

SUPERPOWERED

JUNE 2023

AND OTHER STORIES

A
FIREFLY
PRESS
CREATIVE
WRITING
PROJECT

CELEBRATING
EMPATHY
DAY
2023

A COLLECTION OF CREATIVE WRITING

FROM YEAR 7 STUDENTS AT
CARDINAL NEWMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL



CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU
BOOKS COUNCIL OF WALES



Contents



Dear Reader,

To celebrate Empathy Day 2023, Firefly Press visited Year 7 students at Cardinal Newman Catholic School in Rhydyfelin, Pontypridd, for some exciting writing workshops.

The students came up with brilliant empathy-rich story ideas, and you can read the openings here!

Happy reading!



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The Life of a Dream

by Evelyn Ong



5 years ago, I woke up. I woke up not knowing who I was or why I was there. I was lying near a willow tree, next to a dog. That dog was a pet of mine, named Fidji; the only thing I could remember ever since I woke up. I remember looking around the trees that surrounded me. I searched for a clue, a hint that would give me the answers to my questions. However, still until this day I haven't had a reply I had hoped for...

Chapter 1 - Granny May

'Time to get up, Lily!' shouted Granny May.

Granny May was a little old lady who adopted me. At the time she and I first met I was just a little girl wandering around a small town (only a few days after I had awoken in the forest) looking for medication for my rumbling stomach. When night fell, eventually, she brought me in and raised me as her own and treated me with kindness and care. I staggered as I got out of bed and rubbed my head after being reminded of the situation I was in five years ago. I was reminded of it in a dream. Only this time I saw a big bright light which whispered something along the lines of 'I will always be with you'. I recognised the voice; it was familiar but it was still unknown to me.

As I started dressing, I wondered what I would have to experience in school today. School was never really fun or a place where I would feel safe. Personally, at school I never really had any friends or people who would talk to me a lot. As I walked around, lost in thought, Fidji whined at me sadly as he saw me going out for school.

I crouched down and stroked his furry little head, 'Be a good boy and keep Granny May company.'

He placed his paw up in the air for a handshake; I placed my hand on his paw and shook it gently. Even though I couldn't see the emotions that appeared on his face physically, I knew that he was smiling.

I trudged down the soft carpeted stairs, exhausted and reluctant to go to school yet again.

I've finished my breakfast now, getting ready for another day of school. However, who knew what would happen that day onwards...

Alone

by Ffion Samphire



Alone. That's how Kayla felt. Finding just someone to talk to would be hard in new surroundings. The constant pressure she felt just trying to fit in with others really brought her down time and time again. But that one memory, when she was all happy with her old friends, making up their own stories and enjoying themselves... It felt like a lifetime away, even though she only left them last week.

The only thing she wanted was someone to trust, someone to laugh with, someone to talk with and just someone to rely on. Just having one friend would make Kayla the happiest person in the world. Just one simple interaction with someone would give her joyous and nervous butterflies every time. It was so different to her in her old school, where she knew everyone, knew where everything was and when she knew she would feel comfortable coming in everyday and talking to anyone.

She would often worry about her public persona, overthinking everything she would do and would often talk to herself and hide everything. With every action came the thought, *What do they think?* or *Act normal so no one judges you.*

Going out in the rain was Kayla's favourite. Everyone would be inside leaving Kayla to herself. That's one thing she loved most, but a friend would be better. Much better.

One time, Kayla caught someone staring at her during a class. She started to

panic and overthink everything: thinking about if she done something earlier, or wondered if anything happened involving her which could have made anyone upset with her? It didn't matter if Kayla ignored them, they looked as if they were mesmerised with her. This made Kayla confused and wondered if they were okay.

At the end of the class, they approached her and introduced themselves.

'Hey how are you? I'm Chrissie, and you?'

Kayla was confused. Was she trying to be her friend? That was all Kayla wanted was a friend, so this could be a perfect opportunity for her to meet someone new to talk to.

However, there was one thing in her way. How would she respond? She could be casual, she could be way over the top, or she could completely mess things up.

Her fate was technically in her hands, so she just responded with, 'I'm Kayla, thanks for asking.'

She had done it. It was all so fast and so overwhelming.

Did this mean that she had finally made a friend?



STUCK IN TWO YEARS AGO

by Gwen Coombs

‘**B**ut Mummm...’ I groan

‘No excuses, I told you weeks ago, Freya!’ she yells down the stairs while doing her makeup.

‘I wasn’t listening weeks ago!’

‘No excuses, Freya, all you have to do is stay in the house. Dinner’s in the fridge. You’re 14 now, you need to get used to this sort of thing!’

‘But he’ll force me to play with cars or something!’ I protest.

‘He’s 11, darling. He can take care of himself and, who knows, maybe you and your brother can be friends?’ she says cheerfully, while smudging her lipstick on.

‘He is not my brother and he never will be!’ I say defiantly.

‘Darling, I know it’s hard, but he *is* your step brother, and....’.

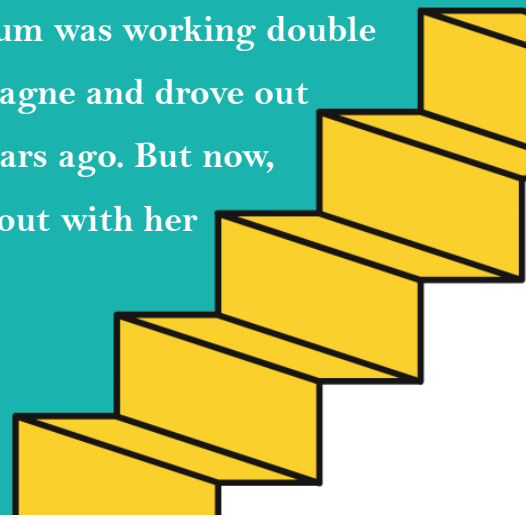
He’s nothing to me.

I quietly walk away.

Her voice fades.

How is it so easy for her? I ask myself. How has she already moved on? On the one-year anniversary she stayed off work all day with me. We watched movies together all day. Why should two years be different? A part of me feels like she doesn’t care. I remember the night vividly. Back when mum was working double shifts and dad had to make dinner. When he burnt the lasagne and drove out to get us takeaway. When he never returned. Just two years ago. But now, Mum’s spending the two-year anniversary on some night out with her new, soon to be, husband. They only met a month ago.

It makes me angry



But what can I do?

I hear the car leave the drive. She's gone. I walk up to Lewis's room and knock on the door.

'Lewis, dinner's in the fridge,' I shout.

I begin to walk away when he opens the door.

'You aren't going to eat with me?' he asks. His sharp blonde curls hang over his piercing blue eyes. He looks nothing like me, with my ratty, faded brown hair and dull grey eyes.

'I'm going to bed,' I mutter.

'You don't like me do you...' he says quietly.

'All I said was I'm going to bed...'

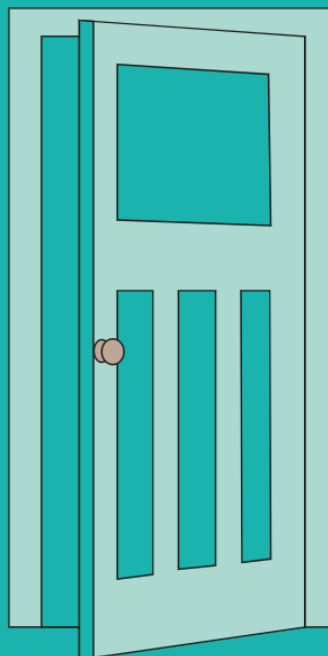
I throw my door open. I pull on my pyjamas and climb into bed. I know it's early but I can't face dinner with him. I do feel bad but I can't bring myself to go back down. I drift into sleep. It can't be more than 10 minutes later when I'm woken by a voice from the kitchen

'Honey! Hurry or you'll miss dinner!'

I hurry down the stairs to the kitchen. 'Lewis?' I murmur groggily.

I walk into the kitchen. I don't believe my eyes. Is this some sick joke?

Standing there. I see my father.





Lost in the forest

by Eva Hanger-Jones

The storm was getting bigger, the air was getting colder, the wind was rushing through the trees, and then...
...it all stopped.

Hi, I'm Missy, and a few years ago I met my best friends: Carys and Winter (Winter's a horse). They have always been there for me, whenever I need them. I live in Cornwall, so the weather is not the best in the cold months.

Although, I always love the summer, as I get to go on the longest rides ever with Carys, Winter and Spirit (Carys' horse). We usually ride along old, rocky paths in the rainy weather, but now that it's summer, we can go wherever we want! My personal favourite route is through the grassy fields. They are always filled with flowers and small critters.

My grandma always loved watching the dormice scuttle about, and the deer play in the grass. But most of all, she loved to watch us ride. Me and Winter were all Grandma talked about. She even talked about Carys now and then. The 4th of June 2015, the day Grandma died, was the saddest day I have ever experienced. I speak of it to no one. Well, the only person I tell everything to is Winter. He's great at keeping secrets, so I never worry about him telling them to anyone. Also because he is a horse... What I'm trying to say is that I trust Winter with all my heart, and will never let anything happen to him. Ever.

I woke up this morning, and got Winter ready for our daily ride. I went to go find Carys, as she is usually in the stables by now. As I wandered about the place looking for Carys, I saw Spirit. He wasn't ready for the journey. This really confused me, as Carys takes really good care of Spirit, and usually gets him ready for our rides early in the morning. Doubt filled my head when I realised I had looked all over the stables already, and found nothing...

I asked mum and dad if they had seen her, they hadn't. I knew what I had to do.

I hopped on Winter and he told Spirit to tag along beside us. We were off. No matter what got in our way, we were going to find her. Enormous grey clouds crowded the sky a few hours into our quest. But we kept going. I started to realise we needed to find shelter, so we searched around the area until we found a small cluster of trees to take cover in. I decided to close my eyes for a second, and before I knew it, I was asleep.

I woke up to the loudest clap of thunder I had ever heard in my life. I was so glad we had found shelter before the storm enlarged immensely. I thought the storm was getting smaller, but no, it was just getting bigger. The air was getting colder, the wind was rushing through the trees, and then, it all stopped. Winter and Spirit, who had been kindly giving me more shelter, suddenly ran towards someone. I got up to follow them, and then realised who it was they had run to.

It was Carys. She was holding a small, sparkling fairy. Carys explained she saw the fairy one day, and followed it. Turns out it needed help finding crystals to stop the thunderstorm coming our way. I was so happy. We all (even the fairy) made our way back home and sat down by the fire. This, by far, was the best adventure yet.



GRIEF

by Sofia Edwards

The best day of my life. Hi, my name is Mili and let's backlog a little. I live in England, but I recently moved from Greater Manchester to Exeter. It was a big move and I had to leave all my friends behind. Especially Leyla. Leyla is my childhood best friend, I miss her. She's funny, kind, sweet and absolutely stunning. But I'll never see her again. She's gone. But that doesn't matter for the time being. I'm in a new school and I have loads of friends, you could say I'm a popular girl. School is going really well, or it was until the summer holidays. You see, here in Exeter, the weather is usually torrential. And let's just say, summer isn't really summer with all of this rain. Now, let's get on to the interesting stuff.

On a Tuesday of summer break, it was raining (as per usual); I decided that I would go to the library on a normal rainy evening just to chill and read. I changed from my school uniform and put on my jacket. I shouted out to my dad telling him that I love him. Things have been really hard ever since my mum died three years ago. Anyway, as I sat down on the train to the library, a girl sat next to me. There was something off about her, almost as if we've met before. I tried to ignore it but suddenly she turned around and looked at me.

"Mili?" she questioned. I was so confused. She spoke again, "I've missed you so much!"

Then it clicked. It's Leyla, my childhood best friend! Why is she here? Am I dreaming? Is she even real? C'mon Mili, of course she's real! You're getting over yourself.



THE GAME

by Daniel Wootten

The big city stretched up into the sky, towering above all the little cars and people entering. Rain drizzled down the car window. It was 7:45pm and Aaron was on his way to a new home, a new school and a new start. Aaron was ... special; he had a very unusual natural hair colour: metallic silver. In his previous school he had lots of friends because of this, but he was worried that at Pine Academy (his new school) things might be different.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEE..... the alarm! It was 8:16am! Why was it so late? If he didn't hurry he would be late for school. He jammed on his uniform, quickly brushed his teeth, and grabbed his lunch that his mum prepared for him the previous day (she had already left for work), and ran out the door. He rushed past all the morning traffic, around the gaping puddles, along outside the public park, opposite the arcades, along towards the shops and supermarkets, and finally to Pine Academy. Just on time!

The school was on the smallish side, as far as schools go that is. As soon as Aaron entered the gates, he noticed people from all years were staring at him. Was it his hair? He heard someone shout, 'Nice hair dye, kiddo!' and he confirmed his first worry; school was going to be torture.

He went to the office to get his timetable. He had visited once before with his mum, but had no idea where to go. The receptionist pointed him down a corridor and said to join class 7q in room 32. He slunk to the back of the room and tried to blend in.

At breaktime an older boy started to advance on him. He was the shortest in the group that was gathered around him, but he seemed to be the boss. He had blonde hair and a scruffy uniform. Aaron was too frightened to move.

The boy soon came face to face with him and said, 'You look weird,' and shoved Aaron backwards into the big wheelie bin. They walked away laughing.

A few seconds later a freckly boy he had noticed in class earlier appeared. 'Need a hand?' he said as he pulled Aaron back to his feet.

'Hi, I'm Callum. Are you new? Your hair is awesome.'

Callum was wearing a very tidy uniform and had ginger hair. He



had a bright purple bag and clean polished shoes.

‘I’m Aaron. I just moved here with my mum and 2 cats. She’s got a contract in the city for 3 months, so I had to come along too and change schools and everything.’

‘That sucks,’ replied Callum. ‘I love cats, but I am allergic so can’t have one.’

‘Who were those boys who just welcomed me?’ said Aaron.

‘That was James and his gang. He acts like he owns the school. He even tells the teachers off, but then he gets sent to the Headteacher. Stay clear of him if you can, he likes tormenting year 7s as they are the only ones smaller than him.’

*

The next day James threw water all over Aaron in the bathroom to try to wash off his hair dye. The day after he filled Aaron’s bag with dead leaves. The next day Aaron’s lunch went missing; guess who had 2 lunches that day? And finally, on Friday muddy footballs were thrown at Aaron by James’ gang until he was covered in mud.

Aaron was totally fed up and went to sit on a bench in a quiet corner of the playground.

Callum came over, ‘You look a mess. I guess James has a new victim. I remember when it was me. Has he done the yogurt trick on you yet?’

‘No yogurt, just dead leaves, water, and hunger. I wish someone would stop him as he is just a big meany. I mean, a tiny meany with a big mouth.’

‘He’s horrid, but there is nothing we can do.’

‘I wish I was stronger, I’d fight him and stop him hurting or humiliating others anymore.’

‘I once heard of a local legend involving wishes. There was a guy who suddenly became an A student and claimed it was because a computer game granted him a wish. No-one knows where the game is or who the student was, but the legend lingers.’

‘I need that game. I could do with a wish, or some good luck.’

*

Over the weekend Aaron explored his new neighbourhood. He visited all the arcades and looked for some sign of a magical game, he went into second hand game shops and looked at their consoles and, in the evening, he searched the internet for any more clues about this legend. He got to know the area a bit better, but the legend was still a mystery.

On Monday he arrived at school with a sense of doom. What had James got planned today? He found out sooner than expected as he was shoved into a locker with the door jammed shut behind him. This was not a good start to the week. He shouted for help, but he could only hear the sound of laughter outside and then silence.

He tried to get comfortable and rested his head against the back wall of the locker. Suddenly he was falling forwards into a cluttered dusty room with dim lighting. It didn’t look like anyone had been in here for years, and the air was stuffy. He looked around at the mismatched furni-

ture, the old toys and lost clothes. There were tattered books and an old blackboard propped up against the wall. In one corner there was a retro arcade game partially covered by a folded curtain. Aaron's skin started to tingle.

He went over to investigate, and tried to turn it on. Nothing happened, so he looked to see if it was plugged in, but there were no wires to connect to anything, even when he tipped it forward to look underneath.

He muttered, 'I was hoping you were the magic wishing game that Callum told me about. I need some help to get rid of the bullies at this school. I was going to wish for strength or speed to get away.'

He was disappointed that this was not the game he was looking for, so decided he probably ought to find a way to get back to class. He turned to go back out through the locker and found it was now unlocked! Aaron walked through and into the school but found it very strange as the corridors were deserted and the classrooms he passed were all empty. How long had he been stuck in that room? He made it to his form room, no one was there either. What was going on? He sat down to think, and checked his timetable. He remembered that it was assembly, so he made his way to the hall.

He peeked through the window at the back and was relieved to see that the hall was full of people. He hadn't been sucked into a different dimension or time zone. He decided to wait just outside for assembly to finish and hopefully merge back in with his class as they filed out.

*

After school Aaron decided to stop at the park on his way home to go on the swings. He noticed James was there already, so tried to divert away, but James had seen him and was coming over. He was smiling, which was strange!

'Hello, I just wanted to let you know that I am really sorry for last week. This morning during assembly I had a strange fuzzy moment and, when it cleared, I realised that I had been doing some really mean things. I don't know why I had been a total jerk, but I am not planning on doing any of that again.'

'Oh-kaaaay,' Aaron replied. He really didn't know what to think of this sudden change. Had James had some strange accident or bumped his head? Was he a different person without his gang around? Or... Did the game actually work?

Adam's Amazing Adventure

by Daniel Shaughnessy

Chapter 1

Adam was a well-liked boy at his old school. He loved the outdoors and even played football and rugby for his school. But, one day when he was walking his specially bred golden retriever in a park, it became really smoky and foggy.

Adam, who was a cocky 12-year-old at the time, tried to push through the fog. However, he suddenly realised something was wrong.

'MAX!!!' Adam screamed, he looked everywhere for his beloved special friend, but he was unsuccessful in his hunt.

Since then, Adam has never been the same. He missed Max so much that he quit all his sports and hid himself in his room or the library.

'ADAM IT'S TIME FOR SCHOOL!!' His mum, Mary, shouted.

'Ughhhhh do I have to? I don't want to go.' Adam groaned back at her.

'NOW!' Mary belligerently replied.

Adam begrudgingly got ready for school on Monday. He used to love school and seeing all his friends, but now it was the worst time of his life. Adam lost a lot of his friends, but he didn't mind. He liked being alone whether that was on the bus or at home.

Also, to Adam's dislike, his school decided to move



some people to different classes. He now, unfortunately, had to socialise with others, his second worst nightmare behind going to parties.

Surprisingly, Adam preferred his new class. He even made two sort-of friends called Josh and Isla; he was still very shy though.

One day, Adam finally told his friends what has happened to him and why he was so shy now.

‘I’m so sorry, Adam. We never knew,’ Josh and Isla whispered in remorse.

‘We have to find him!’ exclaimed Josh.

Adam’s forehead was dripping with sweat, heart pounding, flashbacks began. Noooooooooo, he thought as it brought back all the bad memories. Josh and Isla could not bear to see Adam in such a bad state. They were not going to take no for an answer.

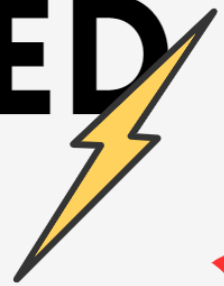
*

After months on end, they finally managed to get Adam to take action and find Max. They were not sure where to find him, and how to get him but they had the right spirit. After maths class, at the end of the day, they all met up in the library.

They bombarded questions at Adam, such as, *where did you lose him exactly? And what day did you lose him?* For the first time, Adam felt comfortable talking to people outside his family, although it took a while to get the answers, they were ready...

SUPERPOWERED

The Diary of Chloe Springfield



BY ELLINOR THOMAS

Chapter 1: The Birthday Morning

DEAR DIARY

My name is Chloe Springfield. I have no dad and I have been raised by my mum and grandparents my whole life. Everyone in my family has some sort of power... everyone but me. On your 13th birthday (mine was yesterday) you should get these powers, I've always been left out though, so I'm fine about it.

Anyway, yesterday was my birthday and it was both the best and the worst day of my life. This is what happened on my birthday.

It started out so normal. I woke up very early and just lay awake in bed for a good thirty minutes (I always do that on my birthday but this year for weirdly longer). By the time I had finished lying in bed it was 8am so I decided to finally go down stairs and open presents. Yay! I got this very diary, a beautiful looking stone and a ton of other stuff that will take me years to list.

My birthdays have always been different. You usually have friends around your house. Not me. Because I have a family full of superpowered people, I can't have anyone around to my house. So, like every year, I have all my family around (even my great aunt June who always gives me the worst looking jumpers ever). So you could definitely say that's where it starts getting bad, but this year it got way worse.

Chapter 2: The Weird and Sad Part

DEAR DIARY

I went to the library and something weird happened as I was coming home. I could weirdly smell something. By the time I entered my house, the smell was really strong and I worked out what it was. My birthday cake. It's weird how I could smell something from so far away but the smell may have just been in the car.

As a birthday surprise, my family took me to my friends' houses so I could have the birthday I've always wanted. That was the best birthday present ever. We danced non-stop. The music was very loud, only for me though. I went to turn it down and everyone was saying it was too quiet so they turned it back up. Weird.

I then got the worst news of the day. My mum, the one person who I love the most, just fainted and is very unwell.



The World's Funniest Grandmother!

by Jennifer Lewis

As I pondered the house, the lights flickered as the floorboards whispered to each other in shock. I heard a voice...

Hi there, I'm Gareth, an eleven year old boy, trying to claw my way through life. I live with my awful grandmother at her creepy old house (I think she's a witch!). She is a short woman, with her hair slicked back in her tight bun. Her fingernails as long as a ruler, her mini moustache quivers on her upper lip when she speaks.

There are very odd things in this house that I would have a hard time explaining. There is only one window, we have a MASSIVE garden that no one is allowed in, a fireplace that never flickers out. However, none as creepy as what I saw yesterday.

It all started with a typical afternoon, laying on the sofa after a long day at school when I heard a noise. I was alone at the time, waiting for Grandmother to come back from shouting at the shopkeeper for not having any marmalade, when I noticed a pile of what looked like sand. At first, I thought it was Gran's bath salts, but no, this was something else. What was it?

Just then Gran came back. 'Got me marmalade!' she said panting, closing the door behind her.

'Gran?' I quivered.

'What boy?' She ever so *kindly* replied.

'What's that?' I said, pointing to the pile of sand.

‘Uuu...uuu nothing!’ she said sharply.

‘Now, off to bed!’

‘It’s five o’clock, Gran! Even babies stay up later than that,’ I muttered.

‘BED!!!’ she boomed.

I slouched up the stairs as slowly as I could, dragging my feet upwards. Time felt endlessly slow, every minute as though it was an eternity. It soon got dark as the lampposts flickered on. It was midnight. Laying still on my bed, I heard a noise coming from Gran’s room. She was crying. Slowly creeping towards her, my footsteps echoing through the hallway, I knocked on the door.

knock, knock, knock

‘Are you okay, Gran?’ I asked her.

To my surprise she said, ‘No boy, Millie died, Bahahaha!’

‘Who’s Millie?!’ I said puzzled.

‘Our cat!’ she said sobbing.

‘Cheer up, Gran. We will get through this together,’ I said. ‘We can order a new cat on [pets_for_oldies.com](https://www.pets_for_oldies.com).’

‘Thank you, boy. You have shown such empathy to me,’ she replied.

Just then she jerked upright. “Midnight marmalade snack?” she said cheerfully.

‘Why not?’ I replied.

We ate marmalade toast and fell asleep, hoping for new bonds to come.



SOUL SWITCH

by Beatrix Egan



Hello. My name is Nox, and I'm currently writing this journal to keep track of past events so I can look back on them and read them to the cubs, that is if anything interesting happens which is unlikely as I live in the mountain ranges of who knows where with zero humans for miles.

The cubs (my brothers and sisters) think everything is extremely interesting. I mean, at that age I guess you don't really know what anything is or what anything does, so curiosity is a major part of your personality. Curiosity is a great trait to have but it's not great for snow leopard cubs that wouldn't know danger if it was standing right in front of their face.

There's not much going on right now. The cubs are taking a nap and my mother's out hunting so I'll write a bit about myself. I'm thirteen years of age and the cubs were born a few months ago. When I was three years old, my human parents who had taught me to read and write and had loved me ever so dearly took me up into these very mountains where I sit now and threw me into the snow then ran away back to the human village. They had abandoned me because, even though I could walk, I chose to walk around on all fours and act like an animal; I had animalistic snow leopard like instincts as well as my human ones. It was as if I was an animal, just in the wrong body. My parents obviously couldn't accept me for that so decided they would leave me to die.

I'm sort of glad they abandoned me; don't take this the wrong way, my human mother was a lovely woman, but I love my new mother better, even if she's a snow leopard. My soul was switched at birth; I was always meant to be a snow leopard. Scratch that, I am one. I may not be one physically, but on all levels except that, I am a snow leopard. That's enough writing for today, I need to sleep goodnight.

*

Please help! I just woke up and I'm not in the den. I can't see the others anywhere. I'm in some sort of vehicle and I think they're taking me to the human village. We've arrived, wait is that... is that my mother?!



ASTRAY

by George Whitehead

Introduction

I woke up. Where was I? How did I get here? Who was I? Wait a minute, when am I? I look around and see that I'm in some sort of lab. That's when I realise I'm trapped in some sort of database; looking through the cameras, I see the outside world. And although it is overrun by scrap eating zurks, I want out.

Chapter One: A New Friend

As I look around, I see the digital world around me, numbers and lines of code floating around meaninglessly, unlike me, alone, lost in this mathematical plane of existence. But, all of a sudden, I see a movement. At first I think it was another zurk; then I realise...

'That isn't a zurk, zurks are small round stubby creatures with an orange eye?' I ponder. 'And this thing has fur and two eyes and a tail and its legs are freakishly long, also this thing is a light orange-ish shade.'

I try to think about what it could be when suddenly, I see an article. It talks about a 'cat'. It seems to match the description of what I saw, but wait, how did that thing appear? Did I do that? I slowly come to a realisation: I am connected to the database, so I can control the database.

As I try to figure out what I can do, I see a camera flash.

I did that, I think to myself. I try to think of what I want it to show and, yes! It worked! I see the cat and show it where I want it to go, hoping it would follow the arrows, and... yes! It seems that cats really were smarter than we all thought. I slowly but surely directed the cat to where I wanted it to go and I saw it! The database control room. I show the cat over to a box, a box full of drones, drones with a blank CPU. If I could just get the cat to plug in the drone, I could maybe download myself onto it, and escape.

COSMIC CENTIPEDES

by Brandon
Morgan



Entering the room... I expected the light, but nothing came on. The bulb was burnt out, nothing too surprising. I thought to replace that later, but no, I wouldn't have time for that after everything that happened later.

Walking in, I saw the green haze of the wall reflecting down to the windows and the carpet. I heard a small hiss as I came in, and a shadow as if something dashed just out of my sight, but I thought nothing of it just yet. As I closed the door, the outside sounds muted and it went quiet. I planned to leave soon - as I had to go to the arranged place - quickly, quickly as I was almost late. I practically slid across the room, grabbing everything I needed instantly even though the room wasn't big, so there wasn't much to grab.

Almost catching my sleeve on the door, (yet again, but this time it missed by a singular atom) I moved lightspeed back out the room and, grabbing a coat, I left out the door. Fast walking - so I wouldn't look too suspicious OR LATE, which I totally wasn't, I headed down the road and almost tripped into the doors.

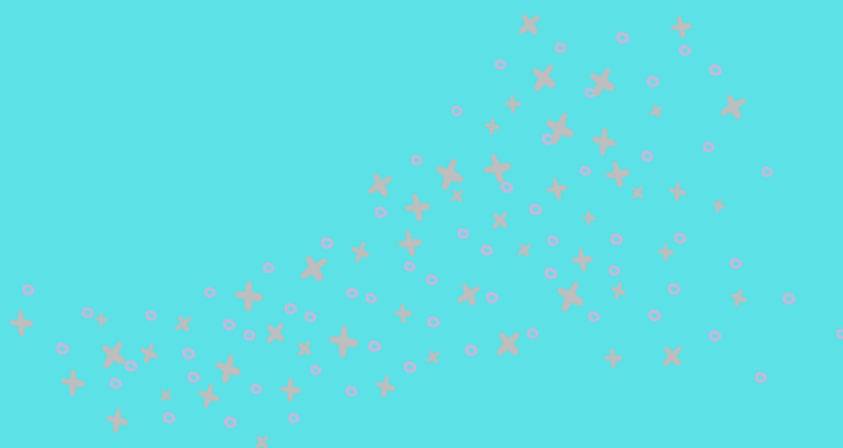
Where was I going? The library, the place of calm. I went in, grabbed a book and sat down... but it wouldn't be 'the place of calm' as I just stated for long. I heard a small hiss and a flicker of light once again, but still... I think nothing of it just yet, but I should have...

A few minutes passed with nothing feeling strange, but suddenly - at exactly

11:34, that changed. I was just going to pick another book out, but...

Quicker than I could have ever zoomed out of my house when I'm late, I saw more and more flickers of light all around. It seemed normal at first, like something going past, but as everyone around looked closer, I saw a bug looking entity move past, as if it had finally noticed something with us. It crawled across the room in seconds, and this was the largest floor. Everyone stared at the thing, as this wasn't the first time it had appeared for them either, with us all seeing flashes of light before. It appeared to be some sort of centipede, but a lot bigger, and also with a large front end topped with layers of teeth. It looked like it was desperately trying to approach us but was just moving too fast. It looked almost alien and everyone just stared, and to be honest - I was not feeling good looking at this alien thing!

Finally, it slowed, approached one of the staff and vanished. We all thought it was gone - but it had done something far more terrifying than that. The staff member looked around, and it was nowhere to be seen - quite yet. With a sudden burst of light rising into the air and down below, expelling lots of shiny dust, the staff member also vanished. This bug, or what it seemed to be now, a parasite, had seemingly just destroyed the staff member. It was horrifying to just see a beam of light, then this person disappeared as if life was a collection of magic tricks. That led to pure chaos all around the area. The parasites, as I will now call them for every mention, had revealed themselves and were everywhere, and no one could seem to tame them, apart from a few... which if no one stood up to them, would have to be me. To be honest, that sounds less than ideal, but it was required.



ENTRY DENIED

by Ben Pearce-Brobin

As I drove to work, the sky was sunny, yet my outlook cloudy as always. I noticed the time; I should be 5 minutes early, which should give me some time, I thought. Although I was speeding slightly, there were no police to stop me. At least, not until I reached work. I slowed down. As I drove into the parking area, I checked the clock again, and glanced back to my car door as I shoved it open. I slammed the door shut, walked up to my checkpoint and opened the drawer. I read the latest news; another attack on the border with Kumilistan. A part of me wanted to leave the 'glorious' Ural State which I lived in.

As I opened the shutters and spoke into the microphone below me, I said 'Next,' and quickly a person came into the booth, slid their passport and visa through the window-hole and I used one of the few tools available - the inspector's scanner, to check through any common discrepancies. 'This passport has expired,' I said.

'It MUST be a mistake, I renewed it just yesterday!' the entrant spoke.

I replied promptly with, 'Denied.'

I stamped their documents, and they shouted, 'NO. I need to get into the Ural State right now. Now, stamp my passport CORRECTLY,' as I reached down for the button labelled 'GUARDS' below my stamp storage area.

'One moment please,' I replied. I closed the shutters, and the guards walked in. They grabbed the entrant by the arms, carried him out, and detained him. Sometimes I feel bad about detaining anyone, but if it is for the country, it is right... right?

*



After another long day of work, I drove home and was greeted by my wife and my young son.

‘We have some bad news,’ they said.

My wife grabbed my hand, walked to the living room and sat the family down. ‘I have been waiting to tell all of you this,’ she sighed. ‘Aunt Yustina has a disease. We do not have the money to pay for her treatment, and even if we did, it is only available in one of our neighbouring countries - the Union of the Seven. We cannot get there for the treatment anyway. She has about 6 months to live.’

‘I know a way we can get there.’

*

Driving to work today was intense. After that news yesterday, I knew I needed to work extra hard today for what I needed. The security head, F. Grigorov, was due to inspect my booth at 9:00 today, and then he would leave. Thus, I decided to arrive at 8:00 to remove anything I could get into ‘trouble’ for.

After what seemed like 5 minutes of cleaning, the inspector arrived.

He said, ‘Good job, Prokhor. No citations this week. Good job. I will come back next week for another inspection. Take this plaque for excellence,’ and just as quickly as he marched into the booth, he vanished from it.

I had arranged for a man named Afanas to meet me at the start of the work day, and as I said, ‘Next,’ into the microphone, I saw my good friend, Afanas, enter the booth.

He slid a map through the slit in the window, and said, ‘Copy it and give it back. They might be onto me, and I need to get into the Valley.’ I nodded. He slid the passport and visa through and I stamped ‘APPROVED’ onto them. I gave him the map back as well, and I quickly said, ‘Next,’ into the microphone. Next, there was a strange man who walked in. He slid through a new passport for me, with the country being ‘UNION OF THE SEVEN’ as well as four other passports for my family; my wife, son, sister (Aunt Yustina) and my niece. He then slid one through for him, with a note saying he had ‘important business’ in the State. I approved his passport and after another boring day with nothing of note, I drove home, carefully concealing my new passports.

As I walked in, Aunt Yustina and her daughter as well as my family were seated at the dining table. Afanas had told them the good news in advance, and I slid each of them their own passports. They all smiled, with tears in their eyes. Now, we had to drive to the border. But my car would likely be followed, so instead, we would have to walk. I called

into work the next morning and said that me and my family would have to go and visit our relatives. Luckily, I still had my holiday time available, and so we began our trek to the border. Trekking through a swamp was difficult, but we did it after about an hour of travelling. We then had to walk through the Valley, stopping every once in a while, for about two days.

We talked about our future in the Union, and after four days of traveling through the Ural Republic, we reached the Union border.

‘Papers, please,’ the inspector said, and I slid through my passport. ‘Are you coming with your family?’ the inspector asked.

‘Yes. My niece, wife, son and sister are coming with me.’

‘One moment please.’

KLANK

KLANK

KLANK

KLANK

KLANK

‘Glory to the Union.’

We were in, and Aunt Yustina could finally have her treatment. We were free from oppression back in the Ural Republic, and could start anew in the Union of Seven.

As I am writing this, I am much older. I may not have long left, but I am free. That is all that matters to me now. Here is a copy of that same map I was given all those years ago.



LARISA'S LONDON

by Ariana Marshman



It was a cold dark night in London. Larisa was trying to find a comfortable piece of pavement to stay on; she was hungry and lonely apart from having her friends, the street rats.

She had been on the street all her life and had always found somewhere to stay even if it was gravel or even mud. Her clothes, now rags, were too tight and small, her hair had not been brushed and was full of knots, but her face was sweet and innocent. Nonetheless, nobody in London would help a girl of 12 who looks like she had been dragged through a hedge backwards, probably because she has.

‘There seems to be no place to stay tonight, Mary,’ Larisa said to her rat with dismay. ‘Maybe I could look around some more?’

Mary just looked at her apathetically. No home, no place to stay, no food, no water. Larisa slept against a wall on Allan Lane. She awoke in the morning to the sound of shouting coming from in front of her.

‘Get out of ‘ere you little scumbag!’ shouted one man.

‘Yeah, and take those filthy rats with yer!’ shouted another.

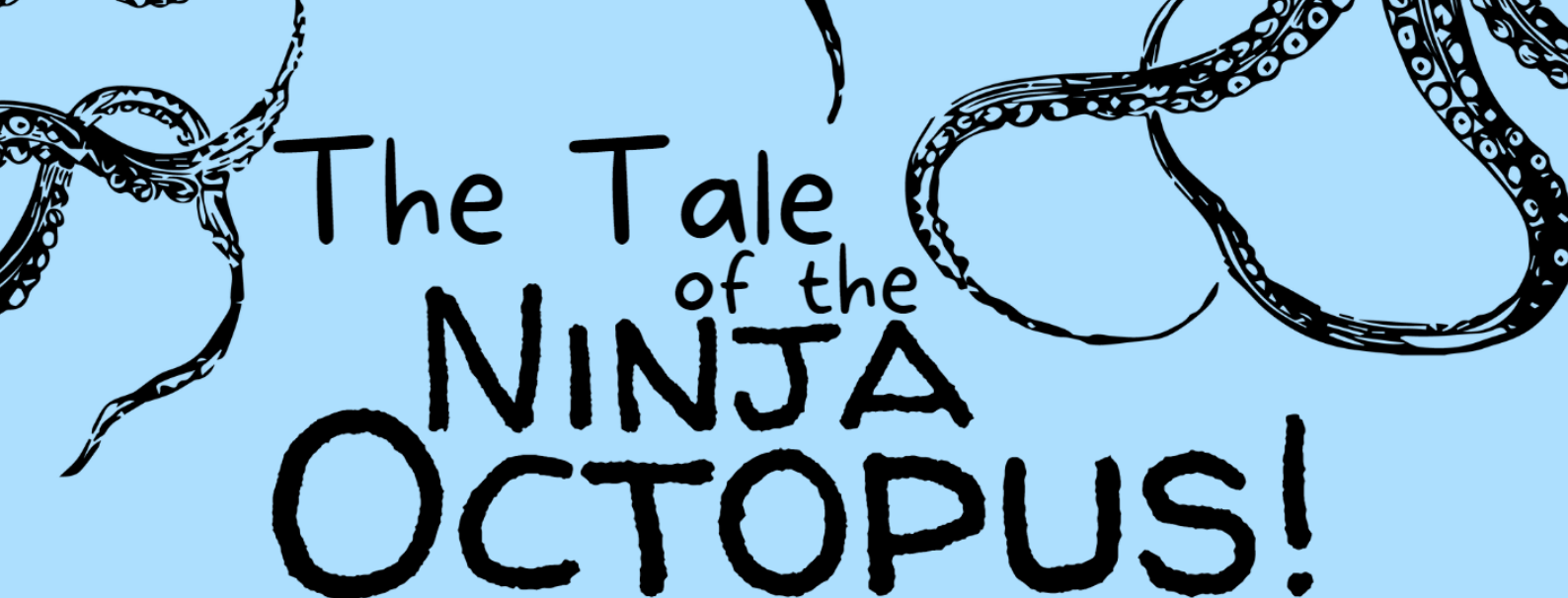
Larisa scooped up the rats and ran as quickly as she could. She ran past the bakers and the park until she bumped into a lady.

‘Are you alright dear?’ she asked. She was a large lady with a jolly look on her face.

‘I’m alright, Miss,’ Larisa replied.

‘Are your parents around here somewhere? I’m sure they are worried about you!’

‘I ummm... I don’t have parents, Miss. I’ll go back where I was. Thank you for your help, ummm Miss.’



The Tale of the NINJA OCTOPUS!

by Zidane Jamal

‘Jiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiim come down for breakfast !!!’ shouted Mum.

‘I’ll be down in a sec,’ Jim shouted back.

Jim got up out of bed and walked over to his wardrobe. He grabbed the handle and opened the door of his wardrobe. He decided to wear a t-shirt as it was scorching hot outside. Jim flipped his fingers through each coat hanger and chose his favourite t-shirt, which had a ninja-type octopus flying through the air with shurikens (ninja stars) in his hands. Jim then looked for a pair of joggers to wear as he hated wearing jeans and didn’t want to wear shorts. Jim picked some black joggers with a white stripe down the outer side of his right leg. He then put a pair of black socks on and went down stairs.

‘I have made pancakes for breakfast,’ said Mum.

‘Thanks,’ replied Jim.

Jim added maple syrup and ate all of his pancakes, then said goodbye to his mum and went off to school.

He then went outside to wait for his school bus for Octo Academy. Jim was 11 years old and had just started in secondary school. He noticed something on one of the billboards whilst at the bus stop. It was advertising for a new fast-food restaurant called Bill and Bob's restaurant and takeaway. As he looked up at the billboard closer, there looked to be some sort of wet ink running down over the text...

Jim thought to himself, it seemed to look like octopus ink?!... but then thought that octopus ink on a billboard would be impossible?!

The bus arrived as he stood there wondering... his curious and imaginary mind would often run away with him...

As he got on the bus he noticed his friend Oscar, who always got on at the stop before, wasn't on, but the other people at Oscar's stop were.

Oscar had texted Jim just 10 minutes before saying that he would be on the bus and would save a seat for him.

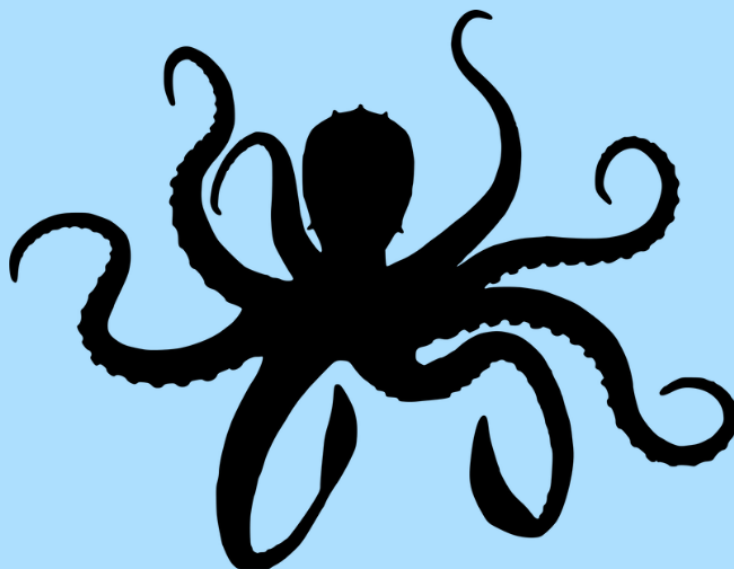
Jim's mind ran wild again as he thought about the billboard he just saw earlier and wondered where Oscar could be.

When Jim got to school he walked through the doors of the school and saw everyone on their phones. Jim didn't think much of this because most days it was like this. Jim walked into room 8 and sat down in his seat next to where his friend Oscar was meant to be sitting. The teacher Mr Marki began the class and explained that he would be showing the class a video about the history project.

The video talked about a legendary Ninja Octopus that was said to have died roughly 83 years ago, but its body was never found and had disappeared.

Jim's mind wondered... he thought again about the billboard. Could what he saw have been Octopus ink?

Jim put his hand up and asked Mr Marki if the Ninja Octopus could still be alive today. Mr Marki laughed and said that would be impossible. Jim then thought that's why his friend Oscar might not be in. Because he was taken.....



#UNORDINARY

by Emlyn Roberts

I am unordinary.

I am in the car, feeling sick inside, fighting back the tears. I am on the way to a mysterious place. Neither Mum nor Dad will tell me where. I am stroking my dog, Lola Fluff, who is now sleeping on my lap. I hope I get through this new terror of a place I am going to; I think it's bad.

To be honest, I am very nervous as we pull up in front of what looks like a crumbling medieval castle. If I have to be in this place my entire childhood, I hope we can have pets, as the only thing that makes me happy is Lola Fluff. She is the thing I spend the most time with, my best friend. Mum and Dad get out of the car, walk up to the door and knock, knock, knock. The door creaks open and I see... nothing.

Mum and Dad beckon me to get out of the car and walk over to them. I open the door and it falls off! I am shocked.

Mum slaps her forehead and Dad says, 'Oh gosh, he is fit for this place!'

I get out of the car, put Lola Fluff on her lead.

Dad says, 'We'll get her later'.

I shout at the top of my lungs, 'I am not leaving her in the car all alone in a place where I don't know what is happening!'

After having an argument with Dad, he agrees that I can take Lola Fluff with me.

I walk into the mysterious hall which looks like the great hall from *Harry Potter* but it's not (sadly). My name is Samuel Coldheart, not 'Harry Potter'.

A random man then speaks to me and my family. They call him Sir Famouse; I would dread to have that name. It makes him sound like a maniac! He introduces himself, and I introduce myself. He says I can keep Lola Fluff. But then he tells me the most important rule of all.

'You cannot talk to 'ordinary people' it is against the school rules. If you do, you will be expelled and all your memories of this school will be wiped.'

I will not stand for this law as I personally think it is ridiculous. I may have to stand up for it one day.



A Chapter He Could Never End

by Aneurin Jenkins

Chapter 1

I'm sitting here alone. My voice is shaking and my hands are freezing. I can't get him out of my head; the more I think about him the more it hurts. My mum is cooking downstairs. I don't know what I'm having as it is my birthday. Her boyfriend is helping her out. I mean, I like the man, but he isn't my father and because he lives here now I don't feel comfortable talking about dad to her. Should I talk to her? No, I will wait till her boyfriend is gone.

'Dinner is ready,' Mother is screaming from downstairs, so I slowly make my way down the stairs and I see my mother's boyfriend waiting for me.

He says, 'Come on, kiddo, let's celebrate!'

I walk into the kitchen. Balloons are everywhere. My birthday cake is on the table and my favourite dinner is on the platter - filled pasta and cheese sauce.

I'm 15 today. I dropped out of school after my dad died. It is my birthday and the date is the 9th November 2002. My birthday just doesn't feel as much of a birthday anymore and I have no friends.

I'm blowing out the candles. No friends came over as this was in school time and they still go to school, unlike me. They still want their qualifications but I had to give up and I couldn't concentrate after he died. I couldn't tell anyone I was lonely and depressed. I mean it has got better but I still can't go to school. I may go to school later on this year, but who knows.

Anyway, my mum and her boyfriend had to leave for their night shifts. I'm all alone. This is normal. It's not like your time when you have phones; I have my diary and that is it, so that is what I do. I write and write for hours and hours, tear stains on the paper and dramatic drama on the ink.

I look at the clock next to my bed. The clock reads 12am. I am shocked that 12 hours has gone by from my writing. Writing is like my depression fixer. My writing is about this story of what happened that day exactly one year ago and this is where the real story begins.

The New

Kid

by Anton Stott



The road was cracked and bumpy. Me and the boys were going on our first ever road trip. You see, I'd just got my driver's licence. (Even though I was the youngest, the others had all failed and couldn't be bothered to try again).

Well, I said it was a road trip, but all we were doing was eating donuts in the parking lot, blasting 'The Real Slim Shady' by Eminem.

Eventually some Italian guy who owned the pizzeria we were driving by made us stop. And in the process of that, threw a lot of perfectly edible Italian gourmet pizza sauce at us. It completely ruined my dad's old beer-soaked flannel.

We got bored after that so we decided to head to the house. And when I say house, I mean tree house. I know, unoriginal, but it's the best we could do. Years ago, when we built it, we made a truce never to tell anyone about the house. It held up for years. That was until last summer, until Billy Maximillian.

You see me and the boys have been friends since we were, like, seven and now most of us are turning nineteen this year. So, one night, we were hanging out at the house when we heard someone walking towards us. We got scared at first but then Seamus decided to look out the front window.

He started laughing. 'It's just that weird new kid that lives down your end, Brent.'

'What!?' I said. 'This isn't funny. If he tells anyone about the house, we could lose our only safe place, forever!'

Everyone went silent. Then Billy recognised our voices. This wasn't good. We talked it over and eventually decided to let him in. We tolerated him hanging with us for a couple of weeks but it started getting weird. We hardly liked the kid. Hell, we didn't even know him!

UNDER FIRE

by Barnaby Gibson



‘Go, go, go!’ The last words Commander Jock shouted before the rattle of machine gun fire and explosions blocked out every other sound.

We ran forward killing every enemy soldier in our sights. It was kill or be killed.

I kept telling myself, ‘Go, just go! It will be over soon.’

It was only the beginning.

I can still hear the screams in my head three days later. We had captured the abandoned apartment buildings on the outskirts the capital. It came at a high cost. We had lost a lot of men in the assault and even more during the counter attacks.

They have reduced us to six men: Commander Jock, Private Second Class Jimmy ‘Jim’ Stevenson, Private Second Class Frank ‘Nuttie’ Hazel, Private Vison James, Private Charlie Dans and, me, Private Richard Edmonds.

We have made our camp in the apartment building.

‘The enemy have been getting closer in their assaults. We need to move out at dark. Be ready.’ I finished packing up my stuff just as we were told to move out.

I was at the front as I was the last one to leave the apartment. We went down the staircase and came to a sign on a door that said ‘Emergency Exit.’

Me and two other soldiers were told to open the door and clear a way. We burst out of the door ready to shoot. There were no signs of the enemy so we signalled the all clear. We ran towards the other apartment buildings.

We did not stop or come under fire. We got into the building and started clearing the way. Inside of the building there were two soldiers who must have been on patrol. They had not been expecting us and were facing the other way; we had the advantage.

As the front man, I fired seven bullets, four into the soldier on the right and three on the left. The encounter shook most of the soldiers but we had to move on. We cleared the rest of the building and saw no other enemy soldiers. We burst through one of the last rooms and I saw someone in the shadows. I turned on my torch and saw a child's face. Sitting by her was a man trembling in fear holding an AK-12. He fired uncontrollably. I felt a burning pain in my side. I touched the wound and then looked at my hand. It was stained blood red.

