fog that had enveloped me, curtained my view from all angles. The thunderclouds above rumbled threateningly while the howling winds raced past my ears. The churning seawater transformed itself into white horses, dancing along the arc of the waves before crashing into my boat draining away the last of my hope giving me the realization that I was more and more alone.

Twice already I had radioed for help with only static for an answer. All sails of my single-hander had been pulled down in fear of the wind flipping me over. I decided now, for my own personal safety, to go below deck. If help really was coming I would already be aboard a lifeboat safe and dry. I retreated into the safe haven that was my mouldy cabin. I quickly shut the hatch behind me before slumping against a wooden cupboard and burying my head into the softness of my jacket. What was I going to do.

Suddenly I noticed that water was beginning to form along the bottom of my boat. I quickly pulled myself up and stumbled over to the water pump. I began to furiously wrestle the lever up and down in order to try reduce the water level, but to no effect.

The boat then rocked violently, throwing me against the hull, crushing my left hand. I winced with pain as I tried to flex my fingers. The tendons were raw and bulging while my wrist was unmovable. I knew at once that it was broken, and with the ever rising icy water I realized what a dire situation I really was in.

I grabbed the two-way radio that was strapped across my chest. “Mayday, Mayday!” I cried desperately “This is Toby Brian, Captain of the Mayflower. I am in need of immediate assistance. three miles east Howth Head.”

I let go of the transmitter, praying for an answer.

After what seemed like forever I heard a reassuring voice saying, “This is officer Sarah Watt of Dun Laoghaire RNLI. We’ve got your position. Don’t worry, we are on our way.”

Relief washed over me like a waterfall. However I still was treading on thin ice, the constantly rising water was now passed my knees and was accelerating at a worrying rate. I pulled myself up wincing with the pain from wrist. I knew that this cabin was soon going to be full before any rescue team was going to reach me. I waded over to the emergency cabinet, taking a handheld flare and bandages

to create some form of splint for my wrist. I clambered out of the cabin into a war zone of elements.

The gale force winds whipped into my face making my skin red and numb while waves crashed off my legs knocking me off balance.

Just then out of the gloom of the fog I heard the spinning of a helicopters rotors through the thickness of the fog. I instinctively broke the seal of my flare sending a barrage of red sparks flying into the sky. I waved and shouted myself hoarse until finally a bright spotlight shone through the surrounding darkness.

Tears of joy filled my eyes as I was hoisted up onto the deck of the helicopter while below me the Mayflower slowly dissolved into the abyss below me. I was gently pulled over to the lifeboat before being hoisted up onto the deck.

Relieved, welcoming faces wrapped my body in warm blankets while a distant voice reassured me, “It’s okay, you’re safe now.”

PSYCHOSIS

Jack Clucas

I was only 13 when my dad brought me to my neighbour Tommy's garage sale. Tommy, a small, plump man was moving to Carlow from Dublin with his wife, Teresa. I was into technology at the time and back in 2010, DELL computers were at their peak. My dad spotted the computer and pointed it out to me. My eyes snapped over to the large, bulky PC. I was gleaming with joy. My dad called over Tommy and they began talking prices. My dad handed Tommy that €200 with a smile and a handshake. I immediately went over and began questioning about it. Why was he selling such a gemstone? Why so cheap? These were the questions that pondered my mind. I went up to him and asked,

“Is this Bobby's?” I got a sudden look of disgust from him. My father dragged me away and apologised profusely to him. I felt a chill run up my spine. I felt sick, like I was at a serious risk of throwing up. My mouth lined with saliva and I spat onto the pavement. Blood. I was confused, dazed almost. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Nothing. What was happening? My dad placed his hand on my shoulder and shook me.

“Happy son?” he asked with almost glee.

“Yeah.” I murmured, shook. We strolled across the road, heading towards the house.

It was easily 7pm by the time we were in the house. My brother sat on the floor of the kitchen, playing with toys and being as oblivious as ever. He gargled now and then, not worrying considering he’s only 4. Dad was on the phone attempting to make a business deal and earn back what he bought that damned computer for. I sat upstairs and hooked up my monitor to the PC. I hit the on button, heard the click and seen the blue DELL logo appear on the screen. The PC coughed and sputtered but was usable none-the-less. I pulled the hard drive and installed all my previous applications from my other computer. I watched that green installation meter rises up and up to 80% before it flat lined. It read ‘ERROR 906’.

I slammed my fists onto the keyboard with a worrying amount of aggression. A good handful of keys flew from the keyboard and onto the floor. I stormed out of the room and downstairs to my dad’s punch bag. I swung for it bare-knuckled. I regretted that, but I cooled down a bit. I returned to my room, the stairs creaking as I went. That sickening feeling returned. I swung open the door to my room. The keys were...back on the keyboard? What? The computer was asking for a password. I sat in my chair and stared at the screen in disbelief. I felt as though the screen stared back. After what felt like 10 minutes, the screen let out an ear-piercing white noise and went static. I felt as if

my ears were bleeding and ceiling spun like the stars in the sky. My head smashed into my oak desk with a resounding thud. Everything was pitch black.

I sat up slowly in my bed to be met with a headache. I scrunched up my face in absolute torment. I called for my mother rubbed the side of my head. My hand slid underneath a bad bandage, soaked in blood. I felt like vomiting. My mother rushed into the room, almost sprinting. She grabbed my shoulders and shook me lightly. She went to tap my face lightly. Her hand went right through my face, dematerializing. I looked up at her to find she wasn't there anymore. She was... gone. I laid back down and closed my eyes. I felt like something was watching me. No. Not watching. Staring. I felt like something beamed its eyes at me while I was on that bed. I stood up and staggered to the stairs. I gripped on to that banister like my life depended on it. It was almost my lifeline by this point. I paced slowly down the stairs to see my dad.

“Help...” I groaned. He eyeballed me.

“Need something, son?” He said.

I felt like screaming. I felt my head again. Nothing. I still felt dizzy though.

“I'm fine.” A blatant lie. I walked up to my room again and sat at the computer. I felt like a psychopath. I kept my eye on the computer while I pressed the large on button. I felt like the computer stared back at me. Content, almost. ‘Don't be ridiculous’ I thought.

The monitor flashed and the DELL logo and a motto flashed, 'Always watching over you.' I was puzzled. That wasn't DELL's motto. The computer seemed to be functioning fine. I went into Google and typed in 'DELL motto'. It wasn't loading. The text appeared into the little information box, 'This computer is MINE.' I almost jumped from my seat. How was this possible? Some kind of joke? A sick one at that. I honestly thought I was out of my mind. A spectator of sorts. I glared at the screen aimlessly for a small while. It felt like eternity. I needed to get rid of this computer, this toxic, evil computer. I unplugged everything frantically. Haste makes waste? My ass it does. I've never done anything with more passion in my life. I dragged the heavy computer from its space in my desk. I struggled to grasp it while I walked out and down the stairs to the front garden. What now? I was outside, ready to rid of it. This didn't feel right. I shook my head and grabbed my dad's snow shovel. Anything would suffice by this point. I dug a hole that was now about a meter and a half deep and pushed the bulky monster of a computer into the hole. I started covering up the hole with the dirt again. This was the hardest I've ever worked in my life. I groaned in agony as I looked at the grave this computer was in, full of dirt and muck. I slammed the shovel into the ground in triumph. I went to bed that night a happy child, gleaming for the next day.

I awoke the next day and sat up quickly. I was buzzing to see what the day had in store for me. I jumped from my

bed and stretched. What a relief it was. I went on with my day as usual, had breakfast, watched cartoons. It was a regular Sunday. Nothing to do. Nothing extraordinary. I slouched on the couch and laughed. Nothing could stop me. I was in the swing of it, nothing could drag me down. I walked upstairs and into my room. I sat down in my chair and turned on my computer. I smiled as I read the white text on the screen.

‘Always watching over you...’

THE WISHING WELL

Seán Nolan

Seaworth was small, even for the standards set by other hamlets. It had a butcher, one inn, a guard house, the town hall from which the mayor made his decrees, and enough farmers that nobody went hungry. By being situated in close proximity to the coast it also had access to a constant supply of fresh fish. However, Seaworth was not famous for the fish, but rather, the strange sight located about half a day's walk outside the town.

His father being ill, it was just Johan manning the butcher's on a relatively quiet day. Due to the lack of business he found himself peering out the window, drifting into daydreams. Through the grimy glass panes, Johan could just make out the tops of the hills where Seaworth's unique sight lay. He remembered in his earlier years when, along with a few other kids, he had visited it. They had all been so excited to see it that none of them had actually expected to find it so terrifying, leading them to leave as quickly as they arrived.

He was stirred from his thoughts by the shrill ring of the front door's chime and he turned to address his customer. He was mildly surprised when he saw Alice

walking through the door. Having never actually seen anyone in her family ever buying produce, Johan assumed they always got other people to do it for them.

“Good afternoon Alice. What can I get you?”

“I’m not here to buy any of your wares Johan.”

Surprise...

“But rather, I have something that I need your help with.”

Johan raised his eyebrow. He was well aware how Alice and her posse viewed him. After often seeing them drinking at the inn, he tried a few times to join in their revelry but after the third attempt, it was very clear they wanted nothing to do with him. He wasn’t sure if they looked down on him. It’s not like he cared anyway. Already reluctant, Johan decided to hear her out; without any real high hopes.

“Well what is it?”

“I have figured out the answer to the wishing well.”

No one actually knew who built the wishing well. An elderly traveller had wandered through Seaworth, an event not too unusual, but made a point of alerting everybody to the well that had seemingly manifested overnight in a forest glade on a nearby hill. Its random appearance would have sparked a couple conversations but it was when the man explained the well’s properties that people started visiting it. Upon arriving at the well, one would be offered a riddle. If answered successfully, you were rewarded with riches beyond your wildest

dreams but you had only one chance to answer. Or so the old man said.

It was this spectacle that caused Seaworth to receive an influx of travellers, aiming to make their way to the well and receive unimaginable riches. The only consequence was the punishment that accompanied an incorrect answer to the riddle. It varied from person to person but the effects were always permanent. You might have a cold for the rest of your life, you could go bald. Or you might never walk again.

When the range of punishments became apparent, it was widely viewed as having a risk that far outweighed the rewards and the amount of people visiting the well dwindled until only the extremely desperate were making the journey. Anyone who lived in Seaworth would see these people pass through looking for the well. They received their warnings but when their determination became apparent, they were given their directions and headed straight for the well. The following day they would be seen creeping back into town, always worse off than when they arrived. Sometimes they never came back at all.

Johan examined Alice and her oozing confidence as she stood straight, making an effort not to touch any of the grubby surfaces around the shop. It was obvious she thought she was right, but that was nothing new.

“You’ve gone up to the well yourself then have you?”
Johan asked half-jokingly.

“Of course not. I’d have already left town if that were the case.”

“So then you don’t know if you have the right answer to the riddle.”

Alice scowled as an irritated look crossed her face.

“No, I haven’t tested my solution yet, but I’ve practically got it. You see unlike everyone else in this town I am not content to spend my entire life here doing absolutely nothing, so a while ago I set about changing that. I’ve been questioning everybody who has come back from the well, listening to their experiences and noting down every single answer. Based off of my report, I have shortlisted a select number of answers that have an extremely high likelihood of being correct.”

“Ah, I see.” John answered causing Alice’s face to perk up slightly. “You still don’t have the right answer then.”

She shot him a nasty glare and leaned over the counter into his face.

“Look Johan, you and I both know I’m the smartest person in Seaworth, and probably the county. If anyone is going to get it, it’s going to be me.” She seemed to remember herself and moved back from the counter while straightening her posture.

“It’s only a minimal risk really. What? A sore foot for the chance of more wealth than you’ll ever possess in your entire life? I can understand though if you don’t want to go, not everyone is brave enough.” Johan treated her to a cold stare. “But you should know that if you don’t,

someone else will, I only need one more person.” She turned her back on him and was making her way out.

“If you do decide to come, you can meet me at the signpost around midday tomorrow.” Alice stopped just before opening the door and looked around the small single room butcher shop, making no attempt to hide her disdain.

“The question you should really be asking yourself is can you afford not to?”

Johan had a long, contemplative night. Having still not come to a solid conclusion by the morning, he decided he would at least travel with them to the well, leaving plenty of time to make up his mind along the way. If he really decided he didn't want to do it, they couldn't force him.

The signpost Alice had been referring to was one that stood at the crossroads a short walk outside of town. Its frail wood pointed to the turn for Seaworth, continue straight on for Albrett, and a fresher wooden pallet leaned against its pole, stating in painted letters: *wishing well past hill*.

He had expected that Alice would have brought Horatio and Judd with her but it was when he heard Horatio's shrill pitch - long before he actually caught up with the group - that he immediately regretted his decision to come.

They saw him coming and Johan could just make out a discreet elbow from Alice, causing Horatio's speech to

drop into a murmur. By the time he was right up to them, the murmur had died completely but was shortly replaced by Horatio's regular tone.

"It's about time Johan. We've been waiting out here, I don't know how long." His blond quiff slightly out of place, Horatio took great care to reposition it before adding with a smirk, "We almost left without you."

"Regardless..." A cross glance shot from Alice's eyes. "You're here now, so we can set off."

And so they did. The day was cool and as they were in no particular rush, they moved with leisure. The four of them reached the large forest surrounding the well, a safe area but for the wolves that prowled at night. If they had been in any way quiet, the group would likely have noticed the odd lack of birdsong and other sounds of life that accompanied most forestry. Instead, their entire walk was filled with Horatio's incessant chatter.

"So what are you going to do with your riches Alice? Hmmmm?"

"I believe that is an entirely private matter that only I should be concerned with."

Horatio's attention quickly bounced to Judd.

"Well, what about you Judd?" He said this in such a mock-slow accent that it seemed as if Judd's name had gained another syllable.

"Hmmm..." The sizeable fellow grumbled for a couple of seconds to himself before answering.

"I don-"

“You don’t know.” Horatio opened his mouth and addressed to group with exaggerated surprise. “Who could have *possibly* guessed?”

Johan didn’t see the wisdom in openly insulting who was most likely the strongest individual among the town guards but Horatio had been doing it without receiving any blows for the entire journey so far. Instead, Judd just released a grouchier grumble and when Horatio realised that conversation had ended, he sprung back to Alice, acting as though theirs had suffered no interruption.

“You Prenderghasts are always so private, aren’t you though? No one’s got a clue what actually goes on inside the walls of that big house. Or how in the world your mother became the mayor’s *personal advisor*.” He punctuated the occupation with a variety of lewd gestures.

“Could it be that we are just vastly more intelligent than the rest of the town?” Alice retorted in her own mocking tone. “It certainly seems extremely likely to me.”

“Smarter than I? Perhaps... But I know you cannot sing my songs so well!” As he ended the sentence, he took a deep breath and belted out a single, extended note.

“Well they aren’t really your songs, are they Ray? I mean, you certainly didn’t write them.” Horatio’s melody was cut short in an instant as his lips pressed into a tight line. Alice turned away from him with a knowing smirk but stopped shortly after.

“There it is.”

Just ahead of the group, the rows of trees were starting to become less frequent until a single stone monument stood in an empty clearing. It remained unchanged from when he had seen it as a child, not even moss or ivy had braved itself to crawl up the stony feature. Johan found the fear attached to the memory beginning to slowly form a knot in his stomach.

The well itself was no different than one found anywhere else. It was made of stone, with a circumference of about two metres. Clear water rested within arm's reach of its top but no one knew how deep it went. Just behind it stood a statue constructed of the same stone. The woman depicted was a complete mystery to everyone but her kind smile and formal habit led to the popular theory that she was an age-old saint of some long-forgotten religious order.

“Right then.” Alice turned to the group. “We all know what we should say so I see no reason to drag this out any longer than we had to. Judd, I believe we agreed that you would go first.” The towering man gave a slow nod before lumbering up to the well.

Johan was just about to inform everyone that he didn't actually know what he was supposed to say but found his voice cut short by another.

What is the single most important thing in this world?

The nonchalant tone of the mysterious voice was offset by its ominous echo that travelled around the silent glade. It was only a voice yet the air of anxiety and unease Johan

had felt when he first heard it was ever-present. He looked to Alice and Horatio, both of whom's eyes were glued to the spectacle, and then to Judd. His brow was furrowed low between his eyes and he was very slowly mouthing a sentence. The silence of anticipation was broken by the hesitant question.

“Alice, what am I supposed to say again?”

This caused both roaring laughter in Horatio, and a frustrated sigh from Alice who swiftly picked a small piece of parchment from her pocket and shoved it into Judd's hand. He unfurled it, peered very close, and then in an unsure voice read.

“Ultimate strength, so... you can protect those who need it the most.”

They waited with bated breath, the seconds seeming to drag on until finally they were given an answer.

Wrong.

There was a tense pause as the group stood still, waiting for the punishment to fall. Johan's gaze was locked on Judd when he noticed him starting to wobble and falter. In response, Alice strode up to his side and placed a hand on his shoulder, turning him to face her as she did so.

“Judd, how do-” Her voice hitched for but a moment. “How do you feel?”

He mumbled a hoarse whisper but despite being only a few paces away, Johan could not make it out. Horatio

breathed an exaggerated sigh of frustration and trotted up beside them.

“How much longer are you going to keep us waiting, hmm?”

When he reached Judd, Horatio gasped before turning to share a look of astonishment with both Alice as well as Johan who was now hurrying to join them. Upon seeing Judd clearly, it was Johan’s turn to stare.

The strongest and hardiest member of the town guard had disappeared and been replaced by some sickly doppelgänger. If he saw this man in the street, he would have assumed he was a poor vagrant with a terrible illness. If he saw him asleep, he would have presumed him a corpse. Where once a full, flushed face had stared back at him, Johan was now looking at a ghoul, with sunken eyes, pale complexion and skin that hung so tight it made his cheekbones look painfully pronounced. Judd had also seemed to half in stature, being at least several feet smaller than before with clothes that, while once fitted snug, now hung loose over his frail frame.

“I...feel...dizzy...” Judd started to mutter, barely audible even to the three standing over him. Alice caught his drooping shoulders and straightened him up.

“Judd, tell me exactly what happened, everything you felt, what kind-” She was cut short as his unconscious form collapsed forward and Alice was forced to catch Judd. Both Horatio and Johan moved to help, aiming to lay him down in the cover of a nearby tree. It was during

this time that the transformation was truly proved to Johan, as the weight of Judd's body seemed almost lighter than a child. After laying him down, Alice examined Judd closely, pulling up his sleeves to reveal twiggish arms wrapped in bulging veins, and laying her head against his chest.

“Well he's only unconscious. His heart is beating quite rapidly and his breathing is very uneven. I honestly don't know what to think but I'm inclined to say that it's some kind of shock, seeing as his body just underwent a drastic change.”

Horatio squatted down beside Judd and gave him a few generous pokes.

“Drastic, indeed.” He let out a small chuckle. “Judd is not going to be happy when he wakes up, not at all.” Another smirk. “Neither will his dad.” He whirled around to Alice. “How are you going to explain that one?”

Alice, with complete assuredness and neutrality replied. “Well we'll each be walking home with unfathomable riches, so somehow I think people are going to care more about that then they will about Judd.”

Johan had always viewed the trio as being a close-knit group but the utter lack of sympathy Alice showed towards Judd's condition was nothing less than a total shock.

It was this such revelation that caused Johan to ask.

“So you don't have the right answer then?”

Alice tutted and gave a dismissive shake of her head.

“Like I said, I have a shortlist of answers, with one of them being the solution. I just have to figure out what the statue’s answer is by using a few final questions. I gave Judd the weakest question, for obvious reasons.” Her and Horatio shared a knowing glance. “And now I have more information to work with.”

The more Alice told Johan, the clearer the situation became. She needed test individuals. Alice would get as many fools as she could gather to ask her questions for her until she found the correct solution.

“Well I’ve definitely made up my mind now,” Johan exclaimed, drawing a quizzical look from Alice. “I’m not giving that thing,” he jabbed a finger at the well, “any answer of yours, Alice.”

They stood staring at each other for a long time, both waiting for the other to react. Alice broke the silence with a shrug.

“No riches for you then.”

This was followed by a smug grin and subsequent tittering from Horatio.

“So much drama, my goodness. How about we get this moving again?”

With more swagger than Johan thought possible, Horatio waltzed up to the statue where, once again, it asked.

What is the single most important thing in this world?

After a dramatic cough to clear his throat and with so much flourish he almost broke out into song, Horatio recited.

“To preserve the tales of heroes so their legacies may never diminish, and spread their stories to others, inspiring a new age of valiant souls in their stead.”

Horatio waited. The statue hadn’t answered incorrect, but in fact it hadn’t answered at all. Standing for a while, beginning to feel more awkward as time passed, Horatio looked back at Alice and Johan. The two were regarding him with worry. He shrugged his shoulders, seeing no cause for concern but frowned when they started mouthing at him. He asked them why they were acting so peculiar. Or at least, he tried to. Horatio found that no words were coming out of his mouth either. He spoke again and again but was making no sound.

It was then the horrid realisation struck.

In order to be sure, Horatio brought a trembling hand to his ear and snapped his fingers.

No sound.

He had gone deaf.

As a look of horror crawled across his face, Alice and Johan realised the punishment Horatio had received.

“So he is deaf then,” muttered Alice to Johan but never facing him; her eyes too transfixed by Horatio.

“It seems he cannot speak either.”

Horatio watched their mouths flap silently, a cold rage bubbling inside him. He had found the idea of exploiting

Judd so hilarious that he never even thought for a second that Alice would try the same with him. Fists shaking, he marched towards Alice. Despite his lack of vocabulary, both Johan and Alice had no trouble interpreting his next words as he mouthed them slow and focused.

You bitch.

Alice was midway through some attempt at an excuse but Horatio cut her short as both his hands clasped around her throat.

Her eyes widened in shock and terror. She flung a clawed hand towards his face but Horatio was already using his height advantage to force her down to the ground. She then attempted to pry his hands loose, but the more they dug into the flesh of her neck, the more vice-like his grip became.

She looked to Johan, who up until this point had stood unmoving, the sudden and visceral action intimidating him too much. Her gaze locked with his and even as her face turned hideously swollen and a dangerous red, her look managed to convey exactly what she wanted to say and how she would have said it.

Help me you useless idiot.

Horatio was so consumed by his rage, Johan reckoned he didn't even realise he still stood beside them. He watched the scene unfold before him, conscious of the precious seconds it cost Alice.

But he didn't help her. He slowly backed away - much to her incredulousness - and moved to pick up Judd. Horatio didn't seem to notice or care.

The self-assured part of Johan's mind told him it was for good reasons. If he saved Alice, she would only rope in more fools, over and over, punishment after punishment until she got her answer. He was saving a lot of people sorrow and hardship at her hands. But he knew it wasn't true. His honest-self thought this was exactly the kind of thing Alice had coming to her. Thinking back, he was surprised something like this didn't happen sooner. Despite acting haughtily towards most everyone in town, Alice never seemed bothered to apologise. She probably thought her scorn immune to any repercussions of the common folk.

Yet her she lay, having the life wrenched out of her in the middle of the forest by the village bard.

Johan hefted Judd's semiconscious form onto his shoulder and started what would be a long trek back to Seaworth. If he was lucky, someone in town might have a way to help Judd, or at least ease his pain. Before he lost sight of it completely, he threw a glance towards the well for the sake of morbid curiosity.

Horatio was still choking Alice but Johan was sure she must be dead.

Poetry

WAITING FOR JUNE

Josh Kelly

Sitting here at my desk, I hear
The whispers of birds chirping in
My ear 'come outside and play'
But I look away – focused.

I cannot help but look out at the
Curtained window sitting beside me,
Oh what a glorious day. A cloudless
Sky, I can almost see the warm breeze.

'Don't let it distract you' replays over
And over in my distorted mind, so
I look down at my desk filled with
Pages upon pages of French vocabulary,
My hand aching from writing too
Much, to impress my teacher, maybe?
Who knows.

Lord, bring me back to the days when
I was a carefree ten- year old, when I
Would eat ice-pops, play football out
At my car-filled street, struggling to
Get my ball from under my miserable
Neighbours car, soaking up the sun with my Nutella-
stained cheeks.

Should I go outside and play? I look
Away- 'focused'.

A HOUSE ON THE MOON

Robert Rawson

My world is shrinking

At the speed of light

All of my days

Start to feel like nights

The moonlight gleams

Upon my paper thin skin

And I think of a new place

Where I could begin

A place of no pain

A place of no sorrow

A place of no today

A place of no tomorrow

I think of this place

And to the night sky I stare

So life could be rid of noise and havoc

That continues to corrupt the air

I know it seems selfish

To tell all these people goodbye

But I'd be brimmed with ecstasy

If I could live beyond that sky.

WASTED TIME

Jack Clucas

Time and effort, a waste in the end.
Introduced you to most of my friends.
Nothing left, gone like the wind
Left me disappointed with something to find,

Myself and my real friends.
You were temporary and that's okay.
A wasted summer, day by day.
Not a text, not a word, or a knock on the door,
Each new day left me looking for more.

Ran off with others all the time,
Slowly but surely filled up my mind.
Otherwise it was great, all of us together.
What times they were in the blazing summer weather.
Here and there, anywhere we could go, we went.
In my mind you left a dent.

I'm not sure if I'll forget about that summer.
The laughs and jokes on each and every bus.
Each day was great until it wasn't,
Rumours spread about me more and more.
This couldn't be healthy for much more.

I gave you my trust, and my trust you took, bent and
twisted, left me shook.

No more texts, no more words, no more knocks at the
door.

I realised that we weren't friends anymore.

DRUNKEN WINGS

Robert O’Gorman

I took a drink and I felt so high
And my mind is wishing it could fly
My mind is racing no time for contemplation
I am also craving this previous sensation

I’m on top of the world I feel like a king
I shouted cheers to everyone and let out a sing
I was dared to drink and a crowd had swarmed
I took the shot and my wings had formed

I was in a mind of my own and I began to took flight
I soared through the streets what a dazzling sight
I began to fly closer to the sky
And I witnessed the stars when the sun was still shy

Suddenly the sun awoke and my wings started to melt
I cascaded to the ground and fell letting out a big yelp
I woke up to the day hungover and melancholic
I lay in the trash not feeling very comic
I toddled home ashamed and feeling miserable
Don’t overdrink is the main law and principle.

WAR

Ronan Cullen

Alas! What shameful world is this
A fire burns through the bliss of innocence
Children stumble from the womb
Carry guns and kill for food

The poor man cries in his old cottage home
Whilst the rich one sings in his gold knitted robe
He won't run into arms of fire
He'll keep the mortal coil for his desires

They thought it might bring merriment
The darkest hours they'll get through
He gasped and grasped and pulled the trigger
The bullet heals future wounds

The heart that beat for love, that fought for love, that died
for love.
Speculation wreaks out blood
And yet we do not care

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