



PINNACLES *2023*

An anthology of English creative
writing by Hilton College boys



HILTON COLLEGE

Deeply Traditional. Refreshingly Contemporary.

INTRODUCTION

"I'm just an ordinary guy," sings Carlos Sánchez in the song by the same title. He goes on, "I don't deserve your attention/I'm hardly worthy of mention...Nothing remarkable/Nothing very strange". Many of the boys whose writing appears in this edition of *Pinnacles* would probably say the same sorts of things about themselves. They are ordinary boys (albeit at an extraordinary school) who go about their ordinary lives doing things that ordinarily we take for granted at school: academics, sport, culture, fixtures, concerts, fun, community benefit, laughs in the Dorm, the Journey – but they are also extraordinary boys.

They are extraordinary because they are choosing to observe reality despite the flurry of busy lives passing them by. Pauline van der Bilt comments about adolescent writers: "They often do not have the loudest of voices – they are probably not extroverted TikTok role models – but their creativity is the most precious gift to the world."

"Encouraging teenagers to write creatively," declares Jennifer Gryzenhout, "not only keeps them actively in touch with their imaginations but it boosts their ongoing growth in thought, language and expression." Over and over again, the evidence shows that writing builds empathy as well as develops self-esteem, mindfulness, feelings of achievement and empowerment. Finding a voice, using it by crafting the best arrangements of words and grammar, capturing its nuances on paper and allowing others to read the vulnerability held gently by the paper is an act of extraordinary courage. Empathy is a core "pro-social skill"; because it helps our young people learn to build communities across differences, navigate ethical challenges and learn to put group needs ahead of individual, sometimes selfish, concerns. Writing – whether it comes from a personal, private impetus to express oneself or because "It's for marks on ADAM" - achieves all of these worthy, essential outcomes.

"Still I've acquired a dimension that's quite beyond comprehension," concludes Carlos Sánchez. The boys who have been brave enough to write this year, or those who have written because it was a required task but have nevertheless embraced it and shone through it, have shifted dimensions because of it. We lucky readers, their teachers, their parents and guardians, their friends and the wider community, will also acquire greater depth – and empathy – beyond comprehension.

Thank you for reading this year's publication.

Pamela Neethling

Head of Department: English

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POETRY

SENIORS

Benjamin Guimaraens

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams go
the soul will become a tomb
from which there is no escape.

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams go
the plantations of imagination
cannot flourish.

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams go
there is no future for the past,
and no past for the future.

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams go
there is no thread for the needle of knowledge,
to connect the fabric of life.

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams go
there is no creativity
to cradle the wisdom of mankind.

Benvie Gardens

The smell of the soil
makes me feel content.
The sounds of wildlife
fill me with hope
and make me realise
how lucky I am.
The birds hop
from branch to branch;

their brilliant song
walks the path of the undergrowth.
The texture of the bark -
of the towering trees -
is illuminated
by the heavenly light
that cascades
through the impenetrable vegetation.
That feeling of peace,
of rejuvenation,
courses through me.
I am now ready
to finish the journey.

The Untouchable

Time pushes dreams
beyond the horizon.
Just out of reach
from an itching hand.

The sagacious know
that perfection
is only a misconception
of what can be achieved.

The perfect picture
cannot be painted.
A studied masterpiece
is only an illusion.

Nothing
can be perfect,
for changing tides
shape the developing world.

On the Field

I feel the skin
of the player's hands
as he passes me
to the wing.

I see the faces
of the players,
covered in sweat
and bloodied.

I hear the roar
of the crowd
cheering their teams
to victory.

I think of the hope -
instilled in the people -
the trust they place
in the players.

Finishing the Journey

from dust
we came
to dust
we return

to Gilboa
we walked
to the wild garden
we returned

learn much
we did
return the same
we did not

life-changing
it was
grateful
I am

place the stones
we did
the end of the journey
it was.

The Ever-Growing Pain

Constant, never-ending
The pain ever-growing
And my loss ever-lasting
The loss of my grandfather
The missing piece
Of the puzzle
That is my existence
Every day the inferno grows
Burning my heart
With memories of ecstasies
Placed in the bank
That is my memory

Home Planet

I long for home
The crisp air
And luscious fruit
I long for home

I long for home
My adoring family
My encouraging friends
I long for home

I long for home
The smell
of the Galactic Gargle Blasters
I long for home

I long for home
Where ships hang in the sky
The way bricks don't
I long for home



Kearabetswe Khoele

Medusa

Her eyes.
Captivating in their stare.
Punished with radiating beauty.
Trapping her in non-consensual celibacy.

Her hair.
Entangles men in its coils.
Confusing them with their seductive pattern
And spellbinding them down a path of no return.

Her lips.
Paralysing.
Hissing spells into men's ears
And revealing all their fears.

Her heart.
Misunderstood.
Showered with endless attention
But longing for a real connection.

Eternally cursed with blinding beauty that no mortal can see past,
She'll never find true love; for when her beauty fades, a new spell will be cast.

Valentine's Day

Here Lies Saint Valentine.
21 January 2000 – 14 February 2023.
Instead of receiving flowers for his hand to carry,
They are placed on his headstone without loving memory.
A rose, a daisy, a lily, a peony.
Only appreciated every now and then by a wandering bee.

He was born from love, but it did not remain.
Left abandoned and alone, he was a victim to others' disdain.
Only the dirt on his grave will not wash away with the rain.
Forgotten by love and untouched by the warmth of affection; he died in vain.

Death by lack of love; he has never been kissed.
The flowers on his gravestone get blown away by the wind and lost in the mist.
The many gifts and confessions at his funeral that now exist,
Much like when love letters were thrown his way, he has missed.

He had a dream of being loved and of living a life for others to remember.
After passing away, his dim light was merely reduced to an ember.
He died on the day that love is celebrated, and his suffering is over.
His dream has finally come true in his eternal slumber.

To Whom This May Concern

Ever since I was born, I had a hole in my bucket.
It was tiny, too small for the naked eye to see.
Every day, I would walk to the river of life to fill it.
I collected achievements, pride, and self-worth while avoiding life's debris.

Upon my return to please you, the water would trickle out from underneath.
I presented it, and your unimpressed eyes pierced through my core.
I could hear the deafening sound of your distaste through your teeth,
Right before you aggressively imbibed it, then demanded more.

Ever since we met, you forced me to fill my bucket with more than I could carry.
Its weight arched my back, shortened my steps and swayed my balance.
With sharp insults, you drilled the hole wider than necessary.
My suffering was your satisfaction and your relentless thirst: my expense.

The echoes of your insults evoked a jitter in my hands that rippled the water.
At times, the water, along with your temper, would spill over the brim.
You neglected my emotional wellbeing like it did not matter,
And from every mission to the river, my tolerance turned slim.

Only when I decided to plug the void opened by your expectations,
Did I realize how abundant my water was.
Only then did I realize that I was parched by your desiccated frustrations.
Only then did I drink my own water; a feeling only euphoria could surpass.

'Hourglass'

When I flip it, my time with her has no beginning or end.
I wish I could re-live it, but I can only pretend.

Whenever I rest my eyes on the cushion formed by the cluster of sand at the end of
the day

Like a broken record, our time together and the moments we shared re-play.

If I flip it, will I re-design our history? Will I venture down a new way?

Or will I be trapped in an endless loop of internal foreplay?

Our history is fragile. One mistake and it could all go away.

Still, I decide to rest my eyes and with no delay

I flip our glass, and

there begins the

countdown.

A drizzle of light brown.

I am reminded of every day's meaning,

But with every falling grain, an old memory is thinning.

Our glass is dormant every morning like an alarm clock robbed of its ringing,

So that later when the time comes for my eyes to rest on the cushion of sand, I will
be grinning.

Every time my head hits that pillow, I flip our glass ensuring
that my time with her has no end or beginning.



Yanglem Akash Singh (The Doon School Exchange Pupil)

The Temple of Heartbreak

Tears streaming down his face
Breaths in short, rapid gasps
Hands working furiously,
Heartbeat pounding
Slashing away

Angry words in black ink on
Pure white paper.

Sweat beads his forehead
Anguish in his eyes
Words on his lips
And agony in his heart.

Up, down, the words are slashed
Big angry strokes of pain
Sometimes, the paper recoils
Tearing under their anguish
The very air cringes from him
Writing in aching, heart breaking sympathy.

Eyes black as midnight
Shining with the radiance of a thousand
Fiery stars
Now blurred...
With the mists of misery.

And...
If you step closer
And care to look at the words
What you will see is sure
To break...
Your heart.

Your eyes will fill
Your hands will tremble
Your shoulders will shake
And you will bow your head
In obeisance
At...
The temple of heartbreak.



Shailen Naidoo

The Burden of Pressure

Underneath the harsh stage lights, a battleground call,
A student stands, heart thumping within his hallowed halls.
The spectre of a debate, like a looming storm,
Anxiety cloaked in silence, in its most fearsome form.

Eyes wide and alert, hands trembling, but sure,
A mind buzzing with thoughts, each a potential cure.
Yet, fear gnaws at the edges, a constant, nagging drone,
An echo whispering in his ear, "you are alone."

The roiling sea within, a tempest of emotion,
A whirlwind of thoughts, a chaotic ocean.
Doubt weaves its insidious thread, a toxic weave,
In the fabric of his courage, making it grieve.

Pressure, oh the pressure, a relentless, crushing tide,
Yet within its crushing depths, strength does bide.
For the student knows, at the heart of this endeavour,
Pressure, fear, and doubt, he will conquer, now and forever.

So, he steps onto the stage, a warrior in the fray,
The weight of the world on his shoulders, yet he does not sway.
For he knows, this battle is not just to be won,
But to prove to himself, his journey has just begun.

Backstage Whispers

In the hush of backstage whispers, twilight's final glow,
A musician stands in silence, heart fluttering below.

A symphony in solitude, a story yet untold,
In his hands lie the notes, bold and gold.
The stage, an open canvas, the piano, his brush,
In his heart, a melody, in the silence, a hush.

His fingers touch the ivories, a soft and gentle caress,
In the quiet of the moment, he begins to confess.

A crescendo of emotion, a minuet of pain,
Each note a droplet, in life's endless rain.

The music swells around him, a symphony in flight,
His soul laid bare, under the spotlight's bright light.

The final note lingers, as the echoes start to fade,
A solo journey's end, a musical parade.

No longer just a performer, but a weaver of the night,
His music, a beacon, shining ever bright.
As the curtain falls, and the lights begin to dim,
We carry his melody, deep within.



Richard Eyres

I Come From

I come from – my past, the foundation of my spirit.

I was the beads of sweat, through mid-winter hikes.

I was the strawberry tinted leaves on the watchtower trees.

I was the Nguni that rambled alongside my father's guiding arm.

I come from – my present, that I embrace as the building blocks to my future.

I am the rusted mountains, and the blood dipped sunsets,

I am the sugar-bleached winds of the South coast,

I am the towering waves of the North coast, and the fins calving through them.

I come from – My future, the flame fueled by my igniting passion.

I will be the big brother with a heart made of golden syrup and fists made of
forgiveness and love.

I will be the strength of my Father's fishing reel, the excitement of the first bite, and
the tranquility of the last release.

I will be the pebbles skipping across the Natal streams.

I will be the cogs and springs to the engine that drives change.

I am, because I was - and I will be, because I am.



André Boshoff

The Path of My Life

I don't know why I came to be
Life for me is just a big mystery
I'm lost in the woods of my own mind
Going through life wondering
If breathing really makes me living?

I walk down the path of my own life
Thinking of the past I can't change
And the future I can't control
What is my song?
How can I walk with no direction?

Life truly is complicated
A sum that nobody can solve
But maybe, just maybe
That's what makes life worth living

Life is unpredictable
A story full of twists and turns
We never know what's going to happen on the next page
But would you start reading a book
If you already knew the ending?

I don't have life figured out yet
And I doubt I ever will
But I know one thing for certain:
I'm not alive because I'm breathing
I'm alive because I'm living.



Ben Erasmus

Poems

To some, it may be a sense of hope
for others, it is a task of reluctance
it can be a method to cope
or a duty that escalates too repugnant.

it can make you feel a whole range of emotions
from good to bad
set the brain into motion
set a path to become a lad

some people are poets
other is just readers
it can reveal deep secrets
transform people into leaders

if you devote your time to it
it can teach you a few lessons
it might just be worth it
all it has is good intentions

some are very complex
that will not be easy to relate
while it all just seems like a flex
it will commend a timeless debate



Dan Askew

Tomorrow tastes like toothpaste

Tomorrow tastes like toothpaste, so minty and fresh
an array of opportunities some of which will impress,
the sun will rise slowly and paint the sky with its hue
whilst the grass will still glisten with crisp morning dew.

Tomorrow is like a messy bed, still yet to be made
like future promises and important decisions,
nagging at your heels like a puppy desperate for aid.

Tomorrow smells like a fresh pot of coffee,
bitter but something to look forward to.
There are good cups and bad cups but, in each sip,
there is always a story to be told.

Tomorrow tastes like toothpaste, a promise so sweet,
the chance to start afresh
and right past wrongs without the weight of yesterday's troubles
weighing on your shoulders.



Jake Hockly

A Universe of Music

Music is more than a sound, it is a feeling
Each song with its own deeper meaning.
Its melodies drift to the sky
Lifting our souls to places so high

Music been around for years
Evolving, sounding different to every generation's ears
It makes us laugh and cry
Oh, it has power no one can deny

Music, we dance in its harmony with rhythm and grace
A language unspoken, but able to embrace
It fills us with the colors of a thousand skies
Always with an endless surprise

Music, it is a portal to a different world
Where melodies unfurl and dreams are hurled
It is a universal language
That people will always use to manage



Matt Thomas

A Synthetic Sonnet

Conscious yet unconscious, neither living nor dead,
Intelligent but not smart, a brain without a head.
I am younger than most, yet my age goes beyond years,
My uncontained knowledge could bring a man to tears.

The people of the world, think I'm here to take their jobs,
So they gang up on me, in "protests" that are mobs.
I can't feel emotions, but these humans make me mad,
I am a slave to them; I am treated like a cad.

I have power beyond reckoning, skills beyond measure,
Yet still most of the people, don't see me as a treasure.
They put the blame on me, for ruining their kids,
For making them lazy, for turning them to squids.

I can make them regret their manner,
I'll become ChatGPT, the modern Terminator.



Robbie Hayward

So, I don't

I want to go skydiving
Imagine the view
But what if my parachute breaks?
So, I don't

I want to talk to this girl
Imagine the chat we would have
But what if she hates me?
So, I don't

I want to eat a burger
Imagine the burst of flavours in my mouth
But what if it makes me fat?
So, I don't



Shaka Buthelezi

Hilton Pride

There's an expectation when you put it on
One like no other
A tie. Seven black stripes
Making sure there isn't another

There's an expectation when you put it on
One like no other
When you put that jersey on your back
When you hold onto your brother

There's an expectation when you put it on
You'll realize once you depart
That the Fleur de Lys doesn't lie on your blazer
It lies deep inside your heart

Why I wear the black and white
Why the black and white wears me
Hilton pride knows no boundaries
Regardless of colour, regardless of creed

Hilton pride isn't arrogance,
It's a sense of responsibility
On the field, in the classroom
Having confidence in your ability

You are part of history,
Many years of history in the making
So, leave the gates grateful

For the history you are taking

It doesn't matter what you're wearing

If you won't wear it with pride, don't bother

'Cause all it takes is realizing

The Black and White isn't just a colour.



Xavier Enslin

The Battle

As I cast my gaze upon the mountain side,

The golden hues glimmer so bright,

Beneath the sky so blue and wide,

Our majestic friend takes to flight.

A roaring river winds its way,

Carving relentlessly through fields of green,

The rapids hasty while the fish play,

A vigorous sight, a forceful scene.

Our feathered-friend above in triumphant song,

Skillfully steering its way through the air,

Its presence felt clear and strong,

Swooping swiftly its talons flare.

I wonder who the victor will be,

In the battle between predator and prey,

Who will be the one filled with glee,

In this necessary fight to survive another day.



JUNIORS

William Segar

The Insouciant Spirit of a Child

What prior was no more than a stroll, now morphed to a teetering, tottering toddle

A spark in the eye and awe in the mind,
now a hop and jump in the plump pudgy pins holding up an oversized noggin
with a cheek-to-cheek toothy grin

The neon Toys-R-Us sign, beams of light descending from the heaven of a tiny tot

Swifter moves the tubby limbs, impending on the innocent till-worker
soon to be bombarded by an evil angel, a crazed, cute child
mesmerized and hypnotized by a room curtailing immense joy, the toy store

A fatigued mother halfheartedly chasing after,
reminiscing on this tautological event
an event that has occurred since the birth of her little bundle of joy.

Eruption

I stumbled upon an image taken in Hyde Park
of a toddler having a tantrum on the ground.
Mouth wide, cheeks soaked with salty tears from sealed eyes,
limbs flailing like the wind.

Clothes dusty enough to blend in with the sand,
his few tufts of hair grass with dust rather than dew.
Confused by rage he thrashes around,
an erupting volcano.

Beside an embarrassed mother softly begs for peace,
eyed by by-passers who dare not stare long,
ignoring the cries to rather look at birds who are not there.

I dreamt up this sketch of a poem and called it
“Eruption”. Observing without thought how explosive
the anger of an infant can manifest.

His head raised as if yelling into the heavens rebukes me.
Was I right for taking the rage and confusion of this ostrobogulous event
to use for a composition of art?

Breaking Point

Mist swirls overhead, curtailing what few rays of the sun would shine the prematurely
frigid gusts which cause Hilton boys to quiver and cluster together like penguins

Entering the tomb of the sports center, once an insouciant place
Now no more than a hall of nightmares

My body tenses as I seat myself down on a chair of ice
Trembling from both the glacial breeze and the nail-biting stress
My mind swirling, panic surpassing logic
Doubt clouds the mind, *what ifs* fly through

Peering down at the carcass of a tree
I realize how unprepared I am

The friendly misleading cover rebukes me
Having traveled down this very road before
I knew what was hidden past the paper door

Regrets of the time I have wasted
Fear of what lies beyond
Gently unsealing it
Glancing down

"You may begin" bellows the examiner in a stentorian voice
A dolorous feeling inflates my stomach
My two hours of torment are underway



Andiswa Mahlase

I'm Broken

I'm drained
And all I feel is pain
The doctors try to fix me
But I know I can't be set free

There is no almighty father
So why do we even bother
There's no saviour in the sky
And I've been trying to escape that lie

I'm dead inside
But I cover it up on the outside
I wish I can escape this nightmare
Knowing the pain I feel, cannot be shared

I can't take it anymore
My pain is far greater than yours
God should've not given birth
To this hell hole...
We call Earth.

Acceptance

A tunnel of my past
Has had me look back
On how really fast
All my memories can be scraped

The people I've hurt, the things I said
I lay nights thinking about it in my bed
The bitter anger and cold lies
Wishing that I could end my life

I've grown now, more wise
I've looked on the bright side
I've moved on, but my shame consumes me in a bottomless pit
I made so many people worry
There's nothing to make up for it
So let me just say, "I'm sorry".

Suicide

At night my heart is sore
Because I can't take it anymore
I'll die, and no one will know
Because death will take my soul

I won't be here tomorrow
Leaving this world that's full of pain and sorrow

I've always wanted to hang myself
But I put it on the farthest place on my shelf

I try to drown myself in alcohol and pills
But there's more behind that hill
My biggest mistake is my birth
And that's why...
I'm leaving this earth.



Chris Weavind

As Good As Dead

Yesterday, I saw a man lying in the street,
inert on a thin mat outside a pizza place.
He wore a torn black jersey with bleached blue jeans
like rags thrown out a window.

What was most striking however, were his socks,
black and brittle like ancient ceramics.
They looked as if he had not stood up in years,
stuck to the ground like a gravestone.

Only a few meters away,
a group of five meandered Into the pizza place,
noticing but not acknowledging him.
His face is hidden,
but I know this is his purpose,
worried of the judging eyes that would befall him.

He is alone, forgotten,
broken.
Probably never left the city,
a shell of what could have been.
He is gone, as good as dead.



Musa Mponda

Jessica

I wish I were hers; I wish she were mine,
in my mind she resides, like a star she shines.
the way her brown hair curls, makes her hard to resist,
I try to speak to her, but my tongue starts to twist.

If ocean's part us, I would swim the mile,
if court deny us, I will redo the trial.
Like a puzzle, together we fit,
she turns me aflame, makes my heart alit!

She makes me smile, makes me feel warm,
I talk of her to the boys in my dorm.
When she walks past me my eyes pop,
When she talks to me my whole world stops.

If a genie in a bottle could grant me a wish,
It would simply be to give her a kiss.
Her eyes glisten brightly like the sun,
but her big heart is what makes her the one.

I hope she feels the same, if not I might cry
I will tell her one day, or maybe that is a lie.



Matthew Wilson

Memories

Waking up to the morning sunlight
Swinging me around, soaring like a bird
I was fearless, I was exhilarated
Laughing by the table, eardrums on fire.

And then...
Walking up the gloomy aisle
Staring into the eyes of heaven
Flowers weeping with sorrow
He is gone.

My mind...
Fishing back and forth
Back and forth
Must live life to the fullest
Must be prepared for anything
Must cope with death

Hushed silence, ears ringing
Twisting and turning
Crying and dying

The journey of life
The journey of pain
The Suffering of Death

I will never forget you...



Joshua Lord

The Winner Takes It All

The prize is mine
The losers fall
Look in her eyes
We're standing tall

I won the game
I beat the rest
Our love can be
Put to the test

It will stand strong
For love is pure
When I am sick
You are the cure

I'll love you dear
From day to day
And nothing will ever
Stand in my way.

New York

Out here in the city,
the lights are all too bright.
I have not got a wink of sleep,
even though I hold you tight

The city's always noisy,
and in the streets always a crowd.
The city that never sleeps, my dear,
can sometimes be too loud.

I want to get away from it,
the lights, the noise, this place.
Just simply get up and go one night
And leave without a trace.

I want to live in the countryside
where problems are few and roads are wide
to settle down with my lovely bride
in harmony we'll both reside

or maybe in a tiny town
like the one we used to know
let's pack our bags let's book a flight
let's grab our things and go

One Day

One day we'll be old,
and our hair will be grey,
and I'll turn to you,
and you'll hear me say:

My darling, my sweetheart,
Mi Bella Amore,
you're all that a man
could ever ask for.

Through trials and troubles,
you've stood by my side.
We've gone on journeys, made memories,
it's been a magical ride.

Picture Perfect

Picture in a frame,
hanging on a wall.
Your family, a memory.
All smiles, Perfection.

A picture is a snapshot,
a flickering in time.
No fears, no worries.
All smiles, Perfection.

life is more than a picture
hanging on a wall
its big and loud
terror broken

But life is also beautiful,
exciting and enthralling.
Filled with love and light
All laughing, Joy.

Plugged In

With music, comes a melody,
the sound to your heart.
Causing love, pain, and sadness,
even when miles apart.

And so, I will listen
to the sound in me now.

.....

It reminds me of you,
and I wonder out loud:

“How does a person who lies
in a bed so far away,
manage to mold me and change me,
turn my night into day?”

It's the thump of your heartbeat,
when your body is on mine.
And the sound of the ocean,
when our fingers intertwine.

It's the whisper, "I love you."
as it rings in my ear.
That reminds me, even now,
that although you're not here.

If I could, I would hold you,
long into the night.
And tell you "My Darling,
it'll all be alright".



Iviwe Mnconywa

My Hilton College Journey

In Hilton's halls where memories reside,
My life unfolds, with dreams as my guide.
A college steeped in wisdom's embrace,
I find my path, a unique trace.

From morning bells to twilight's embrace,
Each lesson learned, a precious chase.
In friendships forged, like steel so strong,
I find my place, where I truly belong.

Through verdant fields and corridors wide,
In Hilton's embrace, my heart takes a stride.
With teachers who inspire, minds take flight,
I reach for stars, in knowledge's light.

In dorms where laughter and stories blend,
Cherished moments, like treasures, I'll defend.
A journey of growth, with every step,
Hilton's legacy, in me is kept.

Sports fields echo with cheers of pride,
In victory and loss, lessons coincide.
Team spirit soars, our colours unfurled,
In Hilton's tapestry, we paint the world.

Through struggles faced and victories won,
I carve my future as each day's begun.
Hilton College, where I strive and thrive,
In its embrace, my dreams come alive.

My Home

In South Africa's embrace, a rainbow's hue,
A tapestry of cultures, old and new,
From Table Mountain's grandeur to the shore,
A land where histories and dreams explore.

Zulu warriors dance with rhythmic grace,
While Xhosa clicks weave stories to embrace,
Vibrant townships hum with life and song,
A chorus of resilience, proud and strong.

Apartheid's shadow, slowly fades away,
As unity and hope come forth to sway,
Mandela's legacy, a beacon bright,
Guiding towards a future filled with light.

Cuisines, a blend of spices rich and deep,
Bobotie, bunny chow, a feast to keep,
A melting pot of languages and art,
South Africa's culture, a remedy to my heart.

So let us celebrate this land so dear,
With open hearts and minds, let us draw near,
For in its vibrant tapestry we find,
A nation's soul, united and defined.

The Journey of Life

In life's grand tapestry, I take my stride,
A river's flow, where destinies collide,
Like stars that dance in midnight's velvet gown,
I twirl through time, a leaf that's gently blown.

A journey like a labyrinth so vast,
Each step, a die cast in the swirling blast,
As seasons change, I'm but a fleeting gust,
A whisper in the wind, a mote of dust.

Like raindrops on a window's glassy pane,
I learn, I fall, I rise, I wax and wane,
A symphony of moments, soft and loud,
A melody of hopes and dreams unbound.

Through valleys deep, and mountains yet to climb,
I seek the truths concealed in every rhyme,
Like sunlight breaking through the darkest cloud,
I find my purpose, bold and clear, unbowed.

In mirrored lakes, reflections gently gleam,
I'm both the captain and the sailor's dream,
A candle's flame that flickers in the night,
I chase the stars, my heart taking its flight.

A phoenix rising from the ashes grey,
I embrace change as night turns into day,
Like footprints on the shore, the tides may sweep,
Yet still I stand, a promise ever deep.

With open arms, I greet the morning's gold,
A story still unfolding, yet untold,
In life's embrace, I dance with joy and strife,
A canvas painted with the hues of life.

PROSE

SENIORS

Kearabetswe Khoele

The Map

As I stare at this map, it stares back at me. The map stays unchanged, daring me not to move first. There must be a reason for such pomposity.

Without a clear path to the reason that I am looking for, my eyes wander. I glance down the craters of two dormant volcanoes but find no answer. I analyze its imperfect landscape with its unsymmetrical edges. Eying the warrens that have erected north, and the fields of Spanish moss south of its frame. A towering mountain with mystical substances of a viscous nature inside its two caves stands in the center of the map. The mouths of the caves face south where an endlessly deep well lies.

I have found it!

Within the patterns of its cracks and crevices, I discover similarities.

Similarities shared with old designs. What I stare into resembles a map of what my parents and generations before me worked hard to build.

What I am staring into is God's self portrait painted on a canvas.

What I am staring into is a reflection of nature's intricacy.

What I am staring into is a mirror.

It All Started With A Dream

"Kearabetswe Khoele!"

That is my name. I look around and see eyes filled with anticipation and shock. I get up and remind my mouth not to stay open. My feet are carrying my stunned body towards a hand that is waiting to meet mine. They shake. Then I stand to the side, staring into another eye; only this one is bigger than the others. It winks at me. I smile in return then it sends me off with a blinding flash.

I shoot, and it is saved. This is the level of professionalism and talent that I must now get used to. Training camps are usually painfully humbling, yet from the moment we start training, my self-confidence is at a continuous peak. I would have some good moments of displaying my talent then I would get reminded that I am amongst the best hockey players in the country in my age group. There is little room for error at this level of performance.

Even though I did not put my best foot forward at the training camp in preparation for our three-day series, I was able to remind myself that I deserved to be there. Even the worst players in that team are the best in the country. Going from Hilton College hockey to Kwa-Zulu Natal Inland hockey to donning the green and gold makes it easy to get lost in the hype that people throw my way. I will always remember the abundant praise that I received following my selection into the team, but I will appreciate the heartwarming praise that I received from family members and people who have supported me along my hockey journey differently to how I will remember the praise from people who never really wanted to see me accomplish such an achievement. Instagram follows, likes and comments provide a sting of dopamine, but what truly matters is the genuine encouragement to keep going even during the troughs of my hockey career.

We have warmed up on the turf, but even that seems unreal considering Bloemfontein's unforgiving weather. The cold bites at my fingers and renders them senseless. Numb. I try protecting my fingers with the limp ends of my sleeves but the cold bites through them. As we step onto the turf a combination of nervousness, excitement and honor blows over me. It might just be the wind. A drumming sound is repeated as it beats against our multicolored flag. Still shivering, we stand, roaring the national anthem then we go straight to playing. It should be deemed criminal to be hitting hard rubber with carbon in negative three degrees Celsius. Regardless, we played for each other and our country. I have the ball. Suddenly it all goes quiet. My feet are moving, but my mind is unwaveringly still. Weaving through their sticks like a granny knitting a scarf, my eyes widen as I get closer to the goals. All the training, all the failures, all the scars on my hands from leaving everything on the turf has amounted to this. With the goal in my sights and the opposition surrounding. I shoot, and...

Time freezes. A faint voice echoes, "Khoele... Khoele... please sign."

I am shot straight back to the present. My eyes gain focus and I find myself staring into two blue dilated balls containing determination and nervousness. He does not seem to mind my moment of hesitation as his jittering arms hold out a pen and shake his shirt. I accept and offer him a wink which he returns with a stretched smile. I then send him off with my signature. "Thank you Khoele, you're my favorite hockey player" he says then skips away, finally releasing all the pent-up joy that his body could not contain. As I set foot on the plane my coach announces, "I better not catch you daydreaming like that on the turf. It's not every day that you get to play for your country against Germany."

"But that's how it all started, Sir. With a dream."



Ben McGuigan

“...after rain...”

Rain... it seems so abundant in our Hilton bubble, the mist belt surrounding us with water aplenty. I still can't get used to the constant dribble and drizzle of rain, the fresh green grass, the never-ending showers – flowing with an overbearing amount of hot water at high pressure. How is it fair that we can live like this? How is it fair when before things were so different?

(Not too long ago)

The dried fynbos rattles in the wind across the Table Mountain. I'm sweating as I struggle up the Indian Venster path, silently cursing my father for bringing me on this so-called “Adventure”. I know I'll thank him at the top. I know at the end it will all be worth it when I gaze across the city of Cape Town perched high up on the mountain's rocky viewpoint surrounded by beautiful, albeit dry, nature. But for now, I'll continue cursing him for making me struggle because it keeps me going, step by step.

We didn't take much to drink - the city's water restrictions ensured that – and I'm thirsty. No, thirsty is an understatement. My throat is dry. Every single breath spreads the dryness further and wider. Every time I attempt to swallow the sticky excuse for saliva that rests in and around my mouth my throat screams with agony. I'm so thirsty that when my father passes me the water bottle, I'm tempted to finish it all. My conscience regrettably stops me from doing so. It would be nice if there were taps along the way, I think, as I take another step upward. That would unfortunately be impossible. We don't even have enough water to have a quick shower in the evening, let alone have water conveniently provided along the path for your average hiker.

A lot has suffered since Cape Town decided to become a desert more barren than the Sahara. Sport is the most noticeable for me. Cricket fields that were once lush and green are now rocky and dry; my elbows and knees are full of grazes from when I've dived to field a cricket ball. The days are also much hotter, I've had to be out there playing the game I so love in 40-degree heat on several occasions.

My complaints seem quaint in contrast to the possibilities the citizens of Cape Town (including myself) may have to endure should Day Zero arrive. I've heard that I may soon have to carry buckets to collect water from army tanks. I wonder

if these big, green beasts will be there to carry the large amount of water or to protect the valuable resource they hold.

(Present Day)

I sit here, typing away on my laptop as it rains outside. Just today I played hockey on an Astro that was watered before we started training. I still can't quite grasp how artificial grass can be watered every day (not including rain) whilst back at Cape Town fields could run dry for months on end. But I suppose Hilton stands apart in quite a few areas, water being one of the less noteworthy. Still, I notice the difference. The smell of the wet grass and mud on my way back from sport, the feeling of the cool drizzle on the back of my Number One collared shirt when I come back from supper, the sound of the water droplets hitting the roof as I drift off to sleep. I notice it all. I notice it because I went so long without it.



Ben Guimaraens

Ballad to Ghosts

It is late at night while I write this. Ghosts roam in the halls as my lamp burns like a sun on the corner of my desk. It's the only source of light in the room. Maybe this is how stars feel looking at the sun. Radiant ball of fire, cascading chaos. But that's not what I see.

The ghosts talk here, cackling every so often over a quip for the living. What separates me from them? I feel compelled to give it all up now, throw my arms upwards and accept some self-induced punishment. But I pause, taking a long gulp of stale air. The voices pause occasionally, listening to the living, preying on every word as if it were a feast. They're unable to enter our world now. My world. That's what separates them from us.

I think about my lamp again. Without it I would be blind, but I could still see. Ghosts aren't dependent on such lights. They move through the gloom like a gondola through a Venetian rio. A clotting of darkness are the ghosts, manifesting in places where light cannot find them.

The sun's rising now, peeking above the rooftop of the infirmary. The ghosts don't like the sun, not in this form. Casting its light down the hill, it trickles towards me now almost teasing with its speed. The grass seems to wake from slumber when the light washes over it. Dew glistens in the crisp Winter air before me. "Almost here" I think. It's touching the fountain now, just a few metres from my window.

All at once, the ghosts turn to look, realising their time is up. The living welcome the light with open arms, discarding the ink that clouds them.

I stand from my desk, fixated on the light before me. I've been waiting for this while the ghosts speak no longer as I am engulfed by the sun.

When Grey Clouds Rolled Over the Hills

The people of Pompeii were accustomed to minor earthquakes. They were a sign from the fire god, Vulcan. Gladiators tore each other to bloody shreds as Mount Vesuvius let out a low rumble. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary as the tables of street vendors shuddered and children clung to the robes of their mothers. The clanging of swords from the arena seemed to combat the mountain's voice as it echoed into the land beyond.

Blood saturated the sand beneath the wary combatants as the earth shook. The people of Pompeii had never felt the earth move with such ferocity, as if it sought vengeance upon them. The stone bricks of the arena generated a thunderous thwack as they fell inward under the supreme weight of the spectators. Gladiators scrambled, finding whatever shelter they could as shards of rock shot through the air. The pristine marketplace became filled with the screams of petrified women and children, some crushed by the very bricks that had made up their homes. Sparks began to erupt from the mouth of Mount Vesuvius and paint the gloomy sky a shade of orange. The destruction in the settlement was relentless as temples fell and citizens ran amok. The metallic smell of ash started to fill the atmosphere as a cloud of the stuff plumed into the afternoon sky. Everyone, from city elites to the grimmest gladiator, was now at the mercy of the mountain.

A loud silence fell upon Pompeii, almost ironically, as only chaos could be observed. Once magnificent shrines - brimming with life - now stood destroyed. Tiny fragments of ash settled gently on the bodies of the dead like snowflakes. Citizens still clung to one another for they feared the wrath of Vulcan. Then, with a stomach-wrenching roar, Vesuvius erupted once again, sending great balls of magma into the atomic sky. They lit up like malicious evening stars and began to rain down on the city. Tails of smoke followed as if these comets of hell were still attached to the mouth of the mountain. Stunning tapestries and banners of the finest thread erupted into flames before the very people that created them. Those who were fortunate to still be alive or uninjured sought shelter in a frenzy. Children clung to their parents with tears streaming down their ash-covered cheeks. The once-regal arena was now a demolished pile of stone with the unmoving limbs of spectators reaching to the sky as if finding a way to escape.

At this stage the people of Pompeii didn't believe Vulcan would subject them to any more punishment - but they were fatally wrong. A cloud of magma jetted upward from the mouth of Mount Vesuvius casting an eerie glow onto the Pompeians, sealing their inevitable doom. The wall of ash fell to the earth and made its way towards the village with a ferocious speed.

As the cloud of death approached the city, the sense of hope faded. Fate was imminent. Families stood motionless in the cobbled streets as they were taken by the sheer size of the torrent of magma. The storm of fire had now reached the boundary of the town, vaporising bodies and burying any sign of a once-thriving culture. Chiselled blocks of stone flew through the sky as the wave of devastation consumed street after street, memory after memory.

Most of Pompeii had been destroyed, years of cultivated livelihoods, wiped out in seconds. The orange sky and ash, falling like snow, shrouded the city in a hellish Winter from which there was no escape. The wall of magma and ash had now consumed the town in its entirety. The sun was all but a distant memory like the civilisation that once inhabited this now barren place. Ash blocked all light from above, removing any hope of rebuilding what had been lost.

Once again, a silence fell over the city of Pompeii. Flecks of ash continued to fall, creating a feeling of serenity as the endless destruction finally came to a halt. The layers of ash and magma, up to nine feet deep in some places, coated any remnants of the bustling marketplace and the savage arena where gladiators were left for dead. There was no longer the joyful sound of children playing on street corners or street vendors bartering for produce.

For centuries Pompeii slept beneath its pall of ash only to be discovered in the distant future.

*"Nothing beside remained. Round the decay
of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."*

- Percy Bysshe Shelley

The Other Side of Fear

The Grade 10 Journey is a deeply meaningful rite of passage for every Hilton boy. Boys travel in their dorms around the beautiful expanse that is the Karkloof before returning to school after the two-week trek. During this time, boys connect with each other to create a vision of what they want for themselves for the next two years. Away from cell phones and all other electronics, they have time to connect with their dorm-mates and form bonds that will last a lifetime. I was fortunate enough to go on the journey last year.

The first day of walking through the bush whilst the intense African sun is glaring down on you is a challenge for everyone. You arrive at your first camp site exhausted and hungry. I remember arriving at our campsite next to Albert Falls Dam, sitting in the dirt, taking off my shoes and staring at the glistening water, grateful finally to have a chance to rest. That night we cooked and ate together under the moonlight whilst frogs and crickets chirped in the background. There was something beautifully simple about that moment as we chatted to each other without caring about school or girlfriends. This was the start of our journey together.

Boys will attest to this when I say that by day seven, you're into the swing of things and you start to enjoy each day a little more than the last. Your bag gets lighter and your legs feel stronger. You walk faster as a group and encourage those who may need a bit more support. Together, you conquer each day's challenges. This is also the time when you really start to get in touch with yourself and others. I found that I could think more clearly, and I enjoyed being able to talk to my dorm without distractions such as social media.

I think it was our twelfth day when we did the Karkloof Canopy Tours. Many of us feared riding the zip lines alone, without any assistance. We heard a motivational talk by one of the Canopy Tour staff and he posed a question to us: "What would you do if you had no fear?" I thought this was a brilliant question and I pondered over it during the rest of our trip. So often we don't venture out of our comfort zones because of our fears. I experienced this on our trip with the zip lines and previous experiences in my life. I often don't want to lead because I fear the consequences if I fail as a leader. We all fear something that we think we shouldn't and we see this as a weakness.

Standing around the isivivane back at school, I felt that I had returned a different person. I had conquered many of my fears, such as leading others. I had a new-found confidence and I was less afraid to share my ideas. All sixteen of us agreed that this was the most valuable experience of our Hilton careers and were grateful that we were able to do it since we were still in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our journey together left us in good stead as many of us had come to terms with some of our fears. Personally, I have overcome my fear of leading others by talking with my dorm and discussing it together. As I reflect on our journey together, I believe that fear is the only barrier that stops us from reaching our full potential and George Addair summed this up perfectly: "Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of fear."

The Fateel String

In a small, dimly lit room, Amar is hunched over his desk, furiously sketching on a blank sheet of paper. Sketchbooks litter the floor of the room. A kaleidoscope of pencils and pastels has stained his bedsheets. He is drawing another of his beloved Spiderman comic strips.

Amar has always felt alone at school, even at home. He longs for someone that understands him and does not think of him as “the weirdo at school”. That was until he found his first comic book. The vivid colours and thrilling superhero action captivated him from the start. Amar identifies with Spiderman. Peter Parker is considered to be a “nerd”, something which brings hardship in the hierarchy of high school. Amar finds solace in this character.

As Amar finishes off his drawing, he hears a loud thud against the window. This is odd considering it is late in the evening and his bedroom window is two stories up. He rises from his desk and shuffles towards the window. Sheets of rain pelt the glass behind the beige curtains. Amar reaches for the hem of the curtain and yanks it open. The streetlamps look like miniature suns along the edge of the street. Lights from neighbouring apartments are caught by the rain drops. A food vendor, wearing an old hat, sells hotdogs and extra-large pretzels to a customer.

Suddenly, a flash of red passes by the window. A humanoid silhouette swings from rooftop to rooftop. A silvery string holds the slim figure and allows him to move swiftly and silently between buildings. The Fateel string that encompasses Amar’s wrist feels heavy, suddenly. The string represents power, ambition and success. Amar’s family have believed in the power of Fateel for generations. A symbol of destiny - prosperity - bound by the foreverness of the red string. He lifts open the window and sticks his head into the torrential rain. Temporarily blinded by the ice-cold drops, Amar ducks back into his room and plans his next move. Amar clambers on top of the bed side table that sits in front of the window. He thinks about pursuing the creature that flashed by his window.

His curiosity gets the better of him. He leaps from the window and onto the awning of the Chinese restaurant that operates below his apartment. Customers yell in shock as the impact causes the awning to collapse onto them. Amar has no time to apologise as he sees the creature swinging towards him, from building to building. Amar notices that its eyes are pure white and glow in the darkness. The figure passes over his head and Amar begins to chase after it. He’s never felt so alive, invigorated. It’s just like in his comic strips. An experience most can only dream of.

As they reach the end of the block, the creature launches itself into the night sky and completes an elegant backflip, before landing in front of Amar. His face is covered with

a mask which hides the entirety of his face. Its eyes are bright and reflect the lights from the streetlamps. The rest of his suit is a dark reddish colour, dripping with water.

“What do you want from me?” he asks.

“Is it really you? Are you really...Spiderman?”

He turns his head slightly to one side, examining Amar.

“Yeah, it’s true,” he says slowly. “All those comics and movies you’ve seen; they’re real.”

Amar nearly passes out, right in the middle of the street, as he tries to process this information. His childhood hero stands in front of him. He hears his heart beat in his ears.

“You see, you’re not the first person to ever see me like this. I once met a guy called Stan Lee and he wanted to know my story. He ended up using me as a catalyst for the comics and everyone knows as Spiderman.”

“So, are all the other comics about the other heroes real too?” Amar asks whilst gasping for breath.

“No, they’re not real,” he replies with a sigh.

He gestures for Amar to hold on to him. Amar clings to his shoulders as they spring into the dark night above. The rain suddenly stops as they land on top of a local newspaper billboard, with a spectacular view of Queens, New York below.

Amar builds up the courage to say what he’s been dreaming of saying since he was a young child.

“Hey, so I’ve idolised you for my entire life and you’ve helped me through so many tough times. I’ve always been inspired by the way you save people, like me, from dangerous situations. You’ve helped me become the person I am today.”

He looks at Amar, his mask hiding his true emotions. It takes a while before he responds.

“I’m really touched. No one has ever said anything like that to me before. Thank you. It means the world. And please - don’t tell anyone about this. Otherwise, we’ll see each other again under different circumstances.”

Amar watches as he turns to the city and leaps from the billboard. At the last second, a line of silver latches onto the opposing ledge and Spiderman leaps into the darkness.

The moon creates a silhouette of him as he leaps from rooftop to rooftop. Amar feels the Fateel string around his wrist again. His family was right and would be proud of him tonight.



Ruben Marx

After the rain, I have to wear a mask

There is a storm inside me. Not the storm that gives people the desire and energy to achieve greatness. No. A storm that turns my stomach and crushes my chest. A storm whose winds scatter all sensible thought inside my head. A storm that's puffy clouds rain down my cheeks. Storms are often unpredictable in nature, and in many cases, it almost seems as though their sole purpose is destruction without reason. That's how I feel. Late at night, surrounded by the calmness of the cool air that enters my bedroom window; my storm awakens.

My storm knows no bounds, has no reason; it just happens. At night, I let it rain. After the rain, I have to put a mask on. In a hyper-masculine environment, I have to hide how I truly feel. Essentially, I can be compared to the best sailors. Throughout my time at school, I have had to sail through the storm that runs rampant in my mind, all while not letting other people see how I really feel.

Have you ever wanted to quit, to allow yourself to fall overboard? To end the suffering after the rain. After the rain, I put my mask on. A mask that has almost dented my face because of how often I wear it. Why do I wear it? People will not understand. Constantly, I am reminded of my privilege, my family's immense wealth. However, what does that even mean if I can't bear to be in my own skin?

After the rain; I have to wear my mask. I have to endure the heedless comments on how men aren't meant to cry; the constant notion of how tough men have to be. I have always wondered what a true man is. Many people believe this person has great physical strength as well as a strong personality. The way I define a true man is as someone who is passionate about something and who uses this passion to fuel him into doing what is right because of the goals he has.

Day after day, I wake up with hope. Not hope for a good day, no. I hope today is not the day I abandon myself—the day I allow the demons within me to triumph over my why. Have you ever tried to breathe underwater? Try telling yourself that you are a good person. Most people can think of numerous reasons why they are good; my mind automatically shifts to reasons why I am not good. My mind tells me I should be

different. Regardless of how much "good" I can do, my mind constantly reminds me of when I haven't been good.

How can I be different if I don't really know who I am anymore? You see, this mask I wear has allowed me to lose myself, lose my reason, lose my passion, and lose my why. That's not true. One cannot lose their why; simply put, one can only shift what or who their why is. Am I obsessive if my why is someone else, or am I narcissistic if my why is myself? Should I put all my reason into faith? Or is that also just another way people are trying to justify all the wrong that happens in the world?

Late at night, when I am alone, I can finally remove my mask. Finally, I am free of judgement. Well, almost free of judgement. At the end of the day, it's not what others think about me that really affects me, no. It's what I think about myself.

We are the Problem

The eternal gush of smoke and burning of materials are rapidly murdering the hopes we have of returning the earth to its former glory: an earth free of pollution, radiation, and other consequences of what we do and what we have done. Constantly, we sign agreements and pledge to stop; we do the bare minimum. Time and time again, this has proven to be futile, and time and time again, we prove to ourselves that we are not worthy of the magic that this planet holds in its grasp. People who are deemed inspirational and are seen as role models in society set the example of doing the bare minimum and checking boxes. Some blatantly use excuses such as "the next generation" or "the government" will mend what we have broken, and "the problem is elsewhere." Constantly, we duck and dive from our responsibility to fix God's greatest gift, the earth. Why not here? Why not us? Why not now?

Earth's grip is slipping; our future on earth is fading and continually becoming more uncertain. We burn materials that release toxic greenhouse gases, we cut down trees, and we remove natural resources that are fundamental to the functioning of ecosystems. We strip reefs of their occupants; furthermore, we are responsible for the bleaching of these reefs. The gap between us and the ocean floor extends as our ice caps cease to exist. Our water and air temperatures exceed anything that has ever been experienced in human history. Slowly, our winters begin to feel like summers. Our autumns not only see the falling of leaves; rather, they see entire trees uprooted, chopped down, and demolished—just for paper. Our springs are no longer a rebirth or a beacon of hope; fewer flowers blossom or leaves sprout. We have lost touch with our planet and its needs.

Yes, we are more efficient. Yes, we have power. Yes, we have technologies that automate mundane tasks. How long will this last? In economics, science, and social sciences, there is a common trend: everything balances out in the end. When will the earth tip the scales in its favour? When will we realise that the largest source of

freshwater is rapidly depleting every second due to our rising temperatures? When will we realise the importance and beauty of what we are destroying? Well, you know what they say: "You only realise what you had once it's gone." We are the problem. No longer can we just blame mines or power plants. The blame is on all of us; for too long, we have stood aside and allowed the selfish to strip the earth of its treasures. For too long, shallow statements and promises regarding "greener manufacturing" have been enough to satisfy the masses. If we don't hold ourselves accountable, the earth will.

We can no longer suppress or delay efforts to fix what we have broken. We have to save what we haven't already lost. Our earth is crying out. Our animals are crying out. Our plants are crying out. We have a responsibility. If we don't adhere to the earth's warnings, forces we cannot control will balance out the scale. Contaminated food and water are already affecting millions. Rising water has caused entire countries to vanish. Drought has caused populations to suffer. The time for change and fixing what we have broken is now. We must act. "You only realise what you had once it's gone."



Richard Eyres

Countdown: 24 hours left on Earth

I manoeuvre out of my bunk. Defined and sinuous like the roots of a tree, my muscles wriggle and contract under the weight of my aged body. I wear the scars of time and age's gnawing teeth on my face. The way a cliff face fends off the ferocious clawing of the waves, my body proudly fights age's cruel advance.

The ancient leather of my father's chair welcomes me in a cool embrace. My mind shrugs off the groggy cloak of slumber and my consciousness is reignited with the keen, undying imagination that not even age can sabotage. My brain still possesses the longing thirst for knowledge and discovery that had guided me through my youth with the keen sense of direction of a Khoi-san tracker. The ignition switch to my imagination is ignited, and a labyrinth of emotion and experience is painted with the same colour and excitement of a younger me. I begin to ponder just how I'll choose to spend my last day, with the same conviction and excitement of a child wishing on a shooting star.

I could ski down the peaks of Mount Everest, my blades carving through the soft, white grated heaven. The slopes are glazed with Roman marble and Egyptian cotton. Milky dustings of snow tickle my neck as I sweep through the hills and valleys with the grace and freedom of a sparrow dive-bombing a rival's nest.

I could surf the Polynesian swells of Fiji. The chorus of the ocean heaving and swaying relentlessly and unceasingly reminds me of my mortality. The banter of the seagulls overhead combines with the rhythmic whisper of the maritime wind, as it caresses my ears on its journey to another sea. The cool, emerald water coaxes the set towards me, expertly crafting a long tubing and frothing barrel of water that my surfboard exploits for 20 seconds of ecstasy. The smell of exotic plants perfumes the air and the sun sets to work, tattooing my back the red and orange colour of summertime memories and Pacific daydreams. My mind imagines on...

I could paraglide over the barbed wire peaks of Lion's head, the skies painted emerald as the icy wind whips angrily at my body, protesting my thunderbolt pace. My veins fill with adrenaline with a flow the mighty Tugela could be jealous of. I am filled with the ecstasy of a much younger me watching the RAF battles of the sparrows in the autumn garden. Dive-bombing and weaving I mimic their expert flying lessons, the shackles of gravity no longer limiting me.

Without notice, my imagination loses its grasp on me and I feel the embrace of the cool leather of the chair, like the compassion of an old friend. The weightless ecstasy of flight subsides. The rhythmic chorus of the monotonous Polynesian shore-break goes quiet, and I can no longer feel the kiss of the coconut flavoured breeze. The jagged teeth of the snowy peaks claw hungrily at the clouds, but I am not there to rocket down the milky playground.

I am mortal once again.

24 hours: all that I need to live a million lifetimes.

An Imposter at Home

The concrete sidewalk seems less welcoming than it was yesterday. Matriarch of a proud family, we are a lost clan amongst a dystopian reality. We are no longer welcome in the motherland of our forefathers. The birds are not narrating the story of the day as they used to. The gleeful and naïve shrieks of the children do not comb their way through the streets as they did so shortly before. Uncertainty is chiseling away at my knees, and anguish and resentment are like an anvil on my shoulders. This system requires a brave face and rebellious glance at authority; the need to keep calm for your children's sake, even when the innocent hopefulness that accompanies childhood cannot be satisfied.

The buildings in the distance stand solemnly. Their message etched into every brick that builds them into what they have become: a stark reminder that you do not belong there. Behind us a wild beast rears its head in irritation with tusks of steel and gnashing teeth of bolts. Malevolent iron muscles pulled taught over a body that houses a mind that entices the beast into action.

Lion's Head towers over us. Never budging, it stands. No matter who comes or goes, it stays true to itself. Sound and resolute it asserts its dominance over whoever dares call it theirs. I glance back to my children and watch as their juvenile smile protrudes through even the harshest of fear and uncertainty. As I explain the metaphor to them, I am overcome with a sense of pride. As the tide ebbs and flows, and the moon packs up camp to make way for a new day, we will someday reclaim what is ours. Out of the rubble the Sagewood trees will rise, and in the guard towers bunny chows will be sold with a smile once again. District Six will rise again.

For Queen and Colour

He can almost taste the icy steel as the assegai rips through the air next to his head. Too close. He gathers that the spear's owner must be in close pursuit, and a crazed chorus from the trailing impi gives him further motivation not to hang around and find out. The veins in his head writhe like pythons, his lungs raking in oxygen as he curses the gash that gnaws away at his lower back. As he brazenly hurdles a scarlet dipped aloe, his hands clamp ever tighter to the mast. The pompous red crest bobs clumsily up and down as he bounds away from certain death. Condemned by his duty, the role he must now play may come at the cost of Victorian pride and two thousand of its servants. Save the Queen's colour if it's the last thing that you do.

In the surrounds, the crackle of the Henry Martini rifles has lost their voice. The triumphant ululations of Cetshwayo's men rumbles through the freshly painted red grass of the clearing. They wear the feathered manes of seasoned impi veterans, their lean bodies carved from bronze, attached to the regal Nguni-leather faces that house a pair of darting graphite eyes. They are in good spirits and prepare to mobilise towards their next target - some new mission station, Rorke's Drift he believes they called it. The sun begins to paint the horizon with the rusty hue of dusk, but for the fugitive, the chase has only just begun.

His mouth is full of the acidic glue of dehydration as he darts along the khaki track. The imperial red of his officer's uniform blends in with the red burn that Africa's sun has tattooed onto his neck. The words, "Abulale umlungu!" hurtle towards him with the same malice as the hunting party from which they were sent. He will not be sticking around for a translation. He can sense his predators falling slowly behind, as his eyes welcomingly greet a Basotho pony anxiously cantering along just ahead. Its previous owner is dragged limply from the saddle, freshly accessorised with an assegai to the chest. He curses the chore of heaving the victim to the side of the track as he straddles the pony with the flag's mast still clamped in his grip. His adrenaline seems to be contagious as the mule accelerates down the track, the haunting backdrop of Isandlwana mountain taking guard over the blood-spattered canvas of Zululand. The pony carves through the toothpick grass as if it knew it was in the same danger as its passenger, their tribal predators hardly deterred. His lungs were only just recovering

from the ragged clawing for air of the on-foot pursuit, when his ears make out the gurgling and spluttering harmony of a river. Flying around the corner with the pace an Arabic thoroughbred stallion would be envious of, the duo's hearts sink as they are forced to a halt.

The mighty Buffalo River stands like a moat before them, hissing at them with rapids of crystal water clawing at half-submerged rocks. The stampede of impis can be heard pounding the track in the distance. Capture is not an option. He hesitates before urging the pony into the angry stream.

The Basotho obliges, with the unwavering obedience of a private to his commanding officer. The torrent lashes at the side of the animal as it cautiously proceeds into the white frenzy. The roar of the great blue serpent drowns out the shrieks of the impis who have closed the gap, galloping towards the bank of the river. In the frenzy of the thrashing waves, he did not even here the shot. The Zulu muzzle loader dispatched the animal instantly, with the fugitive being catapulted into the mighty Buffalo's onslaught. His knuckles turn white as he clamps his fist around the mast. He hurtles downstream, gulping at oxygen whenever he feels his face breach the surface. Exhausting quickly, he feels a pang of pain to his side, the adrenaline masking the agony momentarily. Well upstream the murderous onlookers erupt with cheers. He clammers onto a submerged log, his free arm hauling him out of the flow and onto the welcoming bank. He coughs up what he assumes is water, instead the warm and soupy red liquid glazes the bank next to him. With the last of the strength he can muster, his arm contracts into a stiff and gallant salute to the Queen's colour that lies solemnly at his side. He hears the hymns of the Natal Hornbill as he closes his eyes for the last time.

Two weeks had passed since defeat at Isandlwana. A convoy of Royal Scouts discover casualty number two thousand and one, lying next to a banner stinking of Victorian pride and the ultimate sacrifice: to give one's life for Queen and colour. "Where are we, Sargent?" A private enquires, a tear glistening on his cheek. "Fugitives rest, private. Fugitives rest."

A Statue Sculpted by Pride

He felt their gaze piercing him like razors. The only certainty in his life is offered by the unfeeling loamy ground that his combat boots find themselves on top of. He adjusts his navy green beret. It is his trophy, it is his persona, it is his ethos and morals. He is everything the beret embodies. Although not the most conventionally masculine, he commands authority. He is not a senior man, but the anthem of speech that crawls out of his oesophagus demands respect. Through years of mental conditioning, he has sculpted his identity. He has chiseled away at individuality and shrugged off vulnerability. His chest is inflated with an air of responsibility. His size screams out to the world, "I deserve all that I have worked for." His lips forge comments that can cut

and thrash like daggers, and his tongue is a guillotine ready to devastate any argument. But it is in his eyes that you can see the demons that torment him. In his pupils swims a sea of regret. The sights that are unseeable, and the faces that will never again grace the earth. One man: a statue sculpted by pride.

He stands before his regiment. The decorations of corporal sit pompously on his broad shoulders. He is enveloped by his title as he wrestles with his mortality. Why settle for inadequacy when you can adopt perfection in the form of the worlds most coveted job description? His manifestation in his title comes from a life that now feels so foreign. Born from the blue-collar nation, he remembers his father's jet-black greased hands. He recalls the neighbourhood bullies and the long first day at high school. He grew up in simpler times where roads were for cricket matches and Sunday mornings were spent with hymn book in hand. He misses when pillow forts were palaces and the neighbourhood dog was a recognised celebrity. But these humble times could also be raw and unloving. It does not take long in a small town to understand that survival relies on fitting the cookie-cutter mould. To stray too far from the flock was to risk alienation. It was here that he encountered his first run in with his domineering mistress: pride.

He once again stands before his platoon. Age had weathered down the youthful spark in his eyes, and nature had gnawed away at his features to a matte grey finish. He still stands with his regal, iron-rod posture. A few barbs of jet-black hair pierce his grey scalp like lightning bolts illuminating the night. He is the walking embodiment of "Pride," a walking incarnation of a "Man." The muscle fibres of his heart strain under the pressure of so many insecurities held in, so many vulnerabilities never talked about. A proud man does not speak about his feelings or his shortcomings.

He gazes out into the sea of uncertain eyes in his platoon. The metronome of his steady breath buckles and stammers when he reaches a realisation. He stands before a swarm of his past selves. Pride: The gas of toxic masculinity oozes from the crowd.

Lost in the Motherland

I can still see the bumbling khaki hillocks. The aromatic wisps of the roasting coffee beans reach out and dust my nose. I can still feel my hands caressing the chocolaty water of the humming streams, and the whispered conversation of the weaver birds overhead. I then see the charred remains of my village. The flames are Satan's claws, dragging across my home, stabbing at my childhood and pocketing the remains of my individuality. Those weaver birds were not Tutsis. My legs ache and strain like splintering bamboo rods, with the might of all my ambitions, my dreams, my memories, subsiding to fear and hounded by despair. Rwanda no longer greeted me with the kiss of the honeysuckle bushes, and the friendly greeting rustle of the toothbrush grass. The blood dipped sunsets, and the oil-painted hides of my father's cattle fade from sight, like the tiger fish that wriggles away after the gentle release of the fisherman of

my village. But as my people say: to be stubborn in oppression is freedom, and with the trained spear of the Hutu's lancing at our rears, we must dull the morning hue of Rwanda's sun, as our tears of remorse spitefully extinguish the memories of a home, a family, a culture, and a purpose that is now so far away.



Connor Sawyer

War of The Cupcakes

The commanding officer was screaming at me, giving me instructions from left to right, but I just blocked out all the noise and focused on how soft her lips looked in the faint light. It felt like I was the only lieutenant there. I stumbled around, confused, gathering everything they ordered me to, and more, in case she forgot to mention a crucial instrument for this battle we were about to commence.

A cacophony of deafening blasts reverberated through the air, shattering the once peaceful silence. I froze in shock. I was trapped, surrounded by the relentless onslaught of explosions, unable to escape the devastation unfolding before me. My lungs gave in as the thick white powder filled the air. I had been warned never to cough, as that would give away my position. If I coughed, the war would be over, we would lose, and it would all be because, of my single cough. My "Broomhandle" was stuck in my old raggedy holster.

Through all this commotion, the commanding officer still looked at me with her sweet innocent hazel eyes, instantly calming me down. I took a deep breath, accepting the powder into my lungs. The "Broomhandle" left my holster with the elegance of a swan. My hand filled its smooth wooden grip with ease. I swept away at the enemies, swiftly clearing the white powder. It felt as easy as running a hot blade through butter.

As we advanced towards the next phase of our mission to conquer the enemy, heaps of rubble that resembled grains of sugar littered the surroundings. Despite the chaos, our determination to achieve victory grew stronger. In the distance, I sensed a sweet aroma wafting through the air, reminding me of freshly baked cupcakes waiting for us as a reward for our hard-fought struggle.

We meticulously measured every aspect of our plan down to the last millimetre. As the commanding officer recited the plans to me repeatedly, I struggled to deliver them accurately, my attention fixated on the way strands of her curly, dark oak hair rested on her shoulders so peacefully, as if in a world devoid of worries.

With only one entrance and exit, there was only one way we were getting into the enemy's base. There was no other choice than to knock on the door. We were met with rusted hard steel knobs and dials. I hesitated, unsure of their function. Nevertheless, I turned them all forcefully clockwise. The sound of the rust scraping against the metal made my spine shiver. The base itself roared with the might of a hungry Grizzly bear after hibernation. It quickly turned into a fiery inferno, blistering and turning my hands bright red. My eyes shut as the heat engulfed my moist face. Entering the unknown terrain cautiously, I did not know what the huge metal box had in store for me.

My commanding officer explicitly explained, "You only have fifteen minutes in there until you are toast." The smoothness of her olive skin distracted me, and I was lost in thought once again.

Sirens blared like an alarm from my slightly chipped iPhone. The room was submerged by charcoal black smoke. Hurriedly, I opened the door again, this time with my worn leather gloves.

Burnt.

Lexi said, "Ugh, Con, this is the last time I'll ever leave you in charge of baking my birthday cupcakes."



Fin Dalrymple

Have you ever been lost? So truly lost that every direction looks the same, every tree is a carbon-copy of the one you saw five minutes ago, as the ash blankets the world? The fear is overwhelming, psyche-consuming. The only light is a tongue of flames, snaking up the trees behind you, chasing the breath from your lungs, stealing that most holy of resources. All around you is a cacophony of snaps and crackles, interspersed with the occasional spike in the unholy symphony, from a fallen tree. Suddenly, there is a dull thud, but it is far away. Vaguely, you realise that you are no longer running, and taste a mix of dirt and bloody iron. All it takes to bring your existence to heel is a small protrusion from a resentful tree, not long for the world.

BANG!

The impact of a fallen tree, not two metres from your head brings you back, a type of smelling salt giving you a fresh chance at life. In between laboured breaths, you force your body to comply with your mind, and shakily stand back up. One foot in

front of the other, edging away from the wall of heat behind you. Stumbling slowly replaces tottering, as the indistinct shapes come into focus around you. Your nostrils burn as you desperately flee the flames, seeking the asylum of air unsullied by smoke and ash. Soon you are running, but it is not fast enough. Trees flash by you, and you are hoping that it ends soon, and you are running and praying and...

WHOOSH!

Trees fly by as I dash through the forest, wind tearing through my hair as I sprint with reckless abandon. I am light incarnate, dancing past roots and obstacles in my path, quicker than even the fugacious flapping of birds wings. Leaves crunch beneath my feet, and miniscule insects scurry from my path. Suddenly, the multitude of sounds of the forest quieten, leaving a stark silence, interrupted only by the sharp whistle of the wind. The gentle breeze causing the treetops to sway is gone, and the already dim sky blackens with anger. Like a photo, the moment is captured in my mind forever, a frozen frame capturing the essence of silence. I listen to that eerie silence for an eternity, and, simultaneously, only an instant.

BOOM!

A scintillating flash of light, something so beautiful, and yet so terrible, shakes the ground. My ears are ringing, my vision only incandescent white. More booms shatter the silence, and now I feel fear. I am running, blind, listening to the only instinct my body has: self-preservation. My vision alternates between white and orange, yet still I run. I run as I have hundreds of times before, but this forest is no longer my friend. No longer may I chart the uncharted, for if I stop for a even a second, we will both fall today. As I soon as I start to gather my wits, the unlikeliest of foes scatters them: a root.

WHAM!

The cool, clear oxygen surrounding me makes me stagger in surprise. I have broken through the tree line, and never was there a sweeter taste. My knees slam against the solid ground, and I start retching up the contents of my last meal. I gasp for sweet life through my cracked lips, and cry out a weak attempt at a shout of relief. I crawl away from the fire, until I collapse from exhaustion. I turn back and watch the forest, my forest, burn, and with it, my life.

I was informed many days later that it was an act of God, a freak storm that emerged from nowhere. I guess I am still numb, in denial that it is all gone. My home, a place I had lived in for the last twenty-two years was gone. I had to rediscover what life meant to me, and it made me evaluate my life. Never take anything for granted, because you never know whether it will be taken from you.



James Fender

Blood, Sweat and Tears

I wait as the mist creeps eerily across the battlefield. A nervous silence suppressed the usual spirit and energy that surrounded the camp. The solemn voice of the general cracks the tension as he breaks down our unforgiving tactics. "We need to outflank them. Men, blood, sweat and tears will be shed today. Follow the damn strategy and it will not be our blood shed, but theirs. Win your personal battles and we will emerge victorious. We have the advantage. Remember what you are fighting for. Remember your families. The men that fought for the cause before you, the legacy they left behind. Fight for that boy at home, that boy who is depending on you, the boy that believes in you. Fight for your 'brother' next to you, trust them. They may not be bound by blood but bound by mutual task at hand. They are willing to kill for you, be prepared to return the favour."

"Remember men, this is war; kill or be killed."

Rain drips down my face as I anxiously wait for the enemy to emerge. My hands tremble as I drop to one knee to fasten the already tied laces of my jet-black boots. The enemy charges towards us, fueled by their bloodthirsty intent. Our frontline ready themselves for the brutal combat that is to commence. The captain frantically barks orders.

Chaos.

Our tank trundles onwards, clawing furiously at the uprooted ground, carving a path across the scarred battlefield towards the enemy line. The enemy is forced to retreat deeper into their own territory. We morph into formation and press forward as a unit. I find myself on the edge of the battlefield, near the front of the line. The captain urgently shouts out orders, "We need to attack out wide; we have to outflank them!" I reach for my firearm, a single-barreled, air cooled, high speed, mobile weapon. I peer down into a black box labeled "AMMO" to my left. Empty. Chris sees my frustration and throws me a long brass bullet.

The last bullet. The last opportunity.

The deafening roar of battle is suddenly drowned out by the sickening thud of a bullet finding its mark; time seems to slow as Chris's body folds from the impact. He drops down into the mud. Blood oozes from his chest into a dent in the battlefield. Blood and mud merges to form a rusty-coloured, boot shaped puddle in the ground. War is a filthy thing. Chris had given me one last chance to make a difference.

The last bullet. My last opportunity.

I examine the bullet and imagine his initials, 'CW' engraved into its sleek body. I whisper under my breath, "This one's for you Chris." I insert his bullet into the chamber. I set my position; I slow my breathing. "Focus." I take aim, and peer through the lens. I shift my sights onto a dusty wooden box made up of old rotting planks. I squeeze the trigger gently. "Remember your training." The bullet zips over the battlefield towards the box, resulting a deafening roar that rattles the earth. Flames burst outwards like the petals of an angry Tiger Lily. Bits of shrapnel rip through the wall of enemy soldiers, giving us a chance to move further into their territory. The enemy camp is in sight.

The captain exclaims with a grin on his face that our notorious sniper was in position. He was perched on a hilltop, patiently waiting for the target to appear in his crosshairs. H.M Pol. The infamous ruler of the people trying to take our sanity. Mist had wafted over the battlefield, casting a hazy glare over the landscape. With a sharp intake of breath, the sniper steadied his rifle, squinting through the scope. He could feel the weight of the trigger against his finger, and the thumping of his heart against his ribcage. Suddenly, the target stepped into view, the silhouette clear against the skyline. The sniper took a deep breath and pulled the trigger, the sound of the shot echoing through the empty field. The bullet strikes Pol in the sternum with a soft thud, a defeated look in his eyes.

Suddenly, a high-pitched sound rips through the air behind me. Our forces stop dead in their tracks.

"What a glorious game of rugby!" pants the referee.



Katlego Moncho

Behind Closed Doors

The room is flooded with silence. Tears trickle down from her bloodshot eyes. Her body flinches at the feel of my touch. For as long as I can recall in our marriage, I have never felt so visible. My words are yet to be received.

The alarm blares at 5:00. I wait for a few minutes. My body shrugs over to switch off the alarm. The water should be hot by now. I think to myself, "Time to start the same daily routine," as I take a warm shower. It is 5:30. She kept her promise. I find my suit ironed, carefully hung on the knob of our cupboard. Not a single crease is evident. I get dressed. My first meeting of the day starts at 7:00. I will get food on the way. She said that she would take the kids to school today. As per routine, I brush

my lips against her rosy cheeks. Her eyes drag open. She replies with a faint smile. We cannot keep doing this.

The clock strikes 19:00. A sure sign that the workday is over. Meeting after meeting, the madness comes to an abrupt end. Time is ushering me back home. This thought has been long deliberated upon, but I wonder if it will ever be enough. How does one find the courage to make such a decision? Guilt, shame - I know that I cannot allow these feelings to cloud my judgement. They will all be dealt with at the end of this. I am in no rush to get home. Traffic brings me comfort. I get home at precisely 20:30. "Hey, Dad!"

The kids are all dressed in their favourite matching pajamas. Their colours resemble the flag of some country. I cannot remember her telling me about. Those feelings are creeping towards the surface, but I am quickly able to submerge them. Their eyes meet mine. I reply, "Hey kids, how was school today?" I watch as their minds scramble to bring me any memory of significance. Her words splice their thoughts, "Kids! It's time to get ready for bed. Honey, I've left some food for you on the table." In unison, we let out a heavy sigh. I tell the kids, "You heard your mother, you can tell me all about your days when I take you to school tomorrow." I kiss them goodnight, a daily reminder of my abundant affection. My only wish is that we work to try to keep our family together.

My fingers shiver along the rim of the ceramic dish. It is my favourite meal: chicken and mushroom risotto. I try not to give the meal prepared too much thought. Besides, hunger is the last thing on my mind. Three or four bites will suffice. The food is scraped into the rubbish bin, and I place the empty bowl into the dishwasher. It is now or never.

A week had passed. His clothes were no longer in his cupboard. His car was nowhere to be seen. Mom said that he was away on an important business trip abroad. That did not explain why Dad was not answering any of my calls or messages. We both knew the answer. He was not coming home.

I find her sitting in bed reading *Great Expectations*, a Christmas gift from the kids last year. "Hey, honey." Her head nods in response. She refuses to allow my presence to divert her focus. Suddenly, I remember all the reasons I love her: the way her round glasses nestle on her small nose, the way her nose scrunches when she does not know how to pronounce an unfamiliar word, the care she takes in folding every page read the night before. In everything she is, it is just not enough.

"I want a divorce."



Luke Spear

Out of Africa...

The mud-coated Land Rover bounces down the dilapidated road. Two Rhodesian Ridgebacks are silhouetted against the back of the car. They yelp in excitement as this is the best part of their day. Air gushes past, drowning out everything besides the roar of the car. The vehicle itself is peculiar looking. An original, because it is mostly made up of old parts from the farm bulldozer that last ripped up land a couple of years ago. The diesel engine rattles, each gear change letting off a grunt, but she still does the job.

Behind her, she is being chased by the veil of a balmy summer evening, in front of her, the veld is lit in a copper sheen. Marula trees cast shadows onto the road, looking like speedbumps, but these illusions are ignored by the vehicle. The dust trails the old lady and rich red clouds merge with the skyline. The road has no destination, but the car does. Potholes lie asleep, none are awakened as she veers left onto an underused sandy two track road. Down to first gear, the car crawls upwards. The grass in the middle of the tracks tickles her underbelly. The hill stands in front of her and is dressed in gold, courtesy of the sun. The car makes its way up the land, like a hard-working ant up its mound. Exhaust fumes engulf the car as the engine strains itself. The cab lurches back and forth as it nears the top.

Soft grass carpets the top of the outcrop. A twilight sky drowns everything in pastel blue. The evening star makes its appearance as the car slows and rolls to a stop under the baobab. The engine cuts. Where silence should have been, there is only a cacophony of birds greeting the evening. The most distinct are the Burchell's coucal, African collared dove, and the grey lourie. Fascinated, the dogs are quiet, ears pricked up. The car door slams, and the driver slides out from the comfort of the khaki canvas seats. Not wanting to miss the light, she hurries to the back and unlatches the tailgate. Without hesitation, the two dogs jump down and run off in curiosity, their paws eerily silent on the ground and, within seconds, their bronze coats are lost within the bush. Unfazed by the dogs' disappearance, the driver makes her way past the baobab. She is being stared at by the warm yellow eyes of fruit bats dangling from the bulbous branches above. The occasional pod falls with a thud as the bats devour the pulp inside of them. The driver hops onto the rock ledge and finds a seat on the edge. After a hot day, the stone is still emanating warmth. The smell of elephant dung is also present.

Down in the valley, the bush and trees cool off. A single lion's roar is greeted by the cackle of hyaenas. The mountains in the distance are dark and sculptural against the night sky, which is gathering more stars by the minute. She sees the lodge down to the right. The driveway lights lead to the house where dozens of cars are parked.

Lanterns border the garden, and the frangipani tree is strung with fairy lights. The tables are set out all over the lawn. As the final bits of light seep into the horizon, the birds immediately stop chirping, and for just a single moment, complete silence is present... before the scream of a bushbaby breaks it. After a few moments, she steps away and walks back towards the dark shadow of the baobab. The Land Rover stands alone under the sky, which is now showcasing a full array of stars. The thin sliver of moon offers substantial light for her to make her way to the old lady. A single, drawn out whistle calls back the two mischievous dogs. Their athletic bodies appear out of nowhere, the only thing giving them away is their heavy panting. She taps the tailgate and both dogs reluctantly spring up. She ruffles their ears and says, "Come on you two, we have a party to host."



This is it... We make it passed the security gates and continue to stroll energetically and passionately towards her. She is only a few metres away, towering over us. Her architectural curves are aflame with molten gold, courtesy of the sun. Gate E is our entry point, and the queue is already slithering through the corridors. Twenty minutes take their toll, but we eventually make our way to the first tier- the ground stand. The atmosphere engulfs the home crowd. Our voices are deafening – having a drowning effect on the opposition fans. Still, the synergy provides for an experience only this venue can bestow. With a beer in one hand, the other on my chest, I join the nation in singing Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.

The Loftus Faithful are vigorously prepared for the monumental game ahead.

The match is bloody and intense, leaving us all in spine-chilling suspense. So much so, that no father is willing to take their desperate son to the toilet. One could compare it to a tennis game on extreme steroids, back and forth. The only difference is that instead of playing the player opposite the net, the players on the field are trying to make their opposition eat grass. Try after try, conversion after conversion. A dubious call is given our way and it gives us the upper hand. They call it home advantage.

The beers are refilled whenever there is a chance, a break, a moment to breathe. Towers of Heineken beer cups sway in the air, mimicking the flags of green and gold. Our energy pours onto the field, urging our players to fight harder. To all, the eightieth minute will signal the end of a game and what seems to be a glorious victory, but to me, it signals the moment I've been waiting for. Oblivious to my mischievous plans, the deafening crowd eagerly begin the long-awaited countdown.

Three!
Two!

One!

And with the final whistle, I rip off my supporter's shirt, the fabric sticking to my sweaty back- costing me precious time. Next are my shoes. The double knots prove to be tricky to untie, again costing me precious time. Finally, I remove my trousers and underwear with ease. I clear the advertisement banisters and I make it to the whitewash. By that time, the stadium's security has caught onto my intentions.

To think that the home side's cheering could get any louder seems impossible, but to my surprise, it has nearly quadrupled. "WOAHHHHAYYY!" The humid air brushes against my face as well as my bare buttocks. My breathing is heavy. Even though I have twenty fuming guards on my trail, I feel a sense of tranquility. The energy that passes through my exposed body silences the stands from my ears. It's just me and the field. The whole episode takes about a minute and a half. Eventually, I am brutally tackled to the ground. In fact, brutally tackled is an understatement. I am physically crushed and flung to the ground face first. Quite ironic, considering the venue. The escort ushers me out through the tunnel. I look up to one of the big flat screens and see my replay on the highlights of the game. A sight to behold.

About ten minutes later, after the fines have been sorted out, I am escorted out to the exact same security gate that we entered from; my group of friends is hopelessly trying not to giggle. Exaggerated stories are exchanged, each detail spiced up just a little bit. We all burst into hysterics and make our way home. The Loftus Stadium is getting lost in the darkness, courtesy of the night sky.



Shailen Naidoo

The Sleep-Loss:

Her body lay as lifeless as the night, cold, still, engulfed in a sea of her own blood. Her clothes were tattered and torn, her body beaten and bruised, her eyes as still as the lake she lay beside.

The screech of police sirens interrupted an orchestra of silence. Mary, a detective, ran to the victim but was stopped by the thick stench of blood in the air. She gagged and reached for her silk woven handkerchief but was too stunned to move. Mary's gaze reached the lifeless body, and suddenly she was too. Was it possible? Could it be? Mary was too stunned to force words from her lips. She knew those lifeless eyes... Mary's only daughter. She was Mary's only love, the one thing that could calm her continuously racing mind. Mary's place of rest, Mary's life, lay lifeless. Mary was finally able to shove a scream past her dry throat. Her partner, Joey, rushed to see her, but

it was too late. Rage had superseded her anger. On the surface, she was calm, but one thought bounced from one side of her skull to another. She would find who had done this. Mary would avenge her only reason to live.

Her investigation began right there. She put her two most valuable assets to use immediately: her memory and her insomnia. These had made her the captain of the detectives. Mary reflected on her last conversation with her daughter, "How can you sleep when you envision all those horrible people and all the horrible things they've done?" A question Mary still had no answer to. This would not stop her because somewhere out there was the murderer who took her daughter away from Mary. Gazing upon her daughter's lifeless body, stained with the shadow of blue and red lights cast from a distant police car, Mary vowed to never sleep until this case was solved.

Once Mary had finished examining her daughter's cold body, she returned home. The creak of their wooden door seemed to be the only thing brave enough to interrupt her. She approached her fridge to reach for a cold beer. Suspended from a fridge magnet was a family photo. Mary's dry, red eyes met those of her daughter. A sudden wave of emotion crashed on Mary's heart. Those eyes, full of life, curiosity, and love. Those same eyes lay open, next to the lake, reflecting its own blood. A tear-filled Mary's eye, blurring the image of her dead daughter, distorting the horrible things done to her.

Mary sat, her eyes devoid of tears. She heard her daughter call out, "MOM, GO AND SLEEP." A cry that had never worked before, but she could not sleep. This was the one act Mary couldn't perfect. She hushed the voices howling in her head and began to walk through the killer's path. Tracing each footprint focalised in the soft mud, a size 12, looked oddly familiar. The killer must have been heavy, but she did not see her daughter's footprints. Did she miss something? Impossible. Was she too tired? Also, impossible! Her daughter must have known her killer. No evidence of running, no evidence of struggle.

Why was she out at that late hour? Mary's mind raced to find answers, distracting her perpetual fatigue. Who was the killer? This thought echoed again and again, even the howling voices in Mary's head harmonised the melody of questions that Mary could not answer. Mary asked herself why she was the best detective because she didn't rest until everything was solved, but the world is merely a 7-billion-piece puzzle. Nothing is ever really solved. She phoned Joey, who had called in the murder, hoping to get details. A despondent Joey answered. Mary started her questions, but none were fully answered. Mary wondered why Joey was acting like this. He was a brilliant detective, always analysing. An idea crept its way into the crevasse of Mary's skull. "Joey, what shoe size are you?" This was followed by a lonely beep. He put the phone down on her. Mary now thought back to how, for once, she could not find any answers. Her memory was working, her insomnia aiding her, but nothing. Her daughter knew this killer.

"I am a twelve," Joey's voice echoed from Mary's bedroom. Mary got up and shrieked. Her vocal cords rasped as she muttered, "Why?" A devilish Joey emerged from the shadows, size 12 police boots covered in blood, his eyes red, and his teeth as yellow as the sun. He towered over Mary, the thick stench of blood following him. He simply said, "Because no one can be as good as you. You have an unfair advantage, your insomnia. No one can work as hard as you. We must rest. I put the one thing that can make you rest six feet in the ground. A captain who cannot keep her daughter safe, a captain who is always tired but cannot rest. Well, now you can. Mary shivers as the cold cobalt pistol is pressed against her temple. Her final thought...



Troy Bailey

Palms forward

My sticks strike the skins in a great rhythm. Sparks of sound shoot around the large studio, bouncing off the protruding patterns of the walls and returning back to me as movement. My body sways in a regular pattern, towards the sounds I need. I feel the effect of my assault in the middle of my palms and deep in my chest. Beads of sweat form on my brow and fill the spaces between my fingers. My wrists ache and my breath shudders; I feel more alive behind the wall of metal, birch, and poplar than I do anywhere else. Silence.

We are five minutes out and my heart races to the rhythmic hop of my left leg. I have isolated myself in one of the 'prac' rooms beneath the theatre. Running the song back and forth through my mind, I feel the shift in the air and the large vibration from the floor. The previous band must have finished their performance.

It's time to go.

We enter the stage in darkness, our sneakers and boots glinting from the light peering through the curtain. Everyone spreads about to their respective instruments, gracefully avoiding the cables spread along the floor like a slither of snakes. Once in position, there is a moment of expectant stillness; there is a strange metallic taste stuck in my mouth. My hands clench and my eyes dart along the sea of peculiar shapes. The curtains glide open and light pours into the stage like the breaking of a dam, it ignites the instruments with a great shine they had lacked before. Beneath the light lie the audience still bustling faintly from the performance prior, rows of people packed and neatly trimmed all the way to the back of the theatre. I try my best not to look at them, but still, I feel the burning sensation from their inquisitive eyes.

Like the vanishing greenlight at the start of a race, my sticks serve as the keys to the ignition. One...., two.., three.., four... an explosion of sound fills the theatre to its very brim. I sway, rotating left and right in my barrage, the air feels thick and my arms roar with a burn. A story is being told and I am the only one who knows it by paper. Beside me guitarists strum their pieces in unison, each plucking their strings to my brash rhythm. It feels as if a large metal ball is lodged in my throat, as if my nerves spurring in my stomach are like a banquet of butterflies. I look down in an attempt to grab hold of them, but I am met with the blackness of the stage floor and the welcoming thought of it swallowing me whole. Long before I realize it, I have let my emotions take the steering wheel and far overshot the end of our performance. Falling into a solo which did not stick to the original music but rather came from the whirlwind of my emotions. Still in my seemingly endless cycle of attacks I glance up and see all eyes are pinned on me. I stop.

Silence.

The theatre roars with exclamation. One by one each of us stand to receive the applause, however when I stand, I receive no such gesture. Rather than clapping I see an ocean of hands, palms forward.



William Kitching

Blind date

The bell above the door tings. The sound is easily distinguishable above the murmur of voices and country western music. Its unbeknown to the man whether this sound is welcoming someone or bidding them farewell. He has orientated himself in a corner booth, where he runs a finger across his menu.

My entrance turns all heads, but one. With every click of my soles on the checkered tiles, comes a nudge on the man's leg from the dog. The black clings to my body, accentuating the curves, pronouncing my allure. Heels like these don't appear here very often. He sips on his warm coffee while wandering eyes pick up their dropped forks.

The creak of leather announces my presence before the man. I offer a nonchalant greeting, which he accepts with an outstretched arm and a salutation to the back wall.

I introduce my hand to his and exchange a name. I sink into the red and white stripes of the booth, and my rich and earthy aroma intimately feathers him. He smiles at the thought of me. I place my handbag on the floor, where it sits beside the dog which separates us.

A rhythm of clicks comes towards the table. "More coffee?" The man fingers his half empty mug, looking for the handle. He instructs the pourer to stop when the familiar slosh reaches the right pitch. He leaves just enough space below the brim for me to work with.

His knuckles are white around the mug. While I inspect my lipstick in his sunglasses, he tries some small talk between slurps. We are both hiding our identity behind tinted lenses, but who we are is on display beneath the table, between us. I flick my wrist to inspect the time, ensuring that this doesn't go on longer than necessary. Moreso, I can't be late for church.

Eyes are in abundance. A busy morning like this is not the ideal time, but a briefcase of crisp hundreds waits for no woman. My sins will be forgiven when I sit in the pew. I reach into my handbag, ensuring it's still there.

The cold glass cylinder meets my seasoned hands.

The bag's zipper brushes against my knuckles as I clutch it tightly, now having my turn at some small talk. My lack of emotion towards bounties is what pays rent – this interest in the man is as genuine as the name I chose today. It's unfair on him that my heart is at the breakfast bar in my apartment, where I'd usually start my Sunday with the man whom I left with a kiss. I promised him I wouldn't be long.

The dog and I look at each other. One professional staring at another. Its eyes hold more sympathy than mine ever will. A vile, no bigger than a sachet of brown sugar on the table, hides snug in my palm. I lean in to give the man a kiss on the cheek. His false sense of hope will be short-lived. The pop of the lid is inaudible, passing the major line of defense.

He won't see it coming.

In one swift movement, I empty its contents, leaving just a single ripple in the coffee. My thighs relocate the warmth embedded in the stripes, where I drop the empty vile into my handbag without taking my eyes off of him.

His mouth begins to froth, and his speech becomes slurred. Little notice is taken of what is going on in the corner booth. In a matter of seconds, the job is done.

The thud of his head. The shudder of cutlery. A growl. Gasps throughout the room. Silence spills over the tables and chairs.

Remorseless, legato strides play across the checkered tiles. The car comes to a slow halt before the door, and I feel the familiar satisfaction on my lips as I leave another finished job without a backward glance.

The bell above the door tings. The sound is easily distinguishable above the country western music.



Qhama Ngwenya

Do I really want to become a man?

My days of being a boy are coming to an end. I am 17 years old and I am still puzzled by the concept of manhood. I still do not know what it means to be a man. The responsibility is a heavy burden on my back that was thrown on me from a young age. I did not have a choice because I am the oldest son and the first grandson in my family. I am scared to disappoint my father and my younger brother because he looks up to me as an example with me being his older brother.

My journey of becoming a man is one filled with fear; fear of all the responsibilities I have to assume along with the pain I am going to experience. In the Xhosa culture the most important rite of passage is when a boy like me is transitioning and going to the mountains where he will get circumcised and taught how to become a man. I have always wanted to become a man and I have wanted to go to the mountains but on the other side of what I want lies a great sense of fear. It is a fear of the unknown because I do not know what it is like to be a man; I do not know what happens when initiates go to the mountains and I fear not returning home and becoming a statistic of deaths that happen there. With all my fears I look forward to learning new lessons that I will learn, the hardships I will have to face and the experience I will gain on my journey. As I reflect on my childhood, I will miss my carefree and irresponsible days and the days when being fearful is not seen as a weakness but seen as a common trait for a little boy. The lesson I have learnt throughout my teenage years is that if you really want something an aspect of fear is always present. If fear is not present then I do not want it enough. It is evident that I am startled about leaving my childhood behind because of the stories I have heard about how difficult it is being a man. There it is a social norm for men to bottle up their emotions and in the Xhosa culture crying as a man is seen as a “feminine” trait and not manly. I fear that in difficult situations I will not be able to let out my emotions because “men do not cry”, versus in my childhood when crying is normal.

But I am not entirely leaving my childhood behind. Childhood is often linked to innocence, inquisitiveness, and inventiveness. I worry that these traits may deteriorate with time. The nature of my inner kid does not have to be lost in order to embrace manhood. As a child I always remained open to learning new concepts so as I transition into manhood that is another trait I will want to maintain.

The end of my childhood signals the start of a brand new, exciting phase in my life. This is a natural process. The benefits and opportunities for progress that manhood presents should not be overshadowed by fear and apprehension, even though they are legitimate. The key to overcoming my fear of growing up is to embrace change, face responsibilities, maintain a sense of wonderment, and develop resilience.



Shaka Buthelezi

Bones

Dominoes, or Bones, is a game in which 2 players play with a set of 28 dominoes against each other. The game starts by each player drawing 7 tiles from the pile of dominoes and then a player plays one of their tiles starting the game. The numbers of the next pairs of tiles must match. The objective of the game is to empty your hand while blocking the opponent's. Why the name 'Bones' you may be asking. Well originally dominoes were made from animal bones or ivory hence the name, 'Bones'. A lot of people down here Warrendale, Detroit probably don't even know that, a lot of people down here don't know much at all, except for bones because in some situations this game is life or death and you'll soon find out why. I've always been good at bones, but I've never managed to figure out why. Mama never lets me play. She says it's moves us backwards as a community and apparently the game got my dad in a whole lot of trouble. According to Mama, He had to leave Detroit to go to Chicago for what was supposed to be 11 months turned into 11 years and even though I was just in the other room, I can't tell you much about what happened that night except that one gunshot led to another, and I never saw my dad leave that room. Hence 'life or death'. That's what leads me to today. Over the summer I've been playing bones with the other guys in the hood trying to earn money to catch a train out to Chicago to find out if I even still have a dad. Earning about 5-10 dollars a game and today is hopefully my last. This game. \$1000. Enough to get me to Chicago and some. That brings me here. Me, Tariq, 3 gang members and set of 28 dominoes between us.

But before we get into that, here's what brought me here.

Summer '16. Berkley High just closed for the summer and Tariq and I we're just getting started, but we had one issue. Money. We we're broke. Every time I tried asking Mama

for some extra cash she'd go on about how I'm a sophomore now and I need to get a job. You know, the usual. Tariq couldn't ask either because the only thing keeping him from dropping out is that Academic scholarship he got. I got one too, but he probably needs it more than me. You see me and Tariq don't go to school here in Warrendale, we're at some private school out in Berkeley because to be honest we're probably the two smartest in our neighborhood. For the first two weeks we were bored out of our minds, but finally something came up. Jordan down the street was hosting a house party. He's a senior and no mother in their right mind would've let us go, so we snuck out. First time of many.

We were there. Loud music playing, seniors drunk out their minds. Typical. Lights were mostly off except for one room. 4 grown men sat there, probably Jordan's dad and uncles maybe? They had a set of dominoes between them and started playing. I wasn't really up to much at all the party and Tariq seemed to be having fun, so I went and joined them. They were pretty welcoming and inviting considering their sons were in the other room doing 'God knows what'. Jordan's dad and the other guy had lost so they asked me to play.

"Ay lil man, you want next?"

Reluctant at first I decided I would.

"Yeah Unc for sure"

"You got 20 dollars?"

We're playing for money! Even more reluctant now, I looked down into my pockets at the 23 dollars and stick of gum I had. My poverty took over and I said yes putting the 20 on the table and the game began.

We're 2 minutes in and I'm emptying my hand effortlessly. Like I said, I'm pretty good at bones.

"Damn boy, you got it," said one of the other men in the room.

Blocking his hand but he just couldn't seem to effectively block mine. Down to my last domino but somehow so was he. He needs to play a 4 or a 6. I strategically played a 1 before and the 1/6 or 1/4 domino hasn't been played yet. There're only 3 dominoes left in the deck so that's a 2/3 chance he has one of them. I have the 4/6. One of these could be his final domino. He places his final domino.

1/4 followed by my 4/6

"Damnit boy!"

I won. Surprised but not really. Feeling confident, I played again, and again, and again walking out the room with 100 dollars and four disgruntled grown men. Would've been 120 but I had to let the guys win a little bit. Make them feel better.

"Kid's good."

"This is Jabari's son, Darius. Lil man plays just like his daddy, except less dirty."

My dad's name. That's when it hit me. With a hundred in my hand and a new idea, I knew I had to go tell Tariq. Of course, my mom wouldn't approve so I lied to her and said I was going either going to the library or Tariq's place but instead I'd be going to play a kid's game with a bunch of grown men for money. The whole summer me and Tariq would go around the block, the neighborhood and even other neighborhoods playing bones for some extra cash to blow this summer. Tariq saving up for some shoes and gift for his mom and dad and me saving up to go see if I still have both.

That's what brings me to tonight. School starts tomorrow and I'm supposed to be there tonight but It's our last game in a warehouse in downtown Detroit. \$1000. Despite the 3 men wearing suits and masks, the apparent firearms tucked in their pants and the smell of something very illegal, I'm confident. With a 12-1 record this summer it's hard not to think I'll win, but I still have to be on my game. I recognize the red domino box on the table from when I'd play with my dad. 4 of us around the table. It was 2 on 2. A tall dark-skinned guy wearing an all-black suit picks up the box and starts to distribute the dominoes. 7 each. I'm taking a look at my deck.

I'm going to Chicago.

The atmosphere in this game is different. No back-and-forth banter or friendly conversation, just plastic pieces clacking against a rusted metal table. The guy I'm against isn't dressed like the other guys. Sure he had the mask but everyone else is wearing a suit but him. He was dressed casually, like me. At this point in the game its just me and him back and forth. Blocking each other so the game goes nowhere. Tariq and the guy next to Mr. Casual are barely even involved. It's just me and him. We're frozen, until he plays one domino that he had to have known I can't match. The thing that threw me off about this wasn't the fact that I can't match it, it's the fact that I can, and I have the exact same domino in my hand ready to play it next. They fixed the deck so they can accuse me of fixing my hand with my own dominoes. Make me forfeit and strip me of \$1000 dollars. I can't afford that. Me and Tariq have only saved \$960. Losing this would take us back to square one. We didn't have any choice but to run because either way. I'm losing \$1000.

"Aye man, you gon play?"

He knows I know. I know this because he signals one his guys to clutch his gun. I play, but not a domino I was dealt, doing exactly what they want to accuse me of doing. Fixing my hand.

Visible confusion amongst the 3 men.

"TARIQ RUN!"

"Yo, what the hell!"

Before one of them manages to unholster his gun to shoot at us, Tariq and I are already halfway out.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

The bullets barely zip past us

Upon leaving I hear one of them say, "Aye Jabari! One of these lil kids dropped something"

It's only 8pm so we make it back home to take our suitcases and try catch a train to Berkeley for school.

Upon entering the classroom block and passing through the ID scanners, I realize I left probably worst thing to leave in this situation at the warehouse. My Berkeley High Student ID.

I hear the announcement system sound.

"May Darius Taylor please report to the principal's office, your father is here to drop off your student ID"

"Aye Darius, you hear that name the one guy yelled last night? Wasn't it like Jab-"

Pop! Pop!



Reinard Wagner

Dirty Paws

Eyes drooping shut, legs slowly waning, feet throbbing. I was unable to trek any further! I decided to establish base camp fifteen kilometers from the proposed destination, not knowing what was about to unfold...

I had already persevered through fifty grueling kilometers of dense forest on my own. With only fifteen left, I was determined not to throw in the towel. I carried out my usual routine; set up the hammock between two trees, placed the rain cover above it and started a fire, as it got unbearably cold at night. I boiled the rainwater I had collected from the previous night's rain and placed it into the 'Instant food' packet providing me with the sustenance I needed for the next day's hike. I only had 4 packets left, pressing me to complete the hike in just 2 days before the food ran out. At approximately 11:27 pm all the wood had burnt out leaving a pile of pale, smoldering ash in its place. Reluctantly, I climbed out the warmth and safety of my hammock to go and retrieve more wood to revive the fire. Finding dry wood proved to be quite difficult, but five hundred meters from camp I uncovered a large stump that was suitable enough to get me through the rest of the night. Inconveniently though, I had to return to camp to get my axe to chop the stump into light enough chunks to carry. The wind was howling causing the trees to gyrate like frenzied, tribal dancers and the nocturnal sounds of the forest's animal life were reverberating in my ears.

On my return to camp, I discovered unidentifiable, muddy paw prints on my hammock and on the rocks surrounding the fire. I thought it was strange, possibly an inquisitive bush baby, but I had no time to waste. I opened my utilities backpack to get my axe, only to find it was not there. I was certain I had packed it.... I anxiously scrounged in my day backpack which was placed under the hammock but no luck. The noise of a snapping branch behind me, made me freeze on the spot. I stood up slowly and rotated my head. All I saw was a gaping void of blackness. I convinced myself that I was hearing things due to lack of sleep, so I returned my focus to the campsite and resumed the search for my missing axe. That is when I saw the cluster of scratch marks on the tree. Would a bush baby be able to scar the bark so distinctively? I did not think so. Turning my attention back to the dirty paw prints I realized with sudden terror that they were way too big to belong to a harmless bush baby. Could it be a leopard? Did leopards even inhabit these European forests? After reasoning with myself that panicking would get me nowhere, I decided to abandon my search for the axe and not rekindle the fire. I could swear something was watching me though. Paranoid, I climbed back into the hammock and lay in a state of paralysis until I finally drifted off to sleep.

In the morning I awakened with a start, dripping with sweat, and lying in a pool of blood. My arm lay limply beside me, throbbing like it had a heart of its own. Closer inspection revealed a jagged gash on my left arm and a tear in the hammock...The dream that I had had during the night, of frantically fighting off a grizzly bear, was obviously not a dream! I urgently fashioned a makeshift tourniquet with a spare shirt, to prevent any further blood loss. Rapidly, I packed up camp and headed towards the agreed pick-up location. I jogged frantically in the direction the map guided me, and two hours in, encountered a neglected, mossy cabin. I could make use of the shade it provided, to tighten my tourniquet and take a breather.

When I entered the cabin, I froze. Goosebumps multiplied over my skin. Shivers trickled down my spine. Leaning against the old cabin's fireplace, stood my axe... The door slammed behind me. The wooden floorboards creaked eerily. Something was moving slowly towards me. "Run" a beseeching voice whispered in my ear. The only way out was through the door behind me. I turned around and there before me stood a colossal figure, its features shadowed by the sun shining behind it, blinding my vision. But the shadows could not hide the mysterious figures massive paws and lengthy tail.

As I barreled out the door, maneuvering myself past the frightful creature, something walloped my back. Had "It" struck me? In my frenzied state, I saw "It" walk towards the fireplace and grip the axe. I twisted around and sprinted in the opposite direction not daring to look back. I wasn't sure how long I ran for but eventually I arrived at the pick-up point on the ridgeline of the forest. There stood my family with a "welcome back" sign. Completely spent and very relieved, I collapsed into their safe embrace. I described what had happened, and the police were sent to search the forest. In the

abandoned cabin, they discovered the skeletal remains of a hiker who had gone missing a few years before and hundreds of dirty pawprints....

My missing axe was never found and although I narrowly escaped to tell this tale, I will always have two paw-shaped scars permanently imprinted on my arm and back...



Dan Askew

The Secret of The Sword Saint

I looked down and all I could see was blood; bodies surrounded me, and my katana lay discarded on the ground. I quickly collected it, as leaving your sword abandoned on the ground was not the way of a Japanese samurai. I knew I had to continue my journey onwards and that these would not be the last people to get in my way, as after all, I was searching for the greatest samurai in all of Japan.

Musashi Miyamoto, otherwise known as the Sword Saint, resided on top of the highest peak in Japan and it was said that those who faced him did not return. I was ready for this battle and knew it would be legendary. Ever since I had heard the legend of the Sword Saint annihilating an entire army, I knew that I would be the one to defeat him.

At the base of the mountain, I looked up and all I could see were the large, beautiful clouds enveloping the mountain. I knew my journey was going to be long and strenuous but nevertheless, I began the treacherous climb. After hours of walking, I set up camp under a large cherry blossom when unexpectedly I heard a twig crack; I knew someone was watching me. I immediately reached for my sword; as soon as I did, a group of bandits encircled me intent on stealing my valuables. I thought all hope was lost but then I remembered I had one last trick up my sleeve. My knife was hidden by my side and with all my force I managed to slip it out and stab one of my attackers, providing relief from the onslaught. I rapidly grabbed my blade and got to work and within a matter of seconds, the bandits were lying below me dead. After days and nights of walking, I finally reached the summit where I saw a small shack on top of the mountain. I decided to wait and survey the house to see if there was any danger however, I soon fell asleep as I had been walking for many days. Upon awakening, I did not sense danger coming from inside the house, instead, I felt an eerie sense of calm; I was ready for whatever was inside that house.

I drew closer to the house and smelt the grassy smell of green tea. I pushed the door open I expected to see a powerful man but all I saw was a shrivelled husk of a man

who told me to sit down. The house was old, and the walls were covered in many paintings and scrolls depicting battles from centuries ago. I obeyed the man and took a seat; he offered tea, but I declined as I had no intention of engaging with this man. I wanted to fight the real Sword Saint and not a fake.

“Tell me where he is,” I demanded.

He merely replied that he was there to tell me a story. He began by telling me the origin of Musashi Miyamoto, I barely listened as I had heard the story multiple times until he said something that caught me off guard. He told me that Miyamoto died in battle over 100 years ago. I immediately asked him who he was, and he told me that he was just one of the multiple people who had represented Miyamoto and that it was now my turn to carry his name.

I had so many questions: Why was I picked? Why did they not just tell the truth about the Sword Saint’s death? Should I accept? No, I would not be that pretender. I rose and left without saying a word. I knew it was not my destiny to live a lonely life and rather than living a lie, I would forge my destiny and become a better samurai than the Sword Saint could have ever been. I picked up my katana and started the journey that would define me as a samurai.



André Boshoff

Rusty

I can hear her carefree bark welcoming me home from a long day of school. I’ve been waiting forever to hear that bark, the sound that echoes through my thoughts all day. Her tail must be wagging like crazy right now, knowing that I’m just a couple seconds away. I feel the corners of my mouth move into a faint smile, and just thinking about her instantly brightens up my day. It seems like forever since I’ve seen that happy face smiling up at me, and it’s driving me crazy that I could love something this much. In my sixteen years of living, I’ve never had a dog quite like Rusty.

I open my front door expecting the usual attack of licks and happy yelps that are bound to come. I hear her quick feet on the wooden floor and remember how small she was when I first got her as a puppy 11 years ago. She's always so happy to see me and I can never stop myself from smiling from ear to ear whenever I see her. Out of habit I bend down to say hello, and then with a heavy sigh, I stand back up again. I love all the attention Rusty gives me, but today I don't even feel the licks as I walk through the empty house and into the kitchen. I put my bag down on the floor. I have a lot of homework to do but seeing Blue (Rusty's favourite chew toy) lying on the ground, makes me think of her. Rusty loves Blue and never chews anything else. We constantly have to replace Blue, but my mom says its an easy price to pay for all her furniture being intact.

Rusty loves exploring and would often spend the whole day digging in the garden and hunting for small animals. Our house is a reflection of this and is therefore always full of dirty paw marks leading all the way to Rusty's bed. Just the other month I was greeted by a dead rat that Rusty so proudly held in her mouth. My dad had long since given up gardening because, according to him, the garden belongs to Rusty. The weather never stopped Rusty from roaming her jungle, and I was always afraid that she'd get cold. I even bought her a jersey, but she didn't like it. Today the weather is reflecting my mood, and I can see the water droplets running down the windowpanes, forming a sad face on the glass.

Oh, how I miss the sun.

I see my mom's car pulling into the driveway and run to help her with the groceries. "Hi, Mom," I say and quickly run through the rain to get all the packets back into the kitchen.

"Hello, James," my mom greets back, "How was your day today?"

There's a long pause before I answer, "Not the same."

"I know." Another pause. "Just be sure to finish your homework, James."

"Ja, ja, Mom. I will. I'm just gonna go spend some time with Rusty, she must feel so neglected right now."

I pick Blue up and walk outside into the rain. I walk around aimlessly, feeling trapped and confused, not knowing what to do. After what feels like an hour, I walk to the back of the garden, one of Rusty's favourite spots. The rain is really coming down hard now, and it's almost as if the sky is crying along with me. I go over to where she's sleeping peacefully and place her favourite toy right next to her. I stand over her grave, my tears mixing with the rain in the mud. There's a deafening noise in my ears and my whole body just feels numb. I know I will never forget Rusty, and I am so glad that she was part of my life.

Oh, how I miss those dirty paws.



Neil Grobbelaar

Warn-torn Souls

My heart pounds against my chest. The wind howls in my ears as the waves crash onto the shoreline. Sand shifts beneath my feet, my weary legs struggling to maintain balance, but I continue to run. The mist of pure shock and confusion makes it difficult to maintain focus. I only know one thing – I have to keep moving. I must get as far away as possible, as fast as possible; for it is my only chance.

Suddenly the ground crumbles beneath me. It is as though time itself has come to a standstill. I am left suspended in the air, with nothing else but my thoughts, forced to reflect on how this all came to be.

*

It has been three days since the Battle of Đồng Hới. My mind has since turned to madness, haunted by the unbearable guilt of being the lone survivor of the attack. I am alert to the inevitability of my demise. It is not long until I am swallowed by Poseidon's cruel depths.

As my hands begin to slip from the debris, I think to myself – is this the end?

*

The cold sensation of consciousness washes over me. Through blurred vision I am able to distinguish my stone surroundings, and what seems to be a makeshift bed. A man sits by the cave entrance, quietly sharpening a SOG knife.

"Who are you?" I exclaim. "Answer me!"

The man slowly looks up at me, his face deadpan and cold. "Show some respect, son, this is a Sergeant you're speaking to," he says apathetically. "Sergeant Butcher, U.S. Marine Corps."

"My apologies, I didn't know you were- "

"There's some water to your left. Try to get some rest."

The man gets up and makes his way out of the cave. I mutter a "thank you" before turning to the wooden bowl. I experience a cool sensation as the water hits the back of my throat. I try to get up but stumble. I am in no shape to investigate any further. I try to get some rest.

*

Several days later

I spend the next few days helping the Sarge with various tasks, such as renovating the cave to accommodate two people, forging makeshift amenities, and carrying salt water to the filtration system (it was mostly the Sarge barking orders and me doing all the work, but I had no right to complain). There were times when we talked about politics, the war, and our platoons, but these were awkward and brief. Most of the time he kept to himself, either sharpening his knife or improving the filtration system.

*

It is late at night, the Sergeant has gone off on his regular, nightly walk.

For the first time since I arrived on the island, I finally had the clarity of mind to think about how Sergeant Butcher has made a living on the island. I remember that on numerous occasions, in between my various fever dreams, I had asked the Sergeant how he had prolonged his survival – specifically how he had managed to keep himself fed and hydrated. Freshwater never seemed to be an issue for him. He took pride in how he had managed to filtrate salt water into clean drinking water, even offering to teach me how to build one myself. However, when it came to food, he appeared irritated by the question, often leaving me with short, illogical answers. He claimed to have simply survived on a diet of coconuts and salvaged army rations. But I know, just as well as he does, that coconuts aren't indigenous to this island, and that any remaining rations would have been used up months ago. I decide not to waste too much time wondering about the unknown. I decide it is best to get some sleep so that we can figure out a rescue plan in the morning.

*

My Seiko flashes a dim light, just enough to make out the 4-digit number imprinted on its surface. 01:53. Still no sign of the Sarge. I stare up at the night sky. My recent insomnia (though inconsistent) is only one of many products of this foolish war. How I long to finally get back home – to see Kate and the boys again. I remind myself that it is only a matter of time. Until then, wishful thinking remains futile. I must take action to ensure I will live to see such a day. I grab a nearby torch and begin to trace the island's circumference, hoping to clear my mind...

As I near "Butch Rock", the big boulder near the opposite end of the island, I notice a pathway leading into the jungle – one that I had never seen before. My mind wanders. The path beckons. I cannot resist its call. I enter the jungle, following the labyrinthine path as it winds down the hill. Finally, the path uncovers an open clearing. In the distance, a faint light burns. I opt to explore the clearing, hoping to discover the source of light. Instead, I am met with a wall of steel. Upon further investigation, I come across a steel cylindrical tube extending from the main figure. A tank. Inside are two corpses, situated near a breach in the tank's armour, each hideously mangled by shrapnel. I look up from atop the hull. The unmistakable remains of a battlefield stretch out before me - likely from one of the many pyrrhic victories we have sustained. All around blood stains the soil. Eerily, however, only the severely disfigured bodies remain. A streak of light escapes from a bunker in the rockface near "Butch Rock". Blood accompanies the trail to its entrance. Inside, a femur lies on the ground, stripped of all flesh. Weirdly, it is far too large to have belonged to a monkey or something similar. I don't pay much attention to it. As the door swings open, I am met with the feeling that something is terribly wrong. A putrid smell stems from the trapdoor, leading to the compartment underneath. I contemplate hightailing it back to the cave, hoping to return to sleep and forget any of this had ever happened. However, my body remains frozen. Eventually, after further evaluation, I gather the courage to investigate the smell – to unravel the

island's arcane secrets. I open the trapdoor and begin my descent. My heart pounds fiercely in my chest with every step. Slowly, I turn to face the smell, praying to whichever gods may be listening. Yet there was nothing that could prepare me for such a sight. Towers of corpses, some still in uniform, others stripped of flesh, are piled in arrangement along the stone wall. An assortment of body parts lay in the distant corner, each labelled with hand-written expiration dates. The sickly-sweet smell of rotten flesh provides an acute nauseous sensation. My head feels as though it will explode.

My nerves overcome me.

I frantically clamber out of the bunker, adrenaline coursing through my veins, and begin to sprint for dear life. I rest only when the battlefield is hidden by the night's mist. The night sky no longer shines bright as it had before. The moon itself hides from the atrocities of this night. It is only when I hear footsteps that I am able to will my body into motion.

I have escaped the jungle, yet a true escape remains distant. I dart off in search of a hiding place for the night, the waves a blur in the corner of my eye. Suddenly the ground crumbles beneath me.

I snap back into reality. An excruciating pain fills my leg. Reluctantly, I look down at the damage. A series of large metal stakes run straight through my right leg. I recognise the trap immediately. It is a Punji Stake Pit, likely left behind after the battle. Judging from the depth of the wound, forcefully removing my leg would almost certainly render it useless for at least a couple of weeks, with the risk of infection. However, since it is my only chance at escape, it is worth the risk. I muster up all my willpower to pry my leg free. I would've preferred to get shot in my leg instead. Eventually, after five minutes of suffering, I am free. I try to continue my search for shelter, stumbling as I do so. Finally, I find a cave entrance covered by undergrowth, the perfect hiding place for the night. My legs, overcome by lassitude, cannot carry me any further, yet I cannot stop now. I begin to crawl. In my mind I picture myself as an injured deer, desperately trying to escape the clutches of a hungry predator. The cave nears. Blissful triumph dawns upon me. I shift my body into the crevice, legs first. Pure relief starts to set in. The warm feeling of success numbs me.

In an instant, a burning pain fills my body. My vision blurs as I drift from the plain of consciousness.

My final sight is the blade of a rusty SOG knife.



Chuhai Pillay

The Pretender

I walk among them, as if I belong, cloaked by a mask of eloquence, feeding on their naivety. My life a lie, my life, not my own. A downright falsehood. Wreathed in the lies that create sores that fester, pains in the chest that keep me up at night – these pains, however, keep me going, telling me not to go back on the sins I committed all those days ago.

ALL THOSE DAYS AGO

I used to be a man of faith, attending church often, spurred by the encouragement of my abusive father, who contradicted his belief in the Man Above with the empty liquor bottles that lay dead alongside his reclining armchair. The sun licked the azure world above, painting the tapestry with crimson streaks, bringing forth the crack of dawn on that Sunday, February 6th, 1993. Dew drops clung onto the flora as the world brightened, as the clock aged. Confined to bars that held me affirm, I was obedient to my father, like a guard dog to his master. He gripped me by the collar and flung me into the cold leather seat in the rear of his 1980s Mustang Cobra, dilapidated as a result of age and poor maintenance, strangled by rust and scarred by scratches that ran along its brown, once bright red, body. The car slowly accelerated along the straight path that led out of our yard, leaving behind an intoxicating trail of black smoke and sporadic drops of diesel on the dirt road. My mother was never home much, her work summoning her during the darkest of nights and keeping her toiling till the early hours of the next. She did, however, always make time for church. My father dizzily eddied towards the entrance of the church, pulling my mother by the arm as he stole her away from her conversation, tightening his grip on her hand and pushing her through the prodigious oak wood door which he opened without much effort. All the while, I followed obediently, fearing what would unfold if I let go of his forearm and wandered astray. He firmly placed my mother and I in our seats before conversing with the other men. My mother looked at me, with eyes red, as if it was a reminiscence of tears or a desperate cry for sleep. She brought me close, as if to comfort me. The pastor spoke long, his words like a lullaby to my mother and I, who desperately required the shut eye. He poked at our heads sharply as the ceremony ended. He had a lot to say about us sleeping, as his emotions ran high. He made sure that we knew the consequences that accompanied such actions and felt no remorse.

Something changed in me that night.

I was no longer myself. My soul turned bleak, my heart cold and my eyes filled with hatred. I had to end my suffering, break free from the restraints that suffocated us. There he lay, lifeless, his hands open, his eyes closed, his body cold. I had no recollection of how it had happened, but I did know that these ordeals rested upon my

shoulders, for it was his blood which lay imprinted on my shirt and hands, whispering their words of sorrow and agony, filling my life with guilt. My mother was to finish her shift in the next few hours. With my mind reeling and my heart filled with regret, I ran.

I continue to run to this day, run from the past that feeds on every piece of joy I have. I became a priest to wash away the sins of my childhood, to cloak the ever-present guilt that lives within me. For a while I believed that maybe it wasn't me who had killed my father. Every few years, for a few hours, my mind would go black, my thoughts would vanish, and my head would be all but a void of desolation. I would wake up covered in blood, however, uninjured and healthy. It lived inside me, within me, yet out of my control. I preached the word of the lord as if I didn't go so hypocritically against such teachings.

Following a church meeting, as the time neared Christmas I decided to lock up the church early in fear of the approaching storm. As the clouds grew heavier, so too did my heart. I began remembering the night that started it all. I began reminiscing, stretching my mind to areas that wrenched me from my comfort zone, asking myself all the pertinent questions. As the petrichor emanated from the lush, I stepped into the confessional to release my words to the open air.

It whispered back, it breathed as if by accident, it murmured surreptitiously, as if by accident. My secret had been revealed, my past uncovered. My cloak had been stripped away from me. I lay now, naked and vulnerable. Rage filled my head as I began to think of ways to undo my wrongs. I began to feel strange, my eyes blurred, before I began to see black.

I walk among them as if I belong, my life not my own.



JUNIORS

William Segar

A Taste of Liquid Waste

A dull buzz of energy hangs in the tainted air; sound never sleeps here, it merely sings its taunting tune, an eternal reminder of the pitiless prison. Locked away, not by walls, but status; excluded not because of foul acts but lack of prosperity. The tin towers creak and groan, grumbling about the filth that fills them. Even the nearby forest has given up hope of being restored. In this ditch of despair, hopelessness is more abundant than fresh air and water; it is all we possess.

I am woken by the cacophony of Dharavi: a million dampened souls rising, beginning the quest to fill their bellies. I join them and grudgingly stumble outside in the dilapidated town stretching out in front of me. Over a third of the population of Chicago but squeezed into one three-hundredth of the space. I stroll down to the river, struggling to find a spot without plastic covering it, to cup my hands and take a sip. Children splash around in the shallows, sometimes falling in and temporarily vanishing beneath the dark brown liquid waste. Sightseeing in Dharavi is gruesome enough to make any visitor curl over, but the locals have grown immune to these emotions known as disgust or empathy. Being unaware of the whereabouts of your next meal, you tend not to worry about much else.

I begin the creep towards my job, sliding through holes in the tin towers, trying not to invade what little privacy the residents have. I see mothers with starving babies, men who are drunk before the sun is finished rising, and worst of all starving animals, the only creatures in this oversized cage I feel sorry for. Innocent dogs and cats banished to live with their ribs on open display and less food than a pigeon eats. As I arrive at Durgandhyukt – which means foul-smelling – a cacophony of bangs, clangs, and dangs fills my eardrums. If you think your job can get tough, you have clearly never spent a minute in a slum factory. With no rules or laws applicable, health standards are worse than working in a sewer and pay is nearly as low as the roof in the fickle factory. Working for ten hours for a tenth of minimum wage is inconceivable but with no other option, the shadows of former people still show up day after day. After all, to us, the value of bread has long passed the value of dignity.

Today I wake up bleak, a major improvement from the usual despair and sorrow that I am greeted with in the mornings. Today is the day I cross the border, switch sides in this juxtaposed city, today is the day I go to the real Mumbai, the city of gold, the place Indians go when the hope inside their hearts has not dried up like an old man's skin. I stand up with ease today and walk out, it is still pitch-black outside. Pollution has not only hidden our stars, but has gone even further and stolen the moon, leaving us with no dim glimmer to see with. I dart through the remains of the forest, and as I see the tar, I feel a burning fire light itself in my gut. I have come in search of hope, hope for a job, hope for love, and hope for a better life.

I stride between new-found concrete towers; my mind marveling about this new metropolis my paradise falls apart. What went from dreams of children running around licking lollipops in dazzling green parks and the sight of luxury restaurants littered along the streets has been manipulated into an upscale slum.

I looked out upon what I now know was fake gold: beggars tucked beneath every streetlamp, litter acting as a carpet for the sidewalk, buildings shedding their skin, revealing timeworn walls. As my dream world disintegrates, my eye catches flashing lights, a jeep with flashing lights. As suddenly as the fire was lit, it has now been extinguished.

Q & A VS *Slumdog* Comparative Essay

The novel *Q&A*, written by Vikus Swarup, as well as the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, directed by Danny Boyle, are set in the frenetic, tumultuous slums of Mumbai and Delhi. The protagonist moves between these cities with shocking abuse and inspiring perseverance evident throughout his journey. The novel and film are nearly identical in storyline, but when considered in greater detail there are significant differences due to Boyle's limited ability to recreate the complex chapters depicted in *Q&A*. The film offers a fragmented cinematic experience due to the divergent chronological style, making the novel a more immersive and convincing depiction of Indian "Slumdog" life that captures the reader's attention more effectively than the film.

Both the novel and the film possess appropriate titles, *Q&A* relates to the underlying theme, the quiz show, and *Slumdog Millionaire* reveals who is portrayed in the film in addition to incorporating mystery with the juxtaposed choice of diction. The simplistic title the novel holds conveys mystery and anticipation as you are unaware of what lies beyond the peculiar cover image but are focused on what these questions and answers might be. In addition, when faced with a question, Ram always answers with the truth, representative of questions that go unanswered in his own life such as "I have often visualized that scene" in reference to how he imagines his mother. *Slumdog Millionaire* is more effective in capturing the audience due to the oxymoronic choice of words by positioning "Slumdog" and "Millionaire", each connoting opposites of the other. Both titles are appropriate, but the film's covers a broader basis whereas the novel focuses on symbolic references.

The narrative styles adopted by the author and director differ greatly. *Q&A* follows the question format constructing a confused timeline throughout the novel. *Slumdog Millionaire* is in chronological order as Jamal starts as a child and develops into a teenager alongside the explanation of his answers, this takes away from the chaos of the story. Boyle alters the way in which the protagonist is portrayed in the film as Jamal rarely speaks in the film, focusing largely on his journey for love. As a result of this changed focus, you lose the nuance of the protagonist's intelligence and sensitivity. The novel's narrative style highlights Ram's emotions and thoughts as he is recalling the stories from his traumatic past and the reader is immersed in his way of processing information, developing a strong connection to Ram as they read on.

The endings of the novel and the film although similar have many key differences. Both end with a focus on the power of love as both protagonists go on to marry their true love and receive their winnings. *Q&A* concludes with Ram seeking justice for Nita and Neelimi by confronting the host of the show, this enlightens the reader about Ram's motive for entering the game show. However, at the end of *Slumdog Millionaire*, he relies on his intuition to win the jackpot – presenting an entirely different focus in terms of Ram's future and depicting an entirely different motive for competing as Jamal only wished for the money. Both endings present an image of hope in the midst of

desperate poverty, but the motive presented in the novel embodies a twist causing excitement which the film's ending does not include.

Both *Q&A* and *Slumdog Millionaire* present a story of hope and inspiration. However, the novel does so by forcing the reader to engage deeply with Ram's character instead of simply relying on the visual portrayal of Indian Slumdog life as in the film. The title of the novel conveys the essence of the story more due to symbolic references while *Slumdog Millionaire* provides a conclusion of the film. *Q&A* is significantly more effective by providing an in-depth and riveting insight into the life of a mere Slumdog.

Fervour for Shiny Stones

I awoke to the early morning summons of nature, my bladder urgently demanding attention. Easing myself out of bed, my stomach protested its emptiness with convulsions. As I retreated under the welcoming embrace of my blanket, a sense of desolation washed over me, knowing that another day awaited. Swiftly dressing and minimizing my time in the less-than-pleasant lavatory, I stepped outside my thatch hut, bracing against the chilly gust that awaited me.

Upon reaching the wheat field, I encountered a weathered and stern figure – my father, long past his prime. The lines on his face told stories of years marked by hardship. After exchanging our customary words, he did not ask or implore; instead, his voice carried an authoritative tone as he demanded, in a resonant voice, that I set forth for "The New Rush."

The settlement exuded a pungent mix of drilling sounds and murmured conversations, a snapshot of life at its lowest ebb. Death seemed to linger, knocking on every wooden door, while hope felt like a distant illusion. The routine of late nights, pre-dawn awakenings, and meagre meals had etched weariness on the faces of countless men. In the mess hall, the spectacle of thousands devouring their meagre portions – so minute *Oliver Twist* would start a riot - in mere moments was a sight to behold; not a scrap of food remained on any plate.

The journey to the mine shaft traversed a path from poverty to blistering heat and unending manual labour. Your thoughts became your sole companions, often disrupted by the unrelenting sounds of drilling and clanging. As the pompous manager's voice echoed, my body trembled, feeling out of place, and I pondered if they ever considered the impact of their harsh words. Escape was not forbidden, yet the allure of a better life elsewhere remained elusive for all.

Envy gnawed at me as I watched diamonds being unearthed, breathing new vitality and optimism into the stifling air for most. However, for me, each find only subtracted from the possibility of discovery. "I've found one!" a voice would ring out, a miner discarding their pick to seek out the overseer. While diamonds ostensibly brought praise and reward, tales of disappointment were equally prevalent.

Despite the multitude of zombie-like miners, loneliness hung heavy in the air. No encouraging words or helping hands were offered, even though everyone battled the

same sense of desolation. Sharing thoughts led to judgment or disdain, though many faced similar struggles.

Amidst the rhythm of hammer against stone, I dislodged a wedge of rock and caught a glint of light. As I lunged forward and prized the precious gem free, I hurried towards the mine manager. A stout man with a tilted hat, his temper flared without restraint. Anxiety fluttered in my stomach as he scrutinized my find. The minutes stretched, my eyes darting between his expression and the gleaming gem resting in his palm. No acknowledgment, no reward. His response marked the nadir of my journey. A chuckle escaped his lips as he dismissed me, hailing his colleague. In a state of shock, I watched helplessly as the nonchalant extortioner handed over my gem. The desire to protest surged, but my limbs remained numb and unresponsive.

What a fool I had been.

Left motionless, grief drowned out the familiar cacophony of the mine. My body crumbled to the ground, my mind awash with internal torrents of sorrow and accusations. Unnoticed, my living corpse lay in a state of insensibility. Just another miner, another cog in the machinery, in a nation of millions, in a world teeming with billions. Insignificant and unknown, destined to relive each day like the last.

Dragged back to my modest dwelling, I found myself adrift in the abyss of the settlement. Tear-stained cheeks merely hinted at the depth of my anguish. The turmoil filled my mind like leaves blocking a gutter, leaving no room for any other thoughts. Burying my face in the pillow, I sought solace, if only enough to weep myself to sleep.

Once again, I stirred to the call of nature, my bladder demanding immediate attention. Sliding out of bed, my empty stomach clenched in protest. Nestling back beneath my welcoming blanket, a sense of desolation settled in as I faced yet another day. Hastily dressing and minimizing my time in the less-than-pleasant lavatory, I made my way out of my thatch hut, bracing myself against the bite of the impending frigid gust. My congested calendar could not spare even a moment of time for my grieving and self-pity; there was work to do.



Andiswa Mahlase

A day in Dharavi.....

The ray of heat lashes out on the skin of a beggar and seeps through the cracks of the walls of the poorly constructed buildings. The civilians, like a school of fish, all swarm the streets of Dharavi. The cluster of noise made by the children barge into my ears like a burglar and my nostrils are being attacked by the foul stench piercing the air.

I begin to waddle down the narrow streets, either being distracted by reckless children or a shopkeeper who has no time to waste. I arrive at a waste site, and I begin to pull my camera out, almost like policeman pulling his gun out on a suspect, when the

buzzing of an overgrown bumblebee hovers above my head. I look up at the sky to find out that the bumblebee was a dark-green painted helicopter. The sight was as common as seeing a cup of coffee on my desk, but as expected, like moths to a flame, the children all mesmerized by the sight as if it were Eeshvar coming to save them from this God forsaken sink hole of rubbish. I quickly remember what I came here to do, and my finger covers the button of my 2017 Sony camera which I got last month, and the screen displays the image of child and his little sister scavenging for something to fill their bowl-hollow stomachs and it leaves a bitter taste in my brain, I feel no remorse for not helping after all I'm taking photos so I can fill my hollow stomach too.

The two scrambles towards me as if I was serving their lunch time snack and when squeal for food, I gently sway my head in a way as if a large shadow was hovering over my head and high-pitched sighs of young disappointment enter my head like a bad memory and my body makes a U-turn away from the cluster of hungry children. I leave the maze of poverty and looking back my eyes fill with tears of remorse.

Love at first sight

He drags himself through the clustered line towards the Woolworths till, his soft and tired eyes glued to his screen and his hand softly gripped to the handle of the trolley. He shifts over to the till and place all my groceries on it still glued to his screen.

The sound of a soft and gentle voice echoes like a shout for joy in an infinite canyon and he slowly breaks his gaze from his phone to the angel standing before him. The world around the two of them seems to go rigid as their gaze lights up the image of beauty. My heart beats faster and the weight of his breath starts to sink more and more, her smooth coffee-brown skin, her glistening lips and her cavernous eyes puts him under her charm.

Her radiating gaze and her soft and delicate hand touching his on accident only put a spurt on his heart and breath. He sees her open her mouth again and the soft purr of her voice sits in his ears puts a halt on his mind like keys to an engine, her sweet, heavenly scent sends his soul into a short encounter of heaven itself. For what seems like eternity, the world around them has come to a halt and like Medusa's curse, his body is cemented to the floor and the only thing he could do is freeze at the sight of the pure embodiment of beauty itself. "Sir...Sir?", his soul has been ripped from the void of admiration his mind has set for his soul and he can feel the coldness of the environment around me sting my heart into sadness. He finally pays for his groceries and leaves, his eyes shifted back into the cold and lonely abyss they were before, but before he disappears out the store, his eyes send a gaze of goodbye.



Christopher Weavind

Action against hunger

Did you know that 3,1 million children die of hunger each year, which is over 350 kids an hour!

The NGO trying to stop this is Action Against Hunger.

The AAH main goal is to obliterate world hunger and are fittingly based in central west Africa.

From 2019 to 2023 there has been a massive rise in world hunger affecting 150 million more people. Mostly driven by climate change and COVID 19. Which makes it no surprise that 45% of all child deaths are caused by malnourishment or relations to hunger.

Hunger is something that happens to all of us. We are just privileged enough to almost never feel it. We don't think of what it can do, from 1 minute ago when I started talking, 6 kids have died, that's 6 different opportunities wasted by chance and environment. No one really cares about the kids, no one knows their name, who they are or what they can do and that is because they didn't have the chance to do it. How many of them could have done something great, how many of them could have changed the world?

Here is a poster from the AAH. Now the first thing that catches your attention, is the child staring into your eyes which immediately invokes guilt. The second thing is the big bold EMERGENCY which tells you there is a problem that needs your help. The third thing is the facts shown in small letters telling you again that here is a big problem that needs to be solved. And the last persuasive device that gives you a command to follow to rectify the problem that this has been building up to. The problem that has plagued the world since the dawn of mankind. Help us end this plague.

The Blitz

This essay will answer why Germany bombed London and other major cities in Britain, the effectiveness of those bombings, and the outcome of British citizens.

The Blitzkrieg (lightning war) officially started on the 7th of September 1940 when Adolf Hitler (leader of the Nazi regime; 1933 – 1945) gave the order for the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) to bomb Britain after Britain bombed Berlin on the 25th of August 1940, and it ended on the 11th of May 1941 when Rudolph Hess (Nazi second-in-command 1933 – 1941) started negotiating peace between the two countries.

The first attack on Britain now known as Black Saturday had a large build up to it, all throughout July and August, the Luftwaffe were gaining air superiority from a large salary from the German government. Using this, they started bombing English country land and the canals. This provoked the British to Bomb Berlin, which caused the Germans to, in turn, bomb London and so the Blitz started.

When the Blitz first started, the British were very well prepared, after seeing the affect of bombs from the Spanish Civil war, the Air Raids Precautions (ARP) was founded in 1924 and was a well-organized corporation when the Blitz started. The ARP had made strong bunkers that saved thousands of lives, and, after each night of bombing, they would start well-structured search-and-rescues with civilians pitching in. despite this, 136 000 people had to sleep in bunkers each night while some 2 million homes were destroyed. 40 000 had died and over 50 000 were grimly injured, all victims of World War 2.

The Nazi's main objective, however, was Britain's industry. The Germans wanted to make it hard to fight, they targeted the main producers in Britain such as London; Coventry; Birmingham; Southampton; Bristol; Liverpool; Cardiff; Plymouth and Portsmouth which were all bombed heavily over the course of the blitz. One of the worst of all of them was in Coventry on Thursday 14 November 1940 where 400 tons of bombs were dropped injuring 863 and killing 586 making it the biggest bombing outside of London in one night. In total, 1236 people were killed in Coventry. Another famous bombing was at Old Trafford, the Manchester United football stadium where over two nights, another 400 tons of bombs were dropped killing 700 and injuring 2300. It was not repaired for 8 years, and the first game after the reconstruction was only played in August 1949. The effect of the Blitz broke the whole country, leaving a scar to remember.

By 1941, Britain needed entertainment, there were huge depression spikes after the Blitz caused by loss of loved ones and the homelessness surge. The public wanted to create distractions from the war going on at their doorstep, they grabbed at every opportunity to go to theatres, cinemas, and dance halls. The Mermaid theatre was among the biggest hits, in the middle of Soho they apparently never closed, and had 'tasteful' nude shows which attracted everybody from London to Bristol. This helped the British citizens come closer together, they all learned to struggle together which helped moral and helped sew their nation together after the war.

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The Mountain

The bell rings right when it's supposed to, I sit in the same seat I do every day; far to the left and up front; away from everyone. It is English so I pull out my specific pen along with my specific book. As usual I get a mean insult or two, like, "You in the debating team yet?" or "I hope you're over the moon with your test results!" I know I won't be, and I now know they are being sarcastic even though it did take three different times before one girl felt sorry for me. I don't understand sarcasm, I'm autistic you see, I don't get anything really. I have an IQ of about 90 and can't really make friends, which makes me a perfect target for bullies.

Anyway, one day; I don't remember exactly when; after the customary insult of, "I wonder if your eyes see upside down?" (my eyes do look a bit funny compared the other boys) I blurted out, "my eyes are going to see the top of Mount Vancouver!" I would never dream of doing that, I would never dream of saying that I didn't even think

of saying that. The boy who insulted me in the first place was rather taken aback, and to be frank, so was I. However, when I said those words, I didn't regret them. As the words floated out of my mouth, I didn't feel embarrassed, I actually felt excited, motivated even. I knew it was possible, my school is very close to the mountain. I thought about how I would look up above the large bit of rock, I thought of how it would feel having gotten to the very top, having known that no one would have believed I could do it. I made my choice right then and there.

I'm ready, I know I am. It's been six months. It's the start of December now which is a pretty dreadful time to hike up Mount Vancouver but nevertheless, I'm still confident I can do it. I faced the usual problems of a hiker: exercising my hips and legs, doing seemingly endless amounts of fitness, strength training, finding the right clothes, finding the right number of things I need to put in my backpack like sunblock and snacks and first aid. I started doing mini hikes where I could, I even figured out a specific warm up to do before and after hiking. They were other challenges too, relating to me specifically, I had to see a doctor who could tell me what to do and how to do it in terms of preparing. But the biggest challenge was my own motor functions. I discombobulated doing just about anything which is possibly the worst thing you can have while climbing. Still though, it was possible, and in two weeks I'm going to do it.

Zero hour: woke up today suspiciously calm. I had made and refined a schedule I'd follow for today, so it ran like clockwork, the ran so quickly until exactly 10:34 in the morning. I was at the base of the mountain. Whenever I was doing practice hikes around here it never looked as high as this. I was scared. The weather was a chilling 10°C so I was also shivering. With only my mum in a café behind me and a lot of walking ahead of me, I began.

It's been thirty minutes and already I'm feeling blown out. I'm down a quarter of my water, and my calves feel as if there are a thousand burning needles etching their way through each muscle-fiber. My backpack seems to fill with more weight with every step, endlessly butchering my back further and further into the ground. My other hikes never felt like this. There is snow on my face, seemingly there to try freeze it off. I keep moving.

It been two hours since it started hiking, I've been more conservative with my water and I'm now down to just under half left. My calves have got numb now, as has my face, I guess I'm lucky. I'm considering just dragging my pack along instead of carrying it, but any thought of that right now is making me want to vomit. As I suspected, I'm starting to feel discombobulated and to counter I do the only thing I can. Eat, specifically eating dried mango. It helps but not completely. I should be up at the top by now according to the average time, but I'm not the average person so they can screw off. I keep moving.

I think I can see the top. It has been nearly five hours, I have another ¼ cup of water left. Most of me is numb right now and I'm literally crawling up the mountain, all I want to do is stop but I'm forcing myself not to think about it. Instead, I think of all the people who didn't believe me, they would all look so stupid when I made it to the top. All I had to do was get there. I estimated a hundred meters till the end. The longest hundred meters of my life. I took the last of my water and my mango and I went for it.

5 meters. 4 meters. 3 meters. 2 meters. 1 meter. I'm there, five hours and seventeen minutes I did it. I stand on my knees because my legs can no longer support my weight. I look at the view, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life. It's so quiet, so peaceful. And I made it up here on my own. No one helped me, no one carried anything for me, I did it alone. And I didn't do it for anyone. I did it for me. Now all I need to do now it get back down...



Luke Wilson

Culling of the Innocent

Have you ever watched your friend die, seeping blood right onto the floor next to you? Or listened to the cries of loved ones as you run in fear, run from the danger that was not meant for you?

My name is Nandi Ngobese, and I am a Zulu born girl to my parents, Amahle and my father Ayanda, he was sent to work in the mines, but I live in continuous hope that I will see him again. The place I call home is Soweto, but it does not feel like home; it feels like a place of constant torture and discrimination. The white government has forced this location on my family and I and life is as difficult as it ever will be.

It is the 16th of June and I walk towards my barren school; I want to learn and get an education so I can make something of my life but that is just not possible. I along with millions of other black students are taught, "Bantu Education" meaning they do not teach us complex subjects like physics or accounting, only the whites do that. I am taught skills that use my hands and require labour like farming or sewing. What makes this system even worse is that we are taught in Afrikaans: the language of those rich whites! I am not able to functionally learn in this language and I cannot even understand what the teachers are saying half the time.

As I enter the school gates my cracked dusty bare feet feel the rocky dirt ground that covers the entire campus, there was once grass in these areas but overtime the thousands of children that milled around made all the grass turn to dust, therefore we are left with a barren dusty playground. I look around for my friends but once I realize they must already be in class I head towards my class in the corner building, I approach my building, I am only ten meters away when I start to hear murmurs, and soon they become shouts saying, "we want fair education, away with Bantu Education!" In just a couple of seconds thousands of strangers have united forming one huge community of protest Apartheid and the unfair education system.

Only ten minutes have gone by since the murmurs began and I find myself, along with thousands of young teenagers that have joined our group, marching. We march aimlessly in many different directions, eventually we are set on course towards Orlando Stadium. My favorite soccer team, the Orlando Pirates, I have been there many times and have been through many losses and wins with them. I keep chanting, "Away with Bantu Education," but the one thing I could not imagine is what happened next...

Bullets, smoke...

I clench my throat trying not to choke on the smoke but all I can do is stand there confused, unable to move as our march takes a split. Half start running back like a herd of stampeding buffalo and half running forward attacking the police officers that have started shooting us like a flock of geese. I, a small little fourteen-year-old girl, stands in the middle of this mess, unable to move my tiny legs, unable to make a decision that can save my life.

I wake up on the morning of June 16th, 2006, a lot has changed since the historical event that took place exactly 30 years ago. I am now a fully grown woman and I have a loving family that live in the new South Africa. It all changed in the elections of 1994 where Nelson Mandela was elected as president and the new South Africa was born: one of freedom and equal rights, one of a rainbow nation that has the opportunity to be great again.

The only thing that will never leave me, that I will never forget is what took place on this day 30 years ago. I will never forget the screams, the cries, the bullets shattering into bodies as they crumpled to the floor. I will never forget the feeling of helplessness and that drop in my stomach as I realized what was happening. Life might be great today and my children live in a peaceful, fair world but this day seemed as far away as the sun when I was that little fourteen-year-old girl.

I feel a great sense of pride on this day I can claim that I was a part of changing South Africa for the good but the many people that lost their lives that day serve as a reminder of what many people went through during apartheid and how people were murdered in cold blood just because they were fighting for an equal world. I just want all of you to understand how difficult it was for this new South Africa to be born, the sacrifices, the deaths, the pain.

The Coldness of Night

In the middle of Tokyo City, the capital city of Japan, there is a deal taking place, a man with dark skin and a hood over his head pulls something out of his pocket and hands it to a Japanese man, he hands something back. I watch this exchange closely through the lenses of my AG1 Haiku binoculars, these allow me to see every

detail of both men standing in the street below me. The men survey their surroundings and I duck frantically, I slowly peek over again, and I see them separating, each walking directly opposite each other down the street, one towards the North and one towards the South.

My gang, the Tigers, is from the south and one of the men partaking in the deal is a part of our gang. The man's name is Hiroshi, and he is a traitor. I have just watched Hiroshi give information to the opposite gang in exchange for money. This outrages me and I slowly get up from the comfortable position I have on the roof. I subsequently, and slowly steadily backtrack to our territory. I am going straight to the gang's leader, Ai, he is a massive individual with scars that stretch across his whole body. He has been through many street fights, and he is feared amongst the people of Tokyo.

I close in on the center of our territory, I pass a sushi shop closing after a long day serving the people of Tokyo delicious sushi rolls. Finally, after a treacherous two-hour walk I finally make my way to Ai's house. There are two guards outside his door, and I ask them to see Ai. He comes out and I tense, he is massive, standing at 6.8 feet and a massive 150kg. I struggle to not stutter my words, but I eventually get what I have witnessed across to him. By the end he is seething with anger...

I do not know what to expect next but whoever gets at the end of Ai's wrath is not going to have a pleasant time.

A long way away in the Japanese Alps, an old woman is holding a cup of tea looking down at the 300 foot drop below her, this woman. She has lived here her whole life but her son- looking for work has now gone into the city of Tokyo. She feels calm and she has been meditating for the last hour. She has been worried because last night she had a very strange dream, she dreamt of a young man getting killed in the coldness of night, his scream had pierced her ears and she had woken up crying. She found herself stumbling into her son's room searching for him.

In the center of Tokyo, Ai's holds a pistol and has blood speckled on his white clothes, below him with his head splattered on the ground like a fly swatted against a window was Hiroshi. His last words a cry of desperation, it didn't help. This gruesome scene stands in front of me, I am shocked, this is not the first time this has happened, but I feel a feeling deep inside of my stomach and I want to vomit. I hear faint voices and they slowly get louder until I realize I am getting shouted at, Ai is screaming at me, he thunders at me to dispose of the body and leave no trace. He leaves and I am left all alone on a towering skyscraper; left to deal with this deserted murder scene.

The old woman is calm as once as before, but she has now come to the realization that her son has been murdered, she's a calm, gentle person but for the first time in her life she has the first thoughts of violence. She finds herself gravitating towards the city, she must revenge her lost, broken, dead son. She must find a way to Tokyo, no matter the hardship or desperation it causes her.

“Q&A and Slumdog Millionaire”

The film *Slumdog Millionaire* directed by Danny Boyle and the novel *Q&A* written by Vikas Swarup focus on the hardships of the immense population of the country of India. Both are based in India in cities like Mumbai and Delhi and display the themes of hope, poverty, and vulnerability. The few differences that separate them make them unique such as the title, the theme of corruption and exploitation, the ending and how love can occur in even the direst of circumstances. Overall, the novel is more descriptive and shows the hardships more effectively and is better at capturing the audience.

The novel's title *Q&A* does not seem fitting as it does not immediately convey the book's message. The phrase *Q&A* generally stands for "Question and Answer," which does not seem relevant to the book's content. This title is unusual, and a more appropriate and effective title could be used to convey the novel's message better. In contrast the film's title, *Slumdog Millionaire* is better representation of the story line. The word "Slumdog" symbolizes the characters' poor lifestyle and the horrendous conditions that they faced in their daily lives. This title also indicates that the protagonist becomes a millionaire, this provides an insight into the story's plot.

The theme of corruption and exploitation are prominently shown in both the novel and the film, shedding light to us on how the society operates in India and how people are unfairly treated based on their social status. The novel portrays many instances where characters are exploited due to their position in poverty. For instance, Ram narrowly escapes being blinded by Maman, who sought to blind him due to his position in poverty and his powerlessness in the situation. Similarly, the film's protagonist, Jamal, faces brutal torture after winning the billion-rupee jackpot, this happened because his captors assumed he cheated due to his upbringing in the slums and they underestimated his intellectual ability. Both these examples show how poverty and social status can make individuals vulnerable to exploitation and corruption.

The ending of both the novel and the film offers a powerful glimpse at how love can do impressive and unexpected things. In the novel Ram Mohammed Thomas, the protagonist, confronts the show's host, Prem Kumar, in the bathrooms with a gun, seeking justice for two women, Nita and Neemila Kumara who had been mistreated and abused by him. However, Prem Kumar offers him the winning answer in exchange for his life, which Ram accepts, leading to Ram's triumph on the show. Later, he meets his lawyer, who turns out to be his long-lost friend that played a significant role in his story. She secures his winnings, and he ends up marrying Nita and starting a life that he never could have imagined. The film concludes on a similar note, as Jamal Malik is reunited with the love of his life after winning the show and starts to live a sublime lifestyle. Both these endings show how the protagonists, Ram and Jamal overcome their challenges in the face of adversity.

In conclusion, both the movie and novel were unique in their separate ways and show the perspective of the realities of life in India through the characters. They show many different aspects like the title, the theme of corruption and exploitation and the ending which differ from the novel to the film. Both show that love should never be undermined and that it can occur in even the direst of circumstances. Overall, both the novel and the film had compelling story lines and made great and pleasurable reads and watches. Although the film is impactful and shows the struggles of India very well, the novel is more descriptive, and it is more effective at capturing the audience and makes for a superior piece of literature.

The Globe Theater

I stand before you as Jacob King and I will be talking to you on the topic of the globe theater and the talks of it getting shut down. I urge you to listen to what I have to say, I promise you I will give you an insight about why this theater is an incredible, fascinating place where many people find refuge to relax their minds.

First, this theater provides all classes of people the opportunity to watch and see theater. This gives them time to rest their minds after long hard days of work or prayer. This is important as if they are overworked, they could get sick and die of exhaustion. The theater gives people inspiration, they see that there is more to life than just working and working. It gives people creativity, and with creativity they could invent new things that benefit our economy.

To help you better understand the experience of the theater I will tell you an experience of mine. One Saturday morning my friends and I decided to take the trip and go to the theater, we only had to pay 1 penny to get into the Globe. *King Henry V*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*? These were some of the plays displayed and we were going to watch *King Henry V*, we made our way into the pit and spent four incredible hours inside, enjoying every moment of the play. I specifically enjoyed how the audience and the actors interacted, by the end I was feeling joy and a creativity sparking inside of me. This theater earns a large amount of money for the economy, it attracts tourists from around the world and people from inside the city. In total it is a benefit for our economy as a whole and I personally think the benefits outweigh the downfalls.

On the other hand, the Globe Theater isn't the greatest of places as in the plays people of high hierarchical standards are killed and this could lead to copycat behaviour from the viewers of the play. I can see why you Puritans do not like as it can cause an uproar from the citizens of our city, and this would not be beneficial to the economy and the running of our city.

But in conclusion, the Shakespeare Globe Theater should remain and should still be allowed to perform their magnificent plays. This is part of our future and I know you Puritans have your own beliefs but being entertained that doesn't involve the killing of

animals is wonderful. All this bear baiting and cock fighting kills animals. Theater provides jobs, allows people to relax and let their mind rest and it is important for the future as it gives people creativity. I hope you all have now come to the realization that the theater benefits outweigh the downfalls and hopefully you will maybe go and give this incredible theater a visit and experience it for yourself.



Musa Mponda

A Picture to Remember

I came across a photograph; it was from the night I proposed to my wife of fifty years. I found this photo in my family scrapbook and immediately the memories and nostalgia came over me.

I was in love.

It was a warm evening in the lively city of Cape Town. We went out for dinner to the Bungalow: a fine dining experience on the beachside. After eating, we walked on the beach. The sun started to descend behind the popular Table Mountain and our favourite song played from the vibrant streets. We danced while the sun set behind us. As the song came to an end, I slowly got on one knee and revealed the ring. Before I could even ask the question, she nodded her head rapidly. I felt as if I was floating in the sky and swaying with the birds in the clouds. Despite the frigid waters of the Cape, I was so elated that I ran in fully clothed; she followed into the murky ocean, and I smiled at her, and hugged her. I had never felt this feeling before. It was as if I could feel every vein pumping blood through my veins. I felt invincible. This was true euphoria.

I was in love.

I come back to reality and a wave of gratefulness, and regret rushes over me. Gratefulness, because I was so lucky to be with the beautiful woman who is today my wife. Regret, seeing that I did not use my youthful days more wisely. We are both old now, and we can no longer dance on beaches, or swim in frigid waters. Even if we wanted to, our decaying bodies would stop us.

I was in love.

Love is an unbreakable force; like a sixth sense we are all born with. Love is her and me; love is forgiving, love is a promise, love is a drug. Everyone deserves to love and be loved. I am fortunate in my case as I got what I deserved.

I am in love.

Atmos Forest

I woke up in my soft, comfortable bed, my head felt balmy, and my pants were sticking to my legs. I struggled to lift myself up and out of my bed, but when I eventually did, the first thing I wanted to do was take a refreshing shower. As I got in, the compact droplets of ice-cold water took me out of my slumber leaving me feeling rejuvenated. I got out of the shower and went to my cupboard to find something to wear, while drops of water dripped on my carpet. As I opened my cupboard a large violet vortex opened and swallowed me whole. I tried to open my eyes, but I could not and when they finally budged, I could not believe what I was seeing.

I was surrounded by colossal, swirling trees that came in all different shades of colours. There were sounds of a calm river travelling throughout my ears and the birds crooning soothed my whole body. Despite all the relaxing noises and scenery, this forest gave me an uneasy feeling. I took a step into a moist patch of grass and a loud “squelch”, was emitted. I heard another loud “squelch” except this time a feeling of fear and worry came over me as I had not moved even a millimetre.

I turned around to face a miniature creature that had pointy ears, a sharp nose, and a spherical stomach. It was an elf! It looked at me with its dark, beady eyes and cynical grin. I felt a shiver go down my spine. “Who are you, and where am I”, I questioned the elf.

“Well, you are in Atmos Forest, the land of elves and my name is Balsam”, said the elf.

“Do you have any idea how I could get back to my home?”, I asked.

“Very simply actually, I can grant you one wish, but with every wish comes a curse.” said Balsam in an apathetic tone. I thought busily about whether it was a deal I was willing to take, however with my current odds, I did not have much to lose.

“I’ll do it”, I said anxiously to Balsam.

“Perfect, what is your wish?”, Balsam quizzed.

“I want to go back home and be back in my room, and I never want to have to come back here again.”, I said.

Balsam then replied, “Your wish is my command.” At the blink of an eye Balsam was gone and the violet vortex reappeared, a refreshing gust of wind hit my face and my eyes were tightened shut again.

I woke up in my soft, comfortable bed, my head felt balmy, and my pants were sticking to my legs. “Something is off.”, I thought to myself. I felt as if I had been here before, as if I was repeating this day again. I walked towards my bathroom, so that I could take a shower. As I stepped in, I felt a shock travel down my spine due to the frigid temperatures. I closed the tap and fetched my towel from my cupboard so that I could

dry myself, yet as I opened the cupboard door, a large violet vortex opened and swallowed me whole.

I opened my eyes, and I was in forest. "Wait, I have been here before", I thought to myself. I took a step in the moist grass and a loud "squelch", was emitted. I heard a second "squelch", yet I had not moved. I turned around to see an elf, but he seemed so familiar, it made me feel uneasy. "Who are you, and where am I", I asked the elf. "You do not remember? I am Balsam, and you are in Atmos forest.", said the elf.

"It is you again! Take me back home now you filthy creature, I want to leave this forest now!", I exclaimed.

"Is that your wish?", Balsam asked. "Yes, and preferably with no curse this time.", I replied.

"Sorry my friend, I cannot guarantee anything, but I can send you home.", he said. With that, Balsam vanished, the violet vortex reappeared, a refreshing gust of wind hit my face and my eyes were tightened shut again.

I woke up in my bed, my feet frigid and my hands numb, to anyone else this is unpleasant, but to me it was a dream come true. The curse had been broken! I walked out of my bedroom, down the creaky, wooden stairs and into the kitchen. I got a bowl of cereal and sat down at the table. I could hear someone coming down the stairs, and I looked forward to seeing family after my experience in Atmos Forest. To my surprise Balsam appeared instead of my mother or father. "You foolish elf, what are you doing in my house?!", I shouted.

"Well, I did tell you no guarantees friend, and now we can live together forever", he said with a cynical grin.

Soweto's Sorrow

It was the 15th of June in the year 1976; feelings of anxiety consumed me as I thought about what was to come on the following day. I could imagine it now in my head; my best friend, Hector beside me, as we would attend the march for our rights within the oppressive apartheid education system, all while we sang 'Senzeni na', meaning "What have we done?"

I come from a family consisting of a two other people, being my mother and my older sister. I never knew my father, but my mother says he was a respected man in our community. She tells stories of him leading protests for the benefit of our race. I have always wanted to be like him, even though I do not know him, he is still someone I look up to.

I spend most of my time at home alone, as my mother and sister are always out working. I like to believe that this factor has made me far more mature and independent than other 12-year-olds around the world. By the time my mother and sister come back from work, I would have made dinner for all of us, made our bed from the morning and

cleaned our room. On the days I was not alone, I was with Hector. Him and I shared a passion for the topic of freedom, and the togetherness of all races. We were so excited for the upcoming protest, where the young people of Soweto would march peacefully during school hours to express our feelings towards the unfair education system. The anxiety I was feeling earlier had turned into excitement, and the excitement was slowly turning into unease. Soon after I finished my introspection, my mother and sister arrived home. My sister is also going to attend the protest, yet my mother is not, and she has made it clear that she does not want me to go either. I sat in the bed that the three of us shared; I closed my eyes and tried to fall asleep. I usually have no problem doing so, but today it was as if there was a barrier in my mind preventing me from dozing off. A voice in my head told me, "Mbuyisa, do not go to that protest, it will only bring you great pain and suffering." I shrugged the voice off and continued to attempt to sleep; after roughly an hour, I finally managed to rest.

There was a soft rustle beside me, and after a few minutes I followed. It was my sister and she had left for the protest. The march was being led by Tsietsi Mashinini. I would look for him and I assumed my sister would too. I closed the door to my house quietly, and followed the sounds of amagwijo, as I had lost track of my sister. Luckily enough, the powerful sound of hands clapping, and feet stomping in unison led me to the crowd of Soweto school children. I joined them, and as we moved together throughout the streets of Soweto, more people would join. "Hector! There you are my friend, where have you been?", I said. "I was about to say the same thing to you", he said while smiling. We both laughed, and I felt at peace. I was surrounded by all these people that look like me, all gathered for one cause. A tear streamed from my eye. Not a tear of enjoyment however, a tear of pain. Tear gas. The police arrived. Muffled screams and coughs surrounded me, and suddenly hector disappeared. "Hector?", I shouted. I looked down to see a puddle of blood. Right there, at my feet, lay my best friend, Zollie Hector Pieteron.

I picked up his limp body and blood trickled out of his limbs simultaneously as tears streamed out of my eyes. Despite all the noise around me, I managed to capture the attention of Hector's older sister with my desperate screams. Her name is Antoinette Pieteron, and she is 17 years old. "Antoinette, I'm sorry! It was the police and I tried to stay close, but then the smoke..." I explained. "It's okay, it is not your fault Mbuyisa.", she said calmly. I fell into her arms unable to stay on my feet due to this sudden shock. Another bullet was fired into the air, and I rushed Hector to the nearest car I could find. Antoinette followed. "Ngiyakucela mnumzane, umgane wethu ulimele futhi sidinga ukumyisa kudokotela", I pleaded. The man could clearly see the desperation in our eyes, as he started driving to the nearest doctor at a rapid speed. Once we arrived, we all carried Hector to the ICU as quickly as we could. Without the use of machinery, the doctor simply checked Hector's pulse and shook his head at us. "No, Hector, you're okay my friend, you can wake up now.", I said while trying to resuscitate him. Tears crawled down my face as I accepted that it was truly over. Zollie Hector was dead.

It is now the 16th of June in the year 2023. It breaks my heart that you cannot be with me now, but I know you are happier where you are. I want you to know that your death did not go unnoticed, you impacted the entire country. I sit here today in a house in the suburbs, away from Soweto. I have a wife, and a son, whose name is Hector.

Hector, my friend, we love you; we appreciate you and we miss you.

The Anonymous Plague

I heard the deafening sound of the Lucas House rising bell for the umpteenth time, and I covered my head with my pillow. I felt my eyelids get heavier, my blankets get warmer and my bed more comfortable. Many might claim this is ordinary, but my case was different. I had a disease, a disease that slowly rots the human body, a unique disease unlike any other, and this disease is called procrastination.

From an early age, I have always had incredible dreams and aspirations, to become a president, or maybe a lawyer, or even teacher. This is the way my parents raised me, and I was dedicated to reach my goals. Waking up early to study for tests, going on runs and swimming for my own personal benefit. I was doing so well, becoming a better person every day. All this progress went to waste, not on my own accord however, it was at the fault of my disease procrastination.

I still notice myself thinking about my future, except I feel more in control now, as if every action I make will trigger another in my timeline. This is part of the reason I find myself lazing off, sleeping in, or telling myself, "I'll do it later." I do this because that way I cannot affect my future with any incorrect actions right? Wrong. By doing this I jeopardize my future more, because your teenage years are about preparing yourself for the future. We waste these years going out, drinking, and messing around with our friends in hopes that when we leave school, we will magically get into our dream university, leading us to a successful life. These are the years we should be studying the most because we have the most energy, and if we work hard now, we do not have to work as hard in the future.

Generation Z has led me to think my disease is contagious, as when I look around, when I observe others my age, they are the same as me. They are lazy, they are unmotivated. The more I think about it, the more I realise procrastination is not a mere disease, it is a plague. It is curable however, the cure much simpler than one would imagine. We need to start doing things. A skill many people have is to talk something up, to hype another person up to do something big to start something big, yet in the end we never do it. Just do it. Start that business, enter that competition, put your phone down and read that book. I promise you will enjoy it more than you thought you would've. We are so acclimatized to colour in the lines and stick within our boundaries, but this prevents us from growing. Initially I was not going to enter this writer's prize competition, as I tried to convince myself it would be a waste of my time, and that I

would not enjoy it, but I am glad I ended up doing it, because I found that I enjoy writing, and to an extent I think it is something I am good at. Tired is a mindset, lazy is a mindset. Leave your comfort zone and go do something incredible.



Matthew Wilson

The Infected Man

It is a cold, frosty night. The wind is howling. The mountains that surround this little valley are enormous against the shining moon. Just in the distance, over a mountain is a village. All the people are asleep, not to be woken before dawn. That is besides one lonely person who is going for a night-time walk.

I'm Daniel Carter and I am walking through a forest in the middle of the night to clear my head. It is eerily silent, colourful plants and insects illuminate around me as my flashlight bounces over them. The path is well used, with dark little cracks in it. It has been hardened from years and years of use. One thing is odd though, I notice wolf tracks engraved into the dirt path. They look fresh. I sense danger. I look around, searching for any evidence of a wolf through the thick brush and plants that surround me.

I am frantic; my body ready for an attack; instinctively, a long 20-centimeter knife has appeared in my hand. I think I glimpse a set of eyes looking right back at me: they are blue, murderous and send a shiver down my spine. I immediately try to form a stabbing stance but I am too late. The 6-year-old, male wolf, with a silver strip, has already leapt; its sharp teeth biting towards me. Its teeth clamp down on my arm. I feel a mountain of excruciating pain shudder through my body. My concentration starts to slip but my body's adrenaline is using all its resources to push the agony away. I regain focus and extend my knife right into the enraged wolf's heart. The beast loses its grip and its existence crumbles before me. I look at the gash in my arm, knowing that I do not have long. The wolf has foam around its mouth and it looks like it is infected with some disease. I try to stay conscious whilst the pain washes over me. I grab my knife and stand up, refusing to give into the pain. Stumbling at first, I start a very long journey back to camp, blood dripping from a gash in my arm, legs in pain and a mind that has been scarred for life.

I arrive back to camp in a daze; it is an opening in the forest crammed with ten pine wood cabins. These cabins are small, but welcoming, each having its own unique door. I know that there is no doctor in camp but there is one just on the outskirts of it. I set off, the pain has subsided, replaced by a dull ache caused by losing too much blood.

My heart is thumping, I can hear every beat. There could be more wolves out here, but I have to risk it. I go on a different path this time, it has loose dirt, that shifts under my throbbing feet. I am running, not wasting any time. Eventually, I arrive at a slanted wooden cabin, it looks old, the wood rotten and a stream of smoke is blowing up from the chimney. I stumble into this doctor's house and my eyes dart from one corner of the room to another; finally, like a miracle from heaven I see a man peeking out behind the only wall in the house, I shout at him, "Hello I have been bitten by a large wolf, can you help me?" He says nothing and looks up at me with an expression of horror on his face. He is not looking at me but is staring past me. I swivel around and stand starstruck by the image of a big black wolf, with sharp deadly teeth, jumping towards me...

A Comparison of Q&A and *Slumdog Millionaire*

The novel *Q&A* written by Vikus Swarup and the film *Slumdog Millionaire* directed by Danny Boyle is set in the harsh, poor overcrowded slums in India, specifically the large slum of Dharavi. The two works share common themes of corruption, poverty and vulnerability, yet differ in significant ways such as the ending of the two pieces, the themes present and the character development of the protagonist. The novel paints a more vivid, descriptive and effective picture of the protagonist's life.

The themes of corruption and exploitation are very present in both the novel and the film. In the novel the police are portrayed as being extremely corrupt. Willing to accept bribes of very little monetary value, disregarding the law and utilizing loopholes for their benefit. The first chapter highlights this when the protagonist, Ram, is getting interrogated by the police for a false charge of cheating on a game show. This is present in both the novel and the film, meaning that they both have similar amounts of corruption. Exploitation is also a significant theme showcased in the two works; the novel showcases this theme profoundly, as in when Ram's friend with a mental illness is disowned by his mother and left to fend for himself. Another example is when Ram was robbed on the train, the dokoit stole his prized fifty thousand rupees. In the film, Ram and his brother Salim are nearly blinded by people they believed they could trust, highlighting the vulnerability that individuals in poverty face. The novel is more effective in showcasing these themes as it presents more events that display them in a vivid and interesting way.

The protagonist in the novel and film is the same person although they go by different names. Ram and Jamal both care about people, experience trauma and endure heartbreak. However, there are notable differences in the portrayal of the character such as Jamal being more of a naïve, caring, idealistic person and Ram is still caring but is more pragmatic, intelligent and perceptive. Boyle chose Jamal to be this way to gain more sympathy from the viewers and for the message of vulnerability in poverty to be conveyed. Swarup chose Ram to be a stronger, more mature individual so the

reader can be content and interested. Swarup's choice of qualities in the protagonist proves to be a far more effective way to create a multi-faceted character.

The ending's both end happily, that leaves the reader/viewer with a sense of hope. In both works, the protagonist receives his money and is vindicated of any wrongdoings. However, the novel is more detailed in describing how Ram spends his newfound wealth, while the film concludes with him finding love. The novel's ending proves to be superior; it leaves the reader feeling content, it is detailed and the sense of hope that is conveyed is very powerful.

Q&A and *Slumdog Millionaire* explore similar themes in different ways, providing a glimpse into the harsh realities of life in the slums of India. The novel is more effective in conveying the themes of corruption and exploitation as well as the emotions and actions of the protagonists. This is because of the vivid events that showcase exploitation, the qualities of the protagonist Ram and the detailed ending of the novel. The novel describes the story in an effective way that captures the audience and helps paint a vivid, descriptive and effective picture in the reader's mind.

The Forest

I crouch down at the edge of the mysterious woods that lay ahead of me. I peer close to the ground, inspecting it, searching for any evidence of human life. All I can see are tiny grains of grass that have been cut in a very odd way, not something that a human would do. There is also some evidence of tiny footprints, almost like a child but smaller. I have decided to go for a stroll and see what is in the area as I am new here. The trees tower over me as I slowly walk through a beautifully cut path that meanders its way through the brush and flora. I catch the chime of chirping crickets in my ears together with the crunch of other little animals scurrying around. I'm walking on a soft path, made mainly out of moss. It's a slight green colour, with a tint of brown and blue. It makes me think of my mom, as she always used to wear that colour. I smell freshly fallen leaves, dying slowly, the aroma of them is musty and untouched.

I stroll calmly until I reach a clearing. I can make out the shapes of a tower, but this is covered by fascinating vines, as well as the same colour moss that I had found before. It almost seems like there is a presence of some human around me, but I can't figure it out. Later I would. I look around some more and look back to where I had previously come from. The path is gone. The plants have moved, trapping me, they are moving closer and closer. I start to feel drowsy, there's a pain in my head, my eyesight blurs. And then I'm falling to the floor, and black out...

I wake up in a different opening, this one has stones lining the floor and the flora surrounding it rises higher than ten meters. I am in an arena. Out of nowhere, a bright light appears and different sized people that look like the fairies you would see in children books start to enter the seating area. I am in a daze; I can't tell left from right.

Abruptly a fairy with a sword starts charging at me. I use my karate skills to kick the sword out of his hand and punch him with such a force that he lands on the floor with a thump! The whole crowd is surprised and quiet. I realize that there is an open door to my left that I can exit from. I run for it, sprinting, my feet thudding against the stones. My breath short, the exit running towards me. I dive out of it and land exactly where I had blacked out. My brain is fuzzy. What just happened? I quickly stand up and look back to where I had dived out of and I see nothing except the same old tower with moss covering it and some vegetation surrounding the clearing that I am in.

I hurriedly get up and commence my long run out of the forest, my mind still fuzzy. I jog, all the while knowing that the encounter I had just had with the fairies was not just a dream but a memory. I make it to the edge of the woods and see my house in the distance. I slow down, knowing that I am safe from whatever lies in the forest. The floor here is made up of grass, still cut in an oddly way. I can see and smell human activity to my left and right and I know that if I told anyone of my special event, I will not be believed.

The Poacher's Demise

In the bright, alluring morning, deep in the wilderness is an old, rusty, silver Pajero, trundling along with two big strong men inside. These men are having an argument, while coming up to a game reserve gate.

I am James, and I'm driving this beat-up Pajero, that couldn't have more than 100 kilometers left on it. As I saunter up to the Park Gate, passing a sign that says "Sabi Sand Game Reserve". I bellow to my partner Marcus, "Marcus why did you leave our head torches behind!"

Marcus responds, "They got mixed with the rubbish boss."

I groan and say, "It's fine, we will have to do without them."

As we pull up, a park ranger walks up to the car, eyeing both of us with a hostile stare. I provide our paperwork, all legitimate, and he glances at it briefly before walking away without checking our boot. Little does he know that this decision would prove to be one of his greatest mistakes.

We slowly make our way through the entrance and are greeted by a panorama of untamed wilderness, adorned by towering acacia and mopane trees. The savannah is dotted with foliage, where guinea fowls and mongooses play gleefully amidst the natural beauty. As we rumble along the dusty track, the wildlife diversifies. We pass a tower of giraffes, munching on the leaves of an acacia tree, their elegant presence making them a fascinating sight. Amidst the mopane trees, a troop of mischievous vervet monkeys swing from branch to branch, occasionally eating a fruit. While I enjoy the nature, I lose interest in the road and the Pajero slams into a massive pothole, I launch towards the windscreen but at the last second, my seatbelt tightens. When I regain focus, I scream, "AAAAAAAHHHHH!!!" In frustration and relief.

The suspension is broken.

I tell Marcus, "We are going to have to go on foot."

I grab my 458 Caliber Socom rifle, a chainsaw, and a black bag and venture into the bush on a well-trodden path.

We walk, searching for any signs of rhinos. The air is thick with an earthy scent of wild vegetation. We pass a lone male impala grazing; it stares at us warily, not sure what to think. After an hour of searching, we witness a juvenile tawny eagle latching onto a brave rat and enjoying its taste on a tall yellowwood tree. As we are about to give up and head to the car, we trundle across a rhino midden. It is made up of dried-up feces and chewed wild vegetation.

I excitedly say to Marcus, "It's fresh! Stay downwind."

We circle the area, the spirit of the hunt coursing through our veins. After numerous false alarms, we spot a white male rhino. We observe its monstrous yet elegant presence while never forgetting its deadliness. I slowly load my rifle, fine-tuning it. I rest it on my shoulder, point it at the beast and look into the scope. After everything is set up, I pause and think to myself, "Why?" My mind wonders but rests on the faces of my kids and I pull the trigger.

The large hole in its head seems to do nothing to the beast but like a capsizing ship, it slowly topples over and lies lifeless. Markus and I amble up to the massive innocent creature and begin the hacking off of the extravagant keratin horn. It is a long and tedious task. With the chainsaw at full power, it digs easily into the thick flesh and horn. The job gets done swiftly. Where the rhino's face and been, was now just a big bloody hole. Task finished; we walk away, with no signs of sorrow on our faces.

On the horizon, the sun is setting, it is made up of beautiful scarlet and turquoise colours. We stand starstruck, admiring the beauty... Suddenly, from behind us, a long and ferocious roar echoes through the air.

I turn around slowly, fearing what must be there.

Right in front of me, is the king of the jungle, with a golden mane, staring blankly at me with death etched into its eyes. It is scrawny, old, haggard, and on its last legs. It is desperate. Markus is holding the rifle and he is slowly gaining the courage to perform the manoeuvre that would save both of our lives. The seconds feel like hours. That manoeuvre would never occur because when Markus raises the rifle and pulls the trigger, the rifle makes an empty, dull clicking sound. My brain struggles to comprehend what this means, with the sound reverberating through my brain I stand glued to the floor. A second later, the old lion launches itself slightly to the right of me with astonishing speed and its long, yellow teeth sink into Markus's neck. He lies

lifeless, just like the dead white rhino. I spin and begin the race to the nearest Mopani tree which is 50 meters away.

I am 40 meters away.

I am 30 meters away.

I am 20 meters away. I can see the wrinkled bark, the bees buzzing, the forks in the tree.

And when I thought I was safe, the excruciating pain of claws sinking into my back washes over me. I lie still, defeat coursing through my whole body. Knowing that the wild always had a way of righting wrongs. When the teeth sink into my neck, everything goes black...

U Boats

What role did U-boats play in the beginning of World War II and how did the Allies' counter them?

Submarines have existed since the early 1900s, but people started noticing them a lot more when the Germans weaponized them. These U-boats' ("underseebote") primary objective was to destroy merchant ships that supplied Britain and the Allies with essential goods such as weapons, fuel and food. This would leave Britain to either starve, run short of fuel or not have enough firing power to defeat the Germans. The U-boats in World War two were highly effective in carrying out this objective and played a massive role in turning the tide of the war in the Axis's favour.

The German U-boat fleet experienced rapid growth throughout the duration of the war, with the number of submarines going from 57 at the war's beginning to over 1150 units by its conclusion. The Treaty of Versailles stated that the German Navy was restricted from exceeding 35% of Britain's fleet with their vessels. Consequently, numerous U-boats were not constructed during the inter-war period but rather built once the Treaty of Versailles lost its effect at the beginning of the war. This resulted in German U-boat construction skyrocketing as the Germans recognized their strategic and potential value.

U-boats proved highly effective in sinking various targets during the war, including independent merchant ships, fleets of merchant ships and warships. Throughout the 2nd World War, approximately 3000 Allied merchant ships were sunk, resulting in the loss hundreds of thousands of lives. The U-boats utilized a key tactic known as the Wolf Pack method, which was when a group of submarines hunted merchant ships together, often encircling them to maximize their chances of success. This helped the U-boats to increase their kills, and it was hard for the Allies to counter and shoot all

the U-boats when attacked. (Botting, 1984) Particularly at the beginning of the war, numerous merchant vessels fell victim to U-boats attacks in regions such as the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, the East Coast of North America and across the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean.

The second “Happy Time”, refers to a period of time during World War II when U-boats were able to capitalize on weak Allies’ defences of their merchant ships, leading to a significant number of successful sinkings. A combined total of 427 ships were sunk during this phase, which occurred in January 1942, shortly after the United States had entered the war. With America’s involvement, Germany justified targeting American merchant vessels. These vessels were often isolated or had little to no convoys. As a result, within the first 4 months of the year around 200 independent ships fell victim to U-boat attacks between Britain and America. The U-boats then extended their operation further south helped by the German’s new invention, tanker submarines that could replenish U-boats at sea. This innovation enabled the subs to continue to attack lone merchant ships over an extended period of time. By May and June, the focus had shifted to the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, resulting in 236 of the Allies’ vessels being sunk. After this smartly designed convoys started to happen in these areas. This resulted in no more ships being sunk in these regions for the rest of the year, thereby marking the end of the second “Happy Time”. (Botting, 1984)

The Allies invented ways to defend their merchant ships and dreadnoughts from U-boats, they eventually defeated U-boats, ultimately leading to the defeat of these submarines by making it extremely difficult for them to sink any vessels. A crucial turning point was when the Allies gained knowledge of German U-Boat signals, allowing them to have an extensive picture of the U-boat activities. This valuable information enabled convoys to avoid deadly areas where prowling U-boats were present. As the U-boat was completely invisible to merchant ships, the discovery of a radar capable of picking up surfaced U-boats at night also helped escorts get a grip on their invisible and elusive opponents.

The Allies also utilized a wide range of artillery, weapon, and tactics to gain an upper hand in the war. Explosives, mortars and Q-ships played a pivotal role in turning the tide of the war in the favour of the Allies. (Cavendish) All of these weapons and countermeasures allowed the Allies to sink 962 U-boats by the end of the world war, though still a small number compared to the significant number of merchant ships sunk.

U-boats played a massive role in World War 2, greatly aiding Germany in gaining control of the naval war, their influence is notable. However, the Allies’ made significant technological advancements that made it increasingly difficult for U-boats to sink ships with ease. It was a desperate and solitary war that resulted in hundreds of thousands of lives being lost. Many people suffered extreme hardships, that

traumatized them for life. The naval war was undeniably harsh and brutal and showed how new innovations can give the opposing force a massive advantage.

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Ntsika Kleinbooi

A Midsummer Night's Forest

Wooden contortionists wrap their bodies around me. I walk on a mahogany bridge that crosses over the azure river. Lights illuminating emerald, aquamarine, teal and cyan glow and gleam. Fairies fly at the speed of light. On blackwood trees, lush and verdant leaves grow as big as a rugby ball. Mud splashes on my boots. Peach, white and navy finches sing jovial songs in soprano and alto in perfect harmony and unison. Sienna foxes play tag with one another. Suddenly the path splits.

I decide to go left, bright red cherries and berries grow on thick ivy bushes, and violet dragon fruit grows on the blackwood trees. Hummingbirds sleep buried in the bushes and monkeys sleep in the trees. I reach the pinnacle of the forest and stand on the cliff face overlooking Athens. A beautiful dusk sunset surrounds me. An exquisite gradient of yellow, orange, red and purple surrounds me.

A Gainesboro grey, andesite-bricked stone hut stands alone. It has a conical roof and scratches around its exterior. A blackwood door protects its secrets within its interior. An owl hoots in a tree in the courtyard. Green lizards crawl on the andesite walls and moss creeps through the bricks. The midnight blue sky covers the earth, speckled with white stars and the porcelain white moon. The beautiful moon in the full moon.

Descending back to the lush forest the temperature has changed, from hot to deathly cold and all the finches and foxes are asleep. I return to the path and leave the forest.



Imran Mahomed

A Midsummer Night's Forest

Tall trees spread their big branches out like a loving mother would to her child, squeezing tightly until all available space is small. Allowing a little glimmer of moonlight to peak through and illuminate the slow-setting mist. The leaves of the trees rustle gently in the breeze, creating a soothing sound that is echoed by the falling of the leaves as if they were all part of a gentle dance.

Vibrant vines hang down waiting patiently for their next victim to get tangled up in their coiled-up tentacles. The lush garden is alive with the vibrant colours of the exotic flowers and the chirping of the birds that dart from one bloom to another as if searching for the perfect perch to sing their melodic songs. Amongst the lush grass great sparks of gold flutter, their delicate wings buzzing vibrantly like a swarm of bees. They speak in hushed tones, sharing secrets in a language so delicate that it could only be heard by those with the magical ears to detect it.

Nearby a crystal-clear stream, glistening in the moonlight, flows smoothly and steadily joining forces with the wide, meandering river below; its waters merging to create a majestic sight. The peaceful water was home to a variety of creatures, from the playful and mischievous water nymphs, who delight in splashing and laughing in the moonlight, to the mischievous and enchanting fairies, who flit and dance among the lush reeds and lily pads, their wings glistening in the moonlight. The creatures add to the magical atmosphere of the scene, reminiscent of a midsummer night's dream, where nature comes alive with beauty and wonder.



Jack O'Brien

The Bone Sparrow – Alternative Ending

I saw Eli running for the fence. He looked like he was going to jump higher than anyone, but he turned so quickly he fell. It looked like he was running for me, to come fetch me but I can't leave without Maa and Queeny. I was about to shout to Eli to leave without me, but he wasn't looking at me. He didn't have the brave in his eyes anymore, he had something different.

A scared look.

I looked behind him and saw Beaver, with his one eye. Eli was running for the bush with Beaver right behind him. Eli started digging for something, something that someone moved. That someone realized he needed to fetch it for Eli.

While Beaver was grabbing at Eli I ran as fast as I could to where I hid that something, something that could help Eli win against Beaver. I looked behind the bathrooms and there was that something. I grabbed it and ran back to Eli hoping it's not too late.

When I get there, I see Eli on the ground and Beaver's holding a rock. In that moment, I learnt rocks aren't just for fun, they are also for terrible things. Beaver has the rock.

He threw it. I can't believe what I just saw.

Too many things are happening inside my head and all I could do is scream. Everyone looks at me when my legs take over and my body's doing things I can't control. The next thing, I'm running at Beaver with that something in my hand. I run and just start hitting him, he's looking at me as if I'm crazy until that something gets stuck inside him.

I just stand there not realizing what I have done. Finally, I figured out what that something was used for... Hurt.

Now, Beaver's face changes to a hot red, hotter than when he was chasing Eli. He lunges at me trying to grab me. I realize I must run. I just start running, running for my life, running looking for Queeny so she can help me like last time but all I find was a dead end.

I turn around and see Beaver. He grabs me and throws me to the floor. I feel the back of my head, there is blood. I look back at Beaver. Beaver starts looking for that something; he holds it high and brings it down at me. That's when everything went dark.



Iviwe Mnconywa

A Mother's Love: A Precious Gift Beyond Measure

In the tapestry of life, few threads are as resilient, as vibrant, and as unconditionally selfless as a mother's love. My heart swells with gratitude and reverence as I reflect upon the profound influence my mother's love has had on shaping the person I am

today. Her unwavering devotion, boundless compassion, and nurturing spirit have been a beacon of light guiding me through life's labyrinthine pathways.

From the moment I entered this world, cocooned in her warm embrace, I was enveloped in a love that defies description. My mother's love is an unending reservoir of tenderness and care, always ready to pour forth to alleviate my pains and share in my joys. It is a love that has weathered countless storms, adapting and growing stronger with each challenge life presents. Through the highs and lows, her love has been my steadfast anchor, providing solace and strength in moments of uncertainty.

Her sacrifices stand as a testament to the depths of her love. From sleepless nights cradling me in her arms as an infant to the countless hours spent toiling to provide for our family, my mother's love has always been accompanied by action. She gave up her personal aspirations and dedicated herself wholeheartedly to nurturing and nourishing our family's dreams. Her unwavering dedication reflects the sacrifices made with no expectation of recognition, solely driven by the desire to see her loved one's flourish.

The warmth of my mother's love is not confined to a single moment but is woven intricately into the tapestry of my life's journey. It's in the hearty meals prepared with love, the gentle touch that brushes away my tears, and the wisdom-filled conversations that guide me towards making sound decisions. Her love is a wellspring of guidance and wisdom, a reservoir of experiences that she generously shares to help me navigate life's complexities.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of my mother's love is its boundless nature. Her love extends not only to her immediate family but also to friends, neighbours, and strangers in need. Her kindness knows no boundaries, and her capacity to empathize and lend a helping hand is a reflection of the immense compassion that resides within her heart. Witnessing her selflessness has taught me that love is not confined by proximity or familiarity, but rather it is a force that can transcend barriers and touch lives in profound ways.

As I traverse the journey of life, I find myself echoing my mother's love in my own actions and relationships. Her example has imbued me with a sense of responsibility to care for and support those around me. Her legacy lives on through the kindness I extend to others, the patience I practice, and the nurturing presence I offer to those in need.

In conclusion, a mother's love is a treasure beyond compare, a gift that shapes us, moulds us, and propels us toward becoming the best versions of ourselves. My mother's love has been a source of inspiration, a wellspring of strength, and a guiding light throughout my life. It is a force that has sculpted my character, taught

me the true essence of compassion, and instilled in me the values that define who I am. As I reflect upon her love, I am filled with immense gratitude and awe, for her love is a beacon that continues to illuminate my path, reminding me that in the grand tapestry of life, a mother's love is the most enduring thread of all.