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FOREWORD

The great thing about creative writing is there are no rules. There is no right or wrong. You are given an empty page and you have the freedom to write anything you want. Stories, poems, biographies, scripts and song lyrics are just some of the styles you can choose from. Clonkeen College's creative writing class is a great place to express yourself through the art form of writing. You get the opportunity to develop your skills as a writer and the whole creative writing team is very thankful for the time and space to do that.

The Anthology is a great opportunity for Clonkeen students to have their work recognized on a wider scale. It's an excellent project to work on during TY. Writing a story, be it real or fictional, is a fascinating experience. You have the ability to create entire worlds and contain them within the pages of a book. You allow people to escape from the world through your story. It's quite an interesting thought that stories can have so much power. That is why I think The Anthology is so important.

We've put a lot of work into making this book and we would like to thank you for being a patron of this project. We hope you enjoy it!

Ronan Cullen, Chairperson

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Anonymous

By Joe Clarke

The warm rain fell on the tarmac, plastering Elliott Payne's hair to his head and running blood into the nearest gutters. Two lifeless forms lay sprawled in front of him - a man, whose age Payne couldn't estimate because he was face-down to the floor, and a young girl. Payne had been standing for quite a while, sometimes studying the bodies and their surrounding area, and sometimes just staring in their general direction deep in thought. There were no wounds or cuts other than obvious ones caused by the impact, but there were bruises in other places that could have, in all fairness, come from something entirely unrelated. Boston Police Department cars, ambulances and his own Private Investigation firm had men and women scattered around the melancholy crime scene, analysing things and doing their best not to think of what lay before them.

Payne's eyes slowly panned the front of the building, coming to rest on the balcony with CSI workers teeming on it. Seventeen floors up. Quite a fall for one man, but what didn't add up was why his daughter lay beside him. The analysts suspected a simple murder-suicide. The only evidence of this, aside from the relative certainty that the girl didn't jump of her own volition, was the fact that neighbours heard a high-pitched scream

around the time of the jump. Presumably the girl as she was carried over, say the PD. Payne had a hunch that it was something to the contrary. He glanced around to make sure he wasn't being watched too closely, and strode inside the building.

There seemed to be law enforcement staff everywhere he went. Workers with blue uniforms with "BPD" emblazoned across their backs in white spoke with receptionists, staff members, even bellhops. Payne subtly moved to the stairs - the lift was in use by the men in blue - and made his way up.

As he climbed, he further pondered the crime that had been committed, not an hour ago. There was a third person involved, Payne was sure of this. According to the police chief and the witnesses, nobody had left or entered the apartment between the time of the crime and when the police arrived. The only other way out was - all morbid jokes aside - the balcony. There was only one other explanation.

Payne was a trusted private investigator, recently working under a firm rather than freelance, who was known for having a 100% case-solving rate thus far. He had ensured this record by putting parameters in place for those who hired him - partly to keep his odds of maintaining his record reasonable, and partly to make pricing easier. Most of what made his success rate so constant was his ability to think outside of what was happening, to look beyond the circumstances, the grieving family

and the current evidence, and see a set of probabilities off of which to begin working. His objectivity was compromised this time, however. He had been married with one daughter of his own. He had lost his wife in an accident with a drunk driver ten years ago, and lost his daughter much more recently. He wasn't sure which of the PD's two outcomes angered him more; the one where a man took his daughter with him, or the one where someone killed a man and his daughter for reasons he was yet to find out.

Payne eventually reached the seventeenth floor and slipped inside without objection, presumably because those who were working there knew who he was and what he was there to do. He scanned the crime scene from where he stood and assessed the situation without approaching anyone who appeared overly busy. People only seemed to be conducting CSI work on the parts of the apartment that were obvious signs of evidence, and nobody was going near the rest of the place. The most pressing thought for Payne was that the killer hadn't been caught - either because the killer was the father or because the killer was still in the apartment. In an attempt to rule out the latter possibility he began to look around the apartment.

The flat was a tidy affair - two bedrooms, a lone bathroom and a living room with one tiled corner for a kitchen consisting of a sink and an oven alongside numerous cupboards. One aggressively colourful

bedroom, obviously that of young Chloe, was completely deserted. At least the father's room was being checked for some way to identify the man; this room was completely deserted of any workers. Something felt awry to Payne, something that stopped him from just turning on his heels once he saw it was empty. Faint noises, sensed more than heard due to the muted din of the sitting room next door, caused his head to turn. The door of the wardrobe shifted slightly, almost as though it was going to swing open and changed its mind. Payne thought to alert someone in the next room, but acted impulsively and stood to the side of the wardrobe before swinging the door open abruptly. He heard a scramble and a click, and then silence for a moment before the sound of scuffling as a man warily clambered out from behind the hanging clothes. He glanced around his field of view for the source of the noise with a silenced pistol pointed at eye level.

Payne quelled an urge to swing a punch at the killer, and instead whispered "Oi, this way."

The man whipped around and fired three shots at nearly point-blank range. Somehow, not one landed. "Scared?" Payne asked. The attacker was seemingly frozen by the numerous emotions he was feeling, but the most prominent must have been fear because of the way the gun that was pointed at Payne's head was shaking so violently. "Should be," was all Payne said before striding towards the killer.

“You-” he managed to stutter.

“Me.”

“How-”

“I was in the area, thought I’d stop by, maybe try and catch this excuse for a man that killed an entire bloody family.

The man obviously knew he was done for upon seeing the P.I. on the scene of the crime, and his fight-or-flight instincts kicked in. He began throwing several adrenaline-fueled punches at Payne, all obviously telegraphed and easily dodged. You didn’t get where Payne was in the business he was in without knowing how to defend yourself, but what he was doing was more along the lines of toying with the man. Driving him further and further from a calm mind, descending into panic. He got words out between ducks and weaves.

“Why them?” Payne prompted as he ducked.

“Do you know how old that girl was? She was nine. Nine years old.” Sidestep.

“They weren’t doing particularly well, either, from the looks of it. The man couldn’t be identified, so he’s no millionaire. Did you just feel like ruining a family?” Bob and weave.

“You’d think if you could kill two people you could throw a punch.” He laughed as he hopped back from a jab.

Payne and the killer wove their way around the relatively large bedroom, Payne’s ease completely contrasted against the attacker’s frenzy.

“Laughable.”

“Pathetic.”

“You’re caught now. No amount of amateur Haymakers is changing that.”

“Give. Up.”

The man shouted with rage and shot at Payne in a rugby tackle. They barged through the door of the bedroom, into the living room teeming with police workers - or at least, the killer had thought it was “they”. Payne was nowhere to be seen to him as he lay sprawled on the wooden floor surrounded by people in blue jumpsuits. However, he must have been close, as the killer heard one final insult from him as he was arrested.

“Idiot.”

The following morning, people huddled in front of a stack of televisions in a shop window as morning frost crawled across the pavement, and listened to a news report of the previous night:

“Scottish P.I. Elliott Payne and his nine-year-old daughter Chloe were found dead at the base of their apartment building after falling seventeen floors from his balcony. While it was initially considered a murder-suicide, a man was discovered inside Payne’s apartment who attempted to escape after being detected. He was arrested and has confessed to the crime, but he insisted that Elliott wasn’t really dead. He will face life in prison without parole after pleading insanity. In related news, policemen from Boston PD have gathered...”

The Sacrifice

By Tom Wallace

I was holding on to the ledge by a fingernail.

“Come...on.....just a bit...more,” I grunted as I strained my arms and legs in order to pull myself up.

I managed to get my arm over and I eventually hauled myself onto the rocky outcrop. The view I saw was astonishing.

Below me was the beauty of the Amazon rainforest in all its glory. Lush vegetation could be seen from the thick jungle canopy, and fluffy clouds were rolling into sight. It was breath-taking.

There are many plateaus scattered around Peru but the highest of them all is the Vicuvian. Which was a huge table above the earth’s crust. It was my goal to climb this monster ever since I had left school.

This was my Everest. Many hours had been spent planning this expedition and raising the funds to achieve this dream of mine. Here I was, finally halfway up, reflecting on it all.

A crash of thunder quickly brought me back to reality. Over the distant horizon, black clouds and dark skies loomed ominously, drifting towards me at an alarming rate. I was so close to completing my life goal and I wasn’t prepared to let this imminent storm shatter it for me. There was a hard climb ahead of me.

“It’s gonna be a tough one” I muttered.

All the visible cracks and handholds must have eroded away or fallen off. Some, I noticed, even looked like they had been deliberately chipped off. Either man or God was trying to put a halt to my journey.

After what seemed like hours of tedious climbing, I had finally reached the summit. I was exhausted because of my race against the horrible weather. The panoramic view I was rewarded with left me in awe. I was witnessing nature’s handiwork and beauty. There was no time to be idle for long though as I felt the rain dribble off my helmet.

I retreated under the canopy for shelter. When carrying out my research, I discovered not much was known about this place. Satellite imagery only showed the very tops of the trees and no helicopter could land here. Not only that, this area was plagued with severe storms, as I was experiencing now. This left me all-the-more feverish to explore.

“Thank God.”

The torrential downpour had eased off. The mud squelched beneath my hiking boots as I trekked through the labyrinth of tropical plants and bushes.

I was so captivated by the scenery that I failed to notice a shocking discovery until I had almost trodden on it. I immediately dropped to my knees to confirm what I had seen. My eyes weren’t playing tricks on me. Footprints. Human footprints. Right there in front of me printed in the mud.

Surely, I was the first person to scale this plateau? I had to train for years to build up the physical and mental strength to tackle this expedition. How was it possible that there were bare human footprints here? My curiosity got the better of me so I began to follow the mysterious trail.

I brushed past the thick undergrowth and this was the moment when I first saw them. An ancient tribe that appeared to be lost in time. Slowly, I made my way into the centre of a collection of huts.

They were constructed of wood, leaves and a mud paste from the nearby forest. There was not a soul around to see me standing beside their campfire. I carefully took off my rucksack, placed my gear on the ground and raised my hands in the air, an international sign of friendliness. Behind me, I heard the sound of breathing. I twisted around to see the people of the tribe emerging from their homes.

I could feel their eyes pierce through me like I was made of glass. Some of the men were armed with makeshift spears. This could go one of two ways. I would be turned into a human pin-cushion and eaten or welcomed with open arms. I prayed it was the latter.

Suddenly, the villagers genuflected on one knee in a circle around me. I didn't know what to think. Maybe they thought I was a reincarnation of one of their pagan gods? The answer presented itself in the form of a tall man with long grey hair, decorated

with jewellery and flowers. His body was a canvas of tribal tattoos. The chief of the tribe I presumed.

In his hand, he clasped a staff carved with exotic markings and etchings. He stood above the people with the confidence and air of royalty. He was in charge and everyone knew it. I followed the example of the natives and bent down on my knee. The chief put his free hand on my shoulder and then gestured for me to rise.

I stood up tall and faced him dead in the eyes. I felt very overdressed and somewhat alien in my expensive raincoat and hiking boots as the majority of the people wore loin cloths or animal hides. The chief smiled at me and turned to his people. He chanted in a language I couldn't translate. They erupted with cheering and dancing. It seemed I was welcome.

He took me on a tour of his modest kingdom. I especially liked the roaring campfire that served as a central hub where all the cooking, festivals and meetings were held. I was treated with an herbal drink that tasted like nothing that could be manufactured. The women placed colourful beads over my head while the little children danced around me, captivated by my curious attire.

They treated me like one of their own. If anything, they were being *too* nice. After a time, I was allowed to wander around, taking pictures of everything and anything. The people were fascinated with this

advanced technology. I could show them what they looked like as I captured that moment in time.

My mind raced with the possibilities. I could sell these photographs to National Geographic or any other nature magazine. I could be world famous – Nick Carver: The Man Who Uncovered the Hidden Tribe. I let greed and fame fill up my thoughts.

That was what I was going to do. That was what I was going to do until I saw something that changed my mind. I was on my own and had stumbled into a mysterious cave, illuminated with candles. Turning on my head torch, I ventured inside. I looked around and found stunning cave art decorating the walls. It must have been thousands of years old.

“This is incredible!”

I realised that they were telling a story. It started with an image of stickmen living in their village at peace with one another and the world. It continued on to show them on a beach, pointing at a strange wooden vessel. Travellers with metal skin disembarked and met the natives.

“They must be the conquistadores.”

Things took a horrible turn. Pictures of the travellers with sticks that spewed out fire, temples in ruins, children screaming for their deceased loved ones. It was genocide.

The story went on to tell of how they retreated inland and climbed the plateau, destroying any traces that they were there and destroying any

means of accessing them. “They trapped themselves up here to avoid their people being massacred,” I whispered with tears in my eyes.

I felt a tsunami of guilt wash over me.

I couldn’t risk the livelihood of the tribe for my own personal gain. I decided on what to do next. I returned to the fire and called a meeting with the people. They knew I had to leave. The chief held out his hands and presented me with a gift. A beautifully carved piece of wood. I thanked him for the gift and for his hospitality.

“Here is my gift to you.”

I unslung my camera case and offered it to him. He shook his head and refused but I insisted that he take it. This would be our secret. My gift to them was that they could continue their lives in peace. Tears of gratitude filled his eyes as he nodded to me in a knowing way.

With that, I turned away ready to begin my descent back into modern society, thinking about the sacrifice I had just made.

Anthony Joshua

By Chalmers Nyakwende

Anthony Joshua is one of Britain's most talented boxers at the moment.

He has held the IBF heavyweight title since April 2016, having previously held the British WBC International heavyweight titles.

Early life

Anthony Joshua was born in Watford to Nigerian-born parents on the 15th of October 1989. Joshua grew up in Nigeria and moved to England halfway through Year 7.

He was a very athletic student who played football and did athletics.

Amateur career

He began boxing when he was 18 years old in Finchley ABC in Barnet, North London. Joshua won the Senior ABC championships in 2010 and was offered £50,000. Anthony replied by saying, "All I want, is to get medals". In 2010 his domestic success earned him a place in GB boxing team. In 2011 he was then named amateur boxer of the year. Joshua was becoming a serious challenger in the boxing industry. He then competed in the 2012 London Olympics, where he was given some tough draws but battled his way through to win a gold medal. Who would defeat him next?

Professional career

Joshua was confirmed a professional boxer on the 11th of July 2013 under the Match Room Sport Promotional Banner. He made his professional debut on the 5th of October 2013 at the O2 arena in London. Joshua had fifteen more fights and won them all by KO's. In February Joshua fought Charles Martin for the IBF Championship and presented a spectacular display of boxing by knocking Martin down multiple of times. His last fight was against the American giant Breazzlle who is 6'7". Anthony won the fight by KO and retained his title.

Anthony Joshua is an inspiring individual with a record of 17-0 in boxing and is one of the most talented boxers we have ever seen. He is most definitely up there with the greatest boxers like Mike Tyson and Muhammad Ali.

Next Fight

Anthony Joshua's next fight will be against Kubrat Pulev on the 26th of November in the Manchester arena. Everyone around the world will be expecting a victory for Joshua because he is at the peak of his career at the moment. He is definitely one of the top contenders to come up against and it will take an extremely intelligent and talented boxer to beat. Will Pulev be the first to end Joshua's winning streak?

My own Perspective

Anthony is one of my favourite boxers. I never got to watch people like Muhammad Ali or Mike Tyson, but from my knowledge growing up I've learnt to know that they were simply the best at what they did. Mike Tyson started fighting at a very young age and was a champion at the age of 18. Muhammad Ali won a gold medal at the age of 18, becoming the light heavyweight champion of the world. They both fought in different eras. If they fought in the same era, I'd say it would've been the best fight of all time.

Anthony Joshua is a significant boxer because he started off underrated. People think that he wins through pure luck, but he keeps on proving them wrong. Boxing is a hard sport because you have to have great hand co-ordination, stamina, the ability to recover in dangerous situations and many more skills. He developed all of these things at a very young age. For young people who do boxing, Anthony Joshua would be an idol to them.

Other boxers like to trash talk a lot, predicting what the outcome will be, but he stands up for himself and tells them that he doesn't like talking back and has respect for all of his opponents. This shows that he has great sportsmanship. In any sport, having good sportsmanship is ideal and it just shows that you're a respectful person. He has gained thousands of compassionate supporters who watch and attend all of his fights.

Many fighters are training harder and challenging him but the outcome is usually always the same. I don't think Joshua will be beaten because he's just the best in his weight division. David Hayes might be the only strongest and talented rival to fight Joshua. If they do fight it'll be one of the best fights of all time because both boxers are very strong and wouldn't give up without a fight.

Joshua is only 26 years of age which means that he still has a massive potential against any fighter in his weight division. There are fighters like Tyson Fury who are very strong competitors but, Joshua would beat him. Some people say that Joshua still has appoint to prove even though he has had 17 fights and won all of them.

Boxing is a very good sport but can be dangerous at times. On Saturday the 10th Kell Brooks fought against the middleweight champion GGG. In this fight Kell Brooks was the underdog because he had to go up a weight and take the fight in a short amount of time. Surprisingly Kell actually was fighting bravely and didn't give up. When it got to the 5th round Kell was getting beat badly and his coaches threw in the towel for the fight to be stopped. This was the right decision because they realised that if the fight had kept on going, Brooks would have been in serious trouble. He had a broken eye socket in his right eye and it could've been worse but thanks to his coaches, he was alright. After the fight when he was being

interviewed he admitted that his coaches made a right decision and thanked them. This shows that he was very appreciative about his coaches' decision.

Boxers are brilliant at what they do and people like Anthony Joshua are younger people's idols to work harder in what they are passionate about.

The Traveller

By Daire O'Neill

A lone-cloaked traveller walked briskly along the dirt trail that wound through the sickly green hills. A thick layer of fog hung low over the hills.

As the traveller walked, his worn brown cloak gently billowed from the chilling wind allowing the pale moonlight to briefly glimpse his trusty sword, carefully tucked away so as to not alert any passers-by yet still be accessible should any danger arise. The hood of his cloak kept the rain away and hid his bearded face.

The traveller came to a fork in the road. He glanced up and saw one path wound down into a valley while the other stayed high above. Peering down into the valley he saw a small hamlet. He took the path down into the valley hoping to find an inn where he could purchase a meal and a bed for the night.

The fog grew thicker and the air chilled as he descended down the path towards the hamlet. The constant howling from a pack of wolves hunting in the forest kept him cautious and alert, with his hand on his sword.

The traveller arrived in the hamlet and found the inn. The small town appeared decrepit and abandoned, but the flicker of candle light from within several buildings told the traveller there were

still inhabitants. He entered the worn building that was the inn and sought the innkeeper.

“My word, it can’t be...a person?” Exclaimed a plump man from across the room. His chair screeched as he stood, he stepped forward towards the traveller bumping into the table and spilling his drink in the process.

“What is so strange about seeing another person?” inquired the traveller, discreetly placing his hand on his sword and lifting it slightly out of the scabbard.

“There hasn’t been any new faces ‘round here for months,” replied the innkeeper, as he stepped into the candlelight his pale face was illuminated by the soft light of a dying fire. The traveller noted the bags under the man’s eyes and the grim expression upon his face.

“Really? I find that hard to believe. What happened?”

“It started a few months back, around the middle of August. One day a cold, strange, ghastly fog rolled into town from over the hills, it wasn’t natural, it...it was chilling. Then He appeared, in the middle of the fog. He walked out of the fog and into town, there was something off about him, something not right. Scares me just thinking about it. He walked right down the main street and didn’t take nothing in, just ignored everything and everyone. Then...He stopped. He turned the nearest person and demanded coin.” the innkeeper took a

swig of his drink, “Course we refused, but that's when...that's when He did it.” The traveller looked up, “He slammed his walking stick down into the ground and...”

“No, it can't be,” murmured the traveller.

“The fog got thicker and the ground around him began to harden and crumble, and...and a hand rose from the ground,” the innkeeper inhaled slowly shaken by the memories of the ordeal.

“Where is he now?” the traveller demanded.

“Well, He took gold from us and walked off into the hills, we haven't seen Him since, but He's out there. You can see His...” the innkeeper shuddered again. “...minions...out in the forest sometimes.” The traveller turned to the door, “Where are you going?”

“To find Him,” the traveller replied curtly.

“What? You can't face Him, you can't imagine what He would do.”

“You don't know what I'm capable of.”

“Well, you can't go alone. It would be suicide.”

“Who would go with me?”

“Thonnir, he would go, he lost his father to this monster.”

“And where can I find Thonnir?”

“Thonnir lives on the far side of town by the river. He's a...”

The traveller didn't wait for the innkeeper to finish. He turned to the door and set off to find Thonnir.

He made his way through the small town towards the river. As he passed the centre of the hamlet he stopped. He crouched down to study the cracked ground. He picked a piece of the ground up and held it in his hand. He clenched his fist and the earth crumbled and fell through the cracks between his fingers.

The traveller stood up. He noticed a shadow pass behind a curtain, feeling uneasy the traveller continued down the road towards the river. He reached the river and saw a house a little downstream. He headed towards the lonely house, keeping an eye on the forest across the river. The innkeeper's words echoed in his head 'You can see His...minions out in the forest sometimes.'

The traveller noticed some shadows shifting in between the trees, he stopped and observed carefully. The shadows seemed ordinary, just trees blowing in the cold wind, but there was something sinister about them. Then in the fog he noticed a shape limping, lumbering along. The traveller moved on with haste, returning his hand to the scabbard.

There was a man outside the house sitting on a stool. The man had a pile of arrows on one side of him and a pile of wood to the other. He was holding a knife in his hand and was meticulously fletching an arrow. The man was well built with strong hands and arms.

“Are you Thonnir?” the traveller asked as he approached the man.

“Who’s asking?” he replied abruptly.

“The innkeeper sent me. He said a man named Thonnir would help me take out the Necromancer.”

“You’re going after Him?”

“Yes. I was told a man named Thonnir would help.”

“Aye, I’m Thonnir, and I will help, but not now. Not at night. We shall go in the morning.”

“Why not go now? Get this done before morning.”

“I am not going into that forest at night, not again.” Thonnir lowered his head, the traveller knew there was something wrong but he did not press Thonnir.

“I’ll be in the inn, I shall make my way back here in the morning,” stated the Traveller.

Thonnir nodded in acknowledgement. The Traveller turned and headed back to the inn.

The next morning the Traveller reached Thonnir’s house shortly before noon. The fog was still as thick and as disturbing as it had been in the night. The Traveller noted the bow lying against the wall beside Thonnir’s house with a quiver full of arrows lain down in front of it. There were bones from a small animal lying beside the dying embers of a small fire.

“Morning,” said Thonnir in a dull voice as he appeared from behind the house surprising the Traveller.

“Are you ready?” asked the Traveller

“Aye,” replied Thonnir as he slung his quiver on his back along with his bow.

“Do you have any other weapons? You may need a dagger or sword.”

“I have a dagger.” Thonnir replied as he showed the Traveller his blade, discreetly held in his belt. “Follow me. There is ford downstream.”

The two set off following the river bank. The shadow of the forest loomed over them as they travelled.

“How old are you Thonnir?”

“I’m 19. Why do you ask?”

“You seem older,” commented the Traveller.

“Yeah, I’ve been through a lot in the past year. I’ve wanted to leave this town since I was 16 or so, now more than ever, but I can’t leave now,” replied Thonnir in a quiet voice.

“Why do you want to leave so bad?”

“I’ve bad memories here, and I’d rather not talk about it.”

The Traveller dropped the subject.

The Traveller and Thonnir reached the ford Thonnir was leading them to. The water rushed rapidly over a ragged line of stones and boulders that formed a slippery path across the river. The two cautiously traversed the ford, the rushing water splashed their legs as it flowed passed through the curling fog.

They reached the other side of the river, with their boots flooded. Thonnir took his boots off and drained them into the river. The Traveller stood there not bothered by his cold, sodden boots. He looked into the forest.

“He is close,” noted the Traveller.

“How can you tell?” asked Thonnir.

“I just know,” the Traveller replied abruptly. “Come on, we need to move on.” With that he set off leaving Thonnir barefoot and confused in the stony riverside. Thonnir raced to put his boots back on and catch up with the Traveller.

The Traveller walked briskly through the forest with Thonnir tripping over roots trying to catch him. He was annoyed at how loud Thonnir was being, worried that it would attract unwanted attention. He turned on the spot to face Thonnir in a small opening surrounded by slightly elevated trees.

“Can you be quiet!” he insisted.

“I’m just trying to keep up stop walking so fast,” replied Thonnir, leaves crunched as he stopped in front of the Traveller.

“You are making too much noise, you are going to alert something.”

“Something or someone? Tell me how is it you seem to know exactly where you are going?” asked Thonnir, not noticing a twig snapping to his left.

“Let’s just keep moving.”

“No, tell me how you know!”

“NO!” shouted the Traveller. The Traveller heard leaves crunching to his right and paused.

“Why not? What’s so-”

“Shh!”

“What?”

“Did you hear something?”

“It’s a forest, there’s all sorts of animals round us.”

“It’s a forest inhabited by a Necromancer, or have you forgotten why we are here?”

“Oh gods!” Thonnir turned and stared into the forest, the sound of footsteps grew closer.

“It’s Him,” hissed the Traveller as he drew his blade “He’s circling us. Prepare yourself.”

Thonnir took an arrow from his quiver and slotted it into the notch on his bow. The fog grew thicker as the Necromancer grew close. The Necromancer stepped into the opening. He appeared to be walking on the fog that billowed around him.

“You!” stated Thonnir.

“Yes boy, it is I. What brings you to my forest?” replied the Necromancer without looking at Thonnir. He focused only on the Traveller who kept his hooded head down, concealing his identity. This annoyed the Necromancer.

“Your forest? This is not your forest, it’s-” began Thonnir

“Silence boy!” The Necromancer moved towards the Traveller, “Who are you?” the Necromancer

willed one of his minions to approach the Traveller. In one swift, smooth action the Traveller sidestepped and killed the minion, he then turned his sword on the Necromancer. The sword's intricate design caught the light highlighting the beauty of the deadly tool. "No," murmured the Necromancer.

"You know who I am," the Traveller said quietly, he then looked up to the Necromancer. "Brother."

"What! Brother?" Thonnir asked in disbelief.

"Yes, brother," replied the Traveller.

"But that means, that means you are a—"

"Yes, I am a mage."

"You call yourself a mage? Ha, you never embraced the gift, not like me. You could've been great, but you threw it all away."

"Great? Like you?"

"Yes, like me," replied the Necromancer smugly.

"You are not great, you are a monster. You use your gift to terrorise and extort people rather than to help them."

"What is wrong with that? I'm using my powers to my advantage."

"It is wrong," insisted the Traveller. He strengthened his grip on the sword and moved closer to the Necromancer. "I can't let you keep doing this."

"How are you going to stop me?" enquired the Necromancer.

“I am a mage, you cannot use your magic on me, and you know I’m skilled enough with my blade to be able to fend off your risen thralls,” replied the Traveller as he slowly put himself between his brother and Thonnir who had his bow aimed at the Necromancer.

“Ha! Brother, I don’t need my minions when I have your friend here.”

The Traveller turned to Thonnir who felt an unwelcome force come over him. He was unable to stop himself from moving and unwillingly aimed his bow at the Traveller. His arrow hit its mark with deadly precision. As soon as the arrow flew Thonnir was free from the control of the Necromancer. He rushed to the Traveller, but it was too late. With his dying breath the Traveller managed to rasp two words.

“Stop...Him.”

“I did it! I didn’t think it would work but it did,” exclaimed the Necromancer gleefully.

Thonnir desperately looked around for a weapon, his eyes fell upon the Traveller’s sword littered on the ground by his corpse. He picked it up, spun and stabbed the Necromancer. The glee drained from the Necromancer’s face, it flooded with shock and horror. The thick fog began to retreat towards the Necromancer, circling his body. A flash of light blinded Thonnir. He shielded his eyes with his hands.

When the light vanished, he looked back. The Necromancer was gone. The only evidence of what had happened was the Traveller, lying dead on the ground. Thonnir gently picked up the Traveller's body and carefully returned to the town. The cold fog that had arrived with the Necromancer slowly began to dissipate.

As Thonnir entered the town people stepped out of their decrepit houses to hear news of what had happened in the forest. Thonnir faced them and their questioning looks.

"It is done, we are safe. The Necromancer is no more."

"How can you be sure?" asked a villager.

The Politician

By Finn McGrath

Part One

The politician sat in his office, typing his piece for the party website. The day had been slow, and the article was nonsense; he was using lots of words but not saying anything. He would send it to one of his speech writers when he was finished, maybe they could polish it up a little. The politician groaned. It had been a long winter's day, the sun had never bothered to show itself but there had been no rain, only an unpleasant glare on an overcast, dreary day.

He spun his chair around to face away from his computer screen. Once again, he felt his chest close in tight as his mind drifted to his regrets as they often did on a day like this. Of course, as always, one stood out more than others. He could not stop himself from recalling the conversation in the upstate office. How could he have been so foolish? He doubted that he would ever stop asking himself that question.

The door of his office opened cautiously. The only other person in the office was one of the college attendees who was in on an internship from his home state. His name was Andrew or something, the politician hadn't bothered to learn it yet. The intern spoke in a wavering voice. "Sir, uh, I think you'll want to have a look at this." The intern held

out his phone, displaying a headline from a leading news site. The politician read and understood instantly – he had been exposed. He was horrified, but not truly surprised. He suddenly felt hollow, like he was a snail shell which had been picked clean by a bird. Then the numbness receded and all of the consequences of his decision hit him at once. He realised that his life in the public eye was over – his reputation would never recover.

Then the phone started to ring. The lights for the different lines lit up like a Christmas tree. The politician waited for his mobile to ring, the White House Chief of Staff would get through to him that way. “You can go home now, Andrew,” he said to the intern. The intern turned towards the door, stopped spoke with his back to the politician.

“It’s Anthony, sir.”

Then the mobile rang. The politician answered it, but before he was given time to even say hello. The Chief of Staff’s voice strained over loud background noise that sounded like a stampede of office workers. “Get over here immediately,” and hung up abruptly. The politician rang his head advisor. He had a long drive ahead of him, and he needed a lift.

Part 2

The politician switched the internet off on his phone. He couldn’t stand another outraged tweet or article. The spilling of his secret had sparked far more anger than he thought was possible. He

supposed he had fooled himself into thinking that what he had done was not as deplorable as it truly was. His driver remained sullen and silent as he drove the politician towards Washington D.C.

Text messages appeared on the lock screen of his phone one after another. “What the hell is goi...” “What is this? Please d...” “Is this for real????...” Then one from the White House number arrived with a ding. It read simply: “Where are you?” This one he replied to. “Coming.”

They pounded mile after mile towards the capital, the scenery blurred by drizzle and rain sweeping against the window. Time seemed to slow as they travelled endlessly, seconds and minutes and hours became indistinguishable. Texts continued to drop, but now his phone was switched to silent and the politician barely registered each message as he read its opening words. One caught his attention. It read; “Protests in DC. Get ...” The politician felt ashamed. He steeled himself to face his own arrival in D.C. It would not be the glorious, proud end to his career that he had once dreamed of. Instead his political life was collapsing all around him, and probably dragging a fair few others down with him.

Part 3

The politician tapped a finger nervously on his knee, staring with glazed eyes out of the tinted windows of his limousine as it picked its way agonisingly towards the White House. Rain swept over the

protestors who packed the street, making it almost impossible to move. Only street lights and headlamps illuminated the slap-dash signs and clenched fists that the protestors held above their heads, chanting at the top of their voices. It was remarkable that so many people had turned out at this hour of the night to express their rage on a cold, wet November evening – it was testament to how mistaken the politician had been. The limousine tried to pick its way through the crowds but was blocked again and again by the mass of people which filled the road. The sound of sirens and car horns mixed with the cheers of the protestors to create a deafening noise, even from inside the sleek black car. Thankfully the crowd believed that the politician was in the second car of the miniature convoy – he was in fact in the lead car – so they had chosen to focus the majority of their abuse and their makeshift missiles on the wrong vehicle. The politician put his head in his hands. He had never intended for things to get this out of hand.

The two cars eventually passed through the gates of the White House grounds, escaping from the protest which was in danger of descending into an all-out riot. As the car pulled up to the main door the politician pushed his door open and jumped out of the limo before it had come to a complete stop. He broke into a run, although his briefcase and tight suit made him look less graceful than the kids that would slide around on the ice rink by his house

back in Minnesota. He was rushed through security and practically shoved up the stairs to one of the many conference rooms to where he knew the end of his political career was waiting.

Outside the conference room he crashed into someone who had been invisible a moment before. He turned, stuttering over an apology, when a familiar, rumbling voice spoke to him.

“Pull yourself together man, or they’ll eat you alive in there!” said the senator from Illinois, the man who had been his first major endorsement all those years ago when he ran his very first race.

His advisors swept him into the elegant conference room which was buzzing with stress and tension. High ranking officials scurried back and forth, dropping notes, spilling cups of coffee, shouting over each other and generally getting in their own way. The wide table which took up most of the room was littered with pages, cases and laptops, none of which were any good to anyone – the table was now a complete nuisance as it left very little space around its edges for the crowd of legislators to move around in. The politician caught a glimpse of a news headline on the screen of a laptop which made him cringe with embarrassment and shame. The only person in the room who had retained any sort of dignity was the president himself. He was sitting at the head of the table and appeared to be reasonably calm, considering the circumstances. He saw the politician and beckoned

to him from the far side of the room. The politician elbowed his way through the frantic crowd towards where the president sat. A man in a grey suit collided with the politician but barely noticed. A well-known senator shouted something across the room from beside the politician's ear. By the time the politician had eventually struggled through to the president's side he was almost out of breath. The president spoke in a controlled manor but the stress was clear to hear in his voice.

"What in God's name were you thinking?" he said, not quite managing to keep a straight face. The politician simply shrugged, unable to think of any words to excuse himself. The president held up his hand for silence but was ignored totally by the room of advisors and officials. He sighed and shook his head, glancing up from his seat at the politician who didn't dare to match his gaze. The president grabbed the politician's briefcase off him with surprising force and banged it down on the desk, rising to his feet as all eyes in the room turned to him.

"As you all know we have a national crisis on our hands here, but right now we need to start doing damage mitigation. We need to figure out ..."

As the president spoke other people in the room began to notice the politician for the first time, quickly realising that he was the reason why they were all in the president's office middle of the night trying to resolve a national crisis. Some began to

mumble complaints under their breath as the president continued to speak. The mumbles rose as the president tried to keep control, straining his voice to talk above growing clamour.

“We have got to co-operate!” the president shouted but by then the room was in uproar.

“It’s all his fault!” yelled a Californian senator, pointing an accusing finger at the politician. The room had erupted into cries of anger and derision.

Those Rotten Hornets

By Declan Cossan

France 1952

Alex, his newly wed wife Anna and her two sons Friedrich and Bruno were staying in Normandy to celebrate Alex and Anna's marriage and for a while things were going normal. At some point, the O'Connells met Jonathan (Alex's uncle) who decided to take them to a demonstration of making honey organised by the farmers. Though they were happy to go, Alex got suspicious when he saw a CH-54 Tarhe helicopter fly over with a strange looking container that was fully sealed. Alex felt uneasy, wondering what the Americans were doing in France. At some point during the presentation, Alex notices what looks to be a pitch-black storm approaching the farm and immediately whispers into Anna's ear to get the boys back into the car while he warns the villagers who, noticing the storm, begin to panic. When the farmer looks around he begins to raise his eyebrows at the "storm" because it was going way too fast to be a storm. Indeed, the storm was a swarm of strange looking hornets that attacked everything in their way including people, wasps and even hornets. Some humans and dogs survived and the only hope for now was to get into the trucks, cars and horse carriages. In desperation to slow them down, Alex threw a bottle of water at the hornets which

probably only killed one hornet of what looked to be five billion.

The O'Connells drove to Granville only to realise that many fleeing villagers were at the mercy of the hornets. Realising this, Alex rallies the fire brigade and leads a fleet of fire engines that kill off enough hornets to make the swarm temporarily disperse, saving the remaining villagers from a horrible death. That night, Alex remains more uneasy than the other villagers. He explains to Anna and Jonathan that on the way to the farm, he noticed a US army 'copter carrying a strange container and also told them about how the hornets could kill in one sting and were larger than any ordinary European hornets. Jonathan notes that those are qualities associated with Asian hornets but that these hornets were too big to be European hornets and yet looked like them. Anna then remarked that these are great biological discussions but asked them about how they would deal with them. Alex says that they will discuss it tomorrow.

The following morning, Friedrich and Bruno were skimming stones at the beach near Granville when suddenly an airplane came crashing down near Granville. They went to their mother who woke up Alex. They came across a large group of people gathering around the crash. The gendarmes got people to stay back while firemen and medics got wounded survivors. A traumatized survivor and his wife tell the Mayor that the plane was flying

passengers from London to Paris when a swarm of what looked like wasps surrounded them. Though they weren't able to sting anyone the bugs clogged up the engines causing the plane to crash. Noting that the wasp's descriptions fit the same as the hornets that attacked the bee farm, the Mayor calls the army who explain that this is fifth call they've got relating to bugs and that they are on their way.

The O'Connells drive to Paris. On the way there was the swarm of hornets being engaged in battle with the French army and air force. The boys look on in horror as a Mystere bomber goes crashing down due to the hornets blinding the pilot's view by clogging up the window. Fortunately the army are able to disperse the swarm with modified versions of garden sprayers that were either mounted on their vehicles and helicopters or being wielded by soldiers in hazmat suits.

Eventually they arrived at Versailles, now a massive refugee camp where the French army have been holding out and where the president, Charles de Gaulle, has been residing. Alex sees members of MI6 including Captain Blake trying to urge de Gaulle to ask the Americans for aid but he is not willing to. Eventually Alex meets with Blake who explains that while De Gaulle is willing to accept British assistance he is not willing to call the Americans as he holds them responsible for the hornet infestation. Alex said that he might be right. Curious to find out what was going on, Alex visited

the president in the officer's tent. De Gaulle had descended into fits of paranoia due to the mental pressure of fighting something that is very difficult to stop and that won't just destroy his people but the whole of the human race if given the chance. Alex mentioned about an American helicopter containing a strange container and asked if he had given permission for it to fly in his airspace. De Gaulle explained that during the Second World War, one of his colleagues in the Maquisard overheard a conversation between Eisenhower and Patton about hornets and the possibility of using them as a weapon against the Soviets. To answer the question, he said sorrowfully that, as they were allies, he let them fly through French airspace on their way to East Germany.

Alex asked if Charles had any major plan to which he replied that he had seven airlifters, Vautour bombers and many Mirage fighters packed with water tanks ready to carpet bomb the site of the queen's nest but that he doesn't know where the queen is because many of his scout copters got destroyed searching. Alex then asked Charles where the highest hornet infestation was. Charles simply responded that Paris has a new name: "*La Ville des Frelons*"

Near Normandy, a British regiment investigates a helicopter crash. Mortimer who is leading the expedition gets two soldiers to lift out a dead pilot with brutal sting mark. There was an open

container with tiny holes. Looking at them, Mortimer theorises that the hornets might have been able to creep out of the container through the little holes.

Meanwhile Alex leaves Versailles Palace and he encounters a scout copter hijacked by his two step sons who were setting off to retrieve their Mother. When Alex asked why they responded that she went with Jonathan to Paris despite the fact that she had no Hazmat suit. Hearing this Alex got on the helicopter with the two boys.

Meanwhile Jonathan drove the car down the Champs Elysees while being chased by hornets. The city itself was covered in many nests that were built in either abandoned vehicles or buildings. But the largest one was at the top of the Eiffel tower. Jonathan (who was tightly zipped up in a hazmat suit) and Anna (who had no Hazmat suit on her) got out of the car at the steps of the Eiffel tower. Anna confidently climbed the Eiffel tower while Jonathan went to the elevator, spraying a few hornets on the way with his sprayer, killing them. Much to Jonathan's surprise, Anna could take many stings and survive with immense pain. Despite the agony of the stings, Anna manages to get to the nest at the top of the Eiffel tower.

She does so and finds what seems to be a circle of queens giant hornets that were buzzing to each other. The hornets explain to each other that they will wait till they've consumed every bit of honey

and life in one country before moving onto the next. They believe that soon they will consume the entire world. At the sight of them, Anna gasps, revealing her presence to them. Furious at her intrusion, the whole swarm attacks. Anna immediately scrambles out of the nest when Alex arrives on the helicopter and sprays the attacking hornets with soapy water.

Using this, Alex manages to rescue Anna and is very surprised to see she is still alive after investigating the nest. Before he can ask, Jonathan screams for help as he is still stuck on the ground. Alex gets the boys to fly the helicopter down to the ground to retrieve Jonathan whose spray had run out of water and only his suit kept him alive.

They fly back to Versailles, unaware that the swarm and all of its queens were following them. On the way, Anna explains that when she was younger, the Nazis did some sort of experiment on her. She didn't really understand what it was all about but it was quite painful, fortunately Enrich had managed to sneak her out.

The group arrives and is immediately surrounded by crowds of people who were all anxious to know about where they were and where the nest was. Alex told the President that they had found the location of the nest and its queens in the Eiffel tower. Surprised at this, he asked how and Jonathan explained about Anna's endurance to the stings and that they should use her blood to make a vaccine. But the swarm arrived the following

morning, before any plans could be made. However despite being taken by surprise, the French army and air force manages to fight off the swarm. A convoy with both Alex, Blake and even the president himself lures the swarm down fields. All the queens fall for the trap and are taken out by that fleet of air lifters and bombers. As a result, the swarm disperses and is cleared out by the Air force's helicopters.

After the humans take Paris back, Anna asks Alex if it is normal to get stung on a honeymoon to Alex simply responds that like his parents before him, they're not a normal couple so they won't have a normal honeymoon. The story ends with them and two boys in Paris at night time after the humans have taken back the city. As a consequence of the wasps being created in the first place by the US government, and more importantly because American ambassadors tried to get De Gaulle to cover up the mess, France withdraws from NATO, but will re-join later at some point.

18 Months

By Stephen Hyland

Benjamin and his girlfriend Georgia were interrailing around Europe when they decided to take a train from Prague to Geneva. It was a sleeper train which was good for them as like most people who interrail they were on a tight budget so it meant they did not have to pay for accommodation for one night. The year was 1992, neither of the three countries they were travelling were in the European Community so border checks were in place. It was the perfect time to visit Prague as the Soviet Union was finished and you could now travel by land beyond the Iron Curtain.

And so the 960 kilometre long rail journey was to begin. It was July at nine o'clock in the evening. The sleeper services were beginning for the night. There were many families going home on ancient looking suburban trains most likely going home to their high rise communist style apartment blocks. The train wasn't due to depart until ten o'clock that evening so they decided that they would have a bite to eat in the stations café. The food in the café wasn't very good but it was a state-owned café so it was very cheap and most of the people eating there were railway workers dressed in oily overalls. The food served in the café was basic and bland the food on offer included roast duck with dumplings and sauerkraut as well as cabbage soup, boiled sausage

and wiener schnitzel. However, the café served the most delicious apple strudel ever for desert.

They left the café as it was a quarter to ten and the train was soon to depart. The train was boarding at platform five. They showed their passports and all relevant travel documents to the train guard. The train would not stop until the Austrian border where travel documents would be checked once again. The train departed at ten o'clock on the dot. The lights were switched off and the train rolled out of the station. The sleep they got was poor as the train was constantly rattling up and down.

The journey went on for about two hours when the train came to a stop. Austrian border police entered the train and checked their passports, visas and train tickets. The process was relatively swift and the train soon got moving again. About thirty minutes later the train made another stop it was not at a station it was a red signal in a remote area. A man and a woman got on. Benjamin and Georgia were now asleep they took the couple and carried them off the train and placed in the back of a jeep. Both Benjamin and Georgia were wondering where they were. One minute before they were asleep on a train now they are sitting in a jeep in the middle of a remote forest somewhere in Austria. The man and women locked all doors to make sure there was no escape for the two.

The journey was very bumpy as it was on dirt tracks through and not paved roads. Georgia got

sick when the car went over an unexpected bump. Neither of the kidnappers said anything about Georgia getting sick. The journey on the dirt track lasted for about half an hour until they got on to a normal road which they were on for about two minutes and it was back off-road. After driving for another fifteen minutes on a dirt track they were back on a road this time for the rest of the journey until they reached a remote house.

When they got to the house the man and woman led them into the house. There was no room for escape as they were both much taller than both Benjamin and Georgia and they kept a firm grip on the couple. The house was a typical Austrian log house. They guided Benjamin and Georgia down the stairs to the basement of the house. They then allowed Benjamin to make a phone call home in order to arrange payment of the ransom. The man typed in the numbers to make sure the police would not be phoned. There was no response to the call.

Benjamin was lead to the basement and Georgia soon followed. The basement was extremely hot but luckily there was a tap in it. The basement had a tap and sink, a mattress, duvet and pillow, a light and a heater.

Time passed and there was still no sign of anyone coming to get them in the basement. After a while the temperature in the basement began to drop, it was becoming evident that they had been in the basement for quite some time. After what must have

been at least a full day the heater that was there had to be used.

More and more time passed. Days became weeks, weeks became months. Or so the two thought, they had no way of telling what time it was. The temperature had dropped below freezing. Luckily the heater was working or they could have died from hypothermia in the basement.

Despite the fact that the heater was working the basement was still cold but it consistently heated itself up just as the cold became unbearable. Surely the proprietors had seen the electricity bill and would release them but there was still no sign of them. All the while temperature continued to rise and fall. It felt like they had been trapped for years at this stage.

One day a huge rumble was heard and there was quite a lot of shaking. The heater and tap were not working. The pair realised that within three to four days they would surely die of either dehydration or hypothermia. After about two days they were rescued. The basement door had been kicked down a man wearing an army uniform. He took them outside, where they saw that there was no house or even trees there anymore. An avalanche had hit and everything in its path had been destroyed. But the as it was quite deep underground the basement survived.

They were both placed on stretchers which trudged through the snow and were brought to

waiting ambulances. They were brought to a local hospital where they were given a medical check.

15th July 1992 was the date they were kidnapped. 9th January 1994 the date they were rescued. The search for them was one the largest in Austria's history. The kidnappers had been already arrested and charged with the murder of the couple. It was believed they had killed them and hid the bodies but little was known that they had been locked in the basement alive the whole time.

Now or Forever

By Luc Joole

It was Saturday evening, on a cold, dark winter's eve in the middle of November. The atmosphere around the small, cosy housing estate in the suburbs of Manchester, England, was dull. Rain began to drop onto the window panels, and a pin could be heard drop in the tidy living room of the Rafferty household. The only sound to be heard was the low mumble of the television screen and the flicking of pages as the newspaper was read.

Jennifer was a small, dark-haired housewife. She stayed at home all day to mind her new-born baby, cooked, cleaned and waited. Waited for the sound of her phone to ring, or for Tom to arrive home. She led a boring life and was beginning to feel as though she had no purpose or no value anymore, except to please the two people that she shared her small, colourless house with. Colourless is how Jennifer would describe her life nowadays.

The lamp in the corner of the living room, although cheap, illuminated almost the entire room. The fire was burning, and had been all day, as Tom had been sat in that red, tattered armchair all day. He hadn't spoken a word to his desperate wife all day, and probably wasn't planning on it either. She sat there on a couch opposite his armchair, and stared at him for a good ten minutes

... nothing ... he didn't bat an eyelid – he just licked between his forefinger and thumb, and read on.

Jen was getting impatient, not just at Tom sitting in the corner, more interested in black and white text than her, but more so with her lifeless life. She longed for excitement or maybe even love to sweep her feet. It was time to tell Tom what had happened and how she had been feeling lately, but this time in a way where she wouldn't get put straight back in her place, like she had always been before.

Of course Jen loved Tom ... She would never have married him and had his child if she didn't. But that didn't mean that she had to love their still-young marriage. It was as though she had signed a contract to forget about herself and to simply take care of others, and she knew she couldn't live like this anymore. It was time.

The clock ticked and coo-cooed as it hit nine o' clock in Manchester. She thought out how to talk to Tom without initiating an argument. She built up courage, cleared her throat a few times. It felt like a "now or never" moment in her life, and she had to stand up for herself.

"Tom..." No reply. "Tom..."

(grunt) "What Jen?" he said abruptly.

"I've been thinking," said Jen consciously. He continued to read the paper and gestured as though to tell her to carry on speaking the meaningless words that were about to climb out of her irritating mouth.

“I haven’t been...” (swallow) “...I mean I haven’t been exactly feeling great lately.” There was a ten second pause, and then surprisingly, Tom lowered the paper onto his lap and sharply turned to stare coldly at the face of his vulnerable wife.

“About what?”

Jen knew she had to precisely deliver her next few words – it was her chance. “Well, I feel as though I am being blocked out Tom, by you. I read something in the paper the other day...It was a survey statistic. It stated that three out of every four married women weren’t, well...happy in their marriage.”

A roll of the eyes from Tom set Jen off and she wanted to yell, but fear stopped her. She carried on anyway.

“There was a number at the bottom. It said to ring if you wanted to fill out the survey. I rang...And Tuesday afternoon a lady came to interrogate me. I told her how I’m fed up with being treated like this and I told her how unfair the marriage I *take part in* is on my end.”

Tom sat back into his seat and pondered what he had been told. He thought about it, and bitterly asked what Jen had told this stranger about their lives.

She hesitated and told him.

“Well, I told her about our day-to-day lives and how I barely even get ten words out of my own husband when he gets home, how all I ever do is

worry and take care of you and how I feel as though I am being completely taken for granted in this house...I am bored.”

Without a second of doubt, Jen knew that she had initiated the argument she was avoiding.

Tom stood up and his face reddened. “Don’t you ever, ever tell people about our lives! Whether its people we know or not. How dare you step so far out of line...I am outraged.”

Mentally, Jen stepped back, it was her own fault. She had chosen this lifestyle. “I...I was wrong, it’s my fault...I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.” She had been defeated and deflated and she knew it. She was trapped, by her very own life.

Tom sat back down in the armchair, picked up his paper and began to read, as the fire warmed him. Jen panicked and tried to justify what she had done to Tom, by explaining how all she wanted was to be paid for filling out the survey, and she wanted to be able to buy a brand-new oven without relying on Tom for money.

Unsurprisingly, Tom didn’t even blink. She took some more mental *step-backs* and slouched into the couch.

She didn’t know how to feel. She had been so easily manipulated by Tom again, and once again felt irrelevant. It was too late to stand up for herself again and she knew it very well. She sat there and thought about how her life would be spent in this colourless house, taking care of ungrateful people,

she even questioned the point in which her life had gone so wrong. How could it be like this? She had no-one to blame but herself for being so naïve.

Not another word was spoken between the married couple that night. Tom fell asleep slumped in his chair with the newspaper resting over his lap once again. As he snored, Jen watched him. In an instant, she sprung up, closed the living room door quietly behind her, grabbed the car keys off the kitchen table and closed the door on her family.

She had decided she was leaving. Where to? She didn't even know. But she felt a sense of freedom as she drove away from her boring life. As the windshield wipers flickered, she stared up at the large yellow moon that was glaring back down at her. A new beginning to life awaited Jennifer Rafferty, in her head.

Psychosis

By Seán Nolan

The rain beat down on the window and from the inside it looked like a dull day with the sky being a calm sea of grey clouds. Condensation had gathered, obscuring the majority of detail being seen from outside the room. Vanessa would've wiped it away when she came in so as to have a clearer view and perhaps make the room seem a little less dreary. The bars did their job however, and stopped anyone inside the cell from reaching the window. Dr. Vanessa Williams was a psychologist, straight out of college. She had spent 9 years practising and learning in order to get where she was today. Standing across from a patient in a psychiatric hospital cell.

She only had herself to blame. When looking for work she had wanted to help people and what was more noble than helping people who the rest of society had turned their back on, freeing them of their mental illness and setting them off into the real world a completely new person? Vanessa only wished she knew how different things would be. Pritvale Psychiatric Hospital was the place where the hopeless lived out the rest of their days. When someone has a difficult mental illness, the support from their loved ones often dwindles as times goes on. Eventually they are submitted here and any contact they had with their former life is virtually

non-existent. Vanessa's job was to act as a psychiatrist to some of the less-violent patients in the hospital. It was a task with little reward. She had started in the hospital so determined and motivated to make a difference but then she faced the monotonous day-in-day-out order of her work. Patients very rarely wanted to talk and when they did, it was hard to get through to them or even understand them. What had started for her as attempts at intimate conversations, so she could grasp the nature of their mental illness before helping them overcome it, had turned into visits of approximately three questions.

“How are you?”

“Do you feel like sharing anything?”

“Are you feeling sick?”

This was her routine with every one of her patients, except one.

Albert was an older man, sixty to be exact. He had trouble processing his thoughts, a problem that a lot of the patients here shared. Often his thoughts would become jumbled causing him to have trouble communicating, forgetting where he was or creating fake situations that he believed were happening in his cell, which were mostly derived from his own memories. Vanessa had written him off as having early onset Alzheimer's. However as Vanessa came to his cell once a week and talked he seemed to become more focused. His episodes were far less frequent and he was even beginning to remember

things that Vanessa would have told him last week, if not from longer ago. It was still a long time before he would leave but he gave Vanessa faith, faith that she could actually help the people admitted here. As Vanessa was heading towards his room she remembered the last thing that Albert had said before she left,

“Could...could you come a little bit earlier next week?”

Vanessa had smiled at the request before replying with,

“I’ll see if I can pull a few strings,” and winked before leaving with her usual. “Always a pleasure Albert.”

As a result, she had managed to reschedule her afternoon visit to a morning visit. When she approached Ward E, she was met with the security guard. A six foot two man a little older than Vanessa who had been working here for a while longer than she had. In her time here, Vanessa had gotten quite friendly with him due to his sunny disposition and the amount of time they saw each other.

“Good morning Michael.” Vanessa chirped, a spring in her step.

“You’re in early today aren't ya? Or is it 4 o'clock already?” He said with a quizzical look on his face.

“You really need to get a watch Mike, or at least set up a clock in here or something,” Vanessa replied with a smirk. “No I'm just doing my visits earlier than usual today.”

Michael started unlocking the gate that separated the corridor from Ward E.

“Do you have plans later on or something?” He asked as he swung the gate open. “If you don't mind me asking.”

“Special request,” Vanessa replied with a mysterious smile before walking through the gate.

“Alright keep your secrets,” Michael chuckled as he drew the gate closed and locked it. The loud CHUNK of the locking gate followed Vanessa as an echo down the hallway. It would've been ominous had Vanessa not heard it already, too many times to count. She arrived at her destination, Albert's cell door.

“So Albert,” Vanessa started. “How are you feeling today?”

“Fine.”

Vanessa could tell something was wrong. His response was strange. Every other week he would've told Vanessa about something that happened or comment on the weather. Some small talk or something, but on this visit, silence. She frowned and glanced at the old man. He was as small and frail as every other week although his demeanour was somehow different today. He seemed to be compressing his already small body into a smaller shape. His gaze was strange as well. He was focusing intently on the ground, staring at one point with such rigidity that he gave Vanessa the impression he was afraid of the room. Albert was

sitting on the bed and while he would usually be fidgeting with his sheets or clothes, his hand seemed nailed to his knees.

“Albert,” Vanessa started, making sure that the concern in her voice was known. “Are you feeling all right? Is anything wrong?” She sat down on the bed beside him. “You seem different.”

Albert lifted his head to face Vanessa. Despite her best efforts she gasped audibly. The friendly face she had become accustomed to had completely left the old man, rendering him a total stranger. His hair which he usually made a small effort to keep uniform was completely dishevelled. His hands, which he had lifted off of his knees, were shaking violently. But his eyes were the worst part. They were red, rimmed with tears and wide, wide with fear.

“We have to hurry.”

With that Albert jumped up off the bed and started rooting around under the bed's mattress. Vanessa was forced off the bed and could only watch as Albert almost upturned the entire bed. Vanessa wasn't sure what to think. It looked like Albert was just having an episode and while he had seemed genuinely upset, if it was all in his head, Vanessa decided the best thing to do would be to coax him out of it.

“Albert, can you tell me where you are?”

“In a prison.”

Vanessa started taking down notes onto her clipboard.

“You're not in a prison Albert.”

“Are you sure about that?” Vanessa was surprised by this comment. Firstly, it was ambiguous to say the least, but when he said it, Albert had a coherence in his voice that Vanessa hadn't heard since she met him.

“Now you're sure that this facility is an actual prison?” Vanessa asked, intrigued by the events unfolding before her eyes.

“It was a metaphor,” Albert replied, still hurriedly searching but now his search had expanded to cover the entire room. “It's not an actual prison but I'm a prisoner here.”

Vanessa was writing furiously. Never had Albert been so concentrated and held a consistent conversation for so long, even if it was just one of his episodes.

“Albert this is a psychiatric hospital. You were admitted here for having early onset Alzheimer's, are you starting to remember now?”

“I know where I am,” Albert said before pausing during his search to look at Vanessa. “And that's the exact reason we have to hurry.”

“Could you clarify why we have to hurry? And what is it you're looking for Albert? Can I help you with it?” Albert chuckled to himself in response to her proposal.

“I’m afraid you don’t know where it is, which is what’s keeping you safe. But I do remember. Like I said, we have to hurry because I remember. I don’t remember...everything, but I remember enough to know what to do.” As he said this he stopped his search and stared at a brick in the wall, close to the floor.

“At least I think I know.” And with that he started scraping at the brick with his bare hands. Vanessa was starting to get nervous. She was afraid Albert was going to hurt himself and while he seemed harmless now, his brain could easily become jumbled again and he might become violent.

“Listen Albert I think you’re just conf-”

THUNK!!

The brick that Albert had been scraping at fell away to the floor leaving a hole in the wall. Albert quickly reached around inside. His face lit up, and he pulled out something from inside. In one hand he held a pile of napkins, but on each napkin there seemed to be unintelligible scribbles. When Vanessa looked closer she saw the scribbles were actually messy handwriting, covering every napkin. In his other hand, Albert held three pills. Each was coloured half blue, half red. Albert stood up.

“They’re for you,” he exclaimed, holding both his hands out forward. Vanessa reached her hand out to take them.

THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP.

The sound caused both Albert and Vanessa to jump on the spot. Someone's footsteps were getting closer and closer to the cell. Albert started shaking and crouched low, before curling into a ball.

“So close, so close, so close, so close, so close.”

Vanessa strode towards the door. She was on the verge of something. She wasn't sure what it was but by God she wasn't going to let some security GUARD ruin it. She intended to somehow stave off the guard, whatever reason he had for visiting the cell, she was determined to convince him it wasn't as important as what she was about to discover. However the moment never came. The guard outside walked past the cell and continued walking until his footsteps faded away to nothingness.

“They didn't come.” On hearing this, Vanessa turned around to Albert. He had been crying again although he had a shaky smile across his face now. This time he didn't wait for Vanessa to take the items. He pressed them into her hands and then took her by the shoulders.

“Something is wrong, terribly wrong. I don't know what it is.” He scrunched his eyes closed and pressed his palms against his temples.

“I...I can't remember what... but it's something bad. This place isn't helping, it's hurting. I can't help you as I am.” He pointed to the scrawled napkins. “But I was able to help you.”

Vanessa studied Albert's face, the napkins and the pills when a question popped into her head.

“Albert, have you been taking your medication?” He looked at her and shook his head.

“No.” Vanessa was still taken aback by everything that'd happened to her in this room. But the more she toyed with the idea of Albert rejecting his medication, the more his behaviour made sense today.

“Albert they're giving you medication for a reason, you need to take it.”

Albert quickly backed away into the opposite corner.

“Nope. No. No. NO! NEVER!” He crouched down and sobbed.

“It does bad things,” he whimpered. “Please Vanessa.” This struck a chord with Vanessa. It was the first time Albert had actually used her name. He had actually remembered her name. Her resolve softened. She checked her watch and saw she was already far over the amount of time she should've spent with Albert.

“I'll take a read over these Albert.” This drew a smile onto the old man's face and before leaving Vanessa called, “Always a pleasure Albert.”

When Vanessa stepped out into the hallway she felt her head spinning. There was so many things this could mean. Was Albert reliving a memory? His thought process was better in that one session than in any of their other ones which begged the question, should Vanessa tell someone Albert wasn't taking his medication? One question flashed

across her mind. It was ludicrous, impossible, and unbelievable! But once she thought of the possibility she couldn't lose it. Was Albert telling the truth? In her hands she held possible proof to Albert's claims.

DONG DONG DONG.

Vanessa whirled to the source of the three knocks. It was Albert's door. Vanessa slid open the visor that allowed her to see into the cell. Albert was right up against it and Vanessa could see he had cried again.

“I remembered something, something bad. I wanted you to help me so I showed you my secret but I was just being selfish. I've done something terrible.” Vanessa became acutely aware of how dry her mouth was.

“Why do you say that Albert?” She rasped.

Her question was met with a tear stained gaze and the statement that made her heart plummet in her chest and her blood run cold.

“You're in danger.”

Abandoned

By Garvan Molony

When I was a kid, my parents would sometimes bring me down to my aunt and uncle's house to stay for the weekend. Mainly, I'd spend time playing with my two cousins who were around the same age as me. They lived on a small farm with plenty of open space and we could run around doing pretty much whatever we wanted. If we thought we could get away with it, the three of us would sometimes cross over to the neighboring farm. It had been abandoned for decades with the scattering of derelict buildings and other structures still standing on the property just begging to be explored. This was of course a goldmine for three adventurous boys such as ourselves, especially after my cousins told me stories about the deaths that took place in the farm.

One afternoon, we thought it would be a good idea to play hide and seek. When it was my turn to hide, I ran off for a flimsy brown barn that had living quarters at the top and climbed the stairs looking for a good spot. There was still furniture inside and personal belongings lay scattered across the floor. I tiptoed over broken dishes, tattered cloths and burnt books eventually coming to a small room with a wardrobe. There were even long black dresses still hanging on a rod that I could hide behind. I stepped inside and managed to force shut the folding door.

My only light was a slit of sunlight that shone through the crack in the door from a nearby window. I crouched down with knees tucked into chest and waited.

Sometime passed and there was still no sign of my seekers. I waited some more, debating if and when I should give myself up. After nearly an hour it was starting to get boring. My head began to droop with tiredness.

I woke with a jerk, it was pitch black. Tired and confused, for a minute I forgot where I was and what I had been doing. I tried to get up but a sudden cramp in my calf kept me grounded. I squirmed around, waiting for it to pass as I heard a door slamming shut downstairs and instantly froze. There was a long period of silence, then footsteps at the bottom of the stairs. The noises continued to ascend. After another moment of silence the walking resumed. My worst fears were real as the footsteps reached the bedroom. They got closer and closer and finally stopped directly in front of the wardrobe. I couldn't see a thing. After a chilling pause they moved over to the other side of the room and out the doorway. They faded away down the hallway. I waited for what seemed an eternity. There were no more sounds now and I was building up enough courage to burst out the door and flee. I felt warm breath on the side of my neck and that was enough to send me running. I heard footsteps

chasing behind me, closing in with frightening speed. I never looked back.

I ran all the way back to aunt and uncle's house. There was a police car outside the house. Everyone was packed into the living room worried sick. I have never been to my aunt and uncle's since.

Eyes That Follow

By Matthew Murphy

I used to live in a small town and I could not cope with other people so I moved to a cabin in a forest far from the town. I suffer from a condition which causes me to struggle around other people because of it I felt I was better off living out here far from town. My therapists and doctors said it would be best for me to move to a remote area as it got very bad recently. I moved into a very large forest where there was rarely anyone around. There was a house in the forest that had had been abandoned in world war 2 in Russia. It was a small wooden bungalow with 3 rooms. I also had OCD which caused me to have everything perfect in the house. If something was moved I would notice. Everything in my house was set perfectly to the way I wanted it.

When I first moved in I loved it. There were few sounds and if there was a noise it was only a small one from the animals and insects around. In the morning I could hear the owls. At night the grass hoppers came out as well as the fire flies which looked amazing at night as they would make the forest glow. There was a river nearby as well and I could hear the stream of water flow by my house every day.

I started a routine which was hard to stick to as I had no access to food or water and I had no source of heat. So every day I woke up at 7:00 and went

out and gathered a large amount of wood for fire. I made sure to gather enough wood to last a week just in case it rained one of the days. Which would make the wood too damp to start a fire. Then when I've finished that at about 9:00 I go out and catch fish out in a lake that is about 10 minutes away from my home. I use a large and thin stick with a point at the end to catch the fish. Then when I am on my way back, I would pick some berries which are edible. I then would eat the berries and half a fish, which I would skin, and then cook over sticks set on fire. Later on in the evening I would go out hunting for deer or squirrel. I would take the parts of the deer and squirrel that were edible. When I have done that I would dispose of their bodies so as not to attract scavengers.

I have been living in the forest for about 9 months now and I have begun to noticed a change in the animal's behaviour. I thought that the animals would have moved further away from me but they moved closer towards the area where I lived. I wasn't complaining because it meant I could travel less. I went to the stream were I get my supply of fish. When I started fishing, I noticed a reddish-orange colour in the upper end of the stream. I started walking up to the top of the stream and saw that the colour of the water started turning redder and redder. I froze in horror as I found it hard to look at the horrific sight. I had gutted deer and skinned fish but still I threw up over the smell of all

the animals that were lying on the ground slit open with their eyes gouged out and intestines pulled out of their stomachs. There were bits and pieces of flesh on the ground. Puddles of blood turned the grass a brownish colour. The heads of the deer severed and their necks and limbs scattered across the area. There were giant claw marks on the skin of the animals lying empty on the ground. It had to have been a bear.

I heard rustling in the bushes and I took off back towards my house in case the bear was still nearby. As I was running back, I had my wooden spear ready in case I was attacked. When I got back home I couldn't breathe, my heart was racing. I was having a panic attack. When I lived in the town I had many panic attacks. My coping method was to take big breathes and close my eyes. I did this for several minutes until I calmed down. When I got back up I saw that some of the items in my house were missing. I looked all around my house for the missing items but I couldn't locate them. I was missing the wood that I had gathered three days ago, one of my hand made spears and most of my food supplies. For the rest of today I only had berries and one eighth of a fish. Later on in the day I couldn't stop thinking about what was at the stream. All of those animals looked like they had been tortured.

I stayed in my house for the rest of the day, I had eaten nothing, but I didn't feel hungry. When I went

to go to sleep I was restless. Outside of my home there was whining noise that sounded very loud. I looked outside my window but it was too dark, all I could see was the slight amount of light in through the dark grey clouds coming from the moon. I heard the sound again and it sounded like it was coming from the other side of the house. I went over to the other window and in the bushes outside I could see two large oval shaped eyes that were pure cyan blue, in the dark the eyes glowed immensely. They were hard to look away from; they were almost trying to draw you towards them. I heard a loud bang behind me and turned around as fast as I could. But it was just a branch that had broken off a tree and hit against the side of my house. When I turned back around there was nothing outside, there were no bright blue and large oval eyes.

I eventually went to sleep that night. When I woke up I thought, no I hoped, that I imagined everything from yesterday. I went down stairs and heard a scratching noise along the side of the house. I grabbed my spear and opened the door. It was about 5:00am so it was still dark. When I stepped outside I saw a tall skinny figure with thin and long looking talons and a circular shaped face. It opened its eyes and they glowed blue. I thought that I had imagined it because nothing on this earth has such large eyes that glow. It didn't move it just stood there towering over everything around it. The thing started breathing heavily and then started to

approach me. As it got closer the light from my house showed the features of it. It had grey skin, large oval eyes, pointy ears and a large mouth. When it got too close I pointed my spear at it, the thing stopped and just stared at me, it then opened its mouth wide and I saw so many sharp teeth all over its mouth, there were three layers of teeth.

It let out a very loud screech and then raised its long arm and ripped the spear from my hands and then it struck me with its large talons ripping my upper arm open causing me to crash to the ground in pain. I looked up and it just stared at me almost like it was laughing at me because it was stronger. I backed up inside my house, slammed the door shut and locked it. I quickly ran to get a bandage as fast as I could to stop the bleeding so I wouldn't bleed out. When I had patched myself up I grabbed a long stick and broke the top off it so it would be sharp. I went along the inside of my house looking through the windows checking to see where the monster was. I heard a noise outside and went to look out the window to see if I could see it but when I got close to the window the creature grabbed me and pulled me through the window causing the shattered glass to puncture my skin. The monster then threw me to the ground. I tried to get up but the monster hit me back down. I just lay there waiting for my death. The monster struck me once more tearing my leg so I couldn't run away. There was a large shard of glass beside me, I wasn't even

able to pick it up because of my arm. The monster bent down and began to devour my arm, the one that he had struck. I started screaming because the pain was unbearable. I tried to move around so my arm would tear off but I couldn't. I looked down and saw a piece of glass that had punctured my stomach. So I grabbed the piece of glass and slowly pulled it out causing more blood loss, but when I pulled it out I saw the monster still feasting on my arm and I jabbed the glass through his neck and pulled the piece of glass across his neck almost decapitating it. The monster then plummeted to ground. I had managed to kill the monster but I was also on the way out as well.

I lay there on the ground waiting to die. I had lost too much blood to recover and I was in the middle of nowhere, there was no one to help me. I just waited until I passed on. I can be happy that I at least killed that Thing.

Nowhere to land

By Alex Palmero

La Guardia Airport, 3.10 pm

Flight 1549 operated by United Airlines takes off at La Guardia Airport, New York. It is headed towards Charlotte Airport, in North Carolina. It is a popular, daily flight. Today the flight is full and carries 143 passengers and 5 crew members.

Three minutes into the flight, an explosion is heard coming from the wings. The two engines burst into flames and begin spitting fire like dragons. Screams are heard in the cabin and a routine 3-and-a-half-hour flight goes as wrong as it possibly can. People call their families, others pray, kids are crying and the attempts of the flight attendants to calm everyone down are silenced by the chaos inside the Airbus A320.

Meanwhile, inside the cockpit, pilots Chesley Sullenberger and Mark Jones witness how one by one the alarms begin to buzz uncontrollably. An engine failure is bad, a double one can turn the flight into a nightmare.

Their controls tell them there is a fire in engines 1 and 2. They notice the contact line light with the stewardesses has been switched on, informing them that the flight attendants are trying to contact them. The speedometer shows they're losing speed. The altimeter shows they're falling. Warning alarms fill the cockpit with an annoyingly loud and continuous

buzz. The pilots are confused and don't know what has happened. Quickly, they shut both engines down and activate the engine extinguishers. Luckily the fire is stopped.

The sudden stop of the two motors is followed by a deadly silence inside the cabin. Nobody knows what will happen and a single word isn't heard.

Now the pilots are facing another problem, they find themselves at an altitude of 600 feet and a distance of 5000 feet away from their departure airport. The two pilots have to think quickly, as their aircraft loses 100 feet of altitude per every 700 hundred travelled. The pilots decide to declare a state of emergency to all airports in New York. Runways are cleared off in all airports as they await for the aircraft to land safely. All flights headed towards New York are diverted to Boston or Miami. All flights departing from any of New York's airports are delayed. The city's airspace is totally free for the small aircraft to manoeuvre.

There are three airports in New York; JFK, La Guardia and Newark. The three of them form a triangle. Flight 1549 finds itself in the middle. If the pilots try to turn back to La Guardia airport, they would lose speed and altitude performing a 360° turn and would be 150 feet short. Newark airport is even farther away than La Guardia and JFK isn't close enough either. The pilots are left alone facing their destiny at an altitude of 600 feet and no runways close enough for them to land.

Captain Sullenberger declares they will perform a landing on the River Hudson.

For the first time, the pilot informs the passengers of the situation on board. In the deadly silence, only broken by prayers and children crying, the mechanical voice of the Captain is heard.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have hit a strike of birds and have lost power on both engines. We are doing our damndest to solve the problem. Please remain calm and thanks for your collaboration.”

For some passengers, this announcement sounds rather funny and ironic, but to others, all they hear is their death sentence. Passengers call their loved ones, write goodbye notes and pray once more for it to be quick and sudden. By this time, flight attendants have abandoned their efforts of calming everybody down and move up to those making a last goodbye phone call.

Back in the cockpit, the pilots announce to the airspace traffic control their plans. They receive calls from the three airports demanding them to repeat their announcement, convinced they have misheard it, while Captain Sullenberger ignores them and turns the airplane towards Manhattan Bridge.

Getting near it, the aircraft is holding its speed and can overfly it with a few dozen feet to spare.

Meanwhile, back on the ground, the whole city of New York is paralysed, everyone watching what looks like an airplane flying over the Hudson river.

Phones and cameras are being used to record these magical moments that could become one of New York aviation's deadliest accidents.

Eleven minutes into the flight, United Airlines flight 1549 has overflowed the Manhattan Bridge and finds itself at an altitude of 100 feet over the River Hudson. Seconds turn into hours as pilots maintain a steady direction. The two pilots have stopped hearing all the alarms and are totally focused on landing the plane the best they possibly can, recalling every bit of their simulation training.

Anxious, they watch the altimeter, waiting for the impact to arrive, conscious of the risk a water landing involves.

90....80....70....60....50.....

The Captain pronounces what might be his last words and makes an announcement seconds before impact; "Brace for Impact."

45....40....35....30....25....20.....*Retag, retag, retag...*

The aircraft suffers a violent shake. Passengers scream, others are unable to speak. All news channels are covering the news while helicopters film and retell the events.

The plane glides on the water, but the surface of the river isn't broken, the aircraft slides in the water as if it were a ship. Slowly it comes to a halt and the passengers on the aircraft can't believe their luck. They scream in joy, clap and cry until they realise, they are being taunted by death. They find

themselves on a plane sinking in water close to freezing point.

Flight attendants react, following their training and try to open the doors, but the tail is deeper underwater than the front and doesn't let them open the rear doors.

“Get out the front door! Get out the front door! Now!”

Survival instincts take over and passengers climb over the rows of seats to get to the exit of this aluminium tube, which has turned into a death trap. Slowly all the passengers are taken out, but there is not enough space on the wings and some are pushed into the water at a temperature of 2°C.

Once more, death seems to have caught up with them. If they don't do something quick, people will begin to lose body heat, resulting hypothermia.

Emergency ships are a few minutes away, but a close tourist boat comes to their rescue. With the help of tourists, the passengers are finally safe.

Two hours later, all the passengers and crew have been transported to the nearest hospital and given blankets and food. There are no passengers missing and only small injuries. The crew now finds itself surrounded by those whose lives they have saved, grateful and euphoric.

Three months after this miraculous landing, the crew is awarded with special decoration for saving 143 lives. This landing will be forever known as The Miracle on the Hudson.

Life and Death

By Ruairi Greene

It was a freezing Monday in November. The street was empty except for a few yellow taxis zipping past looking for work and a 17 year old boy walking down the footpath. It was not unexpected for New York to at least be quieter at this time in the morning, there was always some kind of noise, New York wasn't called the city that doesn't sleep for nothing. There were small mounds of dirty snow piled up on the side of the footpath. Mortis always hated the look of dirty snow, grey and all slushed up from people walking on top of it. He felt that people always ruined the purity of snow, corrupting it, creating this disgusting grey colour by stomping towards their dismal jobs, they probably hated, doing their best to spread their unhappiness to everything they could. Not that Mortis was much better as he trudged towards his school at six in the morning. He had always hated school since he could remember. The fact that he had a funny name had excluded him when he was young and the fact that he had been excluded when he was young combined with his strict adherence to his sense of fairness and justice got him labelled as a "rat". As Mortis continued on towards his school he passed an alleyway known in the neighbourhood for drug addicts. He noticed something unusual. It was completely empty. Mortis had lived in this

neighbourhood his entire life. If Mortis knew one thing about this neighbourhood it would be that no matter the day or time this alley always has people in it. Then he noticed something even stranger, that all the noise of the city had stopped. He took a step towards the alley, fear sending shivers down his spine. All he could think of was that it wasn't possible for the city to go so quiet, something must be wrong.

"Is someone there" Mortis whispered into the shadows of the alley.

He waited for a minute before realizing how stupid he looked, a 17 year old whispering fearfully at the shadows. But as Mortis turned to leave he heard something gurgle in the shadows.

"I pity you child for if you can see me you are not long for this world one way or another."

Mortis spun around to see a giant man, he was easily the tallest man Mortis had ever seen, encased in what looked like gold plated armour, but the size of the man and the shine of his clearly valuable armour was not the most shocking thing about him. No, the most shocking thing was definitely a draw between the giant glowing broadsword the giant was using to stand and the glowing tendrils of faintly golden light emanating from his back.

Mortis moved to try and help the golden being stand.

"DO NOT TOUCH ME WITH YOUR FILTHY HANDS YOU SINNER!" the giant bellowed at the top

of his lungs when Mortis went to stop the giant from falling.

Mortis recoiled from the tantrum that was about to explode out of this giant, glowing, broadsword wielding thing. But before the golden guy could make a Mortis kebab two Saint Bernards jumped atop of Mr. Giant. Well, Saint Bernard is not quite correct. Imagine skinless pit bulls, on fire, with no eyes, ears or nose, the SIZE of Saint Bernards and you get closer to the truth. Oh, and they spoke. Now all they really said was “feed”, as they rent the giants armour apart and began to rip and eat his skin, but it really capitalized on the pants wetting terror factor these things had.

Then Mortis noticed one last detail that really made his morning, the dogs were not the scariest things in the alley. Their owner was. The only way to describe him was terror incarnate. His skin, body and face were constantly moving and shifting to whatever thing would scare you. Hate spiders, he’s a humanoid spider; fear for a loved one, he’s their corpse moving; afraid of both, now your loved one is being eaten alive by spiders while calling for you to help them. So, as you can guess, not pleasant. Well, this thing had already seen Mortis and was moving slowly towards him, a chain whip lazily swinging in a large arc around its arm. As you can imagine Mortis did the correct thing and fainted.

Mortis awoke with a girl standing above him. She was many things at the same time, similar to the

horrible thing from before, but in a less terrifying way. She looked like many people at the same time. She looked like a sweet little girl and a kind old woman, a cruel child and a cackling witch. As Mortis began to recover her features began to settle, but if he looked at her out of the corner of his eye her features still moved and changed.

“Who are you, and where am I?” Mortis coughed as he tried to stand up.

“Careful!” she rushed over to stop him from collapsing.

She looked to be older than Mortis, 19 maybe 20, but even though she looked a little older she was a head smaller than Mortis’ 6 feet. They shared grey eyes but where Mortis’ hair was brown, hers was a bizarre mixture of raven black and snow white hair split half and half.

“I must be really concussed still, that or I’m going crazy because you have GIGANTIC SKELETAL WINGS,” Mortis attempted to move away from the girl with skeleton wings but was having difficulty moving for some reason.

“Shh, Shh it’s alright, don’t be afraid. You are probably very confused. Trust me I am not here to hurt you. If there is one thing in this new world you can be sure of it’s that me and the people I work with are not here to hurt you.” The pretty girl with weird hair spoke softly and comfortingly but there was also something in her voice that Mortis knew made it hard for him to defy her.

“What’s happening? Where am I?” Mortis inquired in a scared voice. He realized this girl emanated a strange power that caused him to be attracted to her but not in a physical way. No, in almost a spiritual way. “Wait you said a “new world” right? What do you mean “new world”?”

“Now don’t freak out, because most people freak out, but you may have, well... kind of died.” She said the last bit very quick.

“I WHAT!” Mortis freaked out. “THEN, *whuu*, how-w, who?”

“I get you’re confused now if you just trust me I will explain everything.” The girl moved forward to bind a small gash on Mortis’ side he hadn’t noticed.

“If I’m dead how do I have a cut, is-is this what I died from?” He said all this in fear.

“That tiny cut!” The girl giggle. “You couldn’t have died from that cut if you tried. No it was the ugly guy with whips who killed you.” She stated all this in a very matter of fact way which irritated Mortis.

“Wait so I didn’t imagine that?” Mortis asked.

“Questions, questions, I’ll explain everything to you if you trust me,” she said while moving to grab his hand “OK my names Karen, what’s yours?”

“M-Mortis.”

“Oh wow I’ve never met a Mortis before, apparently it was a really common name two thousand years ago.” She said in a very patient voice.

“Why do you keep trying to take my hand?” As Mortis tried to pull out of her iron grip.

The girl let out an exasperated sigh. “Just trust me ok.” As she said this she squeezed his hand and leaped into the air. Her gigantic skeletal wings spread out and slowly, almost lazily, beat the air and despite physics telling them they couldn’t fly like this they skyrocketed upwards.

Before Mortis could even take in his surroundings he had to sprint to a bush so he wouldn’t empty his stomach in front of Karen.

“Don’t worry I did the same thing the first time I got dragged along for a flight, don’t worry though you’ll get used to it,” she chuckled as Mortis continued to retch.

“Y-you said you’d explain what happened and where we are.” Mortis choked out, still a bit woozy from flying without a plane. He tossed himself on the ground and Karen gracefully folded her wings to sit across from him.

“I do suppose I owe you some sort of explanation. What do you want to know first?” She inquired.

“How did I die and why am I here?” Mortis demanded, his face a stone wall showing no emotion.

“Well then I’ll start at the beginning. Since time immemorial there has been a war raging one invisible to our eyes as huma-”

“Our?”

“Yes ours. I was once human as well. Now do you want to let me finish?” she said with a death glare for added affect. “Now where was I, oh yes invisible to our eyes as humans, a war between demons and angels, now I know what you’re going to say *“but angels are good right”* which was just some blatant angel propaganda they managed to get to the human world. I mean we are still dealing with after effects of some low tier angel showing off on earth.”

Mortis decided not to question any of that.

“But anyway back to my point. This war is over us, the human race, a vast source of power and worship for either side. Now you’ve heard the spiel before: demons are bad, selfish, cruel, untrustworthy liars who need to be banished, but even though they are bad they have many good qualities as well, ambition, drive, patience and flexibility in their plans; they have good qualities the same way angels have bad qualities, zealousness, arrogance, pr-

“Oh yeah, yeah I get this,” Mortis interjected. “In this one book I read-”

Karen only tolerated his digression for a second or two before she cut him off again. “Anyway we were created and led by an angel named Azrael, who had been a great general in the Angelic Host, until he realized that humans did not deserve to be fought over like a resource, so he gathered a group of like-minded angels and demons, who left their respective homes and established the reapers. They

were known as the grim reapers in the human world. They helped guide people to safety after they died, but over time Azrael's followers fell, captured one by one, imprisoned or turned against him. He spent years defending our species from the tyrannical control of either of the two sides. But by the end he was left alone. His angelic powers had left him when he had decided to fight against the angels but he had created new powers from his will. In his darkest moment he was alone, making a last stand, when he found a dead human who seemed to shine brighter to him.”

Mortis was making an admirable effort to keep up with all the information being thrown at him but he felt there was more to come.

“He realized this human had had a horrible event happen to him. He had lost his mother at birth. This had immersed him in death making him extremely receptive to the powers Azrael used to fight the angels and demons in humanities defense. As a result, this human could contain and command the powers Azrael had created to defend humanity. He decided that rather than guide this dying human to safety he would instead share the power and teach him. He would keep the power alive by training humanity to be their own defenders. This man's name was Mortis. After Azrael had trained enough humans he became our leader and led his newfound army to help the few of his followers who remained loyal during their time imprisoned. The

powers given to humans made it impossible for a human, or Reaper, as they became known, to die outside of battle. It also gave them incredible strength and dexterity and the ability to fly. After Azrael trained enough humans he built a city in the Ether to house humanities guardians when they were not defending humans.”

“I’m sorry but what on earth is the Ether?”

“Well actually the Ether isn’t on earth, ba dum tiss.”

“Did you just say ba dum tiss to yourself?” Mortis asked.

Karen sighed. “No one appreciates my jokes,” she said forlornly. She took a deep breath and launched back into the explanation. “The Ether is the realm just under the mortal realm like layers of an onion they are not directly atop one another but instead have some overlap. The main overlap is when you die or are close to death. Now where was I? Oh yes I was explaining the city to you. Well anyway, after finishing the city, Azrael left a council of trusted angels, demons and reapers before going into the tower he built for himself. It is protected by great powers and an elite force of reapers called 'Azrael's hand.' Apparently he calls some reapers to be trained by him personally.”

“So is it this city you’re bringing me too?”

“Actually we are already here.” Karen stood and entered a moss-covered mausoleum.

“Karen?” As Mortis followed Karen through the doorway, the mausoleum revealed itself to be an illusion. The interior was inconceivably larger than the exterior. In fact he was now standing on a ledge, overlooking a magnificent city. It was built entirely between two towering stone cliffs. There were various buildings carved out of both cliffs with bridges criss-crossing a crevasse. The bottom of which was obscured by a swirling fog.

“Welcome to The City of Death.”

The Life of a Leaving Cert Student

By Mike Allen

It's amazing looking back on my life before the Leaving Cert and observing how much it differs from my life now. When I think about what was going through my head for the entire year leading up to this momentous event, I can only marvel at how much this two week set of exams in the middle of June took over my life. There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think about it. Even during the times I wasn't in school, it was like a dark cloud hanging over everything I did. The days felt like weeks, the weeks felt like months and the months felt like years. It turns out I was missing just one word that could have changed the course of that entire year. Perspective.

It's extremely easy to get so caught up in thinking about the future that you forget to live in the present and that's something that I struggled a lot with leading up to the Leaving Cert. I was so focused on the end goal that I was forgetting that there was a life to live there and then that I was missing out on. I feel that a lot of people don't realise that there is so much going on for an eighteen year old besides the Leaving Cert. Your day becomes morning until late at night except for the breaks you have to take in between. You must deal with balancing your academic life with your social life, with your sporting life, keep yourself healthy, get enough

sleep, decide what college to go to and what course to study and the list goes on and on. That's not saying that all of these problems disappear once you leave school but I found they certainly eased once the Leaving Cert was over.

However, believe it or not, the Leaving Cert did have some benefits. It taught me how much it is possible to accomplish once you set your mind on something. I think Leaving Cert students, no matter their personalities, become the most organised people in the world, especially as June creeps closer and closer. Folders are neatly colour-coded, with each section carefully marked and filed away for later use. Trips to the library are more frequent as the desperation for a quiet place to study, away from those who do not understand your plight, increases. People who ask you "What year are you in?" usually quickly followed by a sympathetic sigh and a pitying "That must be tough" begin to get on your nerves. You begin to think the world is against you and remember fondly a time when the pressure wasn't this substantial. The simplest comforts become the greatest rewards, anything to escape from the seemingly never-ending supply of homework to be completed and study to be done. There is never enough time to fit all in, particularly when you spend most of your time making your study schedule and before you know it, the time you set aside for one subject has passed by, and oh that new show I wanted to watch is on, but I shouldn't,

but I will. This cycle repeats on a loop, the reasons for the procrastination change but the result is always the same.

Monday to Friday becomes a war. There are small battles to be won throughout each week. Each day, there is a new obstacle to overcome, one after the other. Class tests, a mountain of homework, there is only a brief moment of respite to revel in the triumph or mourn the defeat as the next challenge will be just around the corner. Every passing minute is a minute closer to this whole experience being over. It's a mental workout as much as a physical one. The mind has to be switched on as often as possible even though every urge in your body is telling you need to rest. It all comes back to finding the right balance. At some points of the week you just have to put the Leaving Cert to one side, it'll still be there when you get back but keeping it as your main focus for such a long time can be mentally draining and ultimately extremely unhealthy. Whether it be sport, music, TV, going out, reading, sleeping or just taking some quiet time to be alone it's crucial to find some other way to occupy your mind and hopefully bring you some enjoyment at the same time.

The weekend suddenly arrives and with it so does salvation. A break. I can also catch up on all the work I've to do and be ready to go again for next week. Unfortunately, this is also a myth. As the hours tick by on Friday evening and you still haven't

got any work done you begin to contemplate the life choices that led you to this moment. You attempt to convince yourself that everything will be “grand” and that there is still plenty of time to turn this around, even when this happens in the last week of May. Even your house is no longer safe from the ever growing reach of school. Every other hour, your parents inquire about the progress you have made, making sure to remind you how important this is for your future, as if you have somehow forgotten. Friday is over but you will endeavour to get up early that next morning. You wake up on Saturday, roll over to check your phone to realise it is already twelve o'clock and that your plan is now out the window.

Finally you get around to starting. The easy homework first to build the confidence up. One look at the first question, already the panic sets in, it's as if you haven't studied the subject before. This is too hard. You look for confirmation that you aren't in fact crazy and that this doesn't make sense to anyone. A message back from a friend, they don't understand either. Relief comes over you - that means I'm justified. Somewhere in the back of your mind, you know that when going through this homework on Monday, all will become clear and that this question was nowhere near as hard as you thought. This fear will not be limited to just one subject either. It spreads like a virus until it has infected all other subjects. Suddenly, even the

subjects that you were once comfortable with now become plagued by the same difficulties. These difficulties make you ask some of life's important questions such as "What even is Physics anyway?"

You decide to take a break, as you know if you spend any longer at this you won't survive, or at least it feels that way. You take out your phone to do something to distract you but even within technology the trace of the Leaving Cert remains. All it takes is a look at your most visited website, the State Exams Commission website, to realise how consumed your life has become by this monster. Another website or app is promptly opened, a quick skim through your Facebook news feed that eventually develops into a funny video marathon. I might as well check Snapchat and Instagram while I'm at it. Any escape at this point seems worthwhile. Even in these more humorous moments, the Leaving Cert lingers like a person looking over your shoulder, not content to allow you to enjoy even the briefest feeling of relief. It is now getting dark outside. The motivation to soldier on and on is getting weaker and weaker. The appeal of not being there grows more and more. Eventually the temptation wins out and you give in, there's still tomorrow to get all this work done.

Its Sunday already, what happened to the weekend? There is still so much to do, but everyone knows that Sunday evening is when the most work gets done. If anyone has leaving it until the last

minute down to a fine art its Leaving Cert students. That English essay that you've been avoiding doing since the weekend started is still sitting there, that final account still won't balance and you still don't have a clue how integration even works. The sun begins to disappear over the horizon and with it seems to go the memory of a time when your life wasn't like this. I don't know how, whether it's adrenaline or a miracle but there is always a way to get it done in the nick of time. On the other hand, the amount of energy it takes leaves you feeling a perpetual tiredness. It always seemed that I was more tired by Sunday night than I was after a week of school, which appeared to me to be counter-intuitive.

While the Leaving Cert is important, it should never come at the expense of either your happiness or your mental and physical health. If I've learned one thing from my short life in college so far, it's that there is always a way to do what you want to do, even though it may not seem that way when you are filling in your CAO form. It's so difficult to pick a course when you don't even know what they entail, never mind if you would like to do them or not. For example, in my course Science, people have come all different routes and we've all ended up in the same place. These people all got a different number of points, have a different story and are all equally deserving of their place. The other important thing to stress is that you should never

pick a course because of the social stigma surrounding it. So many of my friends picked courses that had the highest points because they felt they would be made fun of or accused of “wasting” their points if they didn’t. For some of those, the decision worked out and they are now enjoying their courses, but others are now regretting their decision. So, if I could give some advice, I would say, forget the amount of points needed, take each course on its merits to you and choose the course that you truly want to do the most as your number one.

If there is one really positive thing that the Leaving Cert achieves is the sense of camaraderie it imbues in Leaving Cert students across the country. It becomes an us-versus-them mentality where everyone not going through the same thing as us is an outsider. There is a general consensus that everyone is in the same boat. This is something that I found extremely comforting as sixth year went on. Everyone was willing to help each other as we all had a common enemy. Of course, there is a competitiveness involved between students when it comes to grades and the number of points you will get and while competition can often be healthy, it is important not to let it get to the point where it negatively impacts on people. Leaving Cert students are under enough stress as it is, that something that can often seem trivial could be enough to push them to their breaking point. It is important to work

with each other, push each other to do the best you can and support those who you can see are struggling. You never know, there may be a point along the way where you might need their help. Teachers are also there to offer guidance and support. There is no point not asking about that thing you didn't understand and then regretting that decision when it appears on the exam. More often than not, I came away with a better understanding once I had asked. Sometimes I didn't but let's not talk about those times.

And if relying on your friends or teachers fails, there's always *Revise Wise* or *Less Stress, More Success* to get you through. These "stress-reducing" books become like the Bible at this time. They are fiercely protected, the notes within them highlighted profusely, but only the "most" important pieces of information. Complex diagrams are copied exactly, even though you're not sure how you would ever replicate these in exam conditions. I mean, this diagram to explain how photosynthesis works looks even more complicated than the process itself. This is also a time when stationery companies make more money than ever. Hundreds and thousands of pens, highlighters, hardbacks. A4 pads, flashcards are swallowed up by students just on the off chance there will be a stationery shortage by the time the exams come around. A lot of these will never be used but it's all part and parcel of the process and hey, a student with a full pencil case *looks* like they

are prepared. Scientific calculators and log tables become your closest companions, always there to give you the formula you can't remember or simplify the fraction you can't figure out how to break down. These little aids may seem small but they can make a huge difference if you use them correctly.

The mocks, the less said about them the better. Ultimately, they are a good way of seeing what level you are at, what are you good at and the areas you still need to improve. They should in no way be seen as a reflection of what you will get come the Leaving Cert. They are also a great way of testing yourself in exam conditions. It allows you to put your time management to the test, and if you don't get the exams done make adjustments once the real thing comes around. If the results don't go your way it's crucial you don't become too disheartened. They are only a practice. It's better to make those mistakes now and you can learn from them. They also provide immensely useful feedback and allow you to see how the exams are marked.

By the time April rolls around, stress levels have reached their crescendo. The Easter Break is behind you and you are now into the home stretch. This is the time you most need no distractions, but here they come, the Irish and French Oral Exams. They are the last thing you need at this point but they also offer the chance to get some early marks on the board before the exams begin proper. Weeks are spent combing through the most abstract topics

you know nothing about, like politics or the environment on the off chance they might come up. The sraith pictiúir are studied carefully knowing that only one out of twenty will be chosen. You hope that it's one of the ones you find easier but it's something that is out of your control. You rattle of every detail about yourself, your family, your town, your school embellishing constantly trying to show the best of yourself. The hardest thing I found about this time was mixing up the two languages. When I should've been thinking in French, I was thinking in Irish and vice versa. The amount of times I said "agus" instead of "et" in a French oral was too many. The most important thing to remember at this time is to stay as relaxed as possible even though it's hard. Also, speaking confidently and steadily, even if you make mistakes is better than not attempting that better French/Irish in case it is wrong. Examiners just want you to show them what you know, they are not trying to take marks away from you for the smallest of things.

When it comes to the exams themselves, the most important thing to remember is to trust yourself and what you know. By this point, all the work has been done and all you can do is your best. You'll be surprised at the amount you will remember when it comes to the exam. Of course, there will be the inevitable last minute "cram" and last minute panic about that one thing that has never come up but this might be the year. Remaining calm at a time

like this when the pressure and stress levels are at their highest is extremely challenging but not impossible. Take each exam as it comes, do your best and as soon as it's over, take some time to reflect on it and then try to put it out of your mind. This can be tough when an exam has not gone well. Once you've given it your best effort, the result will take care of itself and worrying too much about it will often negatively affect other exams which is not good. Also, I would say, do not leave any exam early. You'd be amazed at what might occur to you right at the end of the exam. You can't write anything once you leave so it's no good remembering then.

Also if you have no idea how to do a question, just make an attempt at it, you never know, your wildest guess could get you some marks. If you leave a question blank you are guaranteeing you get zero marks. In addition, of course you can try and predict what might come up on the exam. However, it's pivotal that you don't become so fixated on these topics appearing that it causes you to panic if they don't. You have to be adaptable and you don't want to waste time because that one aspect that you were 100% sure was coming up, hasn't. Yes, this might finally be the year that Geibheann and An Gnáthrud finally come up, but it also might not be. You can't get bogged down in what might have been as before you know it you will be behind schedule. I find the luck balances out across the exams. You just have to deal the best you can with the cards you're dealt.

There are, of course, things to look forward to throughout the Leaving Cert period and after. The pre-debs is an obvious favourite for early in the year. A night travelling to the middle of nowhere with all your best friends. What could possibly go wrong? Towards the end of the year there is the graduation, which is an amazing night to celebrate your time in the school with all the people who have made it so memorable. The 6th year holiday, a rite of passage for Leaving Cert students across the country is something to look forward to directly after the exams while the after-exam great feeling is still in effect. It might be the last time you see some of these people before you all head your separate ways so it is definitely worth it if you find the right group and finally, the Debs; the pinnacle of the school events, where everyone dresses to impress with the hope of enjoying the night of their lives. All of these plus many more are a great way to keep you positive when the going gets tough. Of course, the memories made will last a long time and will lead to many a funny story being told recounting what happened on these nights.

Unfortunately, too often we are expected to be in complete control of our lives when in fact I believe this is the time that we should make mistakes and learn from them for the future. In fact, for most of fifth and sixth year I had no idea of what I wanted to study in college or what job I wanted to obtain at the end of it, or what I was doing for that matter.

Everyone feels this way at some point of time. The amount of responsibility we have to deal with during this period is greater than it has ever been previously. The greatest responsibility we have though is to ourselves. Ultimately, the Leaving Cert is just another set of exams in a long line of them. It comes back to a saying that I heard so many times during this time. "You can repeat the Leaving Cert, but you can't repeat life". That is such a crucial point. Yes doing well in the Leaving Cert can set you up well for the future, but it's the friends you make, the experiences you share, the memories you make and the personality that you ultimately end up with will be far more important than any exam you will ever sit.

So all things considered, would I ever want to do it again? Not in a million years. However, upon reflection the greatest education I received was probably during those Leaving Cert years. It just happened to be the life education I received as opposed to the academic one. I realised more about life in those two years than I ever had previously. You learn a lot about yourself as a person when you are placed in the most extreme of pressures. You learn a lot about the people around you, and in my opinion can forge strong enough relationships to last you a long time. Most importantly of all, you learn that life is short and that you should try and live it to the fullest. These could be some of the best years of your life if you allow them to be. We all go

through this hell at some point and it can only get better once it's all over. Keep calm, it's only an exam. The truest test is to choose how to live your life. My advice, enjoy it!! Remember, you only live once.

Shallow

By Alexander Cregan

Samuel didn't recall exactly when he'd fallen asleep but he damn well remembered waking up. The constant humming of the rusty car's engine and the whistling desert breeze rushing through his driver's side window was interrupted by a thunderous horn. The sudden sound shook Sam to his bones. He took a sharp breath and darted his eyes up to the dimly lit desert highway. Before he could even consider what nightmare awaited him that could have made such a sound, he instinctively curled the driver's wheel to make way. By the time his senses caught him he had sent himself careening into the roadside ditch.

Samuel, in his twitching, manic slumber was still searching for the cause of the sound he had heard but there was nothing. He was confused, but relieved also, that there were not any potential witnesses to deal with. He had slipped up, dozing off like he did and Samuel cursed himself for it. The crippling impact of the car left him gasping without air, but at that moment he didn't care for his own well-being, only his captive's. The air bag had been deployed, impairing his movement. Samuel twisted awkwardly around the cushion to look into the rear of the car. The back seats were empty, but there on the floor was his imprisoned colleague. Face to the back of the passenger seat, his muffled groans

signalled to Sam that he was in fact conscious. He didn't know how long he'd been awake, but Samuel would rather the man remained unresponsive. It would make his job easier.

The man Samuel was trusted with disposing of was a middle-aged money man who was an associate of Samuel's boss. They had been business partners since long before Sam had joined the ranks and for this Sam knew him through reputation, though they had never met until the boss gave him this contract. His name was James Carlisle. His professionally fitted expensive suit had gathered dust from their scuffle earlier, and sandy dirt stains marked his fall when Samuel had knocked him out, sending him sprawling into the fine gravel. His short, jet black hair was gelled back carefully and his face was recently shaved. James took great pride in his features. He didn't give Samuel the impression of a desperate man. He wondered why James had double crossed them. It must have been for a good reason, because Samuel's boss wasn't a man who took kindly to betrayal.

James' eyes were open and they were staring at Samuel with a cold contempt.

"You leaned forward on your own horn you jackass!"

Samuel would feel embarrassed and furious in any other situation like this but right then, all he felt was relief that he was safe. Yet he still had James to deal with and now he was awake.

“Shut your mouth dead man,” Samuel said. Those weren’t his own words, of course, he knew that. When he spoke the voice of his boss came out.

James laughed.

“Why?” he asked.

“If you’ve brought me out here to die and I’m sure as hell that that’s what I’m tied up here for, then I’ve got some bad news for you. I am not going quietly.”

Samuel stared at him indifferently.

“You know, I could always stick that scarf around your neck back where it belongs.” He said, gesturing to the gag that had dropped to James’ shoulders.

“Hey, you could, but then who’s to stop you napping at the wheel again?” Jimmy rebuked.

Sammy couldn’t help it. He smirked and for a second James had him in his sights without the show he was putting on to seem like a professional. Sam wiped the smirk off his face very quickly and the remorseless killer returned within a heartbeat, but James had seen the facade fall, and he had taken note of it.

“Stay here” Samuel ordered. “I’m checking out the engine. If you move a muscle I’ll kill you I swear to God.”

“What a tragedy it’d be to rob me of my last few precious minutes of life tied up in the back seat of a rusty tin can.” James sarcastically stated. “What

is it? You scared of an escape attempt? Damn, kid, where would I run to?"

He had a point. They were in the middle of nowhere with not a soul in sight or a bird's song on the wind but Samuel was still trying to seem authoritative. He was only saying whatever he thought the professionals would say, the men with scarred faces and steady hands, men that carried out their business as if they were machines fulfilling their sole purpose. Sam was new to this kind of business and felt he needed to appear menacing. So, he ignored James and opened up the stiff car door to check the engine. He was glad to see that the car was in good shape, save a massive dent on the bumper. There was a large branch caught in the grill. Samuel thought about cutting it out with his knife but it wasn't in his pocket where he usually kept it. It was probably just in the glove box with the rest of his gear. He left the branch and got back into the car. He started the engine back up after it briefly stuttered to life. Catching James' eye in the rear view mirror, Sam darted his vision back to the road.

The hum of the desert road below them soothed Sam a little, but he was still so shaken from the crash that he couldn't imagine sleeping again. To his surprise, James was being very still in the back seat. He didn't say a word for the longest time and it made Samuel all the more uncomfortable to glance in the mirror to see him staring out of the

window at the passing desert sand, blankly, expressionless. Maybe he was pondering his fate or perhaps something else entirely. Samuel couldn't begin to imagine what was going through James' head. All Samuel could think of was the feeling of defeat that must have been dominating his mind. Could he feel death approaching him? The thought darkened his mind, and, besides the hum of the engine, it was so quiet, so quiet that Samuel could hear James breathing. He had almost had enough, now Samuel wished that James would speak and say something to convince him to let him go. They were getting closer...

Sam's prayers were answered with James' voice, which softly prevailed over the background noise around them. James asked him a question.

"Why not here? This place is as good as any, why keep driving? What difference does a few more miles on the meter make."

"I dug a place earlier, up ahead, that's where I'm taking you. I didn't want to dig it after." Sam explained.

"I see," James responded understandingly. "You don't want to be around death any longer than you've gotta be. Maybe you could pull the trigger without looking, pretend you're just shooting air."

He paused.

"Well, at least you won't have me digging my own grave. I've got a bad back."

“Anyway” he continued, far too casually for a man facing death.

“You work for Bruce, right? I mean, Mr. Grafton?”

Samuel hadn’t heard his bosses first name used before. There was a sense of familiarity with the manner in which he said his boss’ name. It caught Samuel off guard. He didn’t say anything but it was a rhetorical question.

“Yeah, I knew there would be consequences, for what happened. For what I did. It’d be unlike Bruce to leave knots untied, even in my case. But it was something that had to be done.” He took a breath followed by a slow sigh.

“You shouldn’t have crossed him.” Samuel’s critique came with the benefit of hindsight, but no one in their right mind would screw with Grafton, he knew that for a fact. “How could you think you’d get away with this?”

James disregarded what Samuel said.

“I remember how things were for the rookies. This is some kind of test for you, isn’t it? An initiation. I did something similar when I was your age.”

James had Samuel’s undivided attention but he could see the marker he had left beside the road approaching hastily.

“What’s your name, kid?” James asked.

He hesitated before answering “Samuel.”

“Samuel,” James began soothingly, “I can tell you’ve never done anything like this before. Killing someone... that’s a thing you can’t ever take back.

It changes you, in your bones, whether they deserved it or not. I speak from experience.” He shifted uncomfortably in his seat moving his bound hands restlessly. Samuel twitched as he brought the car to a stop beside the marker.

“Is there anything you wouldn’t do for your family?”

James’ change in topic confused Samuel for a moment.

“You asked me how did I think I could get away with stealing from Bruce. Well, I ask you, is there anything you wouldn’t do for your family? I’d do anything. If that makes me a bad person in your eyes then I suppose you can kill me with a clear conscience. What I’m, trying to say, Samuel, is that you can still stop this. If you don’t you’ll regret it for the rest of your life, however long that’ll be if you stay at Bruce’s side. If you do stay with him, I can promise you, it won’t be long.”

Samuel couldn’t do it, he decided to pull over and let James out, he just couldn’t bring himself to kill James. So Samuel went around to the back seat and told James to give him his hands so he could loosen James’ bonds.

“You’re making the right choice.” James proclaimed with an easy smile. Samuel let James know how far it was to the next town, about 20 miles further down the road.

“I’ll leave water for you. If you make for that town you’ll get a head start on Bruce. Once I get back to

him I'll tell him I never found you. If I don't get back soon he'll get suspicious of me."

"You'll never see me again" James said. "And Samuel. Thank you for this."

Sam turned his back to James and he leaned to the glove box to get the water bottles he had there. Right then, he remembered his pocket knife that he'd lost and assumed was in the glove box. But it was nowhere to be seen there. Samuel contemplated this and came to the conclusion that the only other thing that could have happened was that it was thrown out of his pocket in the crash earlier. It could have fallen under the seat, it could be anywhere in the car. Suddenly he was aware of James approaching him from behind.

Just before Samuel could turn he felt a sharp, agonizing pain in his lower back that rippled through his body. James had stabbed him.

"Sorry, Samuel. A few hours' head start walking isn't enough."

He fell to the floor. James stepped over him into the car and drove away without looking back a single time. How could he be so stupid? How could he forget how dangerous this man was capable of being? It was Samuel's own knife that James had stabbed him with, no doubt. It slipped from his pocket to the backseat floor. Careless. Samuel struggled to his feet, clutching his back where blood was oozing out of his wound. He had no water, it was still in the car and the car was gone. He gazed

across to the shallow grave he had dug for James and chuckled to himself.

“Digging my own grave.” He muttered.

Samuel began to limp up the road to the town 20 miles away all the while aware that if he fell, whenever that inevitably happened, he would be too numb to rise again.

The Man Who Watched The End Of The World

By Conor Kinsella

The lonely astronaut eyed his transparent reflection in the sleek, stream-lined windows of the *Infinitum*, a small space station orbiting the Earth.

The cold vacuum of outer space was completely and utterly haunting and mystifying all at the same time. All around him were distant stars. They shined even brighter from space than one might think; the view was unmeasurably more beautiful than you could ever hope to see in a city where light pollution blocked any kind of true view of the night sky. Closer to him was the moon; it looked a lot different from outer space. It didn't have the soft, cream-coloured glow it had when it was viewed from the Earth, but rather appeared cold, grey, stoney, with one side facing away from him shrouded in darkness where the sun's light couldn't reach.

Space served as a reminder of scale to all of those who had ventured beyond what was familiar to them; the sheer thought of trying to comprehend how small you were in comparison to each and every country, every continent, every planet, every galaxy was something that many people chose to avoid; whether you viewed that as a scary or mysterious, fascinating concept was entirely up to the person. After all, most people have to worry

about whether or not they'll be late for work or if they'll eat at a restaurant for dinner or settle for takeaway, not worry about how absolutely miniscule we all are in the grand scheme of things.

Yet despite all this, once you were in orbit around the Earth on a space station, these were exactly the kinds of thoughts that you began to have after mere hours. The sense of loneliness and isolation was contrasted by a wanderlust that was like that of no other. Knowing you were the only human for thousands upon thousands of miles had the kind of implications you'd expect; you felt homesick, naturally, but you also felt as though you had become part of a much bigger picture beyond what was happening on the surface of the planet beneath you, beyond the trials and turbulences of daily life.

However, for this astronaut in particular the sensation involved with knowing that he was never going back home was the mood-killer.

The bombs had started a week ago. It had been a traumatic experience, to say the least; everything about it had been awful to watch. The astronaut had seen the mushroom shaped clouds of atomic bombs in books and on television but actually seeing one of their explosions in person from space gave you a powerful and all-too real visualisation of how big they were. But regardless of whichever country had started firing first and why, it was the type of attack that was going to change the world forever.

Nuclear bombs had seemed to fly all across the globe after that. The astronaut was left to watch as it all happened; it was an unpleasant feeling. The sheer quietness of the spectacle was unnerving, almost like watching a creepy, silent, never-ending movie. He didn't even want to think about what it was like on the surface; he envisioned the destruction, the death. It had all happened in the space of only one week. The toxic clouds of each bomb had slowly spread across the surface of the Earth day by day until there was hardly anything left to see of the planet, just a thick, slightly brown haze of deathly fumes and gases trapped under the atmosphere, drifting lazily across the sky.

He had no doubt that the simultaneous explosions had resulted in a catastrophic greenhouse effect being caused; the rapid melting of the ice caps after the temperature of the Earth shot up by alarming amounts had caused the oceans to swell and swallow up coastlines and low-lying mainland with the worst floods to be ever experienced in the planet's history. The astronaut thought about whether anybody was still alive or not; if they were, they were likely trapped far-underground in a bunker until the confined space either drove them insane or they ran out of food. In a way it was identical to the kind of fate he had been doomed to on the *Infinitum*, the difference being that he had a much better view of what was happening.

The International Space Station had been decimated by an internal explosion in the days following the first bombs. The astronaut thought about what might have caused it. The crew on board were all probably married, with kids or in a long-term relationship of some sort; not like him. It only took one emotionally distraught outbreak of a person on board to jeopardize everyone else by causing an explosion and dooming themselves, as well as rest of the crew to a fiery, painful death in a fit of despair, at least that's how he imagined it happening. People always seemed to look to astronauts as being heroes idolised by children or explorers of the unknown envied by adults, but they were just like any other person on the planet; vulnerable, imperfect, not without flaws by any account.

Everyone else, everything else, was gone; thousands upon thousands of years of human history had been essentially erased from existence in the space of a single week, with only a legacy of ruins and radioactive wastelands to show for everything man had ever accomplished, if there was even that much left. Things like the Pyramids and the Great Wall of China which had lived through so much of man's history had been vanquished. It was scary to think about how so many peacekeeping talks had been carried out between nations to ensure that there wasn't ever going to be a catastrophe of this level after the Cuban Missile

Crisis, but yet it had amounted to this in such a short period of time.

The first reaction of the astronaut had been blatant denial; he didn't break down or cry a single tear, but simply agreed with the notion that the whole situation was absolutely *nuts* and that he was dreaming and that he'd wake up from this nightmare eventually and laugh nervously about it to his colleagues when he got back home.

But there was no waking up. No end. The only thing that became real was his sense of terror as the time dragged on, the reality of the situation sinking in as the fear that had once hid in the depths of his mind several days ago rose to the surface, showing itself like some horrifying creature from the bottom of a dark, uncharted ocean.

The astronaut's transparent reflection seemed to stare back at him more intensely than he felt himself looking through the window of the ship. His short, dark hair was covered in a thin layer of sweat and his face was slowly beginning to turn a sickly, deathly pale shade. He hadn't been sleeping recently as a result of everything that had happened and the dark bags threatening to form under his eyes served as the evidence. Oddly, he had come to accept that what he had watched *was* real and that regardless of whatever he did now, he couldn't continue lying to himself about what he'd seen.

He looked out at the planet beneath him feeling incredibly sick to his stomach, thinking about how

he was due to go home the day after the first bomb landed on the west-coast of North-America. He had only meant to be on *Infinitum* for four days to repair a couple of damaged satellite circuits before flying home and crashing down in a comfy hotel bed at the end of it all before finally being able to fly home the next day, but it seemed that fate had something else in store for him.

He had been presented with a front row seat to watch the end of the world right before his eyes. As well as a lot of time to think about the things he had taken for granted before, but was missing them like *hell* now; things like the subtle heat of the evening sun on his face while walking along the gravelled path which crunched beneath your feet of the large park on his way home from work during summer. It was the type of thing that would've been unusual if you'd have actually taken a moment to appreciate it fully at the time but you'd miss it once the cold winters came along and you'd come down with a nasty flu or virus.

The astronaut had tried making calls to the ground the day he'd first seen the first toxic cloud rise up out of the land, even though he knew it was useless. He would've been more surprised if he had actually been met with an answer at the other end of the phone, but all that met greeted him was eerie feedback The type you'd hear in a cliché horror movie before the poor soul answering the phone would be bloodily mutilated by a maniac with a

chainsaw minutes later. He realised that he would have to make a choice sooner or later; death wasn't far off regardless of what he did but he was grateful for the time he'd been given to collect his thoughts, to calm himself down rather than die in the midst of a nuclear explosion trying to run from the inevitable death that awaited.

He couldn't quite make sense of what had happened; it was as if the world as he'd known it had faded out of existence but had managed to forget about him in the process. He was the one person who had seen everything that had happened to planet Earth from the eyes of the omniscient. The destruction of humanity had gone unnoticed by the rest of the universe as well as the astronaut's fateful lonely existence. That was it.

He didn't feel overwhelmingly upset, or anguished; just lonely. The small space station's walls had been no company to him, let alone his reflection. As he felt himself turning away from the window, his reflection did the same, and disappeared back into the *Infinitum* as the astronaut felt his hand unclip the lock that was holding his helmet in place. The brief moment of excruciating cold shock as the vacuum of space rushed in to meet him was met by a sudden peace. A tranquillity unmatched by anything the astronaut had ever felt before, and with his unceremonious passing watched by none other than the dying planet beneath him, the last remnants of his

thoughts trickled away into blackness along with the memory of the planet that he had once known.

We'll Meet Again

By Declan Cossan

The Third World War had been raging on. The Red tide was temporarily halted for now at a high price. The Soviet conquest of Britain was narrowly avoided. The Americans were mostly fighting in the Pacific and the French were strengthening their positions on the Western German front. There were immense famines in Eastern Europe which the Soviet government barely did anything to tackle, despite the very fact that these countries, like Poland and Czechoslovakia, had provided troops for the Red Tide. Britain had ordered a draft, leaving both Alex and Anna worried that Friedrich and Bruno would be drafted, along with dozens of other teens from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. None of these countries were aware that America and Russia were ready to go to extreme measures. Nevertheless a lot of the troops involved in driving out the Red tide from Cornwall were celebrating that night.

The three boys, Magnus, Friedrich and Bruno were staying at home, probably because they weren't interested in lavish parties. A massive jet aircraft passed over from the East spraying a greenish gas over the area, because the house was locked, the greenish gas didn't manage to seep into the house. Later that night, Magnus and Bruno woke up wondering why their parents hadn't come

home. They heard a window being smashed and went over to investigate what it was and discovered a young girl somewhat older and taller than Magnus but smaller than Bruno. She wasn't showing her face to them and long messy hair hung down over her shoulders. Magnus stayed behind Bruno nervously as Bruno stepped forward to see who she was. At that moment Friedrich showed up, recognizing the girl as the one he met at the bar and got into a fight over, before the Soviets came. He happily greeted her only for her to reveal her rotting and ghoulish face. His excitement dropped and was swapped with a deep sense of dread and denial. Suddenly she groaned and revealed her rotting hand to try and reach out for them. Her groaning continued, she started to walk, she was slow at first but quickly began to pick up pace causing the boys to run.

The boys got out of the house through the broken window in the sitting room and into the garden. The rotten girl lurched after them, forcing Friedrich to grab an axe and smash it against her head, the girl crumpled to the floor. The boys sighed briefly, but their relief didn't last long because they quickly figured out that she was a zombie and that there were more zombies coming towards the house. The boys rushed to their car, they grabbed the keys and went speeding onto the road, escaping the groaning zombies, knocking down a few in the process. Driving across the now tainted land of Cornwall

they learned from the radio that the Soviets had staged a bio attack on Britain following their failure to take Europe. So called Zombies were wandering everywhere killing anyone that got in their way. The British government staged a massive evacuation into militarized cities like London, Birmingham and Glasgow. The French government sent some reserve troops who were helping the British army in searching for survivors.

The boys eventually reached the nearest town only to find it deserted of zombies. The boys reached the pub where they found a letter written by their mother Anna, saying that they had been evacuated by the military. Reassured that their parents didn't get affected by the chemicals, the boys hatched a plan to find weapons and get a train to London. During their scavenging trip they stumble across a supermarket where they gorge on the food there. While having their breakfast, Friedrich went on about how the one good thing about the evacuation is that now that there are no adults to stop them from eating what was left in the supermarket. They heard a noise and much to their surprise they came across a Soviet POW named Vladimir.

Though initially hostile, Vladimir decides to help them and explains that he managed to escape from his POW camp during the zombie attack. He also explains that the Americans launched a similar attack on Russia with more devastating results. This enraged the Soviets who were so angry with

how bad the war effort was going that they just decided to retaliate. He also gives them some weapons which he gathered from the camp like knives, grenades and machine guns. The four decide to make their way to the train station which they manage to do at night, taking out a lot of zombies. They manage to get onto the train but an overwhelming number of zombies come to try and overrun the carriages. Friedrich and Vladimir hold off the zombies while Bruno and Magnus activate the diesel electric train allowing it to move on. But Vladimir and Friedrich were overrun, forcing Vladimir to get Friedrich off the carriage and detach the infested carriages from the train. Continued to fight until he was eventually overrun. He gave his life for the boys. Saddened, Magnus turned on the radio only for it to play "We'll meet again".

Listening to it caused Magnus to tear up, which led Friedrich to turn it off. Magnus expressed his fear that they won't reunite with their parents but Friedrich reassures Magnus that they will if they keep trying. Meanwhile Alex and Anna were in London which had become a militarized fortress as the British army fortified their positions, ready to fight either the Soviets or zombies. They searched refugees for bite marks, shooting anybody that was infected. Helicopters and sky ships patrolled the skies. Alex and his crew were waiting for their turn to patrol the skies but Anna came to him in the bar and worried that the boys were not among the many

refugees coming into London and they should go searching for them. Though initially reluctant because of the quarantine, he was convinced and the two parents drove out to find their sons. They left before Alex's uncle Jonathan could warn them that the RAF were ordered to carpet bomb that area tomorrow in preparation for French reinforcements to arrive. Meanwhile the boys were making their way across the countryside in the train when suddenly they saw old towns and villages being carpet bombed by Handley Page Victor bombers.

Shortly after the bombing, French airborne troops were dropped off by helicopters and began fighting the hordes of zombies. The tracks up ahead were destroyed, which caused the train to derail, knocking the boys unconscious. As they regain consciousness, a stray horse appears and they use it to gallop ahead. Zombies tried to pursue the three as they galloped across the tattered English countryside. They managed to make it to a small town that is inhabited by a bunch of survivors. These survivors had managed to take refuge in an old castle and had armed themselves. They were able to spend one night around the campfire but the following morning the zombies attacked and though the survivors put up a good fight, their castle was overrun and they were forced to flee. Meanwhile Alex and Anna searched where they thought the boys could be. The boys were separated from the band of survivors during a zombie ambush. The

boys had no idea where the other survivors were but hoped they had met up with elements of the British army.

They came across another ghost town...the same one that Alex and Anna happened to be in. The family happily embraced each other as they reunited. Their happiness was brief though as zombies came again. The five took a derelict bus in order to escape the zombies. They ran out of fuel which should have doomed them to be overrun...only to be saved by a French assault 'copter at the last minute that evacuated them to London. The helicopter passed some Mirages as it flew across the ruined land of Britain.

Empty Minds

By Ronan Cullen

FADE IN:

INT. WHITE SQUARE ROOM

The room has a table with four chairs in the center and a black one way mirror on the wall.

PROFFESOR HALPIN (40's), dressed formally with her hair in a bun, storms into the room.

HALPIN

(pointing to the table)

Please take a seat.

Four people follow her into the room and sit down.

NATE (18), young and vibrant, seems excited to be there.

BRUCE (40's), a beefy man who looks fed up with everything.

LILY (20's), heavily pregnant. She texts away on her phone.

ANGELICA (70's), very fragile, slowly walks in on a stick.

HALPIN (CONT'D)

Thank you all for coming in today. Now sorry but before I continue I'm going to need you to give me

your mobile phones or any other potential recording devices.

LILY reluctantly hands over her phone as everyone else scrambles into their pockets to give theirs. HALPIN takes each phone, switches them off and puts them into her pocket.

HALPIN (CONT'D)

Thank you very much for coming in today. As our advert said, we are one of the leading scientific corporations in the world and we required four people to take part in a social experiment. Now I assume you are all aware of the recent rumors from the press that the early development of artificial intelligence has started to take place.

NATE

(excited)

Yeah I saw that on the news! It's insane.

HALPIN

These rumors are wildly inaccurate.

BRUCE

They really are pathetic. Can't tell nothing but lies, these reporters.

HALPIN

As I was saying these rumors have no truth in them.

She pauses.

HALPIN (CONT'D)

We are miles beyond the early stages of this process. Artificial intelligence is fully functional right now.

BRUCE

(angry)

Here if this is some kind of joke you can keep my paycheck. I don't want to be paid to listen to some fairy tale.

HALPIN

I assure you this is no joke. During the Cold War the CIA came up with an ingenious idea. A spy that could have all the qualities of a human except for one thing, human error. The idea was that if they were caught, no information could be extracted from them because if you tortured them they felt no pain, if you threatened them they had nothing to lose or if you tried to convince it you're right you couldn't because they are programmed to believe you're wrong. The project has been developing for nearly half a century now. We are delighted to announce that our first prototype has

been made and we want you to perform the Turing Test.

NATE

What's that?

HALPIN

It's a test to see if someone can tell the difference between a human and a machine.

NATE

So you're going to make us talk to a robot and see if we can tell if it's human or not?

HALPIN

No, that would defeat the purpose. You would already know that it was artificial.

LILY

Can you just get to the point please?

HALPIN

You have ten minutes to figure out your answer and then you can write it on the piece of paper in front of you.

BRUCE

What answer?

HALPIN

One of you isn't real. You have to figure out who it is.

BRUCE

Oh come on! This is ridiculous. I'm leaving.

BRUCE gets up to leave. He tries to open the door but it won't open.

HALPIN

You signed a contract just before we came in remember? Which if I recall correctly states that you can't leave until you have completed the experiment.

Looking defeated he takes his seat.

HALPIN (CONT'D)

Thank you. You don't have to look so surprised. It's just evolution.

The door is opened for her from the other side and she leaves.

NATE

Is she serious?

BRUCE

No, this is just some stupid game.

LILY

Maybe it's not as stupid as it sounds.

BRUCE

(Judgmental)

What do you mean?

LILY

Think of Siri on your phone. It has the ability to process what you're saying and respond to it. The only thing it's missing, consciousness. It's like a simulated game of chess, it may be able to make all the right moves but does it know they are playing chess. In my opinion it was only a matter of time before this kind of technology was invented.

NATE

She has a point.

BRUCE

(to ANGELICA)

You haven't spoken a word all day. What do you think?

ANGELICA

Ever since I was born it's felt like they've invented some new kind of gadget everyday. With each new one it would get harder and harder to understand how it worked. I've spent my whole life trying to

catch up with technology. It's no surprise to me that technology has finally caught up with us.

Everyone sits silently for a few seconds as they come to terms with what's happening.

LILY
(to BRUCE)

You gotta admit that it does sound plausible.

BRUCE
(annoyed)
I guess so.

NATE
A.I. is a bad idea. We've all seen the movies right? Everyone says that when A.I. is invented that it would end up taking over the world. If it passes this Turing Test then who knows what. This could be the first step to a world dominated by A.I.

BRUCE
This isn't some stupid movie. Don't you think you're being a little over-dramatic.

NATE
Maybe I am, but I don't think we can risk letting this technology become commonplace. For the good of everyone I think we need to figure out who it is so that it can't be given clearance.

BRUCE
You're probably right.

LILY
Agreed.

ANGELICA starts sniggering.

BRUCE
What are you laughing at?

ANGELICA
(smirking)
It's just, you all seem so sure.

LILY
Sure of what?

ANGELICA
Sure it's not yourself.

BRUCE
You think this is funny do you? You do realize
that's there's as good a chance of it being you: as
good a chance of it being any of us.

ANGELICA
Maybe it is me. At least I'm considering it might be

myself but none of you have even thought that it
could be yourself.

BRUCE

I know it's not me and I know I can't prove it but I
just know.

ANGELICA

Enlighten me.

BRUCE

(defensive)

I don't have to tell you anything.

ANGELICA

Well then I have to assume it's you.

LILY

She's got a point. For this to work everyone has to
be completely open.

BRUCE

(frustrated)

Then why are you all forcing me to speak first. If
you're so keen on being open about everything
then by all means go ahead. Tell us about your
life.

LILY

Fine, what do you want to know?

BRUCE

I don't know. What about your baby? If you're so keen on everyone being completely open with us then I'm sure you mind a couple of questions. Is it unplanned? What about the father, what does he do? How did your parents take it? I'm assuming they were disappointed in you judging by your age.

NATE

Woah calm down man, you can't speak to people like that.

LILY

It's fine I'll answer him. If you must know then no, it isn't a planned pregnancy. When I told the father he hit me and said he wants nothing to do with it, and no my parents don't know I'm pregnant. You know why? They died when I was six years old. That's why I'm doing this stupid experiment. To raise some money so I can care for my child properly. You see, you're not the only one with problems. So maybe you can get rid of your ego for one second and realize that you're not the most important person here and that you can't treat people like the way you do.

There is a tense silence for a couple of seconds but it feels like much longer.

BRUCE
I'm sorry.

ANGELICA
Don't be sorry.

BRUCE
Why not?

LILY
Yeah why not?

ANGELICA
Because then you're treating her as a real
person. For all we know she could be a machine.

LILY
What so you think it's me?

ANGELICA
(mocking)
Oh my life is so sad. Please have sympathy for me.
Pathetic!

LILY
What? You think I made all that up for sympathy.

ANGELICA
Maybe. Everything about it was so sad. I mean if I
was trying to hide the fact that I wasn't real I'd

probably hit people with a story like that. Tell me something else about your life. Something less depressing.

LILY

Fine, emmm...emmm.

ANGELICA

Doesn't it say a lot when you can't even think of one. Your life can't just be these fundamental memories. Unless of course there's nothing more to you.

LILY goes to answer but then can't think of anything to say. She starts considering ANGELICA's words.

NATE

Just because she's had a few bad experiences doesn't mean it's her. We've all gone through rough patches but that doesn't take away our humanity.

BRUCE

(about ANGELICA)

No, she's the only person who's getting things done. It may be a little unorthodox but at least it's getting us somewhere.

NATE

That's not a fact though it's just an opinion. My mom has cancer you know. They don't think she's going to make it past a year. Now according to her point of view I'm probably just looking for sympathy. If that's what you think this is then you need to deeply consider what you deem to be human. We've all got crap going on in our life. Just because you're stone cold doesn't mean we're any less human.

BRUCE

Yeah, you've been messing with us since the start. If it's any of us I'm putting my money on you.

ANGELICA

Wise decision. It probably is me.

NATE

That doesn't make sense. If it really was her then she wouldn't just admit like that. Would she?

ANGELICA

Maybe I would. Maybe I'm just trying to throw you off the scent.

BRUCE

I can't tell if you're completely insane or if you just enjoy messing with people.

LILY

It's not her. They wouldn't be that stupid to design her like that.

ANGELICA

(laughing)

Is anyone else really enjoying this?

BRUCE

(confused)

What?

ANGELICA

It's exhilarating. I've had a pretty boring life. Nothing's made me feel more alive than the idea that I'm not.

NATE

What the hell is wrong with you? We're in the middle of a crisis and you're acting like it's a comedy sketch. Can you please take this seriously?

ANGELICA

Does your mother love you?

NATE

Jesus Christ! This is getting ridiculous.

ANGELICA

Just answer the question.

NATE

Fine, of course she does.

ANGELICA

But there must have been times before where you
didn't get on so well.

NATE

No, not really.

ANGELICA

Really, you've never had one fight with her, a little
tiff, nothing?

NATE

No I haven't.

ANGELICA

That seems kind of strange doesn't it?

NATE

I don't know, does it?

ANGELICA

Everyone fights with their parents. That's what
makes us human, right?

NATE

(angry)

Stop right there! You're just trying to get inside
people's heads now.

ANGELICA

Thanks for proving my point.

NATE

(confused)

What are you talking about?

ANGELICA

You just got pretty angry there.

NATE

So what?

ANGELICA

We've known each other for about ten minutes and
you've argued with me a lot already. Now how old
are you.

NATE

Eighteen.

ANGELICA

I find it hard to believe that you've had multiple
fights with me over a period of ten minutes and
you've never once had a fight with the person

you've seen most everyday for the whole eighteen years of your life.

NATE

But...but...

BRUCE

Maybe's she's right. Maybe we aren't defined by the memories we can remember but the one's we forget. My wife is leaving me. I can't remember a time when we were happy. Now we must have been alright together at some point seeing as I married her but whenever I look back I only see the bad times. She got the kids. I don't get to see them anymore. Now I've spent this whole session under the assumption that it's not me and to be honest I kind of hope it is me. At least it would mean that none of this had ever happened.

Everyone sits silently for about fifteen seconds.

ANGELICA, then goes to write on the paper in front of her.

Everyone follows her example.

HALPIN speaks from the intercom.

HALPIN (O.S)

Thank you very much for participating. You may exit the room now and take a seat in the waiting room. I will be with you in a couple of minutes.

Everyone gets up and leaves with a look of shock on their faces except for ANGELICA who looks pleased after the events.

PAN TO --

The four sheets which shows that everyone has written themselves as the suspected A.I.

BLACKOUT:

Riotous applause.

CUT TO:

INT. LECTURE HALL

PROFESSOR HALPIN stands on the other side of the one-way mirror which shows the room where the Turing Test had just taken place. In front of her are hundreds of students applauding her.

HALPIN

Thank you. Thank you so much. I will accept questions now.

About fifty hands go up. She points at one.

STUDENT #1

How did you know you could get them to believe that A.I. existed?

HALPIN

Well, basically no one trusts the government.

The students laugh.

HALPIN

(smiling)

It's true though isn't it. Two of the most hated things in the world are the government and the idea of something smarter than us. Hence, if you blame A.I. on the government then people will believe it. So all we had to do was leak some false information to the press and you've got your rumors started. Everyone wants to hate the government so if you give them another reason to do so then they will believe it no matter how ridiculous it sounds, even A.I.

Hands go up again. She picks another one.

STUDENT #2

How did you know they would all think it was themselves?

HALPIN

That comes down to the application process. We received thousands of applicants and by doing a simple bit of digging we managed to find the four most emotionally unstable people. They would rather think their life be a lie than have to face the

hardships in it. We'll go one by one. Angelica was an orphan who was never adopted. She's spent most of her life living on her own. Now that's going to lead to a certain amount of insanity. So much so that she was instantly convinced it was herself and yet she still wanted to interrogate others just for fun. Now for Lily, Bruce and Nate it was a different story. As I'm sure you saw they are all going through rough patches in their lives. The best way to escape these problems of theirs would be to convince themselves that they're lives don't exist. They were given a way out today and they took it. I'll take one more question.

More hands go up. She picks the final one.

STUDENT #3

Is there a point to this experiment or is it nothing more than a cruel prank?

The room becomes very tense after that question.

HALPIN

Yes there is a point. It shows how stupid humans can be. We ridicule each other, we disregard each other, we kill each other, we destroy the planet we live on and like this experiment proves we believe in stupid things. Then we vote to give power to people who will do the exact same ignorant things. This world is crazy and what I just did was show

you a tiny sample of how crazy it can be. Nothing
in all the world is more dangerous than sincere
ignorance and conscientious stupidity.

HALPIN walks out of the room as the students
look on in silence.

FADE OUT:

Aamulla Varhain

By Devon Keogh

Early in the Morning stood I, in that coldest of colds.
Not a star had yet yielded to the solar glare. Out my
mouth the whispering condensate of warm air.
Standing patiently gazing across the galaxy, across
the universe itself, through my eye it, a smothering
and wondrous blanket.

I enjoy these enlightened nights... for before the
sun comes up, that is the time of true magic. I stand
down my telescope, bracing it into the frosted
ground. Unscrewing the lens caps, flipping the
mirror into place. Finally complete, ready. Adjusting
the focus, there come forth the perfect points of
providence, guiding me towards my target, that
beautiful red iron globe, Jupiter. Rouged point
finally in sight, heavens how I am glad for your
appearance!

O' Jupiter, I have endeavoured for many weeks
to capture you in my retinae, the convexed
convergence of a forty-four minute journey through
the Asteroid Belt, past Mars, past the Moon,
through the atmosphere, into my eye. Alas,
something is very wrong... What I hoped for in you
seems only a blurred speck. I focus, and focus...
you slip away. Alike a fly tangled in the sinister
strands of a spider's web with every failed struggle,

with every astray adjustment, the image shakes and you wander from the narrow viewing range, your orbital journey going on through the heavens. As you disappear finally, you lay me sorrowful, for I cannot again find you. To make certain my disappointment, so do the invisible night clouds roll in. I ask o' Jupiter, why do you reject me this night?

Early in the morning stand I, cold and alone, the stars fading before my eyes, the growing blue-grey of day dominating. I pull up the telescopic legs of the telescopic device, fastening them in place, capping the lenses. Gone til another night.

Tada Gan Iarracht

(A Haiku, as gaeilge)

By

Naoise Ó Conluain

Tada gan iarracht
Ag sclábhaíocht linn go dian
Coláiste Chluain Chaoin

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