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The Anthology 2015

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FOREWORD

THE ANTHOLOGY 2015 is the collected works of Clonkeen College's students. This year's book consists of writing contributed by students taking the Transition Year Creative Writing module as well as contributions from other students in TY. In addition to this we also have contributions from 1st Yr, 3rd Yr and 5th Yr students.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed for their efforts and their bravery. It takes a considerable degree of courage to put your imagination to work, to give the best of yourself, and then place it before the public. In this sense, writing can be considered an act of imagination, courage and self-belief and the ANTHOLOGY aims to recognize and encourage these attributes.

In this collection you can expect to find a wide variety of writing, from classic adventure stories to Sci-Fi, sporting triumph to autobiography, and a little poetry too. In one particularly interesting development, one of last year's Creative Writing students, Dáire O'Neill, has provided us with a continuation of his story from last year's collection. BETRAYAL is a fast-moving action piece, bursting with energetic dialogue and compelling characters. It is

hugely encouraging for us all to see students return to the Anthology and continue the development of their writing.

Special mention should go to the four students from this year's Creative Writing class who have edited the collection – Michael Culloty, Alex Cregan, Caolan Moore and Emmet Murphy. Equally, we thank Harry Martin for his work designing this year's striking cover, and Harry's father, Michael, for allowing us to use the image which is taken from one of his paintings.

Finally, we would like to say thanks to everyone for supporting our project.

John Toomey
Feb. 2015

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Lights All Faded

Kenneth Lee

‘Have you read the new book by John Maroone?’

‘I got it the other day. I don’t know why though. He’s been rehashing the same pretentious story for about thirty years now.’

‘You could give it to me.’

‘I think it would be a mistake’

‘Have faith in me.’

The two men sat opposite each other at a table. The man on the right was unassuming. His glasses bore a teal tint from the light racing through the window. Outside the countryside and dull grey sky appeared as a blur. The man on the left glanced outside. His face had been eroded by time leaving deep ravines on his forehead. He let out an audible sigh.

The younger man retrieved a small envelope from his briefcase and leaned his hand across the table. In an instant the deal was done. The younger man slid his new envelope into his jacket pocket. Both men stood up and went into opposite directions along the aisle. For a moment their eyes caught each other for perhaps the final time. ‘Good luck, Grayson,’ whispered the older man.

The train ground to a halt outside Victory Station, ten kilometres from the Oristovkan border. People scrambled wildly trying to push their way through various hawkers

and beggars in order to get to the other platform. Grayson observed the pandemonium from the slitted windows of the train. He gripped his case with one hand and his pocket with his other. The air grew heavier second by second. The doors creaked open. A frenzy engulfed Grayson.

Two masses collided causing each to instantly disintegrate. No prior experience could have prepared Grayson for the deafening drone of a thousand people, the barrage of shoulders and or bags, and the sudden breeze of humidity. Grayson shuffled along with the crowd as his vision exploded into a misty daze. He would have to trust in the masses.

The shuffle through the station was arduous and claustrophobic to put it mildly. Hawkers thrust flyers, leaflets and the like haphazardly in the crowd. The scarce spaces between the travellers served only to trap heat similar to the knitting of a sweater. The cacophony of voices echoed within the confines of the station and simply suppressed one's ability to think. Grayson kept his eyes down. The last thing he would want would be to be recognised.

Unfortunately for Grayson, his copper watch caught the attention of a resident beggar.

'Got any change boy?' she asked.

Grayson peeked upwards and immediately regretted it. Their eyes had met. The woman was haggardly, her hair resembling sticks and twigs. She was completely caked in

a ash-like filth. Her whole body contorted as she staggered towards him.

‘W..W..Where are you going..g boy?’ she stammered. Her voice was rising. ‘I s..see that watch on your hand. Can’t you spare anything for the poor!’

Grayson continued on walking and kept his gaze downwards.

‘Look at me!’ screeched the woman. She threw herself headfirst into Grayson. Her nails etched themselves into Grayson’s temples. The sheer surprise of the force knocked him down. For a heartbeat he was immobilised. Then a shot of adrenaline careened through his body. With his left arm, he slammed it straight into her chest. Grayson could feel a slight give in the ribs before they gave way, splintering into two.

The strike launched the woman into a coughing fit. An eruption of blood and phlegm spewed onto Grayson’s face. Grayson heaved himself upwards smashing into several onlookers. He proceeded to vomit.

The ground felt coarse beneath his fingers. He noticed two uniformed men walking towards him. For a moment he could see Samuel and himself walking home together, the howl of the bombers flying overhead. They were going to have a cup of coffee at Marmostein’s. Suddenly he awoke from his reverie. The image burned itself into his mind. He now knew what to do.

The border was the epitome of dreary. A chain linked fence stretched towards the horizon leaving only a tiny

gap in the middle. This was the entrance into...To the right of the gap lay a small booth for the customs inspector and to the left was a dull grey wall with increments of fifty centimetres painted hastily with paint. The inspector today was a man by the name of Karl. He despised every aspect of his occupation from checking passports, to asking 'business or pleasure', and to receiving a subsistence pay.

'Next please,' said Karl into the intercom, 'Have your papers ready.'

The next traveller was a thin man. His movements appeared jagged as if he was in pain.

'Papers please,' Karl couldn't help but let a tone of annoyance seep into his voice. How inconsiderate were people that they couldn't understand how stressful this job was? Surely they could imagine that he was paid for every person processed and that if he was unable to pay his rent at the end of the week the consequences would be severe.

'Sorry for the trouble,' the man reached into a paper envelope and fished out a passport. Karl noticed the man's copper watch as he was handed the documents.

'Mr. William Gutsayev?'

'That's me.'

'What is the purpose of your trip?'

'I'm visiting friends.'

Karl examined the passport. There were no discrepancies. Correct dates, names and issuing cities. Never the less he could feel that something was off.

Firstly, the man emitted a waft of wrongful aromas that curdled his stomach. Secondly, he exhibited an unusual amount of suspiciousness. He was clearly disgruntled and his hair unkempt. Karl groped for the *Security* button underneath his desk with his right hand.

‘Stop,’ murmured the man.

Karl paused for a moment in disbelief. How did he know about the button? ‘No matter,’ Karl reasoned.

‘Mr. Gutsayev or whatever your name is, why should I?’

The man sighed for a second before replying. ‘I’ve got friends across this border. Friends I haven’t seen or spoken to in years. Do you know..’

‘Just who are you?’ snapped Karl, ‘Tell me in ten seconds or I’ll have a guard break your face in five!’

‘My name is Grayson. Anything you’ve heard about me is lies’.

‘Grayson. I’ve heard of that name.’ Karl gave him a condescending smirk. He had caught Oristovka’s public enemy.

A million thoughts were screaming in Grayson’s mind. Perhaps he should plead for mercy or attack the nearest guard and hope that the encounter killed him so that the regime couldn’t extract any Intel using their macabre techniques. The inspector had caught him in the act. No act of deception or cunning could save him now. His skin was already saturated with sweat but his mouth was

searing dry. His heart pounded wildly. Then in a tidal wave of hysteria, Grayson heard a single voice of reason.

‘Mr. Grayson, you are under arrest for acts of treason, including sedition, desertion and espionage.’ The inspector spoke the words slowly. An air of smugness was present between each syllable.

‘Inspector, I would suggest that you refrain from arresting me.’

The criminal’s confidence surprised Karl.

‘Would I be correct in believing that you have a family and friends? Do you know what the investigative unit would do to them and yourself if you were knew anything the government didn’t want you to know? You should know,’ retorted Karl.

‘If you arrest me,’ Grayson snapped, ‘I will proclaim every state secret I know into your ear. And let me warn you that you will not forget.’

Karl sat flabbergasted for a few seconds. His right hand returned itself onto the desk.

‘Unbelievable,’ uttered Karl as he hand back the man his passport.

An overwhelming urge seized Grayson. He wanted to yell into the wind. However the voice of logic restrained him. The feeling dissipated and once more Grayson felt incredibly insignificant and vulnerable.

The memories returned to Grayson as he began his trek through downtown Amblegrad. The city had been constructed in the mid-1960s to serve as housing for

workers. As such the town featured a tired design of straight roads which criss-crossed to form various grids. The towering apartment blocks were as grey as ever. The streets were deserted as usual. Loitering was considered very suspicious. The only noise to be heard was the wind which provided a howling ambience. Suddenly Grayson spotted it. Without a doubt the experience was déjà vu. A memory from a lifetime ago.

Marmostein's coffee shop was the only luxury offered in Amblegrad. The grandeur was fresh in Grayson's mind. The sweet aromatic taste that lingered in his mouth after his first cup of coffee and the warmth of Marmostein, the local barista. The shop itself was modestly small grey shop with a vibrant red sign. Inside there were several stools and a countertop. Thoughts of hanging out with Samuel there after a day's work brought a tsunami of nostalgia over Grayson. However, the building was long abandoned now. Marmostein's appeared somewhat dimmer as if its lights had been extinguished. The red sign had faded into a ageing wood. The building was now encroached by nature on all sides, which was now determined to reclaim its rightful land. Long vines crept along the walls, creating a spider web.

Morosely, Grayson entered the shell of the building. All the floorboards, furniture and tchotchkes had been stripped presumably by the Investigative Unit. Grayson stood before the small hollow in the ground where the counter would have been and whispered a prayer for

Marmostein. Tears burst from his eyes. His choice twenty years ago had doomed them all.

Samuel had been working overtime for the past week. His body ached throughout and the long hours spent outside patrolling the border station had taken their toll. More worrying was the fact that he hadn't seen Grayson in the past two weeks. Absenteeism was not something tolerated by the regime. Samuel still hadn't adjusted to seeing a different face in the inspector's booth. Luckily his shift was over and he could enjoy some coffee. Samuel paused before entering Marmostein's. He could almost sense that he was being watched.

Marmostein gave a welcoming smile to Samuel. His beard shook as he leapt forward to greet him.

'Evening, Samy. How's work?'

'Evening, Marmostein. Cold. By the way, have you seen Grayson around.'

'Sorry, haven't seen him.'

Samuel ordered a black coffee before sitting down. The two spoke for five minutes but Samuel's mind was elsewhere. Idly, he began scribbling into his notepad.

'Marmostein, could I ask you for a favour?' requested Samuel sheepily. He was shocked by how his voice sounded.

'Anything for you, Samuel?' responded Marmostein. 'What do you need?'

'Just hand this to Grayson when you see him,' he replied. 'Thanks!'

Samuel tore the page out of his notebook and folded it neatly in half twice. He handed it to Marmostein who promptly pocketed it in his apron pocket. With one gulp of the drink, Samuel's innards lit up and a soothing warmth spread throughout his body. The scene seemed to last for a while in a trance-like state.

Without warning, the doors burst in. A woman and two men strode in, their footsteps akin to staccato rhythm. The disquieting aura from them was almost palpable. They were all dressed in the green garb of the Investigative Unit. The woman stepped forward. She motioned first towards to Samuel, then to Marmostein.

'Evening Officer, comrade.' Her voice was straining to sound friendly.

'How may I help you, Supervisor?' Samuel reluctantly asked.

'I have just a few questions to ask, if you please,' she requested.

'Of course, Supervisor,' Samuel responded.

'Would you two comrades consider yourself friends with inspector Grayson?' her stare zoned in on Samuel.

Samuel contemplated his answer for a few fleeting seconds. Marmostein glanced at Samuel in hope for an acceptable answer. Images of Grayson flashed through Samuel's mind. Five seconds had elapsed. Any longer would appear too suspicious.

'Yes,' said Samuel.

'Yes,' said Marmostein.

The answer hung in the air. The silence seemed to last an eternity.

‘Very well. Thank you for your cooperation comrades.’ She flashed a smile before leaving along with the two men.

Grayson breathed deeply trying to recapture the scent. But he knew it was an act of pure desperation. He could only smell mold and mildew. Grayson prided himself on being a logical person, always listening to the right voice in his mind. From his birth he had been taught to show completely loyalty to the regime. Perhaps he was defective, with an insatiable urge to defy what was logical. This entire journey was an act of rebellion against his better judgement, a pilgrimage of defiance.

Grayson woke up. His vision was muddy. All of his sense of time seemed to have disappeared. He surveyed his surroundings. The environment was still the same as yesterday and the day before that. An old dilapidated shop that could have once been a coffee shop. Grayson mulled before realising the obvious. He was missing his glasses. Did he leave them in the backroom?

Grayson stumbled into the backroom, pushing a door out of his way. It was pitch-dark. He laid one foot in. An audible creak echoed throughout the room. Grayson put his second foot in. A second creak sounded. The floorboard bent precariously before snapping in two. His foot plunged into an abyss. Likewise his body followed.

The world seemed to be spinning. The world also was apparently very dark. Grayson reached out trying to reorient himself and rediscover what direction up was. Then his hand felt something. It was smooth and quite soft.

Grayson hauled himself up. For whatever reason it was much brighter now and Grayson could see that his foot had gotten caught in a hollow underneath the floorboard. Squinting, he examined the object. Instantly he recognised it. Pressing his nose into it, Grayson found the sought after scent. Marmostein and his sweet aromatic coffee.

Grayson ran his hand across the apron. A small bump in the pocket caught his attention. Quickly, he removed the object. It was a neatly folded sheet of paper. A fresh sense of determination caught a hold of him. He was a child at Christmas unwrapping his first gift. He unfolded as fast as he could without ripping it. As soon as his eyes met the handwriting, he could only experience pure ecstatic fervour:

My dear friend,

I wish I could see you now. I have not seen you in a few days but that has even felt like a lifetime. I hope that you are going to return but I already know that something has gone awry.

If you ever read this note, I would like you to acknowledge this. I am lucky. Even though I am starving in a third world country, working for a corrupt, oppressive regime, I know that I am fortunate. Fortunate to have a friend that makes letting go so difficult...

Miles Out

Michael Culloty

There was an unusual, almost melancholic atmosphere in the classroom. With summer a distant memory, Jack Rumney had settled into his usual routine. He looked around, determined to focus on anything but what he was hearing. He stared at his reflection in the window next to him, and adjusted his hair. It wasn't quite long enough to fall over his eyes completely, but the straw blonde colour at the top of his vision was definitely distracting. He'd been told once, by an old girlfriend, that his hair was his only redeeming quality but he didn't believe that - he thought his piercing green eyes were pretty nice, too. He slowly took stock of his surroundings, for what felt like the thousandth time that day. The walls were a monochrome grey, the uniforms a dull navy blue. The only colour came from the usual monthly posters strewn around the walls, this time the theme was 'Great American Youth,' in honour of Thanksgiving which was still a ways away. He checked the time.

It was half past three, the clock ticked, but it didn't seem to be moving. The lesson had dragged on for what seemed like hours, but in reality was one of the day's shorter classes. Maybe it's because it was French, and Jack felt like a fish out of water when it came to languages. Or maybe it was because Ms. Odell, his

teacher, knew he was dyslexic and used this class to torment him. Jack was leaning towards option two when he heard his name being called. He looked up, everyone was staring at him.

He suddenly felt a wave of self-consciousness wash over him as he worried about every distinguishable feature he had on his face. Were his glasses crooked? Did he have dandruff, which would stick out like a sore thumb in his dark black hair? For a second, he worried.

He barely managed a weak, ‘Oui, madame?’ before the whole class erupted into laughter. Ms. Odell put her head in her hands and sighed. ‘Jack, I’d like to speak to you after class.’

The bell rang at last, and Jack felt anxious rather than relieved. He watched as his classmates left the room to have lunch, took a deep breath and gingerly walked up to where his teacher was sitting. In his mind, he was already running through his usual routine. He would just stare at his feet and pretend he was sorry for whatever he had been accused of doing. To be honest, he didn’t know what he had done wrong most of the time, and this was one of those times. The first question caught him off guard.

‘Jack, you’re quite close with Miles Ryan, aren’t you?’

Jack and Miles had been practically inseparable since preschool, and this was a fact well known to Ms. Odell, considering she had been teaching both in the same class since they had started high school. Jack thought this was a rhetorical question, but decided to answer it to keep the

already awkward silences to a minimum, and so that he could leave sooner.

‘Well yeah, I guess you could say that.’

‘Then would you be able to explain why he’s been absent for the past week and a half?’

Jack froze. This wasn’t following the plan. He looked up and noticed that for the first time in as long as he could remember, Ms. Odell looked more concerned than angry. Had it already been that long? It felt like it had only been a day or two since Miles had told him he didn’t feel like going into school. And then he said the same thing the next day, and the next. And so on and so forth for a week and a half.

‘I’m not sure, Miss, I’ll talk to him today and see what’s up.’

Jack left the classroom, walked through the hallway and started to worry. It wasn’t unusual to feel a shiver run down his spine in November, but somehow it seemed different today. He was nervous about confronting Miles about how many days he had taken off. It was an odd thrill. The two had been friends for as long as he could remember, but they had slowly been growing apart. Jack didn’t really think about this though, he figured Miles just didn’t like going to parties. He’d always been a bit of an introvert after all. Even when Jack took the initiative and invited him, he’d come up with some sort of excuse to get out of it.

Jack took a detour and used the bathroom. He avoided the school bathroom when he could, as it had a stench he could never quite figure out. It was a mix of second hand smoke and dried urine. The school's cleaners had all but given up on trying to keep it clean, and so a number of students had taken to using the stalls as a sort of social network, if a social network was used entirely by anonymous people and used solely for insults and rating girls looks. Jack opened a stall door and saw the word 'GAF' scrawled on the wall behind the toilet in capital letters. He tried to figure out what it might have stood for, but he quickly realised it only said that because of his dyslexia. He winced, wondering what might drive someone to write that and realised he probably didn't need to go to the bathroom badly enough to put up with the smell and made his exit.

He was greeted by winter's cold embrace as he stepped onto the street. The wind was cold and biting, and leaves were moving and dancing in front of him. The brown leaves of autumn had completely disappeared from the trees, leaving the trees to look bare and lonely. He knew the way from the school to Miles' house like the back of his hand. Jack's house was between Miles' and the school, so he didn't pass by on a daily basis. He passed his house, and continued straight to Miles'. Jack crossed the bridge, which lay between the houses and paused. He looked out across the river and admired the view.

It was a steep drop from the bridge to the water below, about a hundred and fifty feet. There were guardrails, obviously, but they were only waist high. There were rumours that people had used the spot to commit suicide before, but even things like that couldn't detract from the beauty of the spot on a late summer's evening. Well, not for Jack anyway. Miles had all but stopped coming to the bridge once he heard those rumours. It didn't look as good in the winter, of course, but it was nice nonetheless. There wasn't much in the way of scenery, but that was precisely what he liked about it. It was just him and the sounds of a river. It was his place. He could clear his mind here. He didn't really have any important memories about the place, but he always seemed drawn to it.

Once he was satisfied, Jack continued towards Miles' house. It was a residential area, so it was pretty close by. It was practically a second home for him, and he was treated as a second son. It was the same for Miles at his house, of course. Neither had visited the other recently. It wasn't that the two had fallen out, but all of their recent meetings had been at school or outside with friends. They hadn't talked one on one for a while, and just thinking about it made Jack nervous. Generally he felt he could talk to Miles about anything but confronting him about something like this gave him a weird feeling.

The two had been friends since the first day of kindergarten, when they had ended up wearing the same dinosaur shirt, but in different colours: Jack had worn red,

Miles had worn blue. They hit it off immediately, and nothing had come between the two since. Not even girls. Since then, it had become a running joke between them to always wear ‘their colour’. As a result, Jack’s favourite colour was red and Miles’ blue. They’d even gotten matching jumpers in red and blue.

It was only a short walk, and Jack arrived outside in under ten minutes. He looked at the familiar building in front of him. There was beige paint peeling from the walls. It hadn’t been painted over in five years, a fact that stood out shockingly well in Jack’s memory. Every time he’d been over Miles’ mother would explain how they needed to paint over it again, but they just didn’t have time to. The front door was a classic wooden door, with no paint but a single cross as a decoration. Miles’ parents were devout Catholics, but Miles himself was agnostic. He hadn’t told his parents that, of course.

It looked old, but it was actually the most recent addition to the house’s exterior. It had been put in about a year ago after the glass window was shattered on the old door, and it was decided that having a door that was predominantly wooden would be a better fit. All in all, it was your standard middle-class suburban home.

Jack knocked on the door. When he was younger he might have climbed over a wall or two and just turned up in the living room, and Miles’ parents wouldn’t even feign surprise at seeing him there. But things changed, and he decided to just knock. He waited thirty seconds, but there

was no answer. He tried again, louder this time. Surely someone was in? It was then he heard a muffled voice through the door. He didn't quite make who it belonged to, but he definitely heard an elongated 'Coming!' It was Miles' mother who opened the door in the end. She was shorter than Jack, but that was hardly enough to call her short. Her dyed blonde hair, which normally passed her shoulders, was tied into a bun. This exposed her roots more than ever, but she didn't seem to care.

'Oh! Jack, not going to break in this time?' she asked, with a smile. She had been Jack's first crush when he was younger, but that was one of the few things he hadn't shared with Miles. 'Did something happen?'

'Is Miles in?' Jack asked, ignoring her.

'No...' she paused 'He isn't in, sorry'

Jack's heart sank. This wasn't how this conversation was supposed to go. He was supposed to be told Miles had been cooped up in his room for the past two weeks, and only came out to eat and use the bathroom. He was supposed to barge through the front door, past Miles' mom to find Miles in his bedroom and confront him about his recent absence. He would then reach one of two conclusions: Miles was sick, or Miles was depressed. If Miles was depressed, they would have a heart to heart and everything would be fine. This, however, wasn't following the script. He quickly said his goodbyes and left, turning back.

He thought back to his most recent conversation with Miles. The last time they had spoken face to face was when Miles was in school, but they had texted each other since. He took out his phone; he scrolled through his contacts until he found Miles, and checked his recent texts. Miles had been anxious about something, but he didn't seem comfortable talking about it over the phone. He tried calling him, but it went through the voice mail. He came upon the bridge, and noticed someone else admiring the view.

He walked towards him, and saw he was standing dangerously close to the guardrails. He looked closer, and noticed he was actually on the other side of the railings. Then he noticed something else: A familiar blue jumper.

Cash Only

Alex Cregan

The life of a drug dealer is a hard, stressful one. Spending your days with addicts and criminals was more difficult than Brad had ever imagined. Steve didn't even have to take a second glance from the driver's seat for that to be clear. Brad was barely able to keep his eyes open. 'Good thing I took the wheel' said Steve. 'Get some sleep; I'll wake you up when we get there.'

Brad leaned up in his seat, determined to stay conscious. 'I'll sleep when the job's done. What's the point anyway, we're almost there.' Sure enough the headlights lit up a sign announcing the junction. The warehouse Steve had chosen specifically for this deal lay at the end of that road.

'You won't be much use if you collapse holding a loaded gun and \$50'000. We need to be quick in there, so for my sake, get some sleep.'

'I'll take something to wake myself up, what the hell do you expect from me, we've been driving in the dark for hours now, should I be bouncing in my seat? If I was driving you'd be in the same state as me. And what are we doing driving in silence here? Turn on the radio for Christ's sake.'

'It's broken, I would have turned it on by now, drown out your whining.'

Brad reached over to the driver's side, hitting Steve across the side of the head. He attempted to hit back, lifting his leg up, knocking the steering wheel, almost sending them into a ditch. Steve reached to the wheel and swerved back to the road. Both men swore loudly. 'Next time, I'll let it go off,' Steve jokingly threatened while laughing at the incident.

Brad looked startled, breathing heavily. 'Jesus I don't have my seatbelt on.' This made Steve laugh even harder.

The warehouse came into view from the darkness, they were close now. The car barrelled down the road coming to a halt outside a large, rusty gate. Right next to them was a slick Chevrolet that by its glistening black sheen, looked brand new. Both its registration plates had been removed and if not for the wheels, it would have a flawless exterior. The country mud hadn't been kind to them. Steve opened his door and stepped out, looking through its windows. Not a spot of dust, or a stray piece of paper. It almost felt inhuman. Brad lifted a bag and seemed to struggle carrying it. He glared at Steve, still admiring their acquaintance's transport. 'Are you gonna stand there all day or help me with this crap?'

'I drive. You carry. That's more than fair,' Steve proclaimed, only now moving towards the iron gate. It was stiff and took a few attempts to open. A gust of wind flew out of the open door. Brad, still carrying the sealed bag, walked through first. It was dark, but barely darker than the open night, so their eyes had adjusted. Brad

carefully placed the bag on the floor in front of them, and Steve let out a loud whistle to announce their presence. They could hear echoed footsteps coming closer from across the warehouse.

From the shadows, three men appeared, one of them bulky, with a sneer so exaggerated on his face that it looked like he'd been preparing it ever since they arrived. The muscle of the group no doubt. The one standing in the middle was wearing smart clothes, in fact he looked a bit too proper to be out here doing a deal. More like he'd be the one giving the orders. And on the left, a short Hispanic man with a baseball cap. He was slouched over, and was taking everything a lot less seriously than the other two. He looked like he just wanted to go home. For a time there was silence, no one spoke for what felt like hours, when Brad kicked the large bag in front of him, between the two groups and began the deal the way every deal starts.

'Where's our money?' he said in a no-nonsense kind of manner.

The leader smiled, turned and nodded to the muscle. 'I like a man who gets straight to the point. Though, it's not a good strategy to keep us waiting for an hour and a half. You must have underestimated the length of your journey.'

The muscle walked across the room and reached into a hole in a wall, pulling out two briefcases. He made his way back with these briefcases and placed them close to

the large bag Brad had also put in the middle. ‘Now, that there is \$40’000. Take it or leave it,’ said the leader.

Steve rolled his head back as if he was expecting the rip off all along. ‘We agreed to \$50’000, nothing more, nothing less. Now that’s a good price for the product we’re giving you. The deal will not change.’

The leader smirked at Steve. ‘You kept us waiting an hour and a half. That wasn’t part of the deal, and it’s gonna cost you ten grand. We’re not the kind of people you keep waiting and you need to understand that.’ Brad looked on the edge, his fists were clenched and he was looking right in the eyes of the leader. ‘No’ said Brad. ‘You came here with Forty, you were going to rip us off in the first place, weren’t you?’

The leader began to look uneasy. ‘Rip off is such a vile word to use. I’d call it bargaining.’

‘All the bargaining was done BEFORE this meeting. We agreed at a price and if you don’t pull ten Grand out of your ass we’re gonna have trouble.’ The Muscle took a step forward and The leader began to laugh. ‘Do you know who we are? Do you know what our guys would do to you in this situation? You see I’m being lenient here. I’m willing to give you this payment. Who the hell do you think you are?’

Before the leader had even stopped speaking Brad had reached to his right hip. A clicking sound echoed across the room as he raised his arm, revealing a loaded pistol in his grasp. The leader gave a quick look of confusion

moments before Brad pulled against the trigger sending a bullet through the air and piercing his skull. He fell backwards like a plummeting tree and landed with a sickening thud. Only after the fall did his body go limp, and the other two men looked on in shock. The Third Man dived behind a wall. The Muscle attempted to react by pulling out an SMG but Steve blew him away with a shotgun he had concealed by his leg; one shell straight through the chest. All of this was over in seconds. ‘We’re the kind of guys you don’t rip off,’ Steve proclaimed. ‘Get the Third,’ he said.

Brad turned the corner seeing the man curled up in the corner.

The man let out a shout of despair and pleaded with them. ‘Please! I wasn’t involved in the deal they just brought me along for an extra body! I’ve got a kid for Christ’s sake!’

Brad lowered his weapon. ‘I’m not gonna kill ye, don’t worry. We need you to send your bosses a message from us. Is that okay?’

The man stared at his two lifeless associates, and the widening pool of blood around them.

‘Hey! What’s your name?’

‘Francis,’ the man said with a stutter.

‘Is that okay Francis?’ Brad said.

‘Yeh, yes! Of course, no problem!’

‘Okay, you say to them that there’s some new guys in town, and they don’t like getting messed around with. Business goes our way from now on, alright?’

Francis nodded and ran out the door into the countryside. Brad lifted the bag back out the door and Steve took the two briefcases containing their payment. They put it all in the back of their new Chevrolet. The two looked at each other and smiled.

‘I’ll drive,’ Steve said jokingly. ‘You sleep.’

The two of them drove away as the sun rose across the meadows.

London Hellfire

Devon Keogh

The year was 1666, King Charles II ruled over Britain and over the course of a few days the city of London would change forever. That summer, a drought had spread over the city, turning timber structures bone-dry. The medieval street-plan resulted in narrow, overcrowded, wooden thatched houses. Foundries, glaziers and bakers all represented fire risks. On one fateful September night, these factors combined to produce a devastating fire which destroyed most of the city.

Over the city the night crept silently. A dim glow distinguished the city from the surrounding plains and fields of the countryside. In the city centre, by the old London Bridge, lay an old man, withered and beaten. His eyes glinted of better days long lost to him. The street was silent but for the roar of flames from an oven. A sign hung from the wall, reading 'Farriner's Bakery'. His stomach growled at the thought of warm bread. Decrepitly he rose and walked towards the window. The baker was nowhere to be seen. The old man slipped through the doorway and desperately lunged at the bread, still sitting in the oven. Gasping with pain and fright, his hand felt the cruel heat of the oven. He suddenly flew backwards in shock, hitting the oven so hard that the burning logs flew outwards over the hay floor. He lunged again, snatching the bread in his

hands, and then wrapped it in his rags to shield himself. The baker, alerted to the commotion, rushed from a doorway to find the floor on fire. From the corner of his eye he gathered the silhouette of a person disappearing through the exit. The old man rushed back through the door and into history...

Within an hour, the constables arrived. After declaring the only option was to demolish the surrounding houses, the inhabitants protested. The only one who could overturn the decision, Lord Mayor Sir Thomas Bloodworth, was summoned. Bloodworth paced about, and with his 'Yes-Man' mentality in full swing he roared, 'Let me speak with the owners!'

The owners of the properties could not be found. 'I cannot demolish these houses until I find the owners!' Bloodworth, deciding he had wasted enough time, let the fire be, despite the clamouring from the experienced fire-fighters of the parish. He exclaimed quite indignantly 'Psh! A woman could put this out,' and with great haste he fled the raging blaze.

The fire leaped delicately from thatch to wood, roof to roof, door to door, unhindered. Very little was done. The glow grew, fuelled by the eastern gale, brighter and brighter as night turned to day...

The old man, having slept well that night woke up to the panicked shouts of people running, stumbling and falling. Their arms filled with valuables and other possessions, their pockets bursting with trinkets. The loaf

sat in his lap, half eaten. He tore another bite from it and then stood up. The Thames River opposite him flowed, unaffected by the clamour, unaffected with the exception of a fleet of small boats, ferrying refugees from the London Bridge, itself now a raging inferno. Some tenants threw bags out of their windows into the water. Diving in after them and using them as flotation devices. An unlucky exception to this was a small boy, who lost his grip in the current and sunk under, violently thrashing one moment, gone the next. The old man watched on with horror and despair.

From his throne the King heard the reports. Deeply troubled and frightened, he decided that the path of action was the path of victory. That through hard work the great dragon could be tamed. ‘Nothing without effort!’ he proclaimed to his court. A witness of the fire, a senior official of the Naval Office by the name of Samuel Pepys, was ordered at this point by the King to tell Lord Mayor Bloodworth to demolish any and all buildings necessary. Brother to the King, James the Duke of York, suggested that his soldiers would be of use, a suggestion the King rejected. ‘This is a civic matter,’ he explained.

The sun stood at its zenith in the sky. A red aurora contrasted streaks of blue as they fought for dominance over the heavens above. A wave of despair shook the city as many of those who fought the fires now fled with the rest. The old man rushed into a nearby church, of which there were many. He was met with what seemed a

warehouse: cutlery, books, fabrics and assorted goods littered the floor from the grand door to the altar. People crouched over their final remaining possessions as if they had the greatest treasure in the world to guard.

Bloodworth stood in a state of exhausted collapse, frantically but uselessly trying to co-ordinate the firefighting effort. He was either deaf or ignoring the order to tear the houses down, still more concerned with his reputation than the fire.

The King sailed by barge to the afflicted section of the city. He found Bloodworth on his knees, almost unconsciously repeating orders to the firefighters. In a fit of rage the King stripped Bloodworth of his authority and he himself commanded that all buildings around the fire should be demolished with the greatest urgency.

Soon the fire grew into a storm. The red mass sieved oxygen from the air like a desperate parasite from its host. Turbulent cyclones formed, creating their own weather. The usual prevailing wind turned erratic and unpredictable, west-east-north-south. This only served to spread the flames faster and further. Over the city, the night crept silently through hell incarnate.

The old man woke up to find a small flame waving through an open side entrance. Heads turned, bled white, and within an instant a chorus of screams and shouts raised the old man onto his feet and out of the great door. Running out into the dawn twilight he was struck with a swarm of embers, tender fire-droplets dancing, churning

and twisting on the convections of the wind. Outside, on the Thames, wood had replaced water as a mass of interlocked boats and barges struggled for release from the pack. The old man ate as he ran through deserted streets until he came across a crowd of soldiers and citizens. Enraged, paranoid and of clouded judgement they grabbed a foreign man and beat him to death. Unperturbed by the ghastly scene, he ran ever more further from the epicentre.

James, Duke of York and his soldiers rode up and down the streets to keep order. Able-bodied men were press-ganged into well paid gangs of firefighters and command posts were set up. Order was regained somewhat and the effort to cease the spread was enhanced greatly but not widely enough to end the disaster. After a long day of demolition and death, the sun set once again.

James and his group of determined helpers fought tirelessly against the red ocean. They hoped the River Fleet, a subsidiary of the Thames, would act as a firebreak but helplessly observed flames spring over it like a miniscule ditch.

That night, the iconic stone Cathedral of St. Peter stood majestically and unbreakably amongst the flames. But unbeknownst to those who hid inside, scaffolding from a restoration effort caught alight. The fire gripped at the wooden roof beams so intensely that the lead roof started to melt. Streams of lead slithered downwards to the ground and in streams along the streets. The building was

quickly and suddenly a shell, the giant slain alike a tiger with its prey.

The old man saw soldiers lugging barrels hurry up and down, placing them at intervals along the buildings. Before he could realise what was happening, he had placed a wall between himself and the scene. A crackle, a flash and a great noise of wood flying charged towards from behind. He turned and found the street he had stood moments before gone, only flaming buildings and rubble left.

Soon the fire ceased to spread. Not yet tamed, but becoming tired. The old man left the city limits and fell asleep on a sloped field overlooking the fallen metropolis, a final hand sized chunk of bread in his lap.

The final day dawned. The old man awoke to the smell of smoke, not of the fresh sort, but the smell of ash after the flame. Grey clouds rose from the ruins. An infinite line of ill-faced people shuffled outwards, their faces black with soot and grime, yet they held their heads high. The old man, withered and beaten, threw away the final piece of bread, only with shock to track its arc and sift his hands through the grass in the hope of finding it again. He failed in this task, falling to the ground, face flat. He fell distraught and silent.

The City

Joe Clarke

When he woke up, he was lying in a room he had never seen before.

He lay in a hard bed, in a cold, grey room with a single light. He stared up into the grey ceiling; trying to piece together what had happened, how he got there. He sat up, and noticed that the bed had no blankets. He was wearing black trousers with no pockets, and no shirt. He got out of the bed and looked out a nearby window. Grey was visible in all directions. Buildings and skyscrapers clouded his vision of the sky and the horizon. He was high enough off the ground that looking down gave him severe vertigo, yet the surrounding buildings were so tall that he had to stretch to see the sky. The city he was in was quite clearly very well developed.

He turned away from the window and noticed that there was a shirt, tie and jacket neatly laid out on the bed he had been on. Without considering who put them there or where they came from, he put them on. After this he left the eerie room, and came into a corridor that seemed to stretch indefinitely in both directions. He turned left out of the door and continued down the hall, until he came to a staircase and an elevator. He chose the stairs, as he felt that was the safer approach. After what seemed like an endless walk down infinite stairs, he reached a door that had a sign above it, titled LOBBY, and stepped inside.

Inside, there were very few people; one woman behind a desk and two men on opposite chairs, yet the noise from outside was very clearly audible. He stepped through the

revolving door at the front of the building and was instantly lost in the crowd outside. The buildings were like a maze, the endless sea of citizens making navigation very difficult. The skyscrapers lived up to their name, stretching as far as the eye could see into the sky, almost like concrete fingers desperately clutching at the clouds.

He moved into a clearing; an area less densely populated than the crowd, with clusters of benches scattered around. A worried woman with long, brown hair and stricken dark eyes was frantically looking around for someone. She spotted him, and oddly, a look of relief washed over her face and she ran towards him. She grabbed in a tackle-like hug, and began sobbing.

‘Oh my God, Cian, there you are!’ she muffled into his shoulder. ‘You were gone for three days! I was so worried!’

He was confused; or at least his confusion had increased. Yet another thing he didn’t recognise.

‘...Cian? Who’s Cian? Who... Who are you?’ he mumbled. She paused, and slowly released him, but still held his arms.

‘You don’t remember...?’ she asked, her voice shaking. The stricken look had returned to her face.

Suddenly, his vision was obstructed as his head was covered in something. It felt like a bag made from coarse string. His hands were grabbed and he was shoved, and he hit the ground hard. The woman screamed out in fright.

Cian felt a sharp pain, like an electric shock, in the back of his head, and he lost consciousness.

When he woke up, he was lying in a room he had never seen before.

The Plague Of Old

Dáire O'Neill

The sages have foretold,
A terrible plague of old.
The tales they are so bold,
O' the plague of old.

We begin our flight-
An epic pilgrimage,
A sight to behold.
We set out into the night,
Led by torch-light,
To escape the plague of old.

We put up a valiant fight,
To escape the cursed plight.
But our efforts are in vain,
As we plough through the rain.
Led through the night,
By this dying light,
O' the tales that will be told,
About us and the plague of old.

The Intruder

Alex Cregan

A sudden crash awoke the owner from her sleep. Startled, she rose and thoughts flashed through her mind as to what it could be. Perhaps a plate had fallen in her kitchen? Care of her surroundings had not been a priority lately, as she passed through her now lonely home in a daze leaving problems unnoticed. Left at the edge of the table, a plate fell and smashed. No, she thought, though her memory failed her at times she distinctly remembered putting all loose kitchenware in the sink to be washed. Not the kitchen. A glass vase on a wardrobe? No, a window. A smashed window. This sudden realisation drove her into a panic. Leading her gaze to the bedside table she saw that it was four a.m., two hours since she had finally let herself sleep. She had become a borderline insomniac, those two hours were impressive. It might have been the end of her troubles. That is, if she hadn't been disturbed.

Opening the drawer in the table she found her mobile phone, which she used scarcely but praised its existence in her current situation. Beside it, glowing dimly, was her husband's watch. He had worn it for thirty years, and now it just lay there in her drawer, unused, gathering dust. She grabbed it from its spot, a place it had held for a month now. One month, she thought, is that all it had been? She clutched it lovingly and put it in her pocket. As she dialled

999 she scanned the room for somewhere to hide. She had no idea what this intruder could be capable of.

The phone rang, unanswered for what seemed to be an eternity. The owner hid in a closet behind her clothes praying for help. Finally the phone was picked up, and the prolonged sigh of a policeman was heard. He spoke as if he expected it to be a prank call from some drunk teenagers looking to have some fun. ‘Hello, state your emergency,’ he said, lazily.

She thought she heard footsteps downstairs, prowling around her home. ‘Someone has broken into my house!’ she whispered frantically. ‘I heard a window smash and he’s downstairs right now!’ Convinced of the truth, as an old woman would hardly prank a policeman for fun, he informed her that a patrol car was on its way to her. Her home was an isolated place, secluded in the mountains outside Dublin City. It may take longer than it was worth, she thought. Maybe she should try act herself? No, that was her stubborn husband speaking. She couldn’t attack a criminal if her life was on the line. Besides, the only weapon in her property was his old hunting rifle, which was in the shed well away from the house. Better to stay hidden, better to stay safe. Anything stolen was not as valuable as she was.

Then, a creak so horrid it sent shivers down her spine broke the silence. The same unmistakable creak that had haunted the second step of her staircase for years. He was coming. The deafening silence after was maddening.

Where the hell was he? And why couldn't she even hear another creak, or a thump or anything? How could he be so quiet now after smashing a window getting in? His break between subtle and obvious was almost that of a schizophrenic. He could be right outside the closet and she wouldn't know. This paranoia was driving her crazy. A frail old woman shouldn't be put through this kind of traumatic event. She could have a heart attack for God's sake.

She remembered what she was told to do when in a panic: Control your breathing. That's the most important thing. Count to four, inhale. Count to four, exhale. Repeat. Count to four, inhale... you know what? Screw staying safe. She wasn't staying in this damn closet while some maniac ransacked her home. No way, this is where she had raised her family and lived the majority of her married life. It meant everything to her.

This was when she came to terms with the truth. This place was in fact more important than her own life, in her eyes at least. Memories were some of the only things she had left. Besides, despite this man being a thief she seriously doubted he would kill an old woman in cold blood. That was just her paranoia. She had the upper hand.

Boosted by the confidence she had just given herself, she swung the closet doors open and stepped up. No sounds; no thief. Maybe she'd been lucky and he was in the spare bedroom across the hall. Now was her chance. She raced to the staircase and descended, careful to miss

that second step so it wouldn't give her position away. as it did for him. Now it was simply a battle of wits. There was the smashed window, and a brick on the floor. Obviously how he had entered. Through the glass door at the back of the house she ran, and across the meadows that surrounded her house in every direction besides the solitary road that swept across the countryside. Pellets of water brushed against her trousers as she ran past the tall stems of grass which had collected rain from a storm, earlier that very night. By the time she reached the shed she was soaked up to her waist and panting for air.

There were cans of beer scattered around the place as if someone had spent the night there. 'Repulsive lowlifes,' she whispered to herself.

She was very lucky that they hadn't found the key to the shed, hidden beneath a rock to the left of the door. Imagine what a bunch of drunk scumbags would do with a loaded rifle. As she opened the old, decaying door it creaked so loud she was afraid the thief would hear from a mile away. The rifle was leaning against the wall on the opposite end of the shed. She swiped at cobwebs as she cleaned it off and prepared it for use. Walking back through the tall grass with the weapon at the ready, she kept a close eye on the surrounding fields in case he attempted to make a getaway. She had been gone at least twenty minutes, maybe he had already left. And as she got closer and closer to the scene of the crime, a dark feeling began to pierce her soul. She hoped he had already left.

She would very much like it if he had left, she didn't want to shoot anyone tonight.

Before entering, she stopped for the briefest moment, and took a deep breath. She was shaking uncontrollably, perhaps more than when she was hiding in the closet. Why? She clutched her husband's watch tighter than ever, and that soothed her somewhat.

She entered and instantly heard footsteps. She dived for a little crevice that hid her behind the kitchen door. More steps, coming closer and closer. She could hardly breathe. Every creak, every gust of wind that blew through the house and every beat of her stressed heart drove her more and more into this daze like state. She felt like she wasn't even herself anymore, like she was hovering above and witnessing this take place. An indescribably bizarre feeling, like she was going insane in this little bubble of space she held herself in. A loud CRASH enveloped her senses and she heard a faint voice say 'Dammit!' before she let out a massive scream, stumbled out of her hiding spot and shot blindly into the dark.

Her chest hurt and her breathing was uncontrollable at this point. Her mind was melting from panic, not a single rational thought floating around. It stayed this way for God knows how long, she completely lost track of time. She just lay there, staring up at the ceiling until a spark reignited her thought process, reminded her how to move, how to think. The latter came to her first. 'I'm not dead,' was the primary news of the day. 'I'm not dead!' she

actually smiled for a split second, then everything else fell into place. She didn't hear a single sound. Not a peep. She was afraid to look. Had she... killed him? She didn't want to do anything, she wanted to go back to the way things were, forget about all this mess. But she couldn't. She had to acknowledge it. She sat up and examined the hallway.

There, lying motionless on the floor was the lifeless corpse of a man. She leaned over to crawl over to him, and planted her hand on the spreading pool of blood. Blood on her clothes and skin were the least of her problems at the moment. Despite the darkness she could make out the man's coat, luminous. Why would a thief wear a luminous coat? Except it wasn't a thief at all. There, lying dead on her floor, whom she had shot, was the body of a Policeman. She had shot a Guard, the very same Guard that had come to investigate her home. She felt a sickening feeling in her gut, a sense of disgust in her very being. Dear God, what had she done? She felt like screaming and crying, but there was no air in her lungs to use, and no tears to fall. She felt as dead as the man on her floor. 'What should I do?'

The right thing would be to take the fall, take responsibility for her actions. But it was the thief who drove her to do this... the thief. Where. Is. He?!?

Rage suddenly boiled up inside of her as she looked to the brick and the broken window. She stepped over the dead policeman and went upstairs. She cleared the entire house, leaving no stone unturned. No sign of him. Not a

trace. Nothing missing, nothing taken, nothing damaged besides the smashed window and the bullet hole in the wall from her rifle. Why hadn't the Guard made himself known?! Why didn't he announce his presence?! She had been gone for twenty minutes, he probably arrived during that time and it seemed as if no one was home. No need to shout out your name every minute after getting no response... Jesus, what had she done?

She sat at her kitchen table and pondered what to do next. Take the fall, or frame the thief. Now she was so unsure of herself she didn't even know if there was a thief in the first place. Then it all fell into place. A bunch of drunk irresponsible teenagers had thrown that brick through her window after getting drunk in her field. The empty cans outside her shed. The rifle... imagine what a bunch of drunk scumbags could do with a loaded rifle...

The next morning Officer Fitzgerald had not reported back. He was last heard from in the Dublin Mountains, where he was investigating a suspected break in. He was remarkably close by and was there within minutes. He made his way inside, announced his presence and while searching the building for the owner or the intruder, he was gunned down by an unknown assailant. When Finnegan showed up, he almost threw up at the sight of his close friend, lying dead in a pool of his own blood.

He looked to the frail old woman, no doubt traumatised by the events that took place. He didn't blame her for not

helping Fitzgerald, she must have been scared stiff, too afraid to make a sound. A psychopath with a rifle was in her home after all. She informed them that whoever broke into her home had stolen her very own weapon previously, which they had shot Officer Fitzgerald with.

He then immediately vacated the premises most likely throwing the rifle in a river, or burying it. They all doubted it would ever be found. But what this intruder had forgotten about, was the brick he had thrown through the window. It had his prints all over it, and with it they traced him to his home. The boy admitted to the window smashing, but swore on his mother's grave that he didn't kill anyone. He said that he and his friends were just having some fun, they were all very drunk. Finnegan pointed out to them that their empty cans were found directly outside the shed, which conveniently stored the weapon. They could have broken in with ease.

While the investigation was on-going, Finnegan visited the Owner. 'I was the one on the end of the line,' he said to her.

This caught her attention and she looked up to him from her chair.

'When you called you spoke to me. Told me about the situation. I sent Fitzgerald out to you.'

The Owner looked at him puzzled. 'Why are you telling me this?' she asked.

He spoke with a monotone voice, depressingly dull. 'I sent him to his death. He was a close friend. I just feel like

I'm responsible. I don't know why I came here today...sorry.'

He began walking to the door. The Owner thought for a moment then called him. He looked at her, one foot already out the door.

'It's not your fault' she said. 'What happened here, it's not your fault.'

He smiled as if that was what he wanted to hear all along. 'Thank you,' he said, and he was gone.

Once again, she was alone. She raised her cup of tea and took a sip, leaning back on her chair. The watch still in her pocket, keeping her safe. As she viewed the spectacular sunset from her window, she forgot about everything that had happened in the recent few days. She forgot about the smashed window, the dead policeman and the rifle she had buried deep beneath her shed. She forgot about the teenagers who were being held accountable for a gunned down officer and even all the guilt she had for it all. She closed her eyes and felt completely at peace, for the first time in a long time. The Owner had gotten away with murder.

The Last Match

Harry Martin

It was a cold wet morning in the middle of September. I pulled up in my dad's car for my last friendly match before the rugby season started. We were playing Naas. It had been raining the night before so the grass was still wet, good conditions for a rugby match because if the ground is hard it means that it would be a lot easier to get injured which is quite easy in the first place. I walked into the damp, dirty away team's changing room and sat down beside my team mates. Five minutes later, our coach John walked in. John is a small, wiry, bald man with a moustache that makes him look like Hitler in a tracksuit. John trains the army as his job which means that he has a very strict way of coaching the team and takes no messing from any of the players.

John stood in the middle of the room like he always does before a tough match and didn't say a word while the rest of us sat and waited for one of his speeches. It was surprisingly short and simple.

'Just go out and have fun,' was all that he said and then he turned and walked out to the pitches. We all trooped out after him and went through our usual warm up that we do at the start of every match, splitting up into forwards and backs and ran through drills in our specific positions getting quicker each time.

After our warm up, we were told the starting team for the day and then the referee came over to check that we were all wearing the right studs and to go over the rules for the props and scrum halves. We saw the other team training at the other end of the pitch and noticed that even though they were all very big, their passing was quite bad and they seemed amazingly slow.

Trying not to get our hopes up we lined out on the pitch and waited for them to do the same. I was starting as a winger which meant that I was over on the touchline beside the Naas coaches and subs meaning that I was going to get a lot of abuse during the game. They kicked off and straight away we almost scored from a few switches and a loop that was only stopped because their fullback was surprisingly fast up close. A few phases later we did manage to score in the opposite corner and Geoff nailed the conversion making it 7-0 after three minutes.

We scored again two minutes later and only John yelling his head off on the side line to stay calm, kept us from thinking that it was going to be an easy morning after all. It was only a friendly so instead of going all out to score as much as possible, which everybody wanted to do. We calmed down and started to go through the moves that we had been practicing in training and had never had a chance to try in a match. Some of them worked amazingly and we scored two more tries in ten minutes making it 26-0 coming up to half time.

Just before the end of the half, they had a scrum on the halfway and their scrumhalf picked up the ball, stepped over our scrumhalf and was in space. He began running towards the corner. Our winger Jack turned and tried to catch him but there was a good ten metres between them. He had no chance. The crowd suddenly began shouting and we saw Carl sprinting from the other side of the pitch with an angry look on his face. Just before he reached the line, Carl connected with him going at twice his speed sending him flying over the touchline where he landed and didn't get up again.

At half time, we were all beginning to get excited at the thought of a complete walk-over. But our coach John stopped us getting too big-headed by making a few substitutions and giving us a few moves to try out. We jogged back onto the pitch and lined up ready to kick-off again. Naas came on after us going at walking pace, obviously not enjoying how the match was going. I had been moved into the second centre position because Stephen had picked up a dead leg in the first half, when he took the ball up but got sandwiched between two forwards.

Geoff kicked off, sending the ball down the middle under the posts, where there was a pocket of space. We chased after it to put pressure on the clearance and it worked causing the fullback to panic and it sliced off the side of his boot out over the touchline giving us a lineout ten metres from their try line. We decided to use a move

that we had never tried before even in training, only talked about, called DXP. We lined up in our positions and after securing the lineout, executed the move. Shane, the scrumhalf, passed it out to the fly-half, Geoff who ran sideways across the pitch. Conan made a run behind him in the opposite direction diagonally back towards the lineout as if they were doing a switch but Geoff dummied the pass to him and instead popped it straight ahead of him to where I was making a straight run up the middle. As Conan ran across, it caused the other first centre to follow him across the pitch which meant that as I received the ball, a huge gap appeared straight in front of me, which I sprinted through, straight under the posts.

Nobody could believe that it had worked, they just stood there smiling while the crowd cheered and the Naas team looked around wondering how we had made such a show of them with a simple dummy switch. Geoff dinked the ball over and made the score 33-0. Now even John was getting excited on the touchline, jumping up and down and cheering.

Just after they kicked off again, we knocked it on and they got a scrum inside our twenty-two. The scrum was the only part of the match that we were struggling in and they were getting annoyed at being ridiculed, which meant that they really wanted to make a point, which they did this time. It started off normally with the usual grunts of encouragement from the back-rows and settling into position. But as soon as the engage was called, it was clear

that they had the upper foot. They were much lower to the ground, which is an advantage because they could then drive up under the opposing front row making it extremely hard to push back against. That is exactly what they did and they didn't stop once they had pushed the front row back up into an almost standing position, they kept going and caused the whole pack to fall back over on itself like an avalanche, crushing the people at the back. There was a shout from somewhere underneath all the bodies and when they got up, Don was lying there holding his wrist with a sick look on his face. He obviously had to go off which meant that I was put in as a replacement flanker and Carl moved into the centre. They also got a penalty because we 'collapsed the scrum'. They slotted the kick giving them their first points of the game making it 33-3.

We kicked off again and they ran back at us with a new eagerness after their success, trying to make up for their mistakes. There were twenty minutes left but that was plenty of time to score a few tries, not enough to win, but at least make the score less embarrassing. They managed to get two more penalties making it 33-9, then we scored again making it 36-9. Suddenly the tackles were much more vicious and there were bigger hits and risks taken. They came at us for the hundredth time and we held them up in a choke-tackle. I ripped the ball free and ran around the corner but was met by four Naas players who wanted nothing more than to crush me. I ran at the gap between two of them, knowing that I wouldn't make it through but

hoping anyway. The pair of them picked me up as I connected with them and upended me making me land on my shoulder. I heard a crack and my arm went numb. I knew that it was my last match in a long time.

The San Diego Sniper

Shane Mullen

Day one of investigation

There have been four murders in the last four days in San Diego and all of the murders have been one-shot kills with an L115A1 sniper rifle. This is one of the most popular sniper rifles in the United States of America, and it is licenced to over 200,000 people in San Diego not including the 10,000 or more that are suspected to have been smuggled in each year from the coast.

All the shots are suspected to have come from rooftops but there has been no visual of any of the shots being fired, this sniper can hit a target from a distance 1.1 kilometres. The FBI is looking into all the owners of this rifle and any sniper specialists in the area. You would need to be highly trained to hit this shot, especially if it is from the distance we think it is. There has recently been a link found between the four victims. They were all in the special sniper forces for the USA and were recently retired but had large sums of money put into their bank accounts. The money ranges from \$200,000 to \$500,000. These men may well have gotten what was coming to them.

Day two of investigation

There is reason to believe that the snipers that were killed all took part in the mission to take out Osama Bin Laden. There are three men left who took part in that mission and one of them cannot be found. That man is special Agent Johnson who survived the helicopter crash and managed to carry on. He killed an innocent child. We think the four murders are in retaliation for the deaths of innocent people on the mission.

We are looking for Agent Johnson: he was last seen in his 67 blue and black Ford Mustang. Neither he nor his car has been seen in the last 12 hours.

New evidence has been found at one of the crime scene to conclude that the sniper is a special agent from that mission. We believe it is Agent Johnson.

Day three of investigation

We have found Agent Johnson's body with a suicide letter beside him. We believe something happened that day that made him do this, and further investigation will be carried out to try and bring justice to this situation. We will be investigating the safety of the remaining two agents from the mission, and what motives Agent Johnson may have had.

Alarm

Dáire O'Neill

After a long day of school until half five and then work until nine, I stumbled home and devoured my dinner, an asparagus pasta bake with roulette for desert. After dinner I went to my desk and finished my maths homework, finding the area of a triangle when it's not a right-angled triangle. It was about half ten when I had my shower, when I was finished I read a few chapters of my book, and at around half-eleven I set my alarm on my phone for half-seven and got some sleep.

6.15

I woke alarmed, my alarm had started to blare but it was still dark! I reached over to switch it off and my hand touched something small and slimy. Instinctively, reflexively I tore my hand back, but the thick slime stuck to my hand like glou, the strange and unknown alarm clock dropped to the ground and rolled under my bed, that's when my bed, a futon, collapsed and I fell into some rope contraption soaked in iced water.

By now I was starting to wake and I began to realise that something strange was happening. The rope contraption began to lift me up and shove me out of my room onto the landing. I landed on a treadmill which was on and which directed me to the bathroom.

‘SAM!’ I screamed, realising only one person in my family would do this, my annoying little brother. I fell into the bathroom, and slowly climbed up, noticing nothing was happening, I stumbled to the counter and decided to brush my teeth, looking at my watch and seeing it was only twenty past six. ‘At least I won’t be late for school.’ I remarked.

I finished brushing my teeth and wondering if I should risk leaving the bathroom when I heard a shrill *DING*. Two metal arms entered the room and sprayed it with lynx, then a basket with my uniform fell from the ceiling and landed on the floor in front of me.

I begin to think that this was Sam’s way of telling me to get to school on time, so I decided that I should just play along. I put on my uniform and waited about twenty seconds when a second *DING* sounded. The door swung open and a metal arm shoved me out on to the treadmill, which was now faced towards the stairs, and on full power. I fell onto the treadmill and was forced down the stairs.

I hit a mattress that was leaning against the corner of the wall halfway down the stairs, then fell back down onto another mattress which was on the ground floor. Once I landed on the mattress another rope began towards the kitchen. I looked out the window and saw that it was now light outside.

I heard a creak as the kitchen door opened, I was dropped off at the kitchen table where a bowl of cereal

and a cup of coffee awaited me. I clambered up to the chair and munched away at my breakfast.

The radio turned on suddenly, and I Kodaline was on. It started to get louder and louder. I got up to turn it off, but I tripped on my way and landed on my back. That's when my dog jumped on me.

'Marshall? Why are you down here?' I wondered as Marshall normally sleeps upstairs and doesn't get up until about eight. The radio was still on crescendo and I tried to get Marshall off me so I could turn it off. Everything started to vibrate as Marshall refused to climb off me. 'Sam?! Sam?!' I called. Then it hit me, I don't have a brother called Sam. 'Marshall get-'

'Off! What the?'

I woke up in my bed, with my alarm blaring Kodaline, I turned over and turned it off. Picking up my phone to look at the time I saw it was half-eight. 'Damn-it! I'm going to be late.'

World War 3

Emmet Murphy

I hear that the people at home pray for me and the other soldiers. I can't understand this; we're far safer here at war than they are back at home. We have our indestructible 'Iron Man' suits and our shelters that could withstand atomic bombs. They have nothing. Obviously we suffer too, but we signed up for this. The innocent civilians have done nothing to deserve the constant threat of their homes being destroyed or their friends and families being killed. Of course, it's not our fault either.

Our government forced this upon us. They started World War 3. North Korea was always looking for a fight but Japan and China were never aggressive towards us. In typical American government fashion they went well out of their way to rile the Asian super-powers. It was naïve to think that America could bully these countries.

It was on the twelfth of January when China and Japan declared war on America. It was a cold winter's day in New York and I can remember the horrible feeling that was contagious in the city, like a horrible mood had descended upon us. I knew that I would be heading out to war, and at the back of my mind I knew that this would be the most brutal war the world had ever seen.

I had myself experienced the incredible weaponry that the US army had at their disposal. I was well aware that

whoever we would be fighting would have something to match our guns and bombs.

It was frightening how well prepared we were. Our senior officers knew how to go about winning a war of this nature and how to use our resources to best effect. They were very clear on various strategies that would be implemented.

We soldiers have a robot role. We do what we are told and we are highly skilled with the equipment that we use. How could we not be? Given all of the training we have done over the past several years. I suppose I never really thought that I would have to go to war, I thought of my role as precautionary, like a backup just in case something went wrong. I think now that people higher up than me knew we would see a war like this in our lifetime.

I keep reminding myself how I have no choice in all that I am doing here, as I am flying towards China. But it kills me because I know what I am doing. Today I will kill thousands. I am heading towards China, to drop a bomb that will kill thousands of people. Some people say that they weren't aware of the effect that they were having at war. They were emotionally detached. They forgot that they were killing people, people who had families, and friends, people who were brothers and sons. I am not like that. I am suffering because I understand the havoc I am causing, the pain I am causing. Today, thousands of families, a whole country, will hurt, because I am doing my job.

I am approaching now, the alarm sounds as I reach the correct co-ordinates. I pull the hand break like lever by my side and look up to the button above my head. I hesitate for a moment and take a deep breath. I push the button. I hear a whistle as the bomb leaves my aircraft. A shiver runs down my spine. I feel ill. I try to think like the others now; I need to detach myself from my evil doing. It is the only way to cope. It was only a lever that I pulled and a button that I pressed, that is all, that is my job.

The Malibu

Jack Hogan

I woke up with a banging headache and there was blood on my hands. I got out of my bed in my apartment in Miami. Swollen fists, bloody hands, the black-eye, I had been out with my friends drinking the night before. Our nights tend not to get out of hand but I don't remember anything.

I went to check my phone for any messages or anything from the night to jog my memory a bit. There was a single photo taken of Mark, Dylan, Nathan and I. I then dialled Nathan's number but it was out of service.

I don't know how I managed to even get home that night considering the state I was in. I began to wonder if the blood on my hands was even mine. I was experiencing a huge hangover and needed to rest. I got back into bed and slept for an hour or two. I was woken by a phone call from Nathan, I answered and he wanted to know what happened last night too. He had blood on his clothes and he knew it wasn't his. He said he was driving over to my apartment now to try to figure out what happened. About fifteen minutes later he arrived. We were puzzled about what happened and began to think the worst.

We decided to drive over to Mark's house to see if Dylan was there too and see what had happened. After a ten minute drive we got to the house but only Mark was

there. He told us that he thought Dylan had been hurt the night before. We went to the bar we were at called The Malibu. When we got there the place was smashed up. We walked inside to see what happened and the bar-man was cleaning up the mess. He explained that when we were all there last night a couple of guys came in looking for trouble and we started a fight with them. There was about five of them and four of us, it was an even enough fight and then we were winning until one pulled out his switchblade and stabbed Dylan several times.

Dylan was in the nearby hospital in critical condition. We rushed to the hospital to see him but the nurse wouldn't let us in. He was in a really bad state. There was a window where we could see him and he was fast asleep. We decided to let him rest. We headed back to the bar to find out who those guys were. The bar-man said they were a local gang that hang around the corner of the bar, they're not the biggest gang so we decided to get payback. We left the bar and I took out a baseball bat from my car.

Just as the bar-man had said, they were hanging around the corner on a basketball court. It was the same men I recognised them when I saw them and Mark, Nathan and I were ready to kick ass. We ran at the five of them and I raised my baseball bat in the air and hit the guy who stabbed Dylan in the head and knocked him out clean. I looked over at Nathan and Mark and they were doing just fine. Nathan had one on the floor and Mark knocked one out. There was two left, me and Mark took one each.

Easily enough I knocked him out. We left the court after we heard police sirens in the distance.

We went to the Hospital to see how Dylan was getting on. I had a quick chat with the nurse and she said that Dylan was most likely going to pull through. It was great news to hear and we stayed till Dylan woke up. After a few hours of waiting, he woke up. We had a chat with him for a while until visiting hours were over.

It was a long day and we all headed back to our homes and got some rest, as we all desperately needed.

The Survivor of the Future

Marek Galas

I slowly regained consciousness, my eyes were still closed and I could only feel a cold breeze coming straight at my face. My body was as stiff as ever. I could barely feel my hands or my legs. I slowly opened my eyes and at first I could only see a blur. I tried to stay concentrated as I didn't have a clue where I was but unfortunately I fell asleep.

I woke up sometime later. This time when I opened my eyes the blur was quickly gone but the problem was that it was pitch black. I thought to myself that wherever I was it was night-time. I chose to not think much of it and wait until there was light.

I opened my eyes and I could finally see something. In front of me were trees, huge massive green trees in a pattern. There was an empty black bench beside the trees. I was really relaxed and I've had lots of sleep for the last few hours. I turned my head to the left and then to the right. It looked like I was in a park. I tried to get up when I noticed my leg was really soar. I pulled up my trousers to check it out. It was a horrendous site. I was able to see that my bone had speared through my flesh and skin. It was broken and an infection was a possibility very soon. I didn't have much time because the pain and agony was

getting worse with every second so I knew I had to get help.

After I had stopped panicking I tried crawling towards the small trees. I was able to collect some very strong branches. I tied them together and placed them over my lower leg where the fracture had happened. Before I did this I had to concentrate on moving my bone back inside my flesh and skin. I was now able to use the rest of my strength to get up and look around. I was now sure that I was in a massive park covered in trees. The weird part was that I felt a lot smaller as if I had shrunk.

In the distance I could see someone running in my direction. It was a man in a new jogging tracksuit which I have never seen before and he was also really tall.

‘Hello, my name is em... Bill,’ I said. ‘Could you tell me where I am and what day it is?’

‘Hey there, I’m David,’ he replied. ‘It’s Thursday and you are in the National Ecology Park.’

I tried to remember have I ever heard of this park. I knew I was in my hometown Los Angeles because of the guy’s accent. I decided to ask him how to get out of here and he told me the exit from the park was just five kilometres away. I laughed and asked him, ‘Are you serious? Five kilometres away, what sort of park is this? There must be a shorter route.’

He replied, ‘This is one of the biggest parks in all of America and according to my GPS we are right in the middle of the park grounds.’ I knew five kilometres was

too far for me and I could not walk long with this leg. Luckily he noticed the leg before I had to tell him about it and so without hesitating he called the ambulance to come and take me to a hospital.

We waited for about two minutes when I finally saw what looked like a flying ambulance. I was completely shocked. I forgot about the pain for that moment and tried to understand what was going on. I now had a huge feeling that I was in a different moment of time. The ambulance was gigantic, three times bigger than a normal one. Two doctors in specially designed surgery suits jumped out of it, they were holding what looked like an advanced scanner. They aimed it at me and in a few seconds they were able to know who I was. At least that's what I thought. It turned out I wasn't in their files, so like me they didn't know who I was.

Suddenly they were on the phone with someone. A minute later I saw another flying machine but this time it was a police car which looked more like a floating military tank. In the space of a second, five members of what I recall the defence forces had jumped out rapidly. They even came up to me and aimed their guns. 'Get on the ground fool!' one of them screamed. 'Who do you think you are trying to get onto the grounds of the USA without any permission? Would you like me to shoot you right in the face for committing a major crime!?'

I was completely shocked and scared now. I couldn't get a word out of my mouth. I couldn't believe how

violent these people were. I opened my eyes and all I could see was a fist being aimed right at my face. I quickly closed my eyes and waited for it to end.

‘Wake up you little trespasser!’ said a man who’s voice I never heard before. I rapidly regained consciousness and was now fully aware of what was going on. I was in a bloody cell. Great. The one part that astonished me was that my leg was fully regained, no scars and no feeling of pain.

An officer came up to the cell and threw food at me. Some old rotten mashed potatoes were smashed into my face making them explode all over my body. Then, to make it even better, I got a chicken leg smacked off my head. He closed my cell and gave me about five minutes to eat the chicken leg and the potatoes which I was now covered in.

After an hour of hitting rocks with a hammer it was finally time for break. I walked outside, looked up at the beautiful sky and inhaled the fresh air. All of this peaceful time had ended when I looked straight ahead of me. There were fifty other prisoners standing in small groups of four or five. Nobody in here was alone, except for me. I could see an officer in every corner or the yard making sure everyone was behaving.

A small group of prisoners came up to me. They weren’t big or didn’t have tattoos like the others but they were nice and welcoming and from the movies I knew this

was a very rare sighting in a prison, especially for someone new.

We were talking for about ten minutes so I had some courage now to ask some questions. They told me that it was the year 2500 right now. I was told that people now receive steroids on a daily basis and that there are many advances in technology like the fact that breakages and cancer can be easily healed in a short period of time. The steroids are not given to prisoners. This is why they are not as tall as the people I saw in the park. People who are arrested and end up in the jail are called 'outsiders' by the officers. They are not allowed to have any contact with the outside world. No telephone calls. No visiting hours. It's really strict down here.

The government's aim is to stop people from committing crimes by establishing these harsh rules. The only way to get out is to earn your way up to the top, to get respect from the officers and prisoners by doing them favours. The easiest way which I decided to take is to fight every one of these scumbags and earn myself some respect by the most dangerous and terrifying people in this prison.

A day has passed since I had the talk with a few of the other inmates. The huge alarm went off, this was an indication of small break. We were all let out onto the yard. I walked up to those inmates who I was talking to the other day as they seemed to like me. We had a laugh together when one of them whose name was Gary said,

‘Hey Bill, why don’t you go ahead and give that guy a dig.’ He was pointing at a small guy who was standing by himself.

I thought that this would be a good start. I accepted the challenge, went up to him and...BANG! I started off with a nicely placed right hook to the stomach. He fell to his knees. I spat at his face and kicked him across the head making him unconscious. Everyone seemed to turn their attention to me.

Three officers came through the emergency, two of them picked up the unconscious lad and brought him to the hospital while the third guy said to me, ‘Not too bad, but you could of picked someone your one size.’

I’ve got to say these words motivated me to start a fight with someone bigger the next day.

For the next couple of weeks all I did was get into fights and train a lot. I had my ass kicked a few times but mostly it was the other guy who ended up on the ground. I was now known to be up for a fight against anyone. I had grown much bigger and I was slowly moving up to the top. I had been hanging around with the dodgy people. They weren’t in here for small crimes like the others. They were murderers, rapists or terrorists.

One day we were standing enjoying a tin of tuna when suddenly Big-Joe came over. He was the biggest and strongest person I had ever seen in my life. The guards sometimes gave him the steroids. He was able to leave this place whenever he wanted to but he knew how much

power he had. He ate lunch with the officers, he played cards with the officers and he was even allowed to get drugs from the officers. He had full control over everyone.

He came up to us, when I noticed it was me who he wanted. In a split of second I saw his huge forearm hit me, right above the eye socket. I was on the ground instantly. I got up and started defending myself. The whole prison was now paying attention to me.

Big Joe, without saying a word, charged right at me. I managed to dodge him but before I could take a breath he was running at me the second time. This time I was too slow and was caught by his huge round right shoulder, which smashed right into my face making me dizzy. I was now praying on my knees with him standing right in front of me. There was a long silence when finally he walked away. He had spared me for some reason. It was a shock to everyone as Big Joe had killed all of his previous victims. I took a deep breath and luckily was taken away by the officers to the hospital.

I lay down in the hospital for a day. My only aim now was to get full recovery and to get Big-Joe back. I didn't have a clue how I was going to do this but I knew I had to do it if I was ever going to get out of here. When I recovered I started asking the other prisoners how I could get my hands on those steroids. It was pretty simple. During my hours of working in the kitchen I had to sneak into the storage room. The trick was you needed a special key to open the safe which had the steroids stored in it.

I had been close friends with the officer who had these keys so I knew this would make this challenge a lot easier. One day when I was working in the kitchen. I went up to that officer whose name was John. I asked for the key to the storage room. He didn't expect me to need anything else. He said, 'I only have my pair of keys. I'll give you two minutes to get what you need and then you have to be back here.'

I was absolutely shocked this went so smoothly. I quickly walked into the storage room, opened the safe and took out a pack of steroids from the very back of the safe. I hid them in my pants, locked the safe, grabbed a few ingredients and walked right back into the kitchen.

'Thanks John, here are your keys,' I said, smiling.

He smiled and took the keys off me.

I took some water from the kitchen tap, walked back into my room. I poured the water into the bag of steroids, shook it, lifted it in the air, bend the bag downwards and let the mixture flow into my mouth. It was disgusting. I knew straight away that I took too much. The taste was way too strong and I felt like I was about to puke. I crawled towards my toilet. I felt as if I was back from the club, totally drunk. I was there for about two hours, trying my best to stay conscious.

I was woken up the next day by a loud noise. There was a strike going on. Most of the prisoners were out of their cells trying to break down the door which divided them and the officers. After about half an hour something

amazing happened. The door was finally broken down but not by the prisoners. The door got smashed by something heavy and this stunned most of the prisoners.

Then, five bodies came inside. They wore special armour which allowed them to use all of their abilities. Some of them had nunchakus or electric whips. They stood there in silence waiting for some dumb-ass to run at them. It didn't take long before they started charging in small groups at the five bodies. In a few seconds the outsiders were on the ground K.O-ed. After a couple of minutes the riot was over and all the outsiders were in the hospital or injured in their cells.

What happened the last day proved how immoderate the prisoners were. All the technology was hidden inside of these prison walls.

I was now really relaxed and I took a moment to look at myself. I was astonished. My hands, my legs and my whole body size had increased enormously. I was now the same size as Big-Joe and I knew this was the day I was going to get out of this place.

They gave us lunch and after half an hour they let us out into the yard. Everyone was amazed at how big I was. People who had previously laughed at me were now turning their heads away or looking very frightened.

I went up to Big-Joe. He himself didn't look so confident by now. I walked up even closer he could feel my breath on his face by now. I swung back quickly and gave him a punch in the stomach. I waited for him to get

up but it looked like he wasn't going to. He fell to the ground in seconds. The whole yard was now looking in our direction. Big-Joe was unconscious and it seemed I had won.

The officers brought me into their boss. He gave me an application to fill out. It read, 'The Proposal.' I looked at it, step by step. It gave me a few propositions. I was amazed with the type of democracy that went on in this place. The moment you beat up the biggest guy around you were automatically offered training for the FBI, CIA or even the Marines. The last option on the list was a favourite for me, a holiday home in Hawaii, a budget that would last me ten years and a choice of my dream vehicle. I thought to myself that I didn't want to fight anymore. I had enough of this. I no longer cared that I was in the future. I just wanted to be able to lie down and relax.

The deal with the prison's manager was made. I thought I was going to get a plane of some sort but then again I remembered it was the future! I was able to get teleported to Hawaii in a split second.

I got a job as a waiter down beside the beach. Found myself a lovely wife and we I had two children. A boy named Alex and a younger girl, Natasha. After four years of working as the waiter I got promoted many times and I was now the manager of the whole bar. So, in the end, I lived happily ever after.

Mass Murder

Daniel McSherry

It was the first day of winter and John was woken up by a soft rattle outside his window. He rolled over to get his phone to check the time and realised he had overslept and was now running late for mass. He sprung up from the bed and put on whatever clothes were closest to him, which in this case was a ragged pair of jeans and a Celtic jersey. Stuck in the back of his head was the telling-off his mum would give him for being late for mass for the third time in a row.

Breakfast had to be kept to a minimum as it was now 10:13 and mass started at 10:20 and the church was at least ten minutes away from his house. John quickly took a handful of Coco Pops and a gulp of milk and sprinted out the door and down the road.

It was a strangely quiet day in John's neighbourhood, no one was out, no sign of life anywhere. He thought maybe it was because people were sleeping in or they were at mass. This all didn't sit well with John but he kept running.

The church was just around the corner and when he turned onto the road where the church mass there was no sign of any cars anywhere. This was extremely strange as this road, Brookeberry Road, was usually packed with cars and people hurrying into the church. It seemed as if

church wasn't on or if he had gotten the wrong day, but he hadn't. John was starting to worry a lot now and he was sweating profusely.

He swung open the doors of the church and things began to get worse. The church was completely empty and the only thing that seemed to exist was this horrid smell that John could not quite put a name on. He couldn't get his head around what was happening. Mass was always on at 10:20 on a Sunday morning and he couldn't think of why this would be an exception. He didn't even stop to think where his mom would be but just thought of ringing her to find out what was happening.

The phone rang out the first time. This was weird because his mom never missed a call, ever. He thought maybe she just couldn't hear it in her pocket or she's just very busy at the moment, so he'd wait five minutes and ring again.

He took this time to explore the church. He went up to the altar and rummaged through the stuff there. The smell was a lot stronger now, almost unbearable and John had to keep his hand over his nose. He saw it fit to ring his mom again. As it rang he could hear another phone ring with a similar ringtone and followed the sound. The noise was coming from the back room where the smell could not be stopped by his hand and John just had to hold his breath.

There were bodies everywhere, piled one on top of the other, with blood painting the walls. John couldn't believe

what he was seeing and immediately rang the police but the phone just rang out. The unimaginable fear was starting to creep into his head now. Where was his mom, and out of the corner of his eye he saw that blue cotton dress that was so traditionally worn to mass. John couldn't bear it anymore and ran out of the church leaving the dreadful smell behind him.

John couldn't comprehend what was happening, why it was happening. Who could have done this? He rang his dad who never came to mass with them and slept in, but to no surprise the phone rang out. John was really starting to worry now.

He started to make his way home and the silence of the street was still there, like it had just been abandoned. He could see his house now and all seemed just as he left it, but that smell was coming back to him as he eased up the drive way to unlock to door. Silence. John was shaking with fear.

He slowly made his way to the kitchen where he hoped his dad would be sitting with his newspaper and his fry up. He opened the door and that horrid stench hit him and he didn't see his dad anywhere. He couldn't understand what the smell was. He followed it and it brought him to the kitchen table. John took a deep breath and flung the table cloth up and to his horror he found his dog, Bob, lying there. There was a pale looking thing in his mouth and he pulled it out to investigate it. It was almost like a finger but not a human one.

John hurried up the stair and the smell was overwhelming now. He slowly opened his parents' bedroom door where the smell was strongest. The door creaked the whole way open and there was his dad lying on the bed.

This was all too overwhelming for John and he felt a bit faint. There was blood everywhere. On the ground and covering the wall. Then John saw it. A message written with what looked like blood. It read 'Look behind you.'

John went as white as a ghost, like all the goodness had been whipped out of him. He slowly turned his and to his relief nothing was there. He turned back to examine the message closer and then he saw it. It was an inhuman figure standing right in front of him with a head at least three times bigger than a human head but a strangely small body frame. John was trying his hardest to not look at his beady black eyes and examined the rest of his body. He noticed that one of his hands, if they were even hands, was missing a finger and remembered Bob had the same looking thing in his mouth. 'Must have put up a fight,' he thought, and that reminded John that he was not dealing with something friendly, but something very dangerous.

The thing wasn't moving, almost statue like, so he decided to examine the face and once he looking into his eyes he felt a burning sensation on his skin. It started as just a little niggle and turned into a searing heat on his skin and in the blink of an eye John lay on the ground and the alien was gone, no trace of his existence.

Betrayal

Dáire O'Neill

1

It was a warm evening in late July, the 27th to be precise. There was a light cool breeze in the air as a red Citroen C4 pulled up on the path in a quiet estate in the suburbs. Two men came out and walked to the back of the car. One of the men was smaller than the other. They opened the boot and inside were two blue sports bags and one red sports bag.

‘You’re sure this is the right house?’ asked the tall man.

‘We’ve been through this Dom. Number 47 is the right house, 45 and 49 are both decoys,’ replied the short man.

‘I know. I just don’t want to mess this up, and don’t say my name, they might have bugs,’ Dom said. ‘What if they try and escape in their cars or if they hear or see us?’

‘As soon as they turn the key, the C4 in the bonnet blows the hell up. And as far as being seen or heard goes, we better just be careful,’ replied the short man.

Dom then took the red bag, gave it to the other man, and then took the two blue bags for himself. They crept up to the side gate where the short man opened the red bag. He pulled out what appeared to be a radio. It had a small screen on it with some buttons on the bottom; there was also a camera on the back. He held it up to the gate.

On the screen you could see tiny lasers which were usually invisible to the naked eye; the only way they could be seen is if a leaf slowly floated down through them. The alarm was triggered by life forms, the size of humans.

The man tapped on a few buttons and lines of numbers started rolling down the screen ending with: 4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42.

‘How long is that thing gonna take?’ asked Dom, ‘We’re sitting ducks out here.’

‘Just give it some time,’ replied the small man.

Five minutes later, the device beeped and Dom stepped forward to pick the lock on the gate. Less than a minute later, they were walking around behind the house. On the patio behind the house, they each took a blue bag, opened it and removed a remote controlled car with a sensor and a camera on it. The short man put what appeared to be a piece of plasticine on the top of his car, then proceeded to drive it down the drain and under the house. Dom drove his car straight up the gutter and on to the roof.

The men then took out more of the plastic blobs, and threw them all over the house. The men crept back to the car, got in and silently drove away. As they were driving, the short man hit a button on the remote and a huge column of flames flew up into the sky. In the rear view mirror, they could see a man on fire trying to get to the hose but he burnt to a crisp before he could make it.

The men drove to a park. They stopped the car and went to the boot. This time they took out a container full

of petrol. Dom opened the container and started pouring petrol all over the car. They each got changed and put their old clothes in the car. The short man took out a cigar, lit it, took a few puffs and then threw it in the car, and ran away as fast as he could to the other side of the wide park where Dom was standing. They felt the heat surge towards them as the car blew up in a mass of fire.

‘Well, that went well didn’t it?’ said Dom with a grin on his face.

‘Yeah, it did,’ replied the short man. ‘Do you need a lift home?’

‘Nah, can you give me a ride to the nearest bus stop though?’ asked Dom.

‘Yeah sure, I’m parked just over there,’ replied the short man.

‘Thanks, Seán.’

‘No problem.’

The men walked over to a battered, old, blue Ford Galaxy and got in. Seán turned the key and drove through the estate beside the explosion as the sounds of fire, police and ambulance sirens started blaring through the night.

Dom smiled. ‘That was a lot easier than I expected.’

‘Yeah, I thought it would take a bit longer,’ replied Seán. ‘Aw, balls! Call my phone. NOW!’

They had pulled around the corner and saw a road block, Seán did a U-turn straight away, but a policeman jumped in a car and followed them with the sirens blazing. Seán frantically changed Dom’s caller I.D. to ‘Mum’. He

then pulled over, rolled down his window and waited for the policeman.

‘Sir, why did you turn around and drive the opposite way when you saw the roadblock?’ asked the policeman.

‘My mother called me and said there was an explosion and that she was extremely scared and that she wanted me to come back,’ replied Seán, calmly showing the policeman his recent calls.

‘Fine, but next time don’t suddenly do a U-turn,’ replied the policeman grumpily. ‘Drive safely now.’

Seán started to drive away slowly while trying to figure out the safest way out of the area. He kept under the speed limit to avoid any unwanted attention. Finally he drove out through a field. They kept driving until they reached a bus stop. Seán pulled up on the path.

‘You’re sure you don’t want a lift home?’ he asked.

‘Nah, I’m grand. I’m meeting Sam, ‘cause he needs help with a *big* job,’ Dom replied.

‘Ah grand,’ Seán replied, ‘Actually, before you go have you talked to Carlie recently?’

‘No I haven’t, have you?’

‘No. Should we just continue as normal?’

‘Yeah, I guess, I’ll see you tomorrow.’

‘Okay, I’ll see you tomorrow,’ said Seán, as he drove away. ‘Goodnight.’

‘Night!’

Dom rode on the bus for about twenty minutes. When it finally pulled up in front of an apartment block called Chipley Hills. Dom stepped inside the lobby glad to be out of the heat. He strolled over to elevator and pressed the up button. Waiting, he pondered what job Sam needed him for; he normally did not work with him. Maybe his partner John is sick. He heard a ding and stepped into the lift to go to the twelfth floor.

Seán drove home to his semi-detached house in a nearby estate. He silently pulled up in the driveway, and crept through the front door. He heated up the dinner his wife, Mary, left out for him, ham fillet with mashed potato and beans.

He plopped a teaspoon of cranberry sauce on the ham, grabbed a knife and fork and feasted. After he ate, he placed his dishes in the dishwasher and slipped into bed after setting his alarm.

Dom stepped out of the elevator, turned right and strolled down the fancy corridor. He paused outside of Room 42, checking his phone to make sure it was the right room, he then rapped on the door and waited. The door slowly creaked open.

‘Hey man, how’s it going? Come in, have a Guinness,’ said an exuberant Jamaican man, leaving the door wide open as he walked to the fridge.

‘Hey Sam. I guess I can have a beer, but why did you drag me down here?’ replied Dom, as he stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

‘All in good time, my friend, all in good time. Don’t worry,’ said Sam as he handed Dom a glass of Guinness.

‘Wow, you have quite the arsenal here!’ exclaimed Dom, as he peered at all the weapons on the wall and in bags. He saw all sorts of weapons, explosives, assault rifles, knives, armour, ‘Does Michael know you have these?’

‘Yeah he does, these are all the guns from the base, that’s what the job is. Have you heard of the NHQ Op?’ inquired Sam.

‘No, should I have heard of it?’ asked Dom.

‘I’m not sure. Only a few people in the gang know of it, but tomorrow everyone will know. The NHQ Op. is the set-up of the new headquarters. It’s near Seán’s place. I’ll show you in a sec,’ explained Sam.

‘So these guns are all from the armoury? Wow, we have a lot of guns. So what’s the job anyway?’

‘Setting up the new H.Q.’

Dom groaned. ‘Ugh, it’s going to be a long night. Guess I better start, what’s first?’

‘Can you bring the van out front? It’s parked in space...’ said Sam, trying to remember where he had parked the van. ‘231. I think.’

‘You think?’

‘Well, it’s in the two-thirties. A black van with clean, blacked-out windows. It shouldn’t be too hard to find,’ explained Sam. ‘You will be grand, man. Don’t worry.’

Dom finished his Guinness and went down to the car park. He made his way to Level 2 and looked for the van. He strolled around the corner, but stopped in his tracks. Blue and red lights danced on his face. He saw the police looking at a black van with blacked-out windows.

Dom cursed silently. He sneaked away from the car park, and rushed upstairs to tell Sam. ‘Sam, we gotta hurry up, the police are all over the van.’ He explained as he burst through the door

‘Okay man, I have an idea.’

3

*BEEP*BEEP* *BEEP*BEEP* *BEEP*BEEP*

Seán groaned as he woke up. He rolled over in his bed and saw his wife was already up. Checking the time, he realised it was almost noon. He had a quick shower, got changed, and rushed down for his breakfast; the smell of French toast filled the house as he cooked his breakfast. When he finished cooking, he devoured his toast while sipping on a piping hot cup of tea.

*BEEP*BEEP*

His mobile vibrated as he received a text from Dom.

‘Meet me outside.’

Seán rose from the comfort of his chair and sluggishly walked to the bottom of his drive-way. He saw Dom leaning against the pillar at the end of his driveway.

‘What are you doing here?’ asked Seán surprisingly.

‘Good morning. I’m here to show you the new HQ, but first, can I have some coffee? I’ve been up all night,’ replied Dom.

‘Since when do we have a new HQ?’

‘Since about six hours ago.’

‘Really? Is it nearby and why did we get rid of the old one? I was just starting to like it.’

‘Yeah, it’s nearby, we got rid of the old one cause Michael thought the police were on to us, and can I please get some coffee? I’m knackered.’

‘Oh yeah, sorry, come on in.’

The two sauntered into the house. Seán filled the kettle with water then put it on to boil. When it popped he put it in to his coffee machine.

‘What do you want?’ he enquired.

‘Can I have a double espresso cappuccino please?’

‘You sure? That’s really gonna wake you up.’

‘That’s the point; I’m almost at the stage where you just spontaneously collapse from exhaustion as if you just slammed into a brick wall.’

‘Okay then, one double espresso cappuccino coming right up, one sec...here you are.’

Dom took the coffee, and drank it in three big gulps. ‘Aw, that was lovely, thanks. Do you want to head over?’

‘Yeah sure. Let me just grab my bag.’

The two walked out of the house and around the corner. Parked outside number seven were two large moving vans. There were about ten men lugging furniture into the newly sold house. Dom and Seán walked into the house, and into the kitchen. The leader of the gang was leaning against the counter.

‘Hey Michael how’s it going?’ asked Seán.

The man sighed. ‘I’m tired.’

‘Well, this house is fu-’ Seán started to say.

‘Don’t curse in this house, I don’t want people annoying me by cursing just because they can!’ exclaimed Michael.

‘Okay, okay. Sorry, won’t happen again.’ Seán hurriedly apologised, worried he might have annoyed Michael. ‘Well what do you need me to do? I can help you set up the HQ, if you want.’

‘Come on, I’ll give you the grand tour. Dom, can you finish the weapons with Sam?’ asked Michael.

‘Yeah sure, I’ll see you in a few minutes.’ replied Dom.

Seán and Michael headed upstairs and through the frosted glass double doors.

‘This is the conference room.’ explained Michael. ‘It has a projector and a laptop, installed to explain jobs when there is nothing to do and maybe watch movies or something.’

‘Nice,’ replied Seán.

‘This is where we will be discussing and organising jobs. We can use Power Point or something on the PC to explain it, we have a few smaller conference rooms across the hall as well.’

They went downstairs to the back of the house. ‘We have a kitchen and sitting room here, and we have the main part of the H.Q. out in the back garden.’

They walked out of the house, through the slightly overgrown mess of a garden and into the wooden shed at the back. On the floor was a trapdoor. Michael opened it and climbed down a stainless steel ladder. Seán hesitantly followed, wary of the unknown.

At the bottom of the ladder, the small vertical tunnel expanded into a vast room, which was occupied by small groups of people busy sorting out the room. On one side by a wall, was Dom and Sam, with a few other people hanging a deadly arsenal of guns on the wall, making sure that they were all even and that none were loaded.

There were some people organising some small offices around the room. There was also a printer and a fax

machine in the corner printing some pages into a tray near a closed metal door.

‘Wow, this place is brilliant,’ exclaimed Seán.

‘Yeah,’ sighed Michael. ‘Anyway, I have a job for you so come on. You too, Dom!’

The three men climbed back up the ladder and proceeded to the upstairs room in the house with the projector. Michael turned on the laptop and projector and loaded a PowerPoint called Sam Grayson. Seán and Dom sat down around the conference table.

‘Okay, Sam Grayson is apparently barking up the wrong tree, and the person who he annoyed wants him out of the picture. Not dead though.’ explained Michael. He clicked the mouse and a blueprint came up on the screen. ‘So this is his house. He has private security because he is worried about the threats on his life but as I said earlier, our employer doesn’t want him dead. I recommend you knock out the guards, sneak into the house, take Mr. Grayson somewhere and give him something to think about. Any questions?’

‘Eh, how many guards are there?’ asked Dom.

‘There are two guards in each of the four towers on the corners of the estate and one guard at the gate,’ replied Michael. ‘Anything else guys?’

‘No I don’t think so. I guess we’ll go do some planning.’ Seán stated.

Dom and Seán left the conference room and headed downstairs. While they were going down the stairs, they engaged in a hushed conversation.

‘Do you think we’ll be able to contact Carlie?’ asked Seán.

‘I don’t know. She hasn’t contacted me in a week and every time I call her, her phone is off. I guess we can just leave her a message on her phone about the job.’

‘Okay, now, where are we going to plan?’ asked Seán.

‘I guess in one of the offices in the basement downstairs,’ replied Dom, as he led the way through the garden and down the ladder in the shed.

They made their way to one of the small offices throughout the room. Inside the office was a laptop, a whiteboard, a corkboard and three office chairs. The two men sat down and got to work.

5

Two months later

On a dark, damp September night, a lone jeep crept up an old country road towards a country estate. Dom and Seán were inside going over the plan one last time.

‘So we’ll use tranquillizers on the eight guards, starting on the north tower, then the east, south and west. Then I’ll hack the security system so that all the cameras are on a feedback loop,’ started Seán.

‘Then I’ll head to the gate pretending to be working with a delivery company and knock the final guard out.

Finally, we break down the door, storm up the stairs and take Mr. Grayson to the warehouse for a talk.’ finished Dom. He sighed. ‘Are you ready?’

‘I guess. Let’s do it.’

They stopped the jeep just before the top of the hill. They both took a sniper rifle which was modified to shoot tranquilizers from the back of the jeep and stepped out of the jeep. They took aim on the north tower.

‘I’ve got the guy taking a smoke,’ stated Dom.

‘Okay, on three,’ Seán exhaled. ‘One. Two. Three. Fire!’

They both fired and watched the two guards fall quickly to the ground. They turned immediately to the east tower. Looking at the guards, they took aim.

‘I’ve got the guy wearing the green hat.’ Dom told Seán.

‘Okay – One. Two. Three. Fire!’

Both men fired and stared in disbelief as neither guard fell. They fired another dart each, but again neither guard fell. Dom peered at the estate, hoping that the guards had not been alerted to their presence. Seeing nothing unusual, he turned to Seán. A look of horror dawned on him as he saw a dozen trucks blazing down the dirt road towards them.

‘OH SHIT! Seán, we gotta go. NOW!’ shouted Dom as he ran to the jeep, jumped in and started the engine, leaving Seán standing on the hill. ‘SEÁN! Come on.’

Seán came to his senses and sprinted towards the jeep, while the trucks blasting towards them opened fire on them. As soon as Seán was in the truck, Dom drove as fast as he could away from the estate. He crossed a barren road to a car park. He stopped the car as fast as he could and jumped out. Seán followed, rushing to break into a car to try and shake their pursuers. Seán started the car and drove away as soon as Dom hopped in. They drove onto the motorway and started to head into town.

Dom started to text Michael: MISSION COMPROMISED. HEADING INTO TOWN ON MOTORWAY

He then turned to Seán. ‘Where are we going? We can’t go back to the H.Q.’

‘I don’t know, maybe we can shake them in the city but it’s risky.’ Seán replied worriedly.

‘Wait, wait pull up over there.’

‘What, the abandoned apartments?’

‘Yeah, we can get the car to drive with some bricks, it might trick’em’

‘Okay, it might work’

Seán drove the car over to the building and got out, leaving the engine running. He sprinted as fast as he could to a pile of bricks and picked one up. He started to head back to the car, but a better idea popped into his head. He dropped the brick and walked over to a homeless man.

‘Do you want our car?’ he asked the homeless man.

‘What? Are you serious?’ the homeless man asked.

‘Yeah, take it, there’s almost a full tank of petrol, and the engine’s running so just take it,’ Seán said as he opened the door for the homeless man to get into the car. The homeless man stumbled into the car giddy with excitement, and drove off just as Dom and Seán’s pursuers drove around the corner.

‘Hide!’ exclaimed Dom. The two men quickly ran behind the closest wall, put their backs against it and sunk to the ground, hoping that their pursuers would follow the man in their car instead of stopping. They were in luck.

As the trucks drove away, Dom and Seán crept towards the stairs, when they were sure that the jeeps had turned off the road that the apartments were on, they bolted up the stairs as fast as they possibly could. When they reached the roof, their hearts were pounding. Dom furiously punched the keys of his mobile as he texted Michael: MANAGED TO SHAKE PURSUERS. ON TOP OF ABANDONED APARTMENTS ON TOLO STREET. NEED PICKUP ASAP!

‘Hopefully help is on the way but we should probably barricade the roof entrance just in case.’ Dom told Seán.

‘Okay, I think I saw some wood and bricks over there.’ replied Seán before cracking under the pressure. ‘Man, this is chaotic, how did we get into this mess? It’s so crazy, I don- I don’t want to die here. I..I want to live my life, I want to be with my wife.’

‘It’s okay Seán, help is on the way,’ said Dom trying to calm his friend. But he was not sure if he believed the

words he was saying. Coming to his senses he knew that he had to remain positive. He quickly glanced around, noticing a couple of nails sticking out of a nearby wall before he turned back to Seán. ‘Come on Seán, we are going to live, go get the logs, I’m calling for backup.’

‘Bu-but we can’t risk the mission.’ Seán stammered.

‘Our lives are in danger; we have to risk breaking our cover,’ Dom said calmly as he pulled his phone back out and dialled 999.

‘Hello, Emergency Services. What’s your emergency?’ a voice asked.

‘This is police officer, Dominic Jefferson. I need to talk to Carlie Thompson immediately.’ Dom replied.

‘Please hold.’

6

‘Hello, is this Dominic Jefferson?’ said a deep, scruffy voice.

‘Yes? Who is this?’ asked Dom.

‘This is Officer Simon Phillips. I took over from Carlie Thompson.’

‘What do you mean took over?’

‘She has been missing for over two weeks.’

‘WHAT!’

‘We know that you were undercover for a mission, but we can’t find any of the case files, Officer Jefferson. You need to tell me what your mission is; how long you’ve

been undercover and how dangerous your mission is? Where can you meet me?’

‘Listen, even though I would love to sit down, have a cup of coffee and talk about the mission with you, it will have to wait. My partner and I are in an extremely dangerous situation and need to be picked up. We’re on top of the abandoned apartment building on Tolo Street, and we are being hunted down by a convoy of trucks.’

‘Hunted down? Listen son, you need to tell m...’

BOOM!

Dom dropped the phone as he saw a pillar of smoke and fire rise up in a swirling fashion a few blocks away. It looked as if the blazing inferno was a tornado wreaking havoc on the road. He instantly knew that their pursuers knew they had given them the slip. He heard sirens fill the air as the fire brigades, ambulances, and police cars made their way to the explosion. He looked over at Seán who had a strange look on his face; it was a mixture of shock, fear and horror. They made eye contact...for the last time.

Dom stared in utter disbelief as Seán fell; the bullet passed through the sides of his temple and he heard the crack of the gunshot as Seán’s limp body hit the floor. Dom dropped to the floor and crawled over to Seán’s body.

‘OH NO!’ screamed Dom, in anger. ‘I’m sorry man.’

Dom was distracted from his mourning over Seán when his phone started to ring. He looked at the caller I.D. -
MICHAEL

‘Michael, where the hell have you been? The mission’s completely ruined. They knew s-somehow! And they chased us down towards Tolo Street, and...and S-Seán...he’s dead,’ stuttered Dom. ‘There was nothing I could do. They just killed him, r-right in front of me.

‘Don’t worry Dom, it’ll be okay.’ replied Michael.

‘It will?’

‘Yeah, ‘cause soon, I’ll kill you too.’

7

‘Has anyone here heard of Officer Jefferson before, or his partner?’ asked Officer Phillips.

‘No I don’t think so, sir.’ replied Officer Phillips’ assistant. ‘There’s no record of them in the system.’

‘Officer Thompson must have hand-picked them. Will someone please find the case files. Also, someone get me Officer Thompson’s computer.’ requested Officer Phillips.

‘Sir, her computer is gone along with everything in her desk, it’s empty,’ an officer told Officer Phillips.

‘Damn-it, what’s going on here? Let’s get a med-evac out to Tolo Street, and hope they are still alive.’

Dom fought back the tears as he raced against the clock to fortify his position. He started to use any timber or bricks

he could find to construct a makeshift wall in front of the only door that lead to the roof. He knew it wouldn't hold up against explosives, but he hoped they didn't bring any.

He was still finishing his wall when he heard the screech of tires down below. He sprinted across the roof to hide as far away from the door as possible. The door started to shake as someone tried to shove it open. Dom could hear talking coming from behind the door and could barely understand it.

'Hey Simeon, you got the C4?'

'Right here.'

'Brilliant, give it here. Okay, I'll put a brick, here, eh here, and here. There that should do it, everyone stand back.'

Dom put his fingers in his ears and turned away as the charges exploded, but immediately screamed out in pain when a piece of shrapnel from his barricade got imbedded in his leg. He could just about make out someone talking;

'Here lads, you can go back to the jeeps, I got this.'

Dom turned around and saw Michael standing in front of the blown up door, with a pistol pointing towards him. 'Nice barricade you had there, shame I had to blow it up.'

'Why the hell do you want to kill me Michael?' asked Dom, as he limped towards Michael.

'Because you and Seán,' Michael gestured towards Seán's body, 'betrayed my trust. Turns out you're both police scum. You thought you would get away with it didn't you? Well, you're going to pay the ultimate price.'

I bet you and that other piece of scum over there wished ye never took this mission? I thought it would be harder to kill ye, but Seán was simple so I'll bet you will be too.'

'I'm going to kill you!' screamed Dom, consumed with rage.

'I would like to see you try, but you're useless. Just another piece of police scum!' replied Michael arrogantly.

'AAAGH!' screamed Dom as he punched Michael. Michael stumbled backwards into a wall, dropping his gun. Dom noticed the nails again, however this time he also noticed a wheel. He guessed it turned the nails.

Dom suddenly snapped back to reality as he was punched in the face by Michael. He almost fell off the side of the building as he stumbled backwards, but he regained his balance and saw another punch coming. Quickly, with all of his strength, punched Michael's fist and pushed it back towards the wall where it was brutally impaled in the lowest nail.

'You scum-bag!' screamed Michael as his face filled with pain.

Dom took this opportunity to hit Michael's hand upward, impaling his arm and hand into the other two nails. He quickly spun the wheel hoping his hunch had been right. As he turned the wheel, Michael's arm was twisted back down behind his back into an excruciating arm-lock.

'AARRGGHH!' screamed Michael as he flailed his left arm at Dom.

Dom took this opportunity to handcuff Michael's left arm to the pipe running across the wall.

'Where the hell did you get them! You know what I don't care just let me go so I can kill you. You're going to die anyway.'

'What? How?'

'You made the top spot on the gang's most wanted. So you're going to die, be it here or in twenty years. You'll never get away.' replied Michael smugly.

Dom limped over to Michael's gun and picked it up, 'How long have you known?' he asked in a small voice.

'What? I'm telling you that you're gonna die and all you say is 'How long have you known?' Well if you must know about three weeks now, and about two weeks ago I kidnapped your supervisor. Carlie, is it?' laughed Michael. 'Been keeping her in the strong-room. She's been quiet but we got her files too, so when we threatened her family she decided to talk.'

'I'm going to kill you!' stated Dom as he raised his voice, trying to believe his words.

'Oh yeah?' replied Michael, as he tried to trip Dom up by sweeping his legs under him. But Dom caught his leg, held on it, and smashed his foot down on Michael's knee-cap. The crack was sickening. Michael looked up in pain at Dom. Seeing the ferocity in his eyes, fear crept over Michael. He could see Dom wouldn't hold back, he could see he was going to die.

Dom pointed the gun straight at Michael.

Michael gulped.

Dom cocked the gun.

Michael shut his eyes knowing that he was drawing his last breath.

Dom put his finger on the trigger. 'I can't do it, you're not worth it,' said Dom.

'Ha, I thought you we-' Michael started to say before Dom clubbed him on the back of his head with the gun.

Dom limped back towards the centre of the roof, where he had dropped the phone. 'Officer Phillips, are you still there?'

'Yes, I am son. Hold on tight the medevac's on the way.'

'What about Seán?' Dom choked on the words.

'He'll be taken care of,' replied Officer Phillips. 'You did good today, son. You made the right choice.'

Twenty-four hours later

The Daily-City Times

Explosions in Escalating Gang-Police War!

Many Explosions have occurred over the past two months, as a result of the brutal war between the gang and the police force. One undercover police-man was found dead yesterday as fighting began on the street. Following the murder the police raided a house believed to be the hideout of the gang, however the gang had abandoned it leaving nothing. Downstairs in the strong room the police are pleased to report they recovered Officer Carlie Thompson who has been missing for two weeks. The police have reported she is in a stable condition in an undisclosed hospital. The funeral of the undercover police-man will be sometime tomorrow, and many members of the public are already paying their respects.

-Jeffry Spencer

‘Come on, Seán, we gotta hide!’ shouted Dom, as he and Seán ran up the stairs of the abandoned apartment building.

When they reached the roof, their hearts were pounding. Dom furiously punched the keys of his mobile as he texted Michael: MANAGED TO SHAKE PURSUERS. ON TOP OF ABANDONED APARTMENTS ON TOLO STREET. NEED PICKUP ASAP!

Dom dropped the phone as he saw a pillar of smoke and fire rise up in a swirling fashion a few blocks away. It looked as if the blazing inferno was a tornado wreaking havoc on the road. He instantly knew that their pursuers knew they had given them the slip. He heard sirens fill the air as the fire brigades, ambulances, and police cars made their way to the explosion. He looked over at Seán who had a strange look on his face; it was a mixture of shock, fear and horror. They made eye contact...for the last time.

Dom stared in utter disbelief as Seán fell; the bullet passed through the sides of his temple and he heard the crack of the gunshot as Seán's limp body hit the floor. Dom dropped to the floor and crawled over to Seán's body.

As Dom reached Seán's body a pillar of swirling black smoke rose from his chest, twisting and morphing his body into Michael's, Dom frantically scrambled away from him.

'Don't worry Dom, it'll be okay.' said Michael.

'It will?'

‘Yeah, ‘cause soon, I’ll kill you too.’ replied Michael in a demonic voice as he started to walk towards Dom, his hand morphed into a gun, which he pointed at Dom’s foot.

BANG

‘AGH! My foot! Why? What do you want?!’ screamed Dom.

‘I am your reckoning, your worst nightmare,’ Said Michael in the demonic voice as he placed his gun on Dom’s temple, ‘I will destroy everything you have ever loved, and I will be there to take your pathetic excuse of a life’

BANG

9

‘AGH!’

‘Mr. Jefferson? Mr. Jefferson, you are in hospital, we had to take you into surgery to remove the shrapnel from your leg and your spleen, which burst during the fight.’ said someone Dom couldn’t make out. ‘You seem to be making a full recovery, I’ll go-’

‘What?-Where?-Who are you?’

‘I’m your nurse, now I’m going to get your supervisor and your doctor.’ The nurse rushed out of the room, and returned with a tall bald man and a doctor.

‘Son, I’m Officer Phillips, we were on the phone together when-, when it happened.’ explained the bald man, ‘The Doctors say, well I’ll let The Doctor explain that.’

‘Well, we removed the shrapnel and your appendix successfully and you should be able to attend Seán’s funeral as long as you take it easy, no running, jumping or other physical activity you can think of.’ explained The Doctor, ‘And we might get you back in a few days for a brief check-up.’

‘When is the funeral?’ whispered Dom.

‘We aren’t sure if we can let you go son, it might be too dangerous.’ said Phillips.

‘What! Why not? I have to go!’

‘Well, Doctor and Nurse Smith can you leave us for a minute?’ Phillips asked. The two left the room promptly. ‘Son, Michael has escaped custody, the transport convey was ambushed.’

‘How could you let this happen? After all he did?’

‘Look we are doing our best to find him, but he’s a snake. He’s managed to get past all of our roadblocks.’ At that moment another man rushed in and whispered something into Phillips’ ear. ‘Son, I’ve got to go, I’ll be back later. Get some rest.’

‘Wait!’ cried Dom as he reached out a hand but Phillips was gone. Dom sighed and lay back down to try and sleep.

‘What is it?’ demanded Phillips.

‘Well sir, we’ve had a call’ replied the officer.

‘About’

‘They said Michael will be at the graveyard on Fitzgerald Drive during the funeral.’

‘How did they find out, it is supposed to be classified.’

‘We don’t know sir, but the informant said he got his information from the gang.’

‘A mole? That could be useful, tell me if he contacts us again. I’m going to check on Officer Thompson.’

‘Yes sir’

Dom was distracted from his thoughts when a nurse came in, he looked at the window and saw it was night.

‘What time is it?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know.’ replied the nurse briefly. Dom thought he recognised the voice but he wasn’t sure.

‘Whoa! That feels weird are my fingers supposed to feel tingly?’

‘Oh, don’t worry that’s completely normal,’ the nurse began as he turned around and stepped towards the light. ‘Paralysis always feels strange.’ Dom was sure he knew the voice but he couldn’t see the nurse’s face.

‘Why are you paralysing me, to help me sleep?’

‘No, it just makes it easier to abduct you.’ replied Michael as the light reached his face. ‘By now you should have no use of your arms and legs-’

‘HELP!’ screamed Dom frantically trying to press the help button on his bed remote. The policeman guarding the door and Phillips rushed in.

‘What’s wrong Dom?’ asked Phillips.

‘MICHAEL’ shouted Dom, pointing at the nurse, Phillips and the policeman drew their weapons.

‘Where?’

‘There!’

‘That’s your nurse...are you alright?’

‘No, no it’s Mich-’ Dom stared at the nurse as his face shifted between Michael’s and his own. ‘I really need to get some-’

The room began to blur as Dom fell back into unconsciousness.

‘DOM!’

‘It’s alright sir, it’s just the sedatives The Doctor prescribed to help him sleep.’

‘Ugh, my head.’ Dom rubbed his head as he rose, he looked around and saw Phillips in the corner. ‘What happened?’

‘You were given sedatives to help you sleep,’ explained Phillips ‘Now son, I know you don’t want to hear this but we can’t let you go to funeral,’ He saw the look of despair on Dom’s face ‘It’s just too dangerous with Michael on the loose, what we can do is allow you to visit the grave after the funeral, and let you attend the wake briefly.’

‘Sir, I have to attend, he is...was my best friend and partner’

‘The F.B.I. says no, so this is the best you’re going to get.’ Dom sighed.

‘When is the funeral?’

‘Two days, we are going to keep you here until then.’

Two days later

The rain pelted down on the black sedan that was driving Dom to the funeral, the overcast sky encouraged the depression that was creeping onto Dom.

‘How long till we get there?’ Dom asked his driver.

‘Just under five minutes sir, it’s just at the end of this road here.’ replied the driver cheerfully as he pointed to the next turn. The cheerfulness of the driver irritated Dom even more then Dom saw the name of the road, Fitzgerald Drive, depression washed over Dom, and he began to lack the confidence needed to meet Seán’s family. The driver pulled the car up onto the kerb and started to let Dom out.

‘Can you wait just a moment?’ asked Dom pathetically.

‘Yes sir, take all the time you need.’ replied the Driver calmly. ‘Sir, I think the Fitzgerald party is approaching, would you like me to drive around the block so you can gather your thoughts?’

‘No, I-, I think I’m ready.’ stated Dom, ‘You don’t need to let me out.’ Dom departed the car and went over to Seán’s family.

‘You missed the funeral.’ said Mary bluntly, she seemed a bit disconnected to Dom.

‘I know I’m sorry, the F.B.I said it would be best.’ replied Dom, ‘I’m... I’m sorry Mary, sorry for your loss.’

He gave Mary a quick hug, ‘I’m going to pay my respects, I’ll see you at the wake.’

‘Yeah, we’ll see you there. You know where it is? Just five minutes away, up the road.’ replied Mary.

‘Yeah, I’ll see you there.’

‘Okay, see you then.’ Mary ushered her children into a car and the car pulled away from the path, did a U-turn and drove away from the graveyard.

Dom approached the gravestone of his best friend, and partner. He shuffled closer and closer, contemplating what he should say. As he reached the grave he sighed and rested his hand on the tomb.

Here Lies
Seán Fitzgerald
Loving father
and husband.
May he rest in peace.

‘I’m sorry Seán, I’m,’ Dom faltered. ‘I’m so sorry. It should have been me, why wasn’t it me-’ Dom continued to weep at the grave as a man peered at him from behind the tree, as Dom stood while preparing to leave, the man quickly turned around and sent a message on his phone. Dom returned to the sedan and got in as the driver was finishing a call.

‘Yes sir. - Will do, yep- Okay, and shall I give him a hand or- oh okay then. Yep I’m leaving now. I’ll see you

soon. Yep, bye-bye. Sorry about that sir are you ready to depart?’

‘Yeah, thanks.’

‘To the wake, sir?’

‘Yes.’ The car pulled away from the path and drove down the road, alongside the graveyard. Dom looked at the window, staring at the seemingly endless amount of graves that dotted the landscape in almost even rows. He began feeling more depressed as he realised this was his fate, a two and a half by eight foot hole in the ground. He was distracted from his pessimistic contemplation when the driver veered to the left down a somewhat busy road with a few shops dotted here and there. He felt like something was off, but he couldn’t put his finger on it.

He realised that his driver was going a different route to Mary’s. He opened his mouth to ask where they were going when he realised that the driver must be working for Michael, if he realises that Dom knows then Dom might just be silenced now. Dom quickly but discreetly patted his pockets to see what tools he had at his disposal; his phone, his wallet, his gun and his Swiss army knife. He carefully takes out his knife, placing it in his right hand, then opens the knife.

‘How long ‘till we arrive?’ asks Dom.

‘We’re about ten minutes out sir.’ responds the driver promptly.

Dom made up his mind, he had to make a move now. He swiftly and skilfully stabbed the driver in his throat,

the driver immediately brought his hands frantically to his throat. Dom climbed up to the front of the car, opened the driver side door, and tried to kick the driver out.

‘Ah, sh..!’ Dom exclaimed when he realised that the driver was still buckled, he undid the buckle, and managed to kick the driver out. He then sat in the seat, grabbed the wheel, and then looked up to see a brick wall.

The car smashed into the wall at sixty kilometres an hour. Dom’s head raced forward hitting the air bag as it deployed. He quickly tried to change the gear to reverse, but when he accelerated the clutch slipped. He was about to start again when he smelled petrol.

He blotted out of the car and turned around. He was stunned to see a small crowd peering at him.

‘Police! Get back!’ Dom screams at them, some of the crowd move along but the majority stayed, a few people had their phones out. ‘God damn-it move, the car is going to -’ Dom felt a wave of heat and pressure push him forward as the car exploded. The crowd screamed and ducked. A small piece of shrapnel from the car was impaled into a person’s stomach. Shards of glass sprinkled on Dom and the crowd.

Dom stumbled away up the street as more people flooded to the car, he found a car left open he glanced in and stole the first aid kit. He then went down an alley to patch himself up. He looked around to make sure no-one is in the alley but he only sees a black van at the end of the alley.

When Dom finished patching himself up he threw the first aid kit in the nearest bin, he looked around and walked towards the opposite side of the alley from where he came. He entered a street. Looking up and down he saw nothing suspicious and proceeded to the nearest clothes shop.

He entered the shop and went to the shirts, he picked a shirt as well as some jeans and a pair of shoes. He went to the changing rooms and put on the clothes, taking the tags. He left his old clothes back. He glanced out the window and saw the same van turn onto the road the shop was on.

He was about to leave when his phone buzzed, he looked at the caller ID and saw Phillips. He ducked into the corner away from the customers and answered quietly.

‘Son, where are you? You should have been here ten minutes ago.’ Inquired Phillips.

‘I’m being followed by a van.’ whispered Dom, ‘I believe Michael is behind it.’

‘-Where are you son?’

‘I’m on...eh...Samington Road, in the clothes shop opposite the post box.’

‘Okay, hold up there I’ll send someone to pick you up and-’ Dom glanced out the window, and saw the van at the traffic lights, he tensed, but the van drove past. Dom let out a sigh of relief. ‘-should be there in about five minutes do you-’ Dom heard tires screeching, he looked

back out the window and saw the van reverse and stop by the post box.

‘Oh no...they’ve bugged my phone, they must have. I’ve got to go.’

‘Wait son!-’ Dom smashed the phone against his knee cracking it. He looked around for a bin and saw a customer looking at him strangely.

He ditched the phone in the pocket of a jacket and headed to the emergency exit. He slammed on the handle and pushed the door outward. He heard an engine start and ran for his life, glancing back to witness an alarm start.

His eyes darted around looking for an escape. He saw that he was in the alley where he patched himself up and ran back to the street where the car exploded. He knew the police and fire-brigade would be there and he hoped that whoever was following him would retreat when they saw authority.

He burst onto the road and glanced right and left, he froze when he saw John, a member of the gang. He panicked and moved back towards the shop. He spun around and stopped in his track when he saw the barrel of a gun pointed at his head.

‘Hey man.’ said Sam. Dom stepped back.

‘What? How?’

‘Don’t worry man. It’ll all be okay we just need to...have a chat.’ As Sam said this Dom felt something smash against his temple, and he crumpled to the ground.

‘Put him in the van!’

Phillips put down his phone. He turned back towards the gathering, looking around to find Mary. He spotted in the corner and walked over to her.

‘Mary, I’m so sorry but, something has come up, me and a few officers are going to have to leave.’

‘Oh...okay, bye.’

‘Thanks Simon.’ Phillips left Mary and rounded up his best men, informing them of the situation.

‘Gentlemen we have to act quickly, Officer Jefferson could be in a life-threatening situation, he believed he was being followed by a van, so we’ll start by searching all traffic cameras on Samington Road. If you see anyone following Jefferson, anyone looking suspicious or any vans on the road report immediately to me’

‘Yes Sir!’

‘We’ve already lost one good man to this, this bastard Michael, let’s not let it happen again.’ The group dispersed. Phillips sighed, ‘God I hope he’s all right.’ He sat down in his office, and waited.

One hour and forty-two minutes later

‘Sir?’ An Officer knocking on Phillips’ door disturbed him.

‘Hm-yes what is it?’

‘Sir, I think we’ve got something.’

‘Show me.’ The officer led Phillips to the squad room and pulled up a video on the big screen.

‘We found this van sitting on the route Jefferson was supposed to take to the wake from the graveyard about ten minutes before the funeral. Then later when Jefferson has left the graveyard the van goes around the block once then parks in the same spot again. This is when Jefferson arrives, there was some sort of a struggle and-’

‘My God!’ exclaimed Phillips as he watched the crash happen. ‘How long ago was this?’

‘About two hours, now after the crash he goes into an alley, comes out again and then goes into a clothes shop. That’s where we’ve lost him. We ran the plates of the van and they belong to a cleaning company.’

‘Okay, go run down that lead, everyone else keep searching for more.’

12

‘Wake up Dom!’ shouted Sam.

‘What? Where am I?’ asked Dom groggily, he tried to stand up but saw that he was tied to a chair.

‘It doesn’t matter’ Dom looked around he saw two different exits in front of him on either side of the room.

‘What do you want with me?’

‘Well, you should know, you’ve been on my side of this conversation a few times.’ retorted Sam.

‘Oh, well then what do you want to know?’

‘It’s very simple man, tell us where Michael is being held or...well you know, and don’t think I’ll hold back, you betrayed our friendship.’

‘Ha, ha-ha. Oh that’s good, that’s very good.’

‘What’s so funny, you think I won’t hurt you?!’

‘No, Michael’s played us both, he escaped the other day. I guess he was worried we had more moles’

‘LIES!’ shouted Sam as he punched Dom.

‘Why would I lie, I’m dead anyway, there’s no way I’m getting away from here.’

‘You are a liar man, I know it. You might want to think on your information, I’m going to get my tools. Sam left the room, as soon as he had left Dom panicked. He knew Sam would never believe him.

His eyes darted around as he searched the room, he was desperate for an escape. He saw a glass of water on the table. He shuffled over to it and rocked onto the table repeatedly to knock the glass off. The glass fell and shattered. He retreated back to where he was left as fast as he could.

Sam and two guards stormed in and looked around.

‘What was that?’

‘I don’t know.’ Sam grunted and went to leave. ‘Watch him.’ Dom looked at the guards as they walked over, one went to the window and the other went beside him.

‘Hey, what’s your name? Stan? Henry? William? Leroy?’

‘Shut-up.’ grunted the guard.

‘No, I must know it, Abraham?’

‘I said shut-up!’ said the guard as he pushed Dom to the ground. Dom scrambled around and picked up a shard

of glass, he discreetly used it to cut his bonds and waited for the two guards to be facing away from him.

He quickly climbed up, placed his hand over the closest guard's mouth and nose, then slit his throat with the glass and lowered him down to the floor, he crept to the guard and slit his throat ruthlessly.

He searched the two bodies, finding a phone and keys, he took them both and the guns the guards had. He then went to the door where Sam had left through and waited behind a column beside it.

'Now, Dom are you ready to talk, or are you going to have to lose a few teeth?' asked Sam as he stormed through the door. He stopped in his tracks when he saw the guards dead. Hearing Dom load the gun he spun around dropping the keys. 'Whoa now, don't do something you'll regret man.'

'Something, I'd regret! You were about to torture me.' exclaimed Dom.

'I wouldn't have man, we're friends.'

'Don't try to play me now Sam, just tell me where the exit is.'

'I, well,-'

'Don't mess with me Sam, I'm not in a good mood today.'

'Man you know I can't-'

BANG Dom shot Sam in the knee.

'TELL ME!' roared Dom.

‘Okay, okay, it’s-Agh-just follow that corridor.’ said Sam as he meekly pointed to the door he had entered from.

‘Thanks.’ said Dom as he handcuffed Sam to a pipe on the wall.

‘Come on man, there’s no need for that!’

‘You want me to kill you instead?’ asked Dom. Sam stayed silent. ‘Didn’t think so.’ Dom stepped back through the door, keeping his gun trained on Sam. As soon as he was passed the door, he turned around and pulled out the phone. And dialled Officer Phillips’ number.

‘Hello?’ asked Phillips. ‘Who is this?’

‘Sir, it’s me.’ replied Dom.

‘Jefferson, son where are you?’

‘I’ve no idea, but the gang, they don’t know Michael’s free.’ Dom saw the door that led to the road outside.

‘How do you know this?’

‘Sam asked me where is he.’ Dom exited the building and looked around for a road sign or landmark

‘Ok, we’ll speak about this in the debriefing-’

‘Sir, I’m on Fizes Street.’ said Dom as he read a street sign he saw at a crossroads.

‘Okay I’m sending four cars to your location, let’s get you home. You’ve had one hell of a week.’

DLSP Club vs. DLSP College

Paul Fitzachary

It was the 20th of March at 7:30 p.m. The three DLSP College teams were on the third-tier pitch all training as one. There were three teams to be faced by both sides and some of the players from the club chose to play with the college.

The first year team were playing against the U13s on the bottom pitch; the team I had played with the previous two years and we were undefeated at that age group. The two other age groups that were playing were the U15-16s against the DLSP College JCT (Junior Cup Team).

I was on the U14s at the time but the players from the two age groups ahead of me weren't as skilled. They weren't as good as throwers, as good at hooking the ball in the scrum, or as good at being pack leader. I knew how to get people going and wake them up so I was next in line to play two years ahead of my age group. I had fit in quite well because I was playing with my brother, Eddie, and I had my dad coaching my team as well as the other coaches.

The next age group was the U18-19s and they were facing the DLSP College SCT (Senior Cup Team) which my brother Brian was playing for.

I was playing Hooker, or No.2, and was practicing my throwing. It was my first time throwing at that age group

where lifting had started. I was getting it right most of the time and was doing fine. Then the team made a suggestion of lifting me since I was the lightest player on the two age groups. At first I wasn't sure what to do but I got the hang of it pretty quick. Though it was quite scary getting tossed in the air and being supported at that height, I soon was catching every ball that got thrown to me.

My brother Eddie was the scrum half and so I knew who I was throwing the ball to after I caught it. He showed me how to catch the ball and to pass it to him. The team I was with was as good as it could be, seeing as we had twenty-two players with us. We knew it wasn't going to be as much of a walk in the park as it had been the last couple of years but no DLSP club team had lost in the last five years and we were not going to be the ones to break that tradition, even though we only started getting trophy's for each year the year that I had my first match against the first years; we won 45-10.

My brother and I were both on the starting fifteen. Him at No.9, me at No.2. The team that we were going to face had some familiar faces but when the whistle blew we had forgot we even knew each other. Our team had three players from my age group and I was the only one starting. The two other age groups ran the rest of the squad. They had no Leinster academy players on their team and we had four, but later two of them got dropped in the final picking round for reasons they wouldn't tell us.

Two of my team mates were playing for the JCT's and we had had a laugh before the match talking about previous games we had played against each other last year and the year previous. One of my friends was saying, 'This year the college is going to win,' but seeing as they had only two new players from fourth year, the year ahead of me, we still had the momentum from the other years to keep us going throughout the game.

It was ten minutes before the game was going to start. We were all in the dressing room having a pre-match team talk on how we are going to beat The College for the third year in a row when the coaches came in. Only the Forwards, Backs and Fitness Coaches came in. Our Head Coach was missing and everyone was finding it really weird. The coaches were wiping their tears off and crying and we were all saying, 'What's wrong? Where's Jynxy? Is there something wrong?' The coaches nodded their heads and the Backs Coach said, 'Your Head Coach, Jynxy, well, his mom has had a heart attack and Jynxy has rushed to the hospital to see her. He didn't want to leave, even though he was crying. We had to put him in a taxi and make sure he got there just to be sure he got to talk to his mom just in case.'

The team dropped their heads. Kevin and I were the only ones who realised that it just made our team's momentum drop and someone had to fill in for him to get the team going. I took the opportunity and went for it. 'Lads, don't drop your heads! Keep them up! This only

helps us when it comes to the game. Not to be disrespectful, but we can use this to boost the pride and momentum that we have for this club. We can't lose! We have to get the three wins in a row. Let's do this! Not just for the club but for Jynxy and his mom. Hopefully she gets better.'

The team stood up and agreed with me. All of us getting pumped up about it started to cheer, shouting - 'SALMO!!' Our team call.

And then we all put our hands in a circle and on three we called, 'Salmo! Again - 1,2,3 - SALMO!!' All at once and we started jogging out of the changing rooms, all ready to beat The College.

As I was leaving the changing rooms the coaches all voted, stopped me, and gave me the captain's armband. 'Never in my life have I seen a team get pumped up from a player, let alone a player from two years below. So take this and wear it with pride. Lead our team to victory. Do it for Jynxy and his family, lord help them.'

I nodded and put the captain's armband on me and I ran out onto the pitch. I set the teams up for a moments silence for Jynxy and his mom.

After the referee checked our boots we began to prepare for the whistle to blow. The College were kicking-off to us. I was appointed as pack leader even though I was the youngest player on the pitch. I started giving us each spots to start the match and when everyone was

ready the ref blew the whistle and The College kicked the ball off.

Steven, our second row, caught the ball and ran at the first player, their scrum half, who at the time was the same height as me but two years older. He broke the tackle but was stopped in the next tackle and I ran towards the ruck screaming, 'Only three in. It's our ball. Rest of pack form pods!'

The pack split up into two pods of three and one pod of two ready to drive the ball up the second time. I caught the ball for the first pod and ran at the gap in front of me. I made it through the gap but was stopped shortly after, but before I was taken out Eddie ran through onto the ball and I popped it up to him. He sprinted for the line with two others supporting him either side. As he ran at the full back he did a dummy pass and even though the full back fell for it he was going to make the tackle on him. So Eddie passed it to the other side and we scored under the posts within the first five minutes.

For the next fifteen minutes they were holding onto the ball by the skin of their teeth until our prop, Osama, ran at the ruck, threw two people out of the way and their forwards ran into the ruck and turned the ball over. My brother went into the ruck to turn it over so I had to intervene and play as scrum half. I gave the ball into the flyhalf's hands so he could kick it out of our twenty-two and send our players up to chase them down. But the fullback got his hands on the ball. He kicked it for the

touch but fortunately he kicked the ground first and duffed it. The ball fell straight onto our winger and he ran for the line at the last play of the half. He had no chance of being caught and scored it under the posts. The half ended 14-0 to us.

The second half had started and they got one back fifteen minutes into the half with their number eight breaking through the centre but being driven towards the corner so that his kick missed because of the position of the try. We had two minutes left for the final play of the game and it was their scrum on our line. I got the ball off them and kicked it to the touch. We won 14-5.

From Fright to Fight

Thomas Finlay

I can remember it was very early in the morning when I was awoken by masked men who were pointing a gun at me. My family was tied up in the bedroom beside me and I could hear their screams as I sat up. I couldn't quite make out where these men were from but they had distinct foreign voices.

I reached under my bed to grab my handgun only to realise that it had been taken by the masked man to my right. I tried to ask what they wanted but I couldn't understand their reply. I heard a gun being triggered from outside the house and the noise of glass smashing rung throughout the estate.

The masked men then dragged me into the next bedroom, within which were my family. Their legs and arms were tied back to chairs and my three year-old daughter was crying beside my wife, who had slashes over her face.

I ran over to them but was stopped in my tracks and hit with a baseball bat. That was the last time I ever saw my family...

One day later

Next day I awoke in the middle of a field, badly bruised and with no idea where I was.

I lay there in the tall grass for a while asking myself what was going on, why it was happening to me? If this had happened to anyone else? All these questions and more were flooding through my mind.

I tried to stand up and stumbled many a times. I saw another man in the distance, running towards me. He had something in his hand and I couldn't figure out what it was until he got closer. He had what I thought to be a lead pipe in his right hand and in his left hand a small bit of rope which was covered in blood.

He charged towards me with a horrible look on his face. I tried to run away but he caught up to me and tripped me up. He started hitting me with the lead pipe until I countered him and held him by the neck. He dropped the lead pipe as I pushed him up against a tree. I then threw him to the ground and picked up the lead pipe and was ready to use it.

He was lying on the ground looking as if he was about to take his last breath. I dropped the lead pipe and attempted to talk to this man. I asked him what was going and he replied, 'Survival of the Fittest.'

I didn't understand what he meant and as I tried to ask him another question he got up, pushed me to the ground and ran away. I tried to chase after him but I stood up only to realise that he had disappeared into the tree line. What could this mean? I told myself. Survival of the fittest? A game?...

After days of searching for food and water my body became so weak I could barely move. I fell to the ground and the only thing on my mind was my family.

I woke up the next day, barely able to lift an eyelid to find the sun beaming down on me and the noise of birds chirping above me.

I managed to get myself up and was able to stand up straight. I turned around to notice a wild pig drinking some water from a little pool of water which must have been from some rain yesterday. So thirsty was I that my first instinct was to frighten the pig away to drink from the water. Yet I thought to myself, ‘What if I killed the pig, ate its meat and drank from the pool?’

I thought to myself, ‘How could this be possible?’ I searched all around me within a ten foot radius and found a stick, a yucca plant and a stone. I grabbed the stick, yanked the leaves of the yucca plant and picked up the rock. I then wrapped the yucca leaves as a lashing around the rock at the top of the stick to create a spear like weapon. I readied the weapon in my hands and aimed at the pig. I had no idea what I was doing yet I couldn’t take the risk of possibly losing the succulent pig. I fired the weapon and it lunged toward the pig. It was a direct hit yet did not pierce the skin and the pig managed to escape.

‘How could that have even worked?’ I thought. ‘How stupid could I be?’ I tried to chase after the pig yet it soon disappeared into the bushes. Upset and angered, I walked

back towards the little pool of water the pig was drinking from and drank from it by in handfuls.

Three days later

I was on the brink of giving up and just lying there, waiting to die, when I had a vision. I saw myself thriving in this environment. I had a shelter, a handmade water well and a rabbit being cooked on a spit over the fire. I began to realise that maybe I could make it here. Maybe I didn't have to lie back and give up.

I got up onto my feet and looked around. Nothing but trees, trees and more trees surrounded me. I began work on a shelter in which I could thrive under. It came to be a lot harder than I thought. With my bare hands I did all I could to create a shelter yet the leaves kept blowing away, even when I tied them down and the sticks weren't properly placed so the whole thing kept on collapsing. I kept trying and trying yet each time failing.

Until one last attempt. I had positioned the sticks and the leaves just right and voila! It was the happiest moment that I had had in the past week. I began to make a living for myself on this small island. I had made my own form of animal traps in which I would set across the island and I had working water well.

Life was going pretty swell all up until a group of about ten men showed up with spears and weapons of all sorts, trying to take my land. I wouldn't go down without a fight.

I lunged myself at them with my weapon and the battle had begun!

My Cycle to School

Dónal Martin

My school mornings consist of three main stages.

Stage 1: Get dressed

This stage takes about fifteen minutes and five seconds. Most of the time it's me wrestling with my tie.

Stage 2: Eat breakfast

In my opinion this is the best stage especially if my Mum gets Coco Pops (This happens rarely. Never actually. Why did I say that?)

Stage 3: My cycle to school

Let me tell you about this stage. If things go according to plan I should be on the road at 8.05am. I put my helmet on and ride off struggling under the weight of my school bag filled with books and my kit bag that doesn't smell the nicest.

If I am lucky it won't snow but its Ireland so of course it will. It's funny the way you see the same people every morning. For example, I see this girl waiting for her friend. It's a good way of telling if you're late or early. However, come to think of it, what happens if she is late? I guess that means I would be late as well and neither of us would know!

Every morning I cycle down Johnstown Hill and every morning I have to avert my gaze because there is a dead fox on the side of the road.

It's disgusting. It smells really bad (I suppose like a dead fox) and I am pretty sure it has no head.

Arriving at school I join the hordes of boys chaining their bicycles to the bicycle rack.

I then walk through the school doors knowing that I will be doing this again tomorrow, the day after that and every morning of school term for the next five years.

Uprising

Dáire O'Neill

A cool Autumn's eve,
We peasants are not asleep.
We are trying to heave,
The smith's weapons to the keep.

We arrive at the gate,
Fuelled by hate
We must act now,
Before it is too late.

In the dead of night,
We climb to the ramparts.
The guards take heart-
And so join the fight.

Pillage the castle,
Raid the vaults.
Get that rascal,
Lord Conhault!

After the fight-
By candle light,
The jester recited-
In a cheerful tone,
How the lord was spited-
By words alone.

‘Sorry Sire,
Your time is spent.
Can’t send for your squire,
He’s down in Kent.
But, don’t worry for your fate,
The stocks you await.
There is no time to waste!’

Now, Our flags be raised,
Your castle be razed,
The uprising has begun.

Crash Landed

Taylor Cook

They told me never to speak of it. They are keeping secrets from us all. They feel that they should be only ones who know about it. They are planning something. Why else would they hide the first alien to ever visit earth? I can't remain silent; I must tell you what happened. But I can't break my promise. So I'll write it for you instead.

I was out walking around the countryside. I came out here regularly. It was a lot quieter than the city and it was a much more enjoyable place. I wouldn't get up to much more than walking and thinking. Sometimes I'd bring my IPod, other times I'd bring my bike, but mainly I would just walk. Nothing exciting ever happened out here, and that's one of the reasons I like it. I got enough excitement back home, so it was nice to be in a much more laidback environment. But something about that day felt strange. I couldn't keep a constant stream of thought. I kept getting distracted by the feeling something was about to happen. There wasn't anything strange around me that would lead me to believe something was going to happen but something in the back of my mind was telling me otherwise.

I tried to stop myself from getting distracted but it became harder and harder. I was beginning to get anxious as I felt like something was coming to get me. My heart

started to race and my eyes darted around, looking out for any unwanted surprises. I started running, I was getting even more panicked, and that's when I realised I was alone. There was nothing around me and I was running from my own thoughts. I took a few moments to calm myself. I told myself to cop on and that I was acting stupid. I didn't feel much like walking anymore, so I decided to head back to my car which was parked about five miles away by the lake. I drew nearer to the spot where I had begun running. I could smell burning, and the air was thick with black smoke. I thought it was a local farmer burning rubbish but the flames were far too big. As I came around the corner I saw the blaze. The flames were at least 60 feet high. They were coming from the middle of a field. I didn't know what was going on. The field was normally empty. There was nothing that could burn so intensely.

I ran towards the blaze but was sent staggering back by the severe heat. My skin was bright red now and I was sweating profusely. I didn't know what to do. I was still trying to find what was at the centre of the fire and began to get even more worried, in case it somebody was in trouble. The fire was roaring, the heat was immense and I couldn't see anything but glaring light. I looked around to see if there were any houses down the road or up the hills. There was nothing in sight and there was nobody i could go to to get help. Suddenly out of corner of my eye I saw someone stumble out of the fire. I stood still. I was

shocked to think that someone was in such bad condition and even more shocked to think that they were alive. I ran over to help and, as I drew nearer, I began to notice something weird. Whatever was lying on the ground wasn't human. It had an abnormally large head, a small body and large, black, oval shaped eyes. It was like something out of an alien film I thought to myself. That's when I realised; it was an alien.

I stood motionless. I didn't know what to think. I concentrated my mind as best I could on helping the alien. I picked him up and brought him to the tree line, where I propped him up against a tree. His head flopped onto his right shoulder. He then slowly began to slide sideways towards the ground. I propped him up again and kept my hand on his shoulder this time. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know whether or not to do CPR. I took out my water and poured some of it on his head to cool him off and then I poured the rest into his mouth. His huge black eyes were open, but he wasn't blinking. I noticed his skin was a lot less burned than when I had originally picked him up. It was almost as if he was in recovery mode and was healing himself. I watched the burns on his arms slowly heal up. I was even more shocked. His arms began to twitch as he regained consciousness. I took my arms off him and stepped back. He sat up and looked around. He appeared disoriented. He looked at me and jumped. He began to inspect me. I stood up and he backed away. He was only about as high as my chest. He seemed harmless.

We looked at each other for a solid five minutes. Not sure about what to do, I thought it was stupid at first but I tried to talk to him in English. I asked him if he could understand me. He looked confused and just as I expected he didn't seem to understand. But he managed to say Thank you. I was in shock. Not only had I found an alien but I was conversing with him. I was so astonished by what I was seeing and hearing that I began to wonder if I was dreaming, but it couldn't be, this was as real as could be.

I asked him, 'Where are you from?'

'A planet far away from here,' he replied.

'How do you understand what I am saying,' I said.

'I've been studying your planet for months now. I've picked up on your languages,' he replied.

I was amazed, I still couldn't wrap my head around the whole situation and I had so many questions to ask him. But they would have to wait for now.

We both looked over at the raging flames in the middle of the field.

'Is that your ship on fire?' I asked.

'Yes, I crashed it during a storm. It was my only way home and the only way I could communicate with my planet,' he said.

His facial expressions told me that he knew he was stuck here. I was confused about what to do next. I had only just met this alien and already he needed my help. I decided the best thing to do was head home and think of

a game plan. I walked to my car which I forgot I had parked so far away. It took us an hour and a half to get there. As I looked back towards where I had found the fire, I could still see a tower of black smoke and the occasional lick of flames poking out the side.

We drove back to the city. The alien, whom I've named Bob, his eyes lit up as he saw the lights and tall buildings of the city. It was down turning to night, I had been gone all day and I hadn't even noticed it. It was fortunate that it was dark as it lessened the chances of bob being spotted. I hadn't done anything wrong in bringing him here but in this day and age people with cause chaos over their favourite show being cut from TV. So who knows what they would do if an alien was to be seen running around town. We pulled up to my house and I got out first. I told bob to stay in the car whilst I checked if nobody was around. He didn't understand why I needed to do so until I told him that if he was spotted he would probably be taken away by the government to be tested on. The road outside my house was completely dead and there was nobody on the path so I told bob to hurry inside. When we got to the door I reached into my pocket to get my keys. I heart began to race when I didn't feel them in my pocket. I searched all my pockets but couldn't find them. Then suddenly I began to hear footsteps drawing nearer. I began to panic and when I looked around to tell bob to hide he was gone, I turned to face the sound of footsteps again.

My neighbour Joe's head popped around the corners with my keys jingling in his hand.

'You drop these outside my door. So how are you?' he asked.

I managed to stutter a reply. 'I'm... I'm good, thanks, how about you?'

My heart was beating so fast I felt like I was going to have a heart attack. My eyes were darting around in all directions to try and see where bob was hiding. Joe started to wave in my face to catch my attention. He had noticed that I was focusing on other things.

'Hey are you alright,' he asked.

'Yes,' I said.

'Well okay then, see you,' he said.

Not waiting for reply he went down to his bottom floor apartment. I turned around to face my door and jumped as bob was standing right behind me where he had been before.

'How did you do that?' I asked.

'I can change colour to match my surroundings. It's a natural defence,' he said.

I was relieved and also puzzled as to why he didn't do that in the first place and save me having to sneak him about town, but I had other things to worry about.

I walked into my flat and set down my keys on the counter. They jingled as I put them down and then dropped onto the floor. The noise scared my cat and he ran out from his bed and across the sitting room floor. Bob

didn't know what to do and he began to run around my house screaming in terror. I ran after him and found him hiding in the closet of my bedroom.

I got him out, calmed him down and got him something to drink. We sat down on the couch and began to think of a plan. I didn't know where to start. I had never had to help an alien get across the galaxy before and I didn't think I would ever be able to. I began to ask him about himself, where he was from, how he crashed and how we could get him home.

'Where exactly are you from?' I said.

'A planet called Pangora, better known to humans as Kepler-186f,' he replied. 'It's top of the list of planets that could support life that was discovered by humans. It's many millions of miles away and it would take hundreds of years for humans to reach it even with their fastest ship. I, on the other hand, have the ability to travel three times faster than the speed of light. It sounds impossible but we've done it.'

I was amazed at his story. It was incredible to know that humans had discovered planets with life on them and also that there could be billions of other planets just like our own. I needed to help him fix his ship, or at least get him a new one, and I had the perfect plan.

We drove out into the Nevada desert which wasn't too far from my town. We were going to break into the high security military base named Area 51. This place was infamous for its secret space projects, high security and

UFO stories. It was used to test military weapons, but the majority of people knew this was a lie. It was our best chance of finding a ship capable of such fast interstellar flight.

We drove cross country most of the way to the edge of the base and got out. The base borders were about a five miles longer in each direction than the base itself. This was to keep people from getting close enough to see what was going on. A sign to my right read

‘Border of Area 51, Authorised Personnel only beyond this point. Trespassers will be shot on sight.’

The sign was accompanied by numerous bullet holes that were rusted around the edges. I couldn’t get into the base but Bob could. He was going to use his camouflage to sneak past the guard towers and cut a hole in the wire fence. I knew it wouldn’t be that easy to cut so I brought super heavy duty bolt cutter with me. I would go as far as the fence and then he would be on his own. He would then sneak across the runways and into the hanger farthest to the right. We chose this one as it said – ‘NO ENTRY: Any requests to enter will be denied.’

This seemed like the most likely place for a spaceship to be hidden.

We waited till dark before we moved. As the light dimmed we began to move towards the fence. The tower lights were scanning the area vigorously. We tried our best not to be seen and had a few very close calls. When we got to the fence and it was even thicker wire than we

anticipated and there were three other fences behind it that we had to get through. I clamped down hard with the bolt cutter and eventually the wire fence snapped letting out a sharp crack followed by the rest of the fence rustling from the motion. We got through the hole and made another cut in the second fence. We got to the third fence and just as I was about to snip the wire, a tower light shone across us. It went speeding past us and the guard mustn't have been paying close attention. We jump to the floor and lay in the dirt. Our faces pressed firmly into the sandy gravel. Our hearts were racing, we had come too far to get caught now. The light came back over our position. It stayed for a while and then moved on. For a high security base it wasn't proving very hard to break into.

 We got through the final fence and bob went on ahead. He could casually stroll across the runway so long as he kept low to the ground. If he stood up at all he would be spotted. He could only change his colour to match one background. In this case we chose the dirt as that's all the towers could see from up in the sky. If anyone on the ground were to look over at him they would see his shape. He made it across the runway without being spotted. But just as he got to the hangar door an alarm went off. The entire base came to life. Sirens blaring. Lights flashing, and thousands of soldiers came onto the runway.

 Bob ran for it. He ran inside the hangar and disappeared out of my line of sight. All the commotion

was overwhelming. A voice rang out over the intercom: 'Training drill completed.'

I let out a huge sigh of relief as I thought we'd been caught

I heard a noise come from the hangar, and so did the entire base. The hangar roof opened and a large circular ship came out of it. It lit up the sky like a tree on Christmas. It began to rumble louder and louder. Suddenly it shot off at the speed of light into the sky. Large bangs came from the base as its defences tried to take it down but there was no chance they could catch him now.

I looked up into the sky feeling proud of what I accomplished. I knew bob didn't have time to say goodbye, but I was just happy to help him get home. I sat there by the fence as the sirens blared up again and knew that I was now screwed. It didn't bother me. The men in black came and took me away. They told me not to speak of what I saw. So I wrote it down instead for you to read.

Never Ending War

Ryan Noronha Brennan

The year is 2015, I have been fighting for three years now. When this battle is done I will be able to go to my family. My name is Sgt. Frank Johnson. I have a platoon of soldiers. All are experienced fighters. We do training every day and we walk pretty far every day to battle.

We have taken out about 1035 enemies this month. We are the best squad there is and we never leave a man behind.

For me, I'm the sniper. My weapon of choice is the L115 or the L96. I have it in black and I have a 40x scope on it with a suppressor for stealth kills. I have a bipod for it to keep it steady. In the gun I added my own special touches such as a straight pull bolt action lever, and a distance in meters aim assist.

My squad consists of me the sniper, Pvt. Hank Dempsey as the support (he keeps our weapons fully loaded with ammo), Cpl. Carl Rodriguez is assault and in other words the medic. Then there is Gunnery Sergeant Daniel Nathans. He is the engineer and he keeps any enemy vehicle we encounter dead and any of ours he keeps up to speed.

We were on patrol when some enemy patrols appeared we instantly got into position. I, who was far away, got my sniper ready. There was way too many of them that

we couldn't take them all out. That is when I saw what was my biggest fear. They had a Lechnov-25L - or a floating tank. The new technology they were studying worked!

I told them to retreat but it was no good and the infantry began firing at my squad. I began firing at the enemy as well. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 went down but it didn't help. They kept coming.

This battle was over, we are done. My squad was dead all was lost. The only thing to do was to report to the command and ask for support. Command said they would send a package.

After a couple minutes a Warthog-21 flew right overhead and dropped a massive payload right onto the tank. I couldn't hear a thing because of the Heavy Jet Fighter that flew by. But to my shock I saw the area around the tank was covered in ashes and smoke and fire. It must have been a JOAM bomb.

Some soldiers still survived and that's when an F35 harrier jet hovered down the street and began firing its 50 Caliber heavy machinegun at the soldiers. They were gone in an instant.

The pilot then hovered above the building and accelerated to fly off. The battle is over I am the only survivor from my squad...

So I logged out of the world and chatted to my friends to say that enemy tank was unexpected. Then we agreed on training in two days.

Back on the Xbox, into the world of Battlefield...

What If

Klent Nervez

What if I saw you first
that fateful day?
If I could have acted,
and knew what to say
would you be mine today?
If I didn't cower from
your gaze that time,
could I have made you stay?
I was too weak and timid to
act with haste,
distracted by another
I regret it everyday,
as well I suspect I lead you
to another, a good friend turned
distrustful foe,
but now after many moons apart,
its easier to forget your face
until the time where the sun is nearly at its peak,
we'll meet at that same place,
to know if you hate or like me,
forgive me or curse me,
heal or kill me,
that day when we face each other again,

to close the chapter of this story,
to bury the casket,
I'm the undertaker.

To stop thinking,
What if...What if?

The Akaviri Warrior

Caolan Moore

1

The door slowly opened. The sound of the rock scraping against rock pierced the frigid air. A blast of stale wind hit me in the face, the smell of desecrated corpses made me gag. The entrance room was strange, the style of the carvings was different to most Nordic tombs. Rather than large and brutish carvings of snakes and sabre cats there were elegant carvings of both beauty and war. The differences unsettled me but the bodies were the same and just as rich as any other tomb.

One of the cadavers fell to the floor across the room. I crouched down, unslung my bow and notched an ebony arrow. The body had gotten to its feet by now. I took aim and loosed it. The arrow struck the zombie in the eye. The light in his eyes dimmed and he fell dead for a second time. I continued looting the tomb, culling the dead whenever they awoke. Finally I got to the main chamber where the most prestigious warriors were buried and the toughest fights to be had. The room was an enormous lake with only an island in the middle. Fortunately I had a couple spare potions of water walking and I used those to get across. As my feet touched rock I saw the owner of the entire chamber, the shrivelled body of whatever ancient warrior king had commissioned this tomb. The body

looked vaguely elven but it was hard to tell through the desiccated skin and layers of dust. Fortunately he was a rich elf and his armour was very high quality, all black ebony and silver detail. As I sized up the armour I realized I would barely be able to carry one piece back to my fence. I decided it would take several trips to clear the tomb. One of the horns of the elf's helmet seemed broken, like it had been cut off. I grabbed the horns on the helmet and winced. A thin red line was forming on my hand. The horns were still razor sharp. I gingerly lifted it off the ruined head only to have half the peak snap off. I cursed myself for being so clumsy, that would take a lot of the profit from the take. Regardless I placed it in my knapsack, putting the stray horn still sharp as glass in my side sheathe. The elf's body seemed to grumble as I did this so I shoved my knife into his brain. I left the dungeon and started to make my way through the snow towards Raven Rock and my fence.

2

The Ash was coming down harder than ever. It was getting into my boots, my cuirass, and even into my mouth making it taste like burnt Horker meat. Mallory was overcharging me for the repairs on my armour but I paid him anyway. I had to if I wanted to avail of his services.

‘So Mallory, I have recently acquired something of value that I thought you might be interested in seeing. It’s

a helmet that I ... found near the Skaal village and I thought you might enjoy it,' I said.

'Show it to me then,' came his gruff voice from the smoke plume that seemed to eternally rise from his forge.

I took the helmet out of my backpack. It was a beautiful thing in the light. It was made of dark black metal, even darker than ebony. It had two eye slits and a thin perforated sheet of that dark metal where the mouth is. The coup de grace, though were the two razor sharp blades protruding from the top. They were curved with the sharp edge pointing out with the tips almost touching at the top. The blades almost looked like they were made from dragon bones. When Mallory saw the helmet he grabbed it from my hands.

'Hey, be careful with that, that's going to buy me a new enchanting set,' I said.

'Hmm, I'm thinking 500 septims,' said Mallory.

'What? Look at the horns, that's dragon bone and the metals some high quality ebony. Definitely worth at least a thousand.' I knew that there were no dragons on Solstheim but Mallory didn't.

'I don't know. I don't like it,' he said.

'Oh come on Mallory you can't chicken out on me over a beautiful and obviously very valuable helmet,' I said.

'Fine I'll take it for 800 septims.'

'I knew we could come to an arrangement.'

As I left the town I got the strangest feeling that something was watching me. I quickly dismissed the

feeling because I knew I didn't have anything to fear from the people or creatures here. I got home without incident and decided to sleep out the ash storm before heading back out. I went down the stairs to the main living area. The dunmer who mainly populated the area preferred to build down into the ash instead of up, probably because the ash got thick enough to cave in most thatched roofs. I decided to drop off my earnings into my safe. I looked in before I closed it and the sight of all the gold and jewels in there gave me such an amazing feeling that it dispelled the last of the premonition like feeling I had on the way here. I took off my armour, placed it on its stand along with my bow, quiver and sword and I got into bed.

3

The sound of screaming and swords clashing woke me up. I thought it was probably just a raid by one of the local Reaver gangs. I dragged myself out of bed and geared up for a fight. As I left my house I could see that the guard had the raiders surrounded. The fight was likely going to be over soon and I found myself wondering why the raiders didn't just retreat. As the seconds dragged on I began to get a bad feeling that the raiders weren't retreating. The only bodies on the ground were the Redoran guard and it looked bad for them. I decided to lend a helping hand so I scampered up the ridge and took up a position that let me see the Main road. The mass of bodies were just outside the temple, there were so many

guards that it was impossible to find a shot. The mob was moving closer to Mallory's place and then suddenly a warrior broke from the fight and ran straight through the blacksmith's door. A warrior wearing my armour. I held my position waiting for him to come out. When he emerged he was wearing the complete set. That must have been what he came here for. I loosed a shaft of ebony that lodged itself in his armpit. A shot like that would down any man but I was beginning to suspect that this wasn't a normal man. He sprinted full speed towards the cliff I was standing on and he began climbing the wall just as fast. I fired a few arrows at him but he wasn't slowing down. I backed up to behind the treeline, hid behind a rock and waited, hoping I could take him out with my axe. He crested the cliff and started looking for me. I could hear strange sounds as if he was sniffing. Then he walked right towards me. I tried to side step him but he changed course. He stopped and a hiss emanated from him.

'Yours will be the first blood I taste since you awakened me.'

'You're a vampire!' I exclaimed.

He began to laugh hysterically.

'I am no more a vampire than a mer like yourself. I am Circusa a tsaesci of Akavir, the immortal snake people. But we do like the blood of mer. I shall feast for a great many days on this island,' he hissed

'Not if I can help it,' I said

I lunged at him hoping against hope that I could kill him before he could make a move. I swung my axe along a wide birth aiming for his side. The strike looked sure to find its mark but the creature's arm moved at an unnaturally fast pace, blocking my attack. He embedded his Long Sword within my axe and flung it to the side. I knew what was coming next. I dived into a backwards roll barely escaping Circusa's counter attack and I quickly took out my bow. I fired a shot which deflected off his armour, fired another at his head to no avail as he took a step forward. A third and he was right in front of me. With one fell swoop he cut my bow clean in two. In a last ditch effort I pulled out my knife extending my blade towards his stomach. He grabbed my hand and twisted it until it broke making me drop my knife to the floor. The agony of it shot through my hand all the way to my head. It blasted all thought from my mind and all that existed was the urge to survive. He grabbed me by the neck.

'A pathetic endeavour,' he stated. 'I hope the others on this wretched island will put up more of a fight. You have nothing left.'

I glanced up to his helmet and remembered the horn I recovered from the Tomb, still at my thigh. This was my last chance; I slid the horn out of my pocket with my one good hand and plunged the long black steel into Circusa's heart.

'Aaaaaaaaahhhh, how could a mortal defeat me!?!?' screamed the snake-man. He looked down seeing his own

armour protruding from his chest. A thousand expressions flew across his face; anger, terror and intense agony.

‘You have failed,’ I said, clutching my arm.

Stumbling backwards, trying to escape he reached the edge of the cliff and I pushed him off it. His body broken, I climbed down the cliff to find what I could take from it. I found an amulet, a few rings and a lovely diamond. I decided to take his armour, it was unique to all of Tamriel and would look good on my mantelpiece.

I left his body to burn by the guards and returned home to stash my loot and get a well-earned rest. I stopped by Mallory’s on the way to see if I had to get a new fence. Fortunately he seemed okay, except for a large dent in his head from the door being crashed open. It may work out well for me. As I made my way home I thought about all that happened.

Just another day in Solstheim...

My Story

Tim Guidera

My name is Tim Guidera. I am eighteen years old. I have short brown hair. I also got blue eyes.

I come to Clonkeen College with David the taxi driver. I take the 59 bus home to Barnhill Road after school.

The name of my girlfriend is Anniekah Walsh and she also is beautiful. She has long blonde hair. She has got blue eyes. She also got perfume on a.k.a lipstick as well as a pair of tweezers. She has nail varnish on her finger nails.

I love to bake. I bake: apple crumble, rhubarb fool, crème caramel, mince pies to name just a few.

There are six people in my family. I have two brothers and one sister. The name of my mom is Madeleine. The name of my Dad is Liam. The name of my brothers is Hugh and Shay. My brother Hugh is twenty years old and my brother Shay is twentyfive also same age as his girlfriend Caoimhe. The name of my sister is Mollie.

I like Sport. I go skiing on Tuesday, basketball on Saturday, swimming on Sunday, and cycling is my favourite. I like fast.

I go to Teen Spirals on wednesdays. I do hockey and Jenga. I see my ex girlfriend Chrissie and my neighbour Phil's son Jack's best friend Will's older brother Jamie Harvey. And I'm good friends with Chrissie.

I did my work experience in Dunnes Stores. I am doing work experience in extra VISION after midterm. I would like to work in my DaDas office making cups of tea and making telephone calls.

