

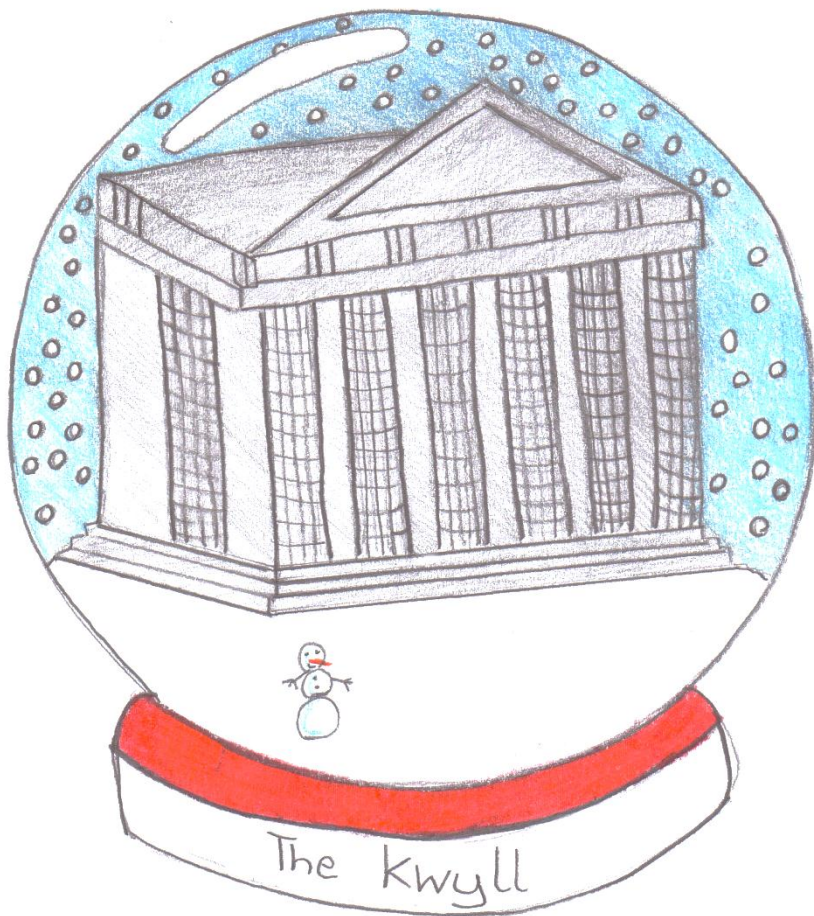


"The Kwyll"



Issue 3

Christmas 2010



Euan
Robb

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Dear reader,

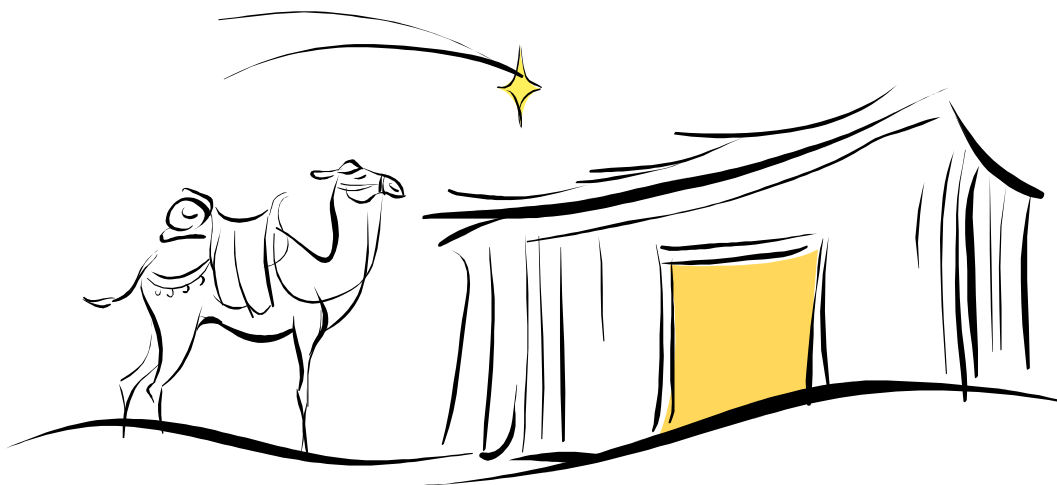
Welcome to the third edition of *The Kwyll*, which hopes to offer you a relaxing read over your hectic Christmas holidays. In these pages lie tales of mystery and imagination, taking you on a journey from Ancient Rome to a bleak futuristic landscape via Fat Sam's – all produced by the oodles of talented writers we have here at The High School.

One of the highlights of this issue is an interview with Nicola Morgan, who is one of Britain's most prolific children's authors. Nicola's works include the excellent novels *Fleshmarket* and *Wasted*, which she discussed with pupils in Forms 1 and 2 during her recent visit to the school. Her interview makes for fun reading and is full of encouraging advice for would-be writers and burgeoning talents. Many thanks must go to Nicola for kindly agreeing to be interviewed.

A **BIG** thank you should also go to everyone who submitted entries for this issue – we wouldn't be publishing this magazine without your hard work and creativity. We are always looking for submissions and will be publishing another issue in the Spring.

Now it's time to read our first story. We recommend that you relax in a comfy chair, with an optional cup of cocoa, and enjoy some lovingly-crafted literature. You've earned it. Oh, and before we forget:

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the English Department!



Autumn

By Billie Duffy F1

1. The crisp leaves fall down like snow.
I stand at my window watching the show.
The autumn leaves lie thick and still
While rain is drizzling down the hill.
I love the smell so sweet and fresh.
The birds now cower in their nest.
Fireworks rise up to the sky like stars -
I think they might just reach red Mars!

3. As the leaves dance through the night
I observe the stars so bright.
The colours red, orange and brown
Begin to fill the dreary town.
I stand and sigh in despair
I wish that summer was still there.
Children playing in the leaves
Their hair is blown by the breeze.

2. As the cold comes creeping in
The auburn leaves do whirl and spin.
As the trees stand tall and bare
I return to my window and begin to stare.
The night is full of a deathly chill
The silver mist draws out the hill.
As the winter comes crashing in
Our daily sunlight is wearing thin.

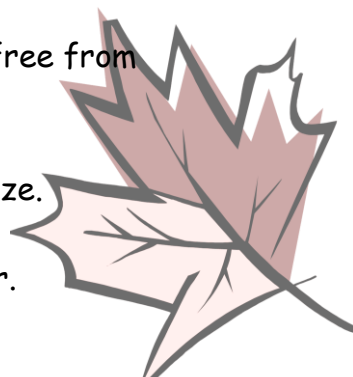
4. As day turns to cold dark night
And the stars are shining bright
Halloween is almost here
The scary day is creeping near.
Vampires, ghosts and witches snare -
These characters might give you a scare!
I haste to say no more orange, brown or red
The Autumn is completely dead!

When The Wind Blows

By Ailsa Purdie F4

Autumn leaves from the garden the same way,
He did in a frenzy of colour and,
Whistling of wind, the crunching of leaves he
was gone from her mind, from her memories.
The wind pulled the leaves from heights to ground.
Swirled them, then dropped them and left them to die,
Beautiful and out of place against the
Dirt and mud of the bed they now rest.

The wind pulled her thoughts and set them free from
The prison of her mind and scattered them,
Across the dark sky. A million vivid leaves
Contrasting with the clouds, wild in the breeze.
They came to rest on the pavement and, like
The leaves, died in the harsh winds of winter.



Dear Pixar by Cairan Mclaggan F5

In 1999, I was five years old. That year, *Toy Story 2* was released; and for a period of time, my attention was less focused on raiding tombs and chasing Lara Croft's butler around with a machine gun; and more on a cowboy doll, his space ranger best friend, and their plucky group of fellow toys. I was obsessed. Posters? Books? Tapes? I had the lot. A Buzz Lightyear toy? Yup. Sure, the wings didn't work, but I was five and didn't know any better. Woody the Cowboy doll? Yessum. Mr Potato Head? Rex? Slinky Dog and Bullseye? Check. I wanted to be Andy. I wanted to believe that my toys came to life any time I left the room.

But like all obsessions, the thrill began to dissipate over time. The toys found a new home in a box in the wardrobe, and I moved onto new things as I got older. The *Toy Story* picture books turned into *Harry Potter* and *Narnia* novels. A row of DVDs and *Playstation 2* games replaced what was once a shelf of Disney classics. Just like in the scene from the first *Toy Story* film -where Buzz Lightyear posters gradually replace the Woody pictures from Andy's childhood - I began to grow up.

Ten years later, a teaser for a third instalment appears online which sends me into fits of wild nostalgia. Cue impatient foot-tapping as the release date slowly draws closer and closer. Trailers and previews arrive, only intensifying the desire to relive my childhood. The film releases in America and receives rave reviews across the board, with critics hyping it as the purest, most perfect, and outright best film in the world. Ever. Cue the five stages of grief as the UK release eternally sits just out of reach.

But then suddenly the film is out. I haven't seen it yet. Why not?! I wait longingly for the day we *finally* have an evening free. We drive to the cinema. The queue for tickets and 3D glasses stretches dauntingly ahead, but the kiosk slowly but surely approaches (emphasis more on the slow, less on the surely). From the summit of the escalator, I dash to the loo before hastily rushing my family into the theatre. Advertisements drag on without any consideration over HOW LONG I HAVE BEEN WAITING TO SEE THIS MOVIE. The short film before the main feature plays and the theatre at long (**very long**) last darkens. My seat becomes a rocky cliff face and I teeter anxiously on the edge without any care for the safety of the four year old in front.

The presentation's film certificate flashes. The screen fades to black.

'This is it, Cairan!' A rushing thought screams in excitement. 'The past eleven years have been leading up to this!' But then another thought passes... 'I'm sixteen...

I'm supposed to be looking for my first job and thinking ahead about what university I want to go to... should I really be *this* excited for a kids' movie?' Answer: Yes. I know I'm supposed to be becoming an adult, but at that moment in time, 'what I want to be when I grow up' is the least of my worries. My pulse races. A lamp bounces across the screen and squishes a capital 'I'; the perfect metaphor for how every *Pixar* film has left me in a formless puddle of adoration, as well as a seal of quality - evidence that this experience will be no exception.

White clouds on a blue sky illuminate the screen, and for a moment I'm glad I visited the little boy's room beforehand. The film's opening sequence, an action-packed adventure film parody, sends me into a euphoric state of awe; my eyes widen like a kitten experiencing catnip for the first time and I literally have to wipe away the drool forming at the corner of my mouth. Andy's imagination shows Sheriff Woody attempting to foil the plans of the Potato Heads, whilst simultaneously trying to save a train of helpless orphan troll dolls, only to be thwarted by Hamm the Pig and a horde of barrel monkeys. I feel giddy like a child and I don't care who knows! The next hour and a half sees me guffawing, tearing up and gripping my armrest with all of my (very little) strength as my childhood idols are brought back to life onscreen for one final adventure.

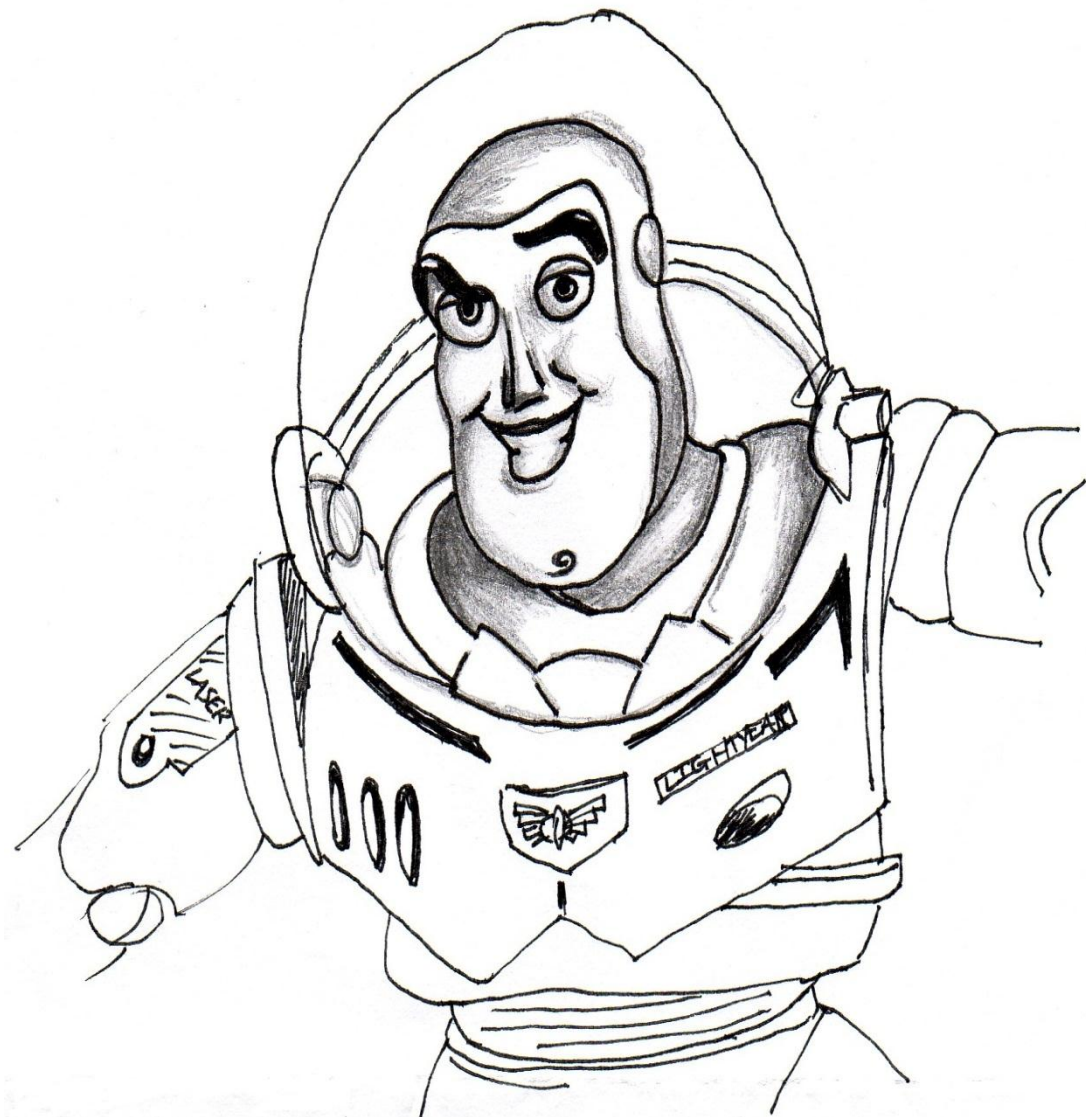
But the thought lingers. I'm not a kid anymore, and whilst the film may have me temporarily transported back to '99, I know in my head, as the film draws to its climax, that this experience has to end sometime. I know that come an hour after the credits roll, I'll be back to my mopey, cave-dwelling self, so I might as well revel in the experience, before the movie ends and it's too late. The film's final scene fully lives up to the hype; and, in retrospect, I can safely say that any other resolution would have felt incomplete and would *totally not* have left me weeping like an infant.

As Andy handed his childhood toys over and played with young Bonnie before leaving for college, I felt a chapter coming to a close. Seeing Andy's decision to give away his toys and take a step into adulthood made me realize that after all those years of wanting to be Andy as a child, I am more like him now than I ever have been. Having just recently reached my sixteenth birthday, I see myself taking the first steps towards adulthood. I'm becoming a self-reliant, independent person; maturing, and always looking forward. I realise that there's no harm in feeling nostalgic, and reliving my early years, as long as I keep a grip on myself as I do now.

I feel that *Toy Story 3* serves as a landmark in my life. While it may just be the end of a trilogy of films fifteen years in the making, it also marks the end of an era, and at long last, though it may be a stretch to say, I feel like my childhood is finally complete. However, as a wise woman once said; 'I'm not a girl, not yet a woman'... Britney, I think

it was. And whilst I don't see myself as a girl, nor in the process of becoming a woman, the message still stands. I feel like I'm maturing and evolving out of childhood, but just because I'm not a kid anymore, doesn't mean I'll turn down a set of Buzz Lightyear bed sheets...

*Dear Pixar,
Thank you for making me feel five again.
Love Cairan, aged 16 years xxx*



An Interview with Nicola Morgan



Who or what first inspired you to become a writer?

I think it was a way I could express myself. I was a shy child and HATED actually performing, but writing was a way of “performing” without having to act or blush or forget my lines. I always loved making people laugh or cry with words. I’m probably a little power-crazy and language is THE power!

How did you feel when you had your first novel published?

Thing is, it happened so slowly that in the end it didn’t feel as special as I’d expected. First a couple of agents were a bit interested and then more interested; then it took a while before I signed the contract with my agent, then a while longer before the agent actually sold the book to a publisher, and then over a year more before it was actually published. So, by the time I saw my book on shelves I’d pretty much got used to the idea. But I LOVED the moment when I first saw and touched the real book. Mind you, I feel that exact same pleasure when I see and touch the first copy of each of my books. I stroke it and carry it around for a few days!

Who are your own favourite authors?

That question is very similar to “What are your favourite foods?” It just depends what I feel like at the time. I have lots of favourite authors. Here are a few: Kate Atkinson, Bernice Rubens, David Almond, Kevin Brooks, Ian Banks, Joanne Harris and Robert

Cormier. They are all very different. Ask me on another day, and I'd probably have some different ideas.

Did you have a favourite book or books when growing up?

Different books at different ages. I was a pony-mad girl, so anything with ponies, even if it was really badly written! 'The Little White Horse' was a huge favourite for ages. Another that I loved and read over and over was 'The Black Tulip' by Alexander Dumas and I loved the Willard Price books. I needed books all the time, and lots of them were "easy" ones, like Enid Blyton, and others were "harder", like Thomas Hardy and Graham Greene. I didn't really mind, as long as I had a good story in my hands. I liked to be ill, so I could read all day in bed!

How does it feel to have your novels studied in schools?

I have slightly mixed feelings! First, I'm really, really proud when teachers choose my books, because it means that they think they're good *and* they think you will like them, too. But I also wince a bit because I know that some of you will end up hating the book. Thing is, I believe we should read for pleasure, and my books are written for you to enjoy more than anything else. But I also believe that studying books in class is really important – especially for those of you who want to be writers, but also for anyone, to get the greatest possible understanding of how stories work. Stories and literature are so important to us as humans – recent research shows that reading novels develops our emotional intelligence, tolerance and wisdom, and I have to be proud if I'm even a tiny part of that.

What is your new novel 'Wasted' about?

Chance, luck, fate, risk, danger, obsession, passion, alcohol, quantum physics, Oedipus, imperfect parents, bereavement, grief, love, hate, mistakes, and why leaving the house ten seconds earlier could change your life.

Can you tell us about what you're working on just now?

It's top secret! Even I don't know! I'm working on several things but I'm waiting to hear from my agent which one I should go with. It's an exciting time in my career just now and I'm writing some adult non-fiction about how to write, so that's a new direction, too. Watch this space!

How would you encourage pupils at the High School to read more books?

It depends on the pupil. There are millions of books out there and I believe there are books which will inspire everyone, if you can only find the ones that suit you. So, this is what I'd say:

1. It doesn't matter whether you think you're a "good" reader; or whether you read slowly or fast – it's not a race.
2. Although reading IS very good for us, don't think about that: just aim to find books you enjoy. When you've enjoyed some, then try something different. Reading is a journey and it will take you to places you've never imagined.
3. The only people who say reading is stupid or boring are people who don't understand, or who haven't managed to find the book for them, or who are afraid of it. Reading is everything you want it to be, because books are everything you want them to be – funny, scary, exciting, weird or simple, deep or light, gory, shocking, relaxing – anything at all.

What top tips would you give to teenagers who want to get into writing?

1. Read hungrily.
2. Practise – it takes years, just like trying to be a professional musician, dancer or footballer. So, do it! You don't have to show it to anyone until you want to.
3. Start small – don't think about writing a novel until you are desperate to. Don't worry about the length of what you're writing. Just make it as long as feels right.
4. Do it because you enjoy it. Writing is for pleasure, even if it's hard, and because it's hard you have to get pleasure from the result. So, enjoy it!



Dousha Kohetok by Susie McAdam F1



In a world of shadows, the last thing you want to hear is a scream.

The light from the streetlamps bounced perfectly off the walls. Anyone could've seen the man. He was missing an eye and his sole eye was tinged a light orange. His mouth was a monstrous sight - no teeth, just gums – and it was all a big mess: blood freshly dripping from the wound in his mouth. His build was pitiful, a scrawny dagger was his weapon and his wounds and scars showed his disabilities. Only one person saw him as he kept his gaze fixed heavily on her. She had felt sick even thinking of him, now he was here. She had to fight her body to stop sinking into unconsciousness. Natalie watched him unmoving, just staring at her body. The man did not know his target was watching *him*.

'Why should I be afraid of a creepy old man?' Natalie thought but she knew that she'd seen a look of familiarity the two times she'd seen him. In the morning she was deeply unconscious, and her granna had called the village doctor and was trying to figure out what was causing this. When Natalie woke up from her unconsciousness it was dusk and she went outside before it was night. She didn't notice it getting slowly darker and darker until her granna called her inside. Her dear granna – Natalie had called her that since her mama died when she was three.

Shuddering, Natalie kept her mind occupied by thinking about little lambs in the field but then she thought about the slaughter of those sweet little boy lambs and she got back to thinking about death. Natalie slept very little that night - her dreams were all about the man who she saw and just when the dreams couldn't get worse...she woke up. The man saw her about to wake up so he ran over silently and plunged the dirty dagger right into her heart just as she woke. She was dead -with that, Mire Dousha Kohetok fled.

Natalie woke to see the man, his eyes full of hate plunge a small knife into her heart. She expected to cry out but there was no pain and no death. She had only seconds before she fell in to the pit of death, so she tried to sit up. To see the knife plunged into her heart - Natalie puked, her hands shaking. She tried to pull the knife out but her hands were too weak. She relaxed and fell into a deep, long sleep, as a light so bright and pretty floated into her brain.

"Soul killer will rule ca-ca-canib-al-is-ism full m-m-oo-n ten, t-t-ten, ten. Liver, lungs, heart-t-t, kid-kid-kidney and br-ain." Someone was there under the moon but they were unidentifiable due to the fact they were covered by shadows. There those words were again. "The chosen one will perish! Watch the holder of the souls die..."

As soon as Natalie woke up, she remembered her vision - she knew he was the soul killer, he *had* to be, and *she* must be holder of souls. A creeping feeling went into her stomach, she had seen the vision: Mire was dead and she realised the only way for time to continue...she pulled the knife out of her heart. The blood was crusty and old and the steel was a grey colour. She sliced open her stomach and set to work.

Making sure it was 10.00pm on 10.10.10, Natalie ate her heart. It was not like chicken or duck or anything she'd ever tasted. She was sick in her mouth and close to fainting, beads of sweat running down her face like she'd switched a tap on. Liver - the blood dripped down her hands and it was such a gruesome sight. Natalie closed her eyes. Lungs - they were still breathing, up and down, it was comforting to have such a soft rhythm and as soon as it was in her mouth, it was still going up and down. Kidney - it seemed to contain a purple-coloured liquid, Natalie didn't want to know what it was. Then the worst - her brain. She could feel the power and life in it as she held it in her hands. "Mire, I sacrifice myself for the world: not for you, but for the world. You brought this on me!" With that, she ate brain in the dark and then her eyes slowly turned to diamonds. She went under the full moon and laughed hysterically, killing whilst laughing. Dousha Kohetok, soul killer, was born.

In a world of death, the last thing you want to hear is a scream.

Fireworks by Anushka Pathak and Ciara Mitchell F1

The fantastical fireworks set the night so bright,
Sparkling scarlet and twisting; they kick out rays of light.
Glowing gold and silver as they prance across the sky;
Shocking cyan, luminous and dancing, mesmerises every eye.

Like a glistening unicorn, the flame gallops and glints,
It glimmers and glides with a magical tint,
It twists in the air and flaps great wings of fire,
Soars into your heart and ignites deep desires.

It pops and explodes with a crackling fizz,
Spreading over the sky with a breathtaking whizz.
It dazzles and spins as it spits out sparks,
With magical powers it captures your heart.



The Discovery by Charles Arthur F2



Gaius was exhausted. The stifling hot weather had sapped his strength throughout the course of the day. His knuckles were red and painful from where the Blacksmith had struck them. It wasn't the first thrashing he had taken from his master and it wouldn't be the last. Gaius was punished for daydreaming more than any other offence. He tried not to but sometimes his concentration slipped...

'Look out!' cried the Blacksmith in alarm. Without noticing it, Gaius had let his grip on the cast iron pot slip. He could only stare in horror as a puddle of molten iron spilled across the workshop floor. He braced himself for the beating that would undoubtedly come next. When he realised that he was not on the ground, taking multiple blows of fists and feet as he should be, Gaius opened his eyes. The Blacksmith's face was scarily calm. 'Get out and don't bother coming back.' The words were spoken softly but somehow had more force and power behind them than the loudest barbarian war cry. Before his master could change his mind, Gaius picked up his cloak and bolted out of the door.

Somehow the streets of Rome seemed more appealing than his own house when he considered the punishment he would get when he arrived at his flat. He decided to go for a walk. To distract himself from what might happen when he got home, he thought of the only thing he ever thought about: being a soldier. Nothing in the whole world seemed more appealing to Gaius than the prospect of being a legionary, fighting for the expansion and safety of Rome and her Empire. It was his thirteenth birthday in a few weeks. After that it would only be three years until he could enlist as a soldier. Gaius hadn't decided what legion he would join yet but it would all depend on where he wanted to go. He could choose any Legion in any place in the Roman Empire, but there was only one obstacle between him and his goal; his mother. Gaius's mother had a will made of iron and seemed to be able to get anyone to do anything purely by constant arguing and nagging. She was never like that when Gaius's father had been alive. The man had been dying of a brain disease and was suffering constant fits. Knowing that his time was nearly at an end, Gaius's father was travelling north to Arretium, to say a final goodbye to his parents. He was ambushed barely a mile away from the gates of the city by bandits. He tried to bargain with them but they killed him.

Gaius's thoughts were interrupted as a group of teenagers, a few years older than Gaius, came out from a back alley. They had undoubtedly been drinking, judging by the way they staggered down the street. He groaned aloud as he noticed who it was. Lucius Tiberius was the son of one of the most wealthy slave sellers in Rome. His cronies all laughed at something he had said. One of them pointed at Gaius as he whispered in Lucius's ear. The arrogant boy's smile grew even wider as he swaggered towards Gaius. 'Well, well, well, if it isn't little Gaius,' Lucius sneered. 'Grab him!' The older boys charged towards Gaius and he was lifted off of his feet, only to be smashed painfully back down on the hard, stone cobbles. He struggled to breathe as Lucius stood astride him. A fist came out of nowhere and smashed into Gaius's face. A warm spurt of blood splattered his tunic as he felt his nose break. 'That will teach you not to show me up in public!' raged Lucius. The boy was still sore from the time Gaius had tripped him up into a pile of horse droppings by accident, but Gaius was sure that it was just an excuse for Lucius to beat him. He saw a foot swinging towards him but he managed to block it before it crashed into his ribs. The attacker was off balance and had his legs wide apart; Gaius instinctively thrust his foot up between Lucius's legs. He roared in pain and fell, writhing in agony, to the ground. Gaius swiftly sprang up and sprinted towards the nearest corner. He could hear angry shouts and curses behind

him but he didn't look back. When the shouts had faded into the distance, Gaius darted into an alleyway. Realising it was a dead end, he backed into the wall at the end of the alley. Gaius's heart shot into his mouth as the wall crumbled under his weight. As he fell backwards, he thought why he hadn't hit the ground yet... Then he felt the crushing impact as he hit the bottom of the hole.

Gaius woke with a start. His head was throbbing and his back ached as if his spine was expanding. It was pitch black and he realised that he had probably fallen into somebody's wine cellar. He stood up and walked in one direction until he found a wall. Gaius followed it around the room, trying to find a door but with no success. Eventually, he stubbed his toe on something. When he picked it up for inspection, he realised that it was an oil lamp. He checked if there was oil inside it and was delighted to find that there was. Another quick search across the floor found Gaius some matches as well. He had never been afraid of the dark, whatever Lucius and his friends liked to say about him, so he wouldn't usually panic at all about being in a dark cellar on his own but this time, there was definitely something not right as he lit the match...

Gaius's jaw dropped as he saw what lay in front of him. There were five altars, all pointing towards him and on each one, a skeleton wearing a Roman Centurion's armour and uniform. He slowly crept towards them as if they could leap up and grab him at any moment, until he realised he was being childish. As he approached the closest altar, he noticed that four of the Centurions were wearing exactly the same thing but one, was the distinct clothing of a General. There was also a standard at the head of each skeleton. The men's hands must have been wrapped around the swords when they were buried down here because the cold fingers of the men still encircled the well decorated handle of the Gladii swords. Judging by the intricacy of the men's armour, they were all of considerable wealth. Gaius blew the dust from one of the standards and gasped as he saw the distinct Hercules emblem of the Primigenia (First Born) Legion. They were disbanded many years ago, when their commander was exiled. The standard fell over unexpectedly and caused Gaius to step back in shock. He stumbled backwards and tripped up, and he prepared to fall over for what he swore would be the last time that day. It was a very soft landing and heard a tinkling sound as he landed. He opened his eyes and gasped at what he was lying in.

The horde of treasure that he had fallen onto must have been worth a fortune. There were goods from the far corners of the Empire: Ivory tusks from Africa, Bottles of dye from Carthage, Glass ornaments from China and above all, Gold. There were stacks of Gold bars, piles of gold coins and golden decorations. He was rich! Gaius swore to Jupiter that he would get the Primigenia back onto the senate scrolls, even if it was the last thing he did.

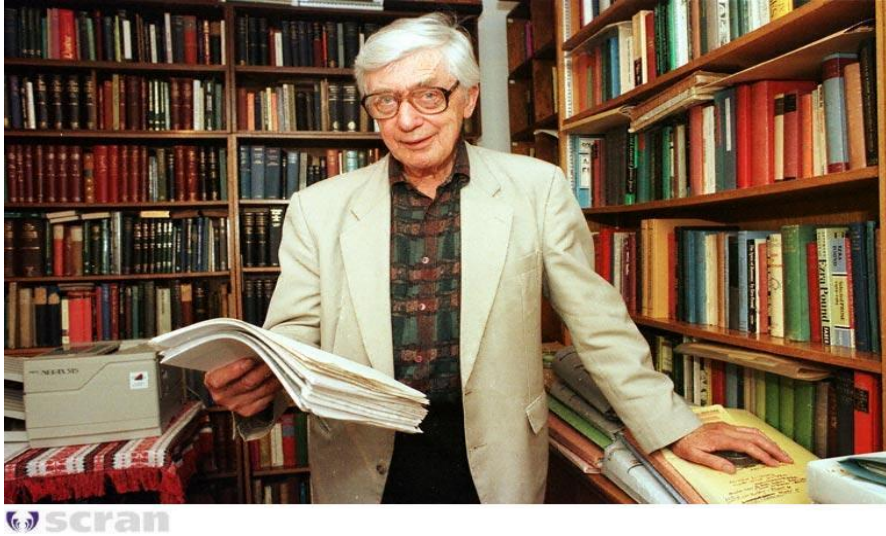
Ten years later, Gaius was standing at the head of his legion, saluting to the Emperor on the balcony as the crowd cheered in appreciation of Primigenia and all of its victories. A tear of joy welled up in Gaius's eye as he looked in pride at his legion. He had finally satisfied his oath.

The Sky: A Limerick by Anna Lockley F1

Who wonders what's in the sky?
Who wonders why it is so high?
The sun comes running by
It is as warm as pie
And the sky still runs by.



Edwin Morgan (1920-2010)



On 19th August 2010, Edwin Morgan, widely considered to be Scotland's greatest living poet, sadly passed away aged 90 years old. During his long life, Morgan worked variously as a teacher, a translator, a poet and a playwright. In 1999, he was recognised as Makar – or 'national poet' – by the Scottish Parliament. It is likely that you will recall having read one of his poems during your school career: 'Trio'; 'In the Snack Bar'; 'The First Men on Mercury'; 'Strawberries' and 'The Loch Ness Monster's Song' being amongst his most well-known works. His immersive words will live on as a fitting tribute to Makar Morgan.

Our very own wordsmith, Mr Durrheim, has produced the following piece on Morgan's passing:

Epitaph to Edwin Morgan

The Makar's unmade, concrete verse crumbles;
The sonnets' pure pentameter stumbles;
Solitary blind men slowly go down;
A trio carries fruitless gifts through town;
Each word crafted, each line a skilful choice;
A nation mourns the loss of Morgan's voice.

TFWD 2010

The Crowd by Peter Vannet F5

The day was behind me, now it was night. Weeks of waiting for this moment and now it had finally come. All I had with me were the clothes on my back and that one solitary ticket clutched firmly in my right hand. Street lights rushed past the window of the car in a blur like thick orange paint, distorting my view of the outside world. I didn't care - my mind was on the night ahead and what was to come. Slowing to a halt, I murmured a quick goodbye, left the warm seclusion of the car and dived into the sharp November night air.

Like waking suddenly from a dream, the mist in my head cleared and a sudden intake of breath reminded me that the air temperature was sub-zero as the cold air stabbed at my lungs. Ahead of me, illuminated by two brilliant white spotlights, was the nightclub known as 'Fat Sam's', or simply 'Fatties' to most of the local population. From the two black glass doors, stretching like an immense snake along the road out of sight and round a corner, was the crowd. A mass of people, all ages, sizes and styles, yet they all had one thing in common: they were ready to let the night slip away to the sound of roaring amps and shredding guitars. The crowd spoke as one, a low drone broken only by the odd high pitched laugh. Suddenly, I hear my name being shouted from somewhere within the crowd, my friends were calling me, yet I could not see them, searching to no avail. The dense forest of people parted just for a second but it was enough, I caught a glimpse of my friends and started hacking my way through the jungle of t-shirts and tattoos to reach them. The crowd surrounded us and enveloped us into its midst. Cigarette smoke hung above us like an ocean of swirling grey toxins, it began winding its way through the crowd; a spirit on the wind, burning at our noses and mouths then suddenly disappearing. But it hadn't gone...it was still there, all around us, inside our lungs; we had become at one with the spirit. The ice cold temperature in the street made a shiver run like a Mexican wave through the crowd, leaving no one untouched. Every second dragged on into minutes and every minute felt like an hour. Time slowed down to a halt. Then, ever so slowly, the crowd began slithering its way towards the doors and the huge music that had suddenly started trying to burst through them. The electric atmosphere transferred into raw energy as I was whipped along by the crowd into the gig. It was time.

Along the wide dark entrance, the crowd was drawn to the music like a fly to a bug zapper. With no control over my direction or speed of travel, I was washed into 'the mosh pit': no way back; only forward towards the stage where the band 'Glamour of the Kill' was bathed in a vivid crimson light. A lull in the music. The crowd began scuttling as individuals in a collective mayhem to find a good place to stand. Without warning the four truck-sized podium pro subwoofers roared into life and the crowd erupted into a frenzy of jumping and fighting. Within mere seconds hair, sweat, alcohol and fists began flying. The music was more than just noise, it awakened a primal instinct within everyone there. Lights flashing, the temperature rose similar to that found in tropical rain forests. The heat and the pounding bass that hammered through the crowd like an invisible explosion made my blood run hot my heart pounded away at my ribcage like the drummer was playing my organs instead of his kit. Then silence; the set was over. The lead singer, panting for oxygen, shouted a goodbye before launching himself from the stage into the murky depths of the crowd.



The next band 'Sylosis' came and went after giving our ears a thorough work out. The crowd, still pumping with energy, was subdued by the volume of the music. Finally the band stopped this ear battering and left the stage. I was starting to feel like I had run a marathon; the crowd was leeches of its power and began dissipating towards the toilets and bar.

Bang ! The penultimate band was on; they were a Swedish metal band called 'Sabaton'. One foot on that stage and they had stolen the show, like wizards on their instruments. They controlled the crowd like a puppeteer, bringing a new found life into the crowd and spinning their spell like lyrics over everyone. A raw energy built from the front of the crowd and almost instantaneously the world became a jumping, jostling mass of bodies. One second I was bursting through the surface to grab a gasp of air, the next I was plunged back into the darkness of the crowd. People flying into you, bumping off, a quick flash of a face then it was gone, thrown back into the depths. Anarchy was my first thought, then I saw a man fall, as if in slow motion, down, down, down, blood streaming from his nose onto his white shirt, then he hit the ground. Out cold. The crowd could sense the injured in its midst and with a collective front it went to aid the man. Anyone and everyone did what they could whilst the gig raged around them. This wasn't anarchy; this was, in a weird way, a friendship. The humidity was stifling, the air seemed to have become fluid and thick like treacle and by the time the music ceased many of the crowd had been overwhelmed by the harsh conditions. Too tired to go on, willing strength back into my aching legs and body, I managed to drag myself towards a source of water, drinking it quickly as if it was going to evaporate in the heat.

The lights dimmed and on came 'Dragonforce'. From then on it all became a blur of lights and movement. Flashes, bass drum beats and crashes. The band that everyone had come to see, the global superstars seemed belittled by the Swedish metal band from a small village in the snow. The crowd ran out of steam before the end, like a lion tired after a hunt. We settled down and let the music hammer away at our scenes with no resistance to it. Right there in that moment I no longer felt like part of a crowd, I was the crowd.

In the car on the way home, the world became a blur once again. My ears ringing, every sound was muffled. The warmth of the car surrounded me, pleasant warmth. My eyes began to flicker closed, the stench of sweat, beer and smoke still clung to my clothes. The night was dissolving into a memory when I finally lost the battle and succumbed to the still darkness of sleep.

The Messenger by Molly Wilson F2

You are a Messenger.

Your Letter is a Bullet.

Your Horse is a Rifle.

And you only bring one Message. Death. Another Perfect Kill.

You are cold. You are sitting on top of a building in Manhattan, waiting for your recipient to come out of the office from work. He knows too much about the corporation you work for. It's a pity, really. Wrong place, wrong time. Nothing more.

Even so, a paycheque is a paycheque, and protection from the law is even more valuable. You look down at the street. It's quiet. There are no cars at this time of night. He must be working late. Even so, your fingers tighten unnecessarily on your gun, gloved by latex doctor's gloves. Ironic, really. These gloves were sold to prolong life, yet really they let an assassin get away with murder.

Assassin. There are many names for you. Assassin. Sniper. Marksman. Serial Killer. Psychopath. And the rest are none too complementary.

But a job is a job, and you cannot back out. Not now. They'll kill you. Then they'll let out your record and simply say that they were thinking of the majority of American Citizens.

A sudden blast of cold air makes you shiver. The stars are out, and the moon is full. It would have been ghostly except for the streetlights, and the sounds of youths emerging from clubs.

What a shock that would be to any drunk. A body, lying on the street, shot in the head.

Just another body.

You are struck by the memories of your past kills. None of them ever saw it coming. They never can. You're wearing black scrubs, another kind 'donation' from hospital resource centres. You melt into the shadows, and leave behind no DNA.

You've never failed in your job yet. You've never spared anyone, missed, or even just left it to another night.

You would be dead if you did.

You push your hair out of your eyes and then check the time on your watch.

11.30 PM. He should be coming out soon.

You check your picture of him. Tall, brown haired, dark eyed, walks with a slight limp from a childhood rugby injury. Or was it American Football? Being English, you can't really tell the difference. It doesn't matter anyway.

The building which he worked in across the way was lit up in only one office. Made entirely of glass, it looked modern but you knew it had been built at least 20 years ago. The moon glinted off it, like embers of a fire.

You look up, suddenly, like a hunting dog catching the scent. The light had flicked off in the office.

You roll your shoulders, blink your eyes and look at your watch again.

11.45PM.

You take up position, leaning on the low wall that surrounds the building, and place your rifle against it. You load a bullet. You only need one.

You train the cross-hairs on the door, and wait. You can't hear anything. Not even the youths anymore. Not even the wind, whispers of the past sending shivers down your spine.

Not even your heart.

The pavement was plain asphalt, and would cause a bad head injury when he fell. Not that he would really care. His head would already have a hole through it, caused by a cone of metal running through it faster than 681.8MPH.

You look over your shoulder quickly. There was no-one watching.

Another perfect kill.

The door opens slowly down on the street, and he steps out.

He turns back. He locks the door. He bends down to pick up his briefcase.

You take the safety off your gun. You train the cross-hairs on his temple, visible in the moonlight. He's sweating. You're sweating.

Just one small muscle movement ends his life.

Brings in another paycheque.

Keeps you out of jail.

Keeps you alive.

You squeeze the trigger.

Bang.

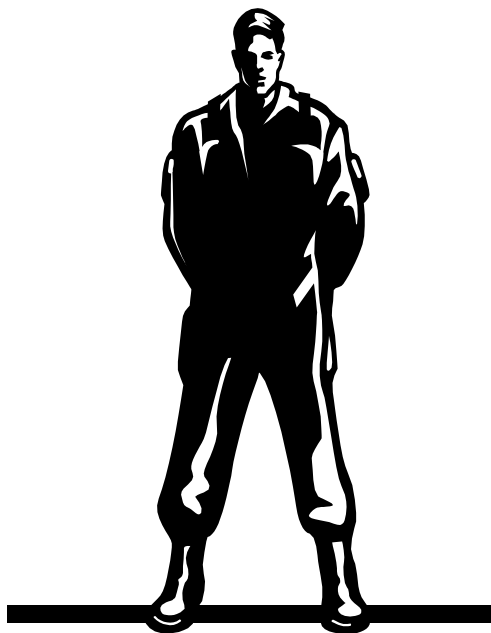
He falls to the ground, red, red blood pooling on the grey asphalt.

You are a Messenger.

Your Letter is a Bullet.

Your Horse is a Rifle.

And you only bring one Message. Death. Another Perfect Kill.



Untitled by Leann Chenn F4

You trudge along the vast expanse.
Your skin is parched and peeling.
Wallpaper in a once magnificent, resplendent home,
Flaking, shedding until it wears completely away.
Your tongue hangs out – a feral dog,
Slapping dryly against your lips with every stumble.
The soft sound of flesh on flesh echoes in the desert.

It will be hours till they come looking for you,
And find your half buried corpse.
Your golden hair glinting in the dying sun,
Lying exotically, sensually, accusing in a seductive red dress.
With your lungs full of sand.

They will panic at the sight of you.
They will fear for their own safety,
Their reputation, jobs and credibility.
All the material mortal ties.
The veneer of a civilized being will wear rapidly away.
As they return quickly from wherever they came.
To bury their guilt and memory in desperate drink.
And leave you there.
A flash of gold and red in the desert
Condemned to burn forever
Under the African sun.



Luton to London

By Allan Hamilton F1

Bleary-eyed and half asleep
Waiting at the station for a comfy seat.
Starving and cold in a plastic tunnel
Staring at the same advert for Chanel.

DING DONG!
“Can you please step back from the edge-
A train is approaching.”
Hooray! It’s here!

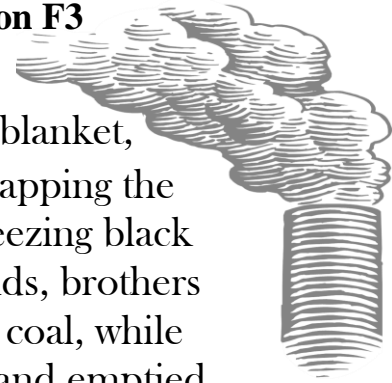
Doors open, no one gets off-
Too many get on,
Squashed!
Not cold now.

Clattering wheels and stuffy carriage
Wedge in the luggage space with a fold up bike!
Someone says, “There’s Big Ben”
I think, never again.

Humanity: The Second Dawn

An excerpt from an original story by Michael Fergusson F3

A cold, leaden sky consisting of poisonous fog acted like a blanket, smothering the feeble golden light emitted by the sun, and trapping the despair of the workers below. Entire families toiled in the freezing black mud, huddling together in the vain hope of warmth. Husbands, brothers and sons laboured deep underground, mining for metal and coal, while the women carried the produce across the bleak wastelands and emptied the laden baskets into satanic, vast freight trains. The young children of the families were hidden from view, enslaved like their parents, but inside a massive factory, responsible for keeping the scorching coal fires hot enough to melt the mined metal. For some, the torturous conditions of intense heat and severe dehydration were too much, and blinded by sooty, stinging smoke, they fainted with exhaustion, only to be used as fuel themselves. All this was watched by the heinous eye of their metallic masters. Yet just two years ago, life on earth had been very different...

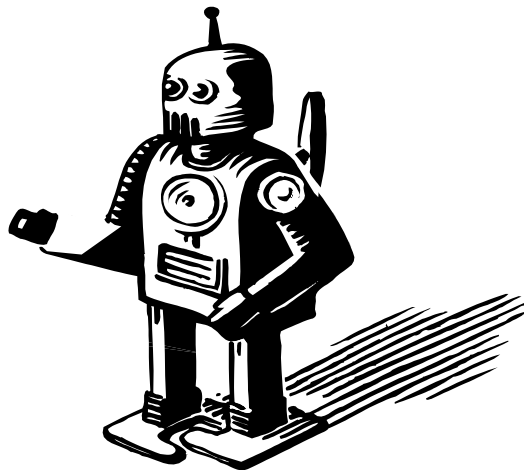


North Carolina, December, 1985

It was around seven o'clock on a crisp winter's morning, and the sun had not yet risen above the trees, instead preferring to cast shadows of the slender, smooth charcoal branches across the ivory white carpet of snowflakes. Most of the sky was a peaceful, fading, midnight blue, in which the remnants of a ghostly white moon were still visible. A gaggle of white snow geese honked peacefully, as they flew gracefully across the teal skies, barely disturbing the perfect silence of the dawn. As the sun rose higher, the sky was transformed into a cluttered collection of silvery, glistening clouds, through which rafts of rosy sunlight seared through a crack between the dense red curtains, penetrating the room and gently brushing the man's face, with immediate effect. Grunting, he sat up, rubbed his eyes, and presently deflated in a tired heap onto the soft mattress. Lazily his arm stretched out as he tried to awaken his girlfriend. She yawned, got up and dressed allowing the radiant sunlight to catch her blond hair, which now looked like golden strands of fine ribbon. Her hazelnut eyes were sleepy as they grew accustomed to the bright rays of

morning sunshine, illuminating the room. Laura Finchley worked as a teacher, at St Wilson's School, just a few miles down the road. As she turned on the radio, she was surprised to hear that school was closed today, and pondered on what could have caused it. Certainly it had been snowing last night, but it was not substantial enough to even stop a car, let alone close an entire school. Deciding to investigate for herself, she got into the silvery hued Cadillac and drove to the school building. However, upon getting there, she saw the school had been totally destroyed as if by an extremely powerful bomb. It was only then that she began to fear for the life of her ageing mother, Josephine, who worked as a caretaker at the school. When she got home, a few minutes later, James had turned on the world news, which was now reporting the incident, with images of the charred, smouldering wreck gradually being picked apart as the fire service looked for dead bodies. Laura's fears were indeed confirmed as the mangled body of her dead mother was pulled out of the wreckage. As she wept helplessly into the affectionate arm of her boyfriend, something much more sinister and horrifying emerged as the firemen dug deeper into the charred ruins of St Wilson's school. It was only then that people knew of Exterminator Robots, as a singed machine-like corpse was lifted from its disintegrating grave. This was only the tip of the iceberg...

(To Be Continued!)



Oblivious by Anonymous

Dawn. The whisper of the wind: subtle, caring, concealing. The gentle drip of the morning dew upon the dry, harsh ground. Sudden awareness. Sudden realisation. He could feel the cool, crisp air caressing his cold skin. He could hear the bird's nonsense rising slowly and sweetly from the surrounding greenery. Beauty divine.

Surrounding him, engulfing him. Even dawn must break, and with it comes the sound of confusion; the dark grey clouds of uncertainty.

Mid-afternoon. He can see them. The wandering mounds of flesh and bone. Drones, oblivious to the truth; oblivious to the beauty which surrounds them, oblivious to him. He feels something. Strong emotion: malice, greed, hate, longing? This surge of emotion confuses him, he knows not which is true; he knows not why they come without invitation. He recalls a time where he thought as the others do now. There was a time when he would iterate these fabrications of the mind to those other helpless beings which surrounded him. He was noticed then. He is forgotten now. This was not always the case.

Once he had been important. He thinks he has been important; he *feels* that he was. Once his life was an orchard: ripe with pleasure, and forever growing with opportunity. Now this field is desolate, the pleasures of the flesh have all but faded to black; the lake of opportunity is now barren. He sits there, awaiting the one to lift him from this dark abyss of depression and loneliness. He knows they won't come. He can feel it from the darkest depths of his heart. He is truly alone. He remembers her. The woman who had been his saviour, but became his destroyer. He felt for her. Strongly. He remembers every detail vividly: the blonde hair, flowing gracefully in the wind, the green eyes, captivating, enticing. She was his life, his soul. This was all lost forever. He can still picture her there, looking down at him, her cheeks lined with the tears which she shed for him. He had cried out for her. She didn't hear. He ran after her. He couldn't keep up. The joy in his heart is gone; the void left is filled only by his sorrow and his depression. He is alone.

Evening came. Silence. An eerie, deathly chill ran down his spine. He saw her. Faster and faster were his footsteps; a gallop upon the cobbles of the path. She was not alone. It came fast: malice, anger, hurt, fear, loss, pity. He knew these all too well. She has made him feel this before. She has but come to taunt him while in the presence of another man. Flowers were laid on the ground; she spoke my name, and kissed him. The lips of an angel, kissing a demon.

He lay down, the grief broke his fall. It caressed him to its chest. His only comfort is the hate she has made him feel, the pain that she has installed within him. His last thought is not of bad intent, however; he thinks only of the compassion he holds for her. Sleep comes quickly. His mind wanders, his earthly ties severed. His mind wanders, through joy and tranquillity. He is at peace. The note left upon the ground: "I shall always love you", met only by the gentle whisper of the wind. The silence is golden. Morning comes full circle, the dawn breaks, the evening comes; yet the light still shines on. The shroud around his grave is lifted. He is no longer alone. He feels: love.



Merry Quizmas!

Try your hand at this gruelling yuletide quiz. Answers in the next issue and from your nearest Internet search engine!

1. Which of Santa's reindeer is the German word for 'lightning'?
2. Hollywood legend James Stewart starred in which classic Christmas film?
3. From what country does St. Nicholas (Santa Claus) originate?
4. When Good King Wenceslas last looked out, what did he see the poor man doing?
5. Which commercial company is said to be responsible for the red colouring of Santa's garments?
6. On which musical instrument was Silent Night first played?
7. At what time does The Queen's Speech air on television and radio?
8. What is the name of Ebenezer Scrooge's clerk?
9. Why did Joseph and Mary have to go to Bethlehem?
10. Who originally sang 'Walking in the Air'?
11. What did my true love send to me on the ninth day of Christmas?
12. Complete the following line from a Christmas carol: "*In the _____ midwinter*".
13. What date is St. Nicholas' Day?
14. What are the names of the three wise men?
15. Which actor was *Home Alone* at Christmas?
16. On what date is the eighth day of Christmas?
17. Name three singers who contributed to Band Aid's hit single '*Do They Know It's Christmas?*'
18. In what year of the First World War did the Christmas Day Truce take place?
19. What is the last day of Christmas called?
20. During which monarch's reign did Christmas trees become popular home decorations?





That's all folks!



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