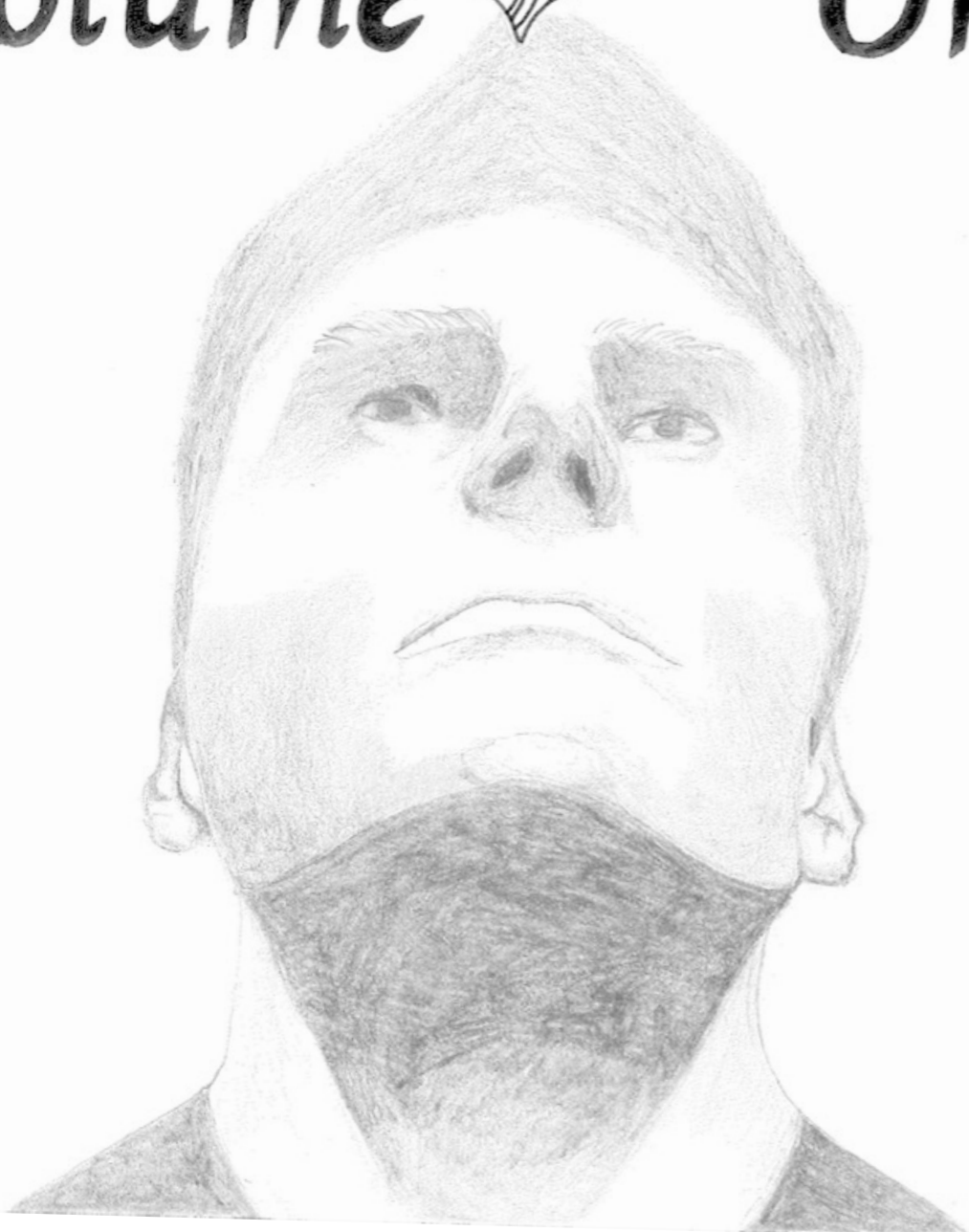


# INKSTER

## Volume One



# FOREWORD

Welcome to the first ever edition of *Inkster*, a journal of creative work produced by students of John McGlashan College. Our first edition contains creative writing pieces produced largely, though not exclusively, by the members of the College's Creative Writing Group (those more adept at meeting deadlines that is), as well as a smattering of student artworks.

We hope this is the beginning of an illustrious run of *Inkster*, which we will publish around three times a year.

Enjoy.

*David Schaumann*  
(*Editor, Dogsbody and reluctant Proofer.*)

# Paper lantern

How curious it is,  
this ethereal lantern.  
light's warden, thief  
of the memories that  
walk her dreams, glittering.  
Yet all that glitters,

Is rhinestone?

One can almost forget  
the years of grief and suffering,  
of having loved and lost and too much  
to bear and the days months years that pile  
on and on and on yet not enough to forget that  
even few words have too much power once spoken  
and all that remains is the taste of death pungent bitter  
sweet, of course,

because royalty does not feel  
such wretched things. And she  
Blanche, white, as the faded silk  
of her garb, and the powder  
on her lip, is a monarch.

How unfortunate to be  
The queen of the Nile,  
in a monarchy ruled by Kings.  
Alas, the king may dictate the game,  
but the queen wins it.

How curious it is! To think,  
innocent paper belies such  
a violent flame, conquered,  
and does not ignite?

*Luke Nie*  
*Year 13*

# Heed

Upon further inspection, he realised the finger holding the pen bent at its final joint. The sight alone made him uncomfortable and lead him to test the movement by squeezing his own finger nail, pulling it back and forth under the desk in front of him.

This was, of course, after wiping the vast amount of sweat from his palms on his father's suit pants which he had borrowed. Hoping the lady's eyes (whom he had only now noticed, due to her name tag, had the name Janice) would not lift from the document to view just how uncomfortable he was.

It was most likely the lack of comprehension that had him notice the small things in the office. How the sound of the ink pen dabbing at the document form seemed to correspond to the clatter of his teeth, how the second hand on the clock above him would be slightly adjacent once it reached the forty-five second mark, and how the woman's lifestyle magazine in the rubbish can was the same issue he'd been reading in the waiting room. To him, everything seemed to be a little disjointed. Or perhaps he was just too anxious.

Before he could re-evaluate, the woman raised her head from the sheet in front of her. He could only hope she would see it in his eyes, that he only wanted to leave and never return to the creaking floorboards of the office. Oh, how he knew from his first foot into the waiting room that he would not dare spend his life in a building whose floor would not even welcome his presence.

"So again, what was your emergency contact?"

A pulse ran through to break the daydream. Once again, gazing down at his pants, he responds with the names of his parents then follows with the bouncing digits of their phone numbers. He had only memorised them by creating his own melody around the sequence of the numbers.

He then grabs his knees and stands. The woman's eyes remain low on her hand darting over the sheet. In a single breath he thanks her and pushes the door handle open.

"Sorry, I wasn't quite fin...."

It was too late, even the floorboards themselves had wished him his final goodbye.

*Christian Tucker*

*Year 13*



*Henry Ward*  
*Year 12*



# The Burning Republic

*A people's voice is dangerous when charged with wrath.*

- Aeschylus

*A disorderly mob is no more an army than a heap of building materials is a house*

- Socrate

The pale last light diffused through the wood smoke and pollution, snagging on the discarded armour at street corners. The surface of the Tiber was littered with shards of ice. The few Vigiles who remained in the city were barricaded on the raised stone platforms of the Servian walls, watching the final tendrils of red light flee to the sanctuary of the horizon, ushering in the Night of Wolves.

As the crowd entered the Curia Hostilia, hearths darkened and candles flickered in the cold breeze that slinked through the open doors. The senators were a cacophony of noise, colours and silks. The smell of their perfume lay heavy in the air but it did not quite mask the undercurrent of sweat that seeped into Flavius's nostrils. He stood beside the Consul, Pompey, gazing over the sheep that ruled Rome.

"You'll need to ensure this lot doesn't escape in the morning, Tribune."

"If we see the morning," he responded curtly.

"Remember your place, Tribune."

"I didn't come here for you, Pompey. The soldiers didn't come here for you. We came for Rome and its people."

"Rome belongs to the Senate Tribune, and the Senate belongs to me."

"I will not kill the citizens I represent," Flavius responded.

"You are a soldier and you will do as you're told." The Consul pursed his lips, his expression terse.

The sun finally failed altogether, leaving them only the dim light of the torches and hearths. "Your time is up Tribune, go to your men." And with that, Flavius was alone, watching the red cloak of the Republic retreat down the hall.

As the dark thickened so did the screams, starting as a lone cry of alarm and proliferating into an orchestra of dread. Flavius marched down the steps into the Forum, where the red cohorts stood facing the twisting morgue of streets. He made his way to the front of the soldiers. The Pilus

Prior ran towards him: "Sir, our scouts have reported pillaging in Campus Martius and the main bulk of the mob are now approaching down the Appian Way."

"Send forth the messenger and bring the rest of the legion into the city."

"Yes, Tribune." The soldier snapped off a salute and turned, his shouted commands puncturing the pregnant silence. Flavius fastened his plumed helm and took his place behind the red square of men. Down the Appian Way he could now see a mass of flickering torches growing ever brighter as they rioted betwixt the temples and houses. In his mind Flavius could see his quiet estate in the Sabine Highlands and his mother waiting for his return by the stables. Would he see her again? Murmuring a quick prayer to Mars, he came back to the present. The torches of the mob had been extinguished and now the wordless music of their anger filled his ears. The Cornu of the cohort fought back briefly before it was overwhelmed. Shields clashed together with a loud tintinnabulation. The shadowed mass began filtering into the Forum as the dark swept towards the red cohort of the Republic.

*Alex Thomson, Year 12*

# It is Time for a Re-draft?

What makes a beginning good?  
Is it something clichéd?  
Something formal?

Writing, a skill derived  
from overcoming mistakes.  
That is something I can't stand.

16 years of knowledge  
and I still come up with nothing.  
What shall I write?

A day later...  
"Something with flair."  
Doesn't help.

72 hours later...  
"Vampire romance!"  
No!

A fortnight later...  
"Write nothing."  
It makes a statement.

One month later...  
"Write about me!"  
No thanks Cheryl!

The day draws near...  
Procrastination.  
You fiend.

Mr Schaumann always told me,  
write about something  
that has relevance to me.

A struggling writer.  
Yes.

I begin writing.

*AJ Visage*  
*Year 11*



# Chapter 1: Dead End.

T

he baton cracked across Jasper's face and sent him crashing sideways into the unyielding cobblestones. He twisted to look up at his assailant, just in time to see the rugged sole of a shoe falling towards his face. It struck a glancing blow across his jaw, and he rolled to the right, desperate to escape further punishment. He staggered to his feet and sprinted away, ducking down an alleyway to the left, the guard hot on his heels. He cursed, it was a dead end. Jasper barged through a random door on the side, snapping the bolt lock, and stumbled through an unlucky merchant's storage room. As he sprinted along, he pulled down shelves full of ornamental Farlian pottery to slow his pursuer. He heard a curse from the guard behind him and a dull thud as one of the large ceramic pots shattered over his head. He roughly pulled a painstakingly woven decorative silk robe imported from Idani off of a stand nearby and, wrapping it around his arm, he smashed through the store window. Recovering, Jasper staggered to his feet and tore off down the street, sidling into another dark alleyway.

He looked around, frantically searching for an escape route, the guards muffled yells echoing nearby; he didn't have much time. He briefly considered his options. He couldn't leave the alleyway; they would almost certainly spot him before he made it a stone's throw from the entrance, and he was in no condition for another chase through the narrow streets. He could try to hide - the alley had a plethora of refuse and trash heaped through it. He decided on the latter. But he had pondered too long, two guards appeared as if from thin air, and stood blocking the only way out of the alleyway. Jasper started, then panicked, then cursed.

"Halt" The guard yelled in a self-assured tone. "Come quietly and you'll only lose a hand, come otherwise, and you'll lose both." Jasper backed up until his sweat and grime coated cotton shirt stuck against the cold stone of the wall at the end of the alleyway, then concentrated hard. The guards were steadily advancing, but Jasper was no longer in any position to care. He closed his eyes and felt the wall behind him. He could feel the very essence of the wall, every particle of it. He reached behind him then pushed gently against the wall. It parted easily before his hand, as if it were soft clay. He was ready. Taking a Deep breath, Jasper leapt backwards through the wall. The guards cried out and rushed forward, but it was too late, Jasper was already hastily patching the wall back together. The wall reverted to its original density, and the guards were trapped. So was Jasper, for that matter, albeit in a slightly more metaphorical sense.

He had a pounding headache from the mental exertion of manipulating the matter of the wall, and the guards wouldn't find him any time soon, so he relaxed and surveyed his handiwork. The section of the wall he had entered through wasn't pretty, a misshapen patchy mess of smooth rock. He cursed, there would be trouble if this was found. There was no way he could patch it up to be unnoticeable before somebody else discovered it - two guards trying to pass off their incompetence by claiming that their quarry was a matterlurgist would be overlooked. But if they had proof... Jasper terminated the line of thought, the consequences didn't

bear thinking about. He breathed in and out and counted to ten, fighting to control his panic. He may have just doomed himself to a fate worse than the removal of his hands. He turned to the hole again. How could He disguise it? He couldn't, the stone where he had exited the wall was too smooth and unnaturally shaped. He couldn't leave any witnesses, no one could be able to link his description to his abilities, or else he would never be safe again.

Thinking fast, Jasper poked a hole in the wall with his finger, and widened it so he could see through. He peered through, his face deforming the wall slightly. The two guards were examining the misshapen patch of wall, looking confused. Jasper grinned and the wall stretched around his face to accommodate it. He pulled back, and stood before the misshapen part of the wall. He took a deep breath, then thrust his hands through the wall, and grabbed both guards by the neck. There was a sickening crunch as their spines snapped beneath his hands. He pulled his hands from the wall, and collapsed on the ground, his hands cradling his pounding head.

After a time, he recovered, and scampered off into the comforting embrace of the dark streets.

*Stuart van Turnhout*

*Year 12v*

# Bored in a Forest

When I got lost, I thought I could go along, being on my own for as long as I like but I was wrong. I don't feel like doing ANYTHING, ANYTHING at all; I just want to sit down and do nothing. Except sitting down! How do I always get these ideas anyway? I know own my mind and and I don't even know why I do these things. Maybe an idea suddenly pops up, without thinking I just do it. This is definitely the one thing I hate about myself.

Anyway you're probably wondering who I am. Where I come from. And what I am doing in the middle of nowhere. Well, my name is Charlie Fisher and I am a fourteen year old from Wellington. I am home schooled because I used to get in trouble a lot at school. My parents ripped me out of school and the torture endured for about three months before I got the idea to run away. You see, it was so boring at home. I had no friends and my parents were worse than the teachers at school.

The need to get away was so intense, hence a plan to escape. Over a week I prepared everything. The hours ticked down and when I was finally ready, I snuck out of the house. It was around half past one in the morning, so I knew my parents were fast asleep. When I was out of that hell hole, I grabbed my bike and headed down the road. My plan was to run away to the bush where no one could find me but, if I felt like it, I could go back.

After a long bike ride along mostly empty roads, I finally made it to my destination. Here's where I stuffed up. If you are going though bush in the middle of the night, it is really easy to get lost. That's what happened to me and now day one has gone terribly wrong. I also regret not taking my phone because I heard somewhere that the police can use it to track you. So I guess I will have to find my own way out here.

I decided to get up because I have a dead leg, then I get an idea, Why don't I stay - they should find me. For once maybe, I have a good idea (or maybe I am lazy, I don't really care which). Even if I was not was not found, I could then try and find away out of this forest. It would be like watching paint dry but better than walking in circles. I sat down again, quickly getting bored.

Since I was up most of last night, I feel very tired. I decide that it would be a good idea to catch up on some sleep. So I lie down on the forest floor. It was not very comfortable. I reach over to get my backpack to use as a pillow. Just before I close my eyes, I glance at my watch, the time was 6:39 pm.

I wake up the next day, I could see the sun shining brightly through the trees, then I turned towards my left wrist which my watch is on, the time was 11:34. I was out for over twelve hours. I start thinking about going back, but I don't want to face the consequences. I decide that after today I'll go back but if someone comes the plan will change.

A need for food overwhelms me, this is not surprising as I had not eaten in a day. While reaching over to my bag, my hunger grows. I reach inside and grab a bag of chips." Thank who ever made humans, I am so happy I did not forget food".

Suddenly, there is a rustling in the bush. Guessing they were footsteps, I sat there quietly, waiting for something to happen. A man walks up to me, his face is blank as a piece of paper. He was tall like some of trees around me. His arms were long and thin, they are the branches off the tall tree that he is. His head was covered by a beanie but I could see that it was partially bald. Then out of his mouth came,"Are you Charlie Fisher?"

With out thinking I blurted out, "Yes!"

“You’re coming with me whether you like it or not. You’re in a lot of trouble you know.”

I reluctantly pick up my bag and my bike and follow this man. While walking back the man told me his name, Robert Keegan. He was also a police constable and there was many people looking for me. It turns out that I was long way into the bush as the walk back was about two hours. When we finally came out of he bush we were greeted by police cars in a taped off area.

Police officers escort me to one car, I was driven to the centre of Wellington. When the car finally stopped at the police station I hopped out. A police officer then took me to two people waiting outside, they were my parents. My Mum and Dad put their hands around me. They would not be letting me out of their sight for a while. I guess they were happier to see me than I was to see them.

*Daniel Johnson*

*Year 8*



*Guillaume Bennani*  
*Year 13*





# Journal of a retired lunatic

I have always pitied those elderly souls who lost their minds alongside their youth. It always struck me as a great tragedy that a once wise scholar should be reduced to, at best, a forgetful old man, and at worst a pitiful vegetable. Nothing pains me more than the fact that, as I enter my mid sixties, I may be falling into this terrible senility myself. I have seen many wonders during my time as an archaeologist, wonders I have no desire to forget. However, if ignorance is the price that I must pay to be free of the visions that plague me now, then I would pay it twice over. But I suppose I am getting ahead of myself, Perhaps I should introduce my predicament, so one might better understand my state of mind.

Despite my hopes and prayers, age has been in no way kind to me. While once I may have been able to walk from my home to the City Centre twice over in the space of an hour, now I can scarcely walk one hundred meters without pausing for breath. As such, many of my colleagues suggested that I move from my Flat in the City of Auckland to a local retirement village, where all my needs would be satisfied and then some. While I scoffed at the idea of being waited on hand and foot by a swarm of nurses, I must admit I found the idea of retirement quite appealing. And so it was that I sought out a home by the ocean, where I not be disturbed by the bother of Urban life. Eventually I found one; a seaside cottage near Bucklands Beach, only a short drive from the small town of Howick.

The move was uneventful, the most notable occurrence being a broken vase, but it nevertheless felt very important to me. Perhaps it was the finality of the whole thing. Certainly the idea that this was the last major change of one's life would be disconcerting to anyone who had yet to make their peace. Despite my miniature existential crisis I found the house pleasant enough. It was well insulated, spacious enough for my needs, and was far enough back from the beach that I never had to worry of rising tides, yet not so much that I was denied the spectacular view of the ocean that the previous owner promised.

Shortly after settling down in my new home I received a parcel from a man named Alec Davidson, one of my old colleagues from England. When I worked with him, he had been quite young for an academic, about 27 years old, but despite his age he was a one of the most competent historians I have ever met. He also had a love of collecting relics, as anyone who looked at the wall surrounding his fireplace could tell. I always found it odd that the man whose job it was to record the relics cared more for collecting them than one such as myself, who went all across the earth finding them, but I suppose we all have our oddities.

Inside the parcel there was a note wishing me well in my retirement, and a small statue carved from what appeared to be Basalt. The note stated that Alec had collected the thing from an eastern curio salesman that had passed through London, and who had been "all too eager to part with it, as though it were poisonous to him," as the note stated. I must admit, and I mean no offence against Alec when I say this, I found the statue repulsive. It depicted what appeared to be a misshapen half-breed of man and fish sitting upon a stone plinth in a pose not unlike Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker." The face of the thing was horribly misshapen, with its eyes taking up at least half of its face and its mouth and its lips occupying much of the

# *Nick Page Year 12*



remainder. Upon the Plinth were carved many odd characters that to date I have not been able to decipher, most resembling a crude parody of the Japanese alphabet.

Despite my revulsion, I found the statue oddly fascinating. I'm not sure why I thought this, perhaps my senility had simply given me an attraction to the grotesque. Whatever the case, I placed the thing atop my fireplace and for a time thought nothing of it. That is until the nightmares started. Initially they were relatively mild: Running from an invisible predator, being unable to move as a malicious presence grew closer, nothing that I had not already suffered in my youth. However, after about a week, they grew more...specific. Gradually, the dreams began to take on a more aquatic theme. The scene of the chase would be a beach covered in fish corpses, or the reason for my paralysis being entrapment in a pool of thick slime. While frightening, these dreams were still nothing to lose sleep over.

However, one night, I had a truly terrible vision. I was standing on the ocean floor, directly in front of large, vaguely humanoid figures. I could not move at all, not even a simple turn of the head to see if there were any figures behind me. Unlike my earlier dreams, these figures did not seem to have any immediate interest in harming me. Even as I began to panic due to my paralysis, they just stood there, as though content to observe my plight. That is until they began moving towards me, stoic as ever. Their advance only increased my panic, to the point where, if I could have moved, I surely would have thrashed about violently. Eventually, they got close enough to me that I could look upon them without the oppressive darkness obscuring my view. And when I did, and I saw a face one-half occupied by eyes, and one-half occupied by a hideous mouth.

I woke with a start and, despite my atheistic beliefs, I am not discounting the possibility that I may have offered thanks to god for letting that nightmare end. As I was very tired at the time, I'm not entirely sure what happened next. Though I believe I decided that I, for fear of suffering such a nightmare again, I should just stay up the rest of the night. As such, I set

about making myself a strong coffee. As I waited for the water to boil, I noticed something out of the seaside window. Under the moon-light, I saw a shape in the water that did not move as the waves around it did. At first I believed them to be seals, but then I noticed just how many there were. I spied at least 15 shapes, and given my ageing eyes there could have been more. I was quite surprised by this, as the seller had made no mention of it being a gathering place for any sort of aquatic mammal. Then memories of the fish-men pierced my thoughts. Despite my growing anxiety, I didn't feel truly fearful yet. I simply rationalised that I should quit worrying, as I always made sure that my doors and windows were all firmly locked before heading to bed. Yet, as I watched them from my window and my paranoia grew, I decided to check the locks nonetheless. When I returned, satisfied that my home was secure, the shapes were gone. Even now I cannot be sure if they were ever there at all, or simply the products of sleep deprivation, senility, and paranoia.

The nightmare I have described above happened one week ago and since then it has not only repeated, but also intensified. Every time I fall asleep I see more of those mongrel abominations and the abyssal, cyclopean places that spawned them, and



every time I wake in a panic, I Look outside to see the shapes from the water once again, each night growing closer to my home. Though I doubt that the creatures are anything more than a delusion brought on by my sleep-deprived mind, I have found signs the, much to my horror, seem to say otherwise. Just yesterday, as I went to comb the beach for any sign of the abominations, I happened across a trail of thick, oily slime, similar that of the deep-dwelling hagfish, pointing towards my house. I must confess that, despite the pleasant conditions of my home, it has begun to feel more like a prison. I cannot flee to Howick for fear that the beasts would follow me, and I cannot return to Auckland as my now fixed income will not cover the costs. My dreams have shown me that the creatures are horribly pale and their eyes white and milky, leading me to believe that they cannot abide the sun, and as such I believe that I should be safe during the day.

But time stops for no man, and night will fall no matter how much I pray and beg. I suspect that, if they truly wanted to, the scum could reach my house in a single night. Just as in my dreams, it seems they are content to observe my suffering before finishing me. I cannot say for sure what caused my curse, though I suspect that the most likely culprit is the statue. Supernatural or no, my worries started not long after I came into possession of it, and have persisted ever since. Whatever the cause, the creatures plague me still, and will likely continue to do so until my death, or until I do something about it.

The demons want the statue? Then they can have it. Hell, they can have me as well if it'll allow me some rest! Tonight I will walk out to the beach, just before the sun dips below the horizon, with the statue in tow. Once I'm at my destination, I will hurl the damn thing as far into the sea as I can, let the fish-men have their fish-man. If I do not return, do not seek me out. These beasts are very patient, if they are to have me, then they will have me sooner or later regardless of what I do. Best get it over with. Do not seek out the beasts, I couldn't bear it if my actions brought more people to meet with the scum that have tormented me so. And lastly, for the love of all that is holy, do not seek out the statue. Let the accursed thing sink down into the dark places where man cannot tread, and where it will never again see the sun...

*Jack Craig-Pearson*

*Year 11*

*Ben Mitchell*  
*Year 11*



# The River

A trickle. That's all it was at first. A spring of water spreading across the ground. The water snaked down turning the dust a dark brown. The trickle became a stream. The stream became a steady flow that carved rock and churned seeds from the earth. The banks became smooth and worn from persistence and time. Moss and Lichen appeared in the cracks and spread like wildfire across the nearby land. Seeds sprouted and roots began to reach out. Dandelions grew everywhere and turned the banks to white.

White. Winter approached and began to spread. Crystals crunched underfoot and the river began to slow. The surface froze. Ice hung from the leaves and snow lay silent on the ground. The place was still. All except for the river.

Even the cold could not stop the flowing river. Through icy panes, the water moved ever downwards, sprouting life as it went. The cold dark receded and the land recovered. Buds grew once more and the clear water glistened in the sunlight.

The seasons passed and the cycle repeated. Winter brought hardship and summer brought regrowth. Ever on the river ran, carving a channel as it flowed. This was true, until the day a second river burst through its banks. The waters merged, murky at first, but they gradually began to clear. Now transparent for each other to see. They flowed on, now on the same path. The main waterway began to divide. Small streams trickled out from either bank, ready to cut their own channel.

Then came the Drought. The water began to slow and sink into the ground. The steady flow became a stream. The stream became a trickle. Drop by drop the water disappeared, only to be remembered by the plants and streams that sprouted from it. In time, even they began to fade. The spring dried up and the land returned to what it was before. The only sign that anything had happened was the trenches now cut into the earth.

*Alfie Richardson*

*Year 12*



# Through the Window

Death used to horrify me. But, when you actually die, all that you're left with is confusion, a question mark in your soul where your fear should be. My family wasn't there when it happened, friends evaded my grasp, even my colleagues lacked the dignity to show their faces. I was surrounded by the ghosts of strangers, ignorant about my shortcomings. Perhaps in some ways it was a blessing that I died in a place where everyone loved me, and no one knew me.

I'm sure God has condemned me; the number of times people have told me to go to hell has probably solidified myself a place on the board of suffering. I lie for a while, beginning to wonder whether I would have to walk to hell myself; wondering if there is a hell at all.

An unusual fact about being dead: you can still feel the sand in your shoes. Perhaps I am ignorant of my other senses, or the desolation of myself doesn't allow for anything other than annoyances to pierce its thick layer. In any case, the golden grains find their way between my toes as I pull myself from the earth and begin to circle the area, looking for somewhere to go. Police tape wears thin under the dark of the night, and the water laps softly at the shoes of horrified bystanders. They never took their eyes off of the place where I was lying a moment before. How is this possible? This is an out-of-body experience with the addition of still being housed within my flesh.

This is horribly upsetting, to say the least. My eyes would have watered, but I don't think my tear ducts are still functional. Behind the yellow tape are my loved ones. Motionless, they stand, shell shocked with a sadness that comes with the memory of my momentary goodwill. Even the unknown bystanders don't cry for me. Why? Was I not worth a single tear? I was attempting to reconcile us earlier today; I was trying to reconcile all my relationships then. Now, I see that those rivers had run dry. The strongest form of love is between family, and even they lack enough love to cry. I can hear my niece whispering:

'Is he truly gone?'

'Yes, honey.' My sister whimpers. That is as close to a tear as I believe I will receive tonight. I lie back down on the earth where I washed up and realise that I'm too tired to process what I'm experiencing. Let me suffer alone.

Death has always intrigued me, like a friend that suggests bad ideas that I am never idiotic enough to go through with. Therefore, my friend fooled me into becoming a half-willing participant in their naturally devious plan. You relax too much, the wind howls, and suddenly you're falling in slow motion, waiting for the ground to catch up to you. But it never does. You find yourself in deep water with little swimming ability. I deeply wish I was talking metaphorically. The further I fell from that boat, the more I found

myself wanting to be away from it. Even as the water invaded my lungs and my family called out for me, I couldn't imagine myself standing on that deck for a second longer.

There was a certain calmness at that moment. You accept the fact that there is no escaping, and the transition on to this unusual plain of existence becomes easier than expected. Although, I'm not entirely sure how much of my misery increased my willingness to accept it. Wherever I find myself tomorrow, I believe I deserve it. My plagued mind had treated people wrongly, but I wasn't to blame for that. I could still go to Heaven, assuming there is one. Because it wasn't me. It was my thoughts. I can't be held responsible for how I acted, can I?

# A Winter Storm

The tentative tendrils of dawn could do little to abate winter's grip as Robert traipsed down a lonely stone corridor towards the Thieves Guild's prison, his sword slapping his thigh and echoing as he walked. Indeed those half-hearted rays of light would do little against the threatening clouds overhead. He halted at the corner where a burning torch cast his weathered face into a visage of pure hardship. Taking a bracing breath, he stroked back his rough sandy hair and continued towards the guard. Upon seeing him, the guard frowned at him through the half-light. "Who are you... ah Robert my friend good to see you." Robert realised that he was addressing his friend and partner in crime Duncan.

"Yes you too."

"I know why you're here Robert."

"Yes."

"You can't see him yet, Robb, I'm sorry but you know... master's orders and all that."

"Right of course but... just call me no one that way, if the Master asks who saw him then-"

Duncan held up his hand to stop him, his grey eyes uncharacteristically stern "It's too early and you know it Robert, it only happened a few days ago."

"Please Duncan," Robert pleaded, "You've been a friend ever since I joined and you know I have to leave tonight."

Duncan hesitated, visibly conflicted for what seemed like an eternity until something seemed to leave him. Sighing in resignation, he shoved a set of rusty iron keys into Robert's hands. "Down the end of the hall on the left but don't tell a soul." Robert nodded his appreciation to Duncan and turned towards the rows of cells but just as he set off, Duncan grabbed his arm, "No-one saw him right?" he asked. For a moment the two of them were silent, their eyes locked and Robert nodded.

With renewed determination, Robert set forward down the row of cells, foot by weary foot as a wind began to pick up outside with the first hints of rain. Shuddering, he pulled his fur cloak tighter around him though, in truth, it was little to do with winter's influence, which was perpetually present in the slimy stone walls of the Thieves Guild's cells.

In all his twenty-three years, Robert had only ever experienced one place as foul as the fetid streets of the slums. This man's cell. The rough stone walls and floor were green with mould, excrement steamed in a pile beside the man's 'bed,' and neglect hung heavily on the air. The fetid mix of blood, sweat and waste coalesced into a true epitomisation of depravity; rats scurried across the floor and there was a maddening slow dripping of water echoing into the dim.

Robert looked down through the rusting iron bars at the breathing pile of rags hunched in the corner, desperately trying to forestall winter's cold embrace. Shame. Revulsion. These words flashed into Robert's head as he opened the cell door of the man he had worshipped. He was much like Robert: strongly built, handsome in a rugged way and he used to have sandy hair just like Robert. Except now he was just an old man with matted grey hair, an unkempt beard and face weathered far beyond his years. "The greyhound of Westport," proclaimed Robert in mock reverence, his voice thick with contempt. "That's what we called you." The wind



# *Nick Page Year 12*



outside grew in strength as Robert took a step towards his shame. "You were the best you know. Never failed a job, never messed anything up. The Master's favourite." The man stayed motionless, his head bowed towards the harsh stone floor like a simpleton. "Will silence be your only answer?" Robert was speaking with a louder voice now, his temper rising against his will. Still his father stayed exactly where he was.

"What would you have me say?" replied a broken voice, "I don't imagine that you would consider anything I say to be truthful, not that I deserve your trust."

"Truth did you say?" asked Robert, his voice laden with contempt and incredulity, "I'll tell you about truth!" he yelled, "You ruined everything! That is the truth!"

"You don't understand, there is more at work here than you realise."

"Understand? Under-bloody-stand? I understand plenty," he spat at the man. Trauma twisted Robert's face into a grimace and despite himself he screamed. "Why?" The man's manacles screeched agonisingly across the floor as he stretched a gnarled hand towards him. "I know I don't deserve it son but please just hear me out-"

Robert swatted the filthy hand away, "Don't call me that!" he wept, "don't call me your son, I don't want to hear it, you were my everything you understand? Everything!"

"And because of that, you lost your independence!" he yelled back, his broken voice finally finding some strength, "you've lost sight of who you are as an individual." The wind raged. "You can't decide for yourself." Rain beat at the outside walls. "And so since everyone else has told you I'm guilty, you can't help but agree."

Robert shook his head; tears still sliding silently down his face.

"I'm dead in your mind now so don't wait around to see me die for real." The gale reached a crescendo. "You are in a prison far stronger than mine." Lightning lanced through the sky. "Without windows or walls and you must escape and then you can see me in the afterlife and tell me." Robert's father clasped Robert's head in his hands now, "Who are you?" The words numbed him and his eyes filled with understanding. And total despair. The world was a blur through the tears as Robert pulled away and ran. He stumbled back down the hall, his father's voice scraping through him again and again "Who are you?" he called "WHO ARE YOU?" Robert shoved past Duncan and kept running straight out of the building and straight into the decrepit streets of the Westport slums, where he knelt and cast his gaze up at the torrent of rain washing over him; through him.

As he knelt there, Robert swore he could still hear his father cries over the storm, "Who am I?" thought Robert with a bitter laugh "I am lost."

*Henry Ward*

*Year 12*

# Lest We Forget

The warm spring sun beams down onto one of the many calm fields that lie scattered throughout the Belgian countryside, extending its tendrils of light. Poppies flutter lonely in the breeze, as peaceful as the night sky, while several sparrows chirp playfully, flitting and darting about on the breeze. Far in the distance, the hazy silhouette of the village church stands out from the immense tree line. While in the foreground, a farmer trundles slowly along on his beaten tractor, cultivating the ground for the coming crop. Small animals, rabbits and mice, scamper through the lush grass that wavers in the wind, and for now the field is a picture of tranquility; but small peculiarities hint to an alternative past.

Strangely, a battered old rifle lies rusting against the fence, while several shell cases and a various assortment of steel parts lie on the edge of the road, ready for imminent collection. Also, further along the field, a group of tourists stand admiring a small rocky memorial, on it inscribed: *To those who gave their lives for their country, lest we forget.*

100 years ago.

Hell. The once peaceful field has transcended into the depths and profanity of war. Cannon fire booms across the tree line, decimating each beautiful tree with the turn of a shell. All that lingers in the air now is the toxic stench of death and the all consuming mud which eats anything and everything that enters its inescapable grasp. The once radiant sunshine is replaced by a dark gloom that casts shadow and pain across the surroundings, syphoning life away. Deep trench lines now line the field, while inside men frantically scurry around like ants, carrying crucial supplies and tending to the critically wounded who lie stranded, oblivious to the fighting. The shrill sound of a whistle pierces the air and the artillery awakens from its deep sleep again, sending thunderous noise out across the horizon. Men begin to pile over the top of the trenches, charging valiantly towards their inevitable fate, until slowly they all fall until not one is left standing.

Everything is silent again.

While 100 years have passed, the field still remains constant. We will never forget.

*Harrison Biggs*

*Year 10*

# Communion

Sizzling, bubbling, crackling. A heavily scented aroma seeped into the dining room, further taunting the awaiting guests. The amber glow pouring through our kitchen's little window had run dry; a constant reminder our time was up. My mum danced between shelves and pantries gracefully, mixing flavours like an artist mixes colours. Each dish was delicately sculpted into a masterpiece. The rapping of wood against wood on the front porch, along with strenuous rasping, signified his entrance.

"I'm quite capable," Grandad waved me away. A scowl surfaced in his expression. "I'm walking just fine thank you." The chatter and conversation died abruptly as he ambled his way to the head of the table, partially out of respect, partially out of fear. In contrast to our wooden dining table, full of life and warmth, the atmosphere was still and silent. Eyes darted around the room, hoping someone would do the honours of reviving the conversation.

Mum inched over beside him and gingerly tapped his shoulder.

"My apologies Dad, one of our guests is yet to arrive." The scowl deepened.

"And who is the one responsible for postponing our meal?" Mum, struck by sudden indecision, held her tongue. Grandad tilted his head; his eyes narrowed.

"I'm positive he'll arrive soon." Determination was etched on her face. He sighed in dismay. We were all well aware Mum was even more stubborn than he was. So we waited. The silence returned, no one daring to draw attention to themselves under his gaze.

Four hollow knocks. The guests at the table visibly jumped. Mum looked at me and then gestured towards the door. It appeared I would have the pleasure of welcoming our last guest. The handle turned. The door opened. As the light revealed his face, I could sense the despair emanating from the table behind me.

His straggly goatee clung to his chin like a parasite. The peculiar gloss of his blonde hair was not due to cleanliness, I suspected, suggested by the miasma of alcohol and cigarettes he carried with him. His skin was pale, sickly pale. Apprehension was drawn all over his trembling figure.

As I turned around, I understood the source of his discomposure. The eyes of my family were ablaze, teeth clenched and fists clamped. Grandad rose from his chair but said nothing, only portraying wordless emotions. Resentment, hostility, bitterness.

"Hey, Dad," he looked disheartened, "It's been a while hasn't it." He was met with no response. "Look, I understand if you haven't forgiven me, but I just want to say-



“And by what right do you have to enter this household?” Grandad’s voice was sharp and suffocatingly intense.

“Dad please,” Mum pleaded at his side, “this is a family meal. I thought we should have it all together, just this once.” I stood there, dazed. I was related to this man?

“I will not share my meal with the likes of him, not now, not ever.” He was beyond outraged at this point. Grasping the cane beside him, he began to clamber away towards the door. Mum was in desperation.

“Isn’t it’s time to let things go and move on?”

He didn’t waver. A baby wailed in the embrace of one of my aunts, only inflaming the lingering anguish in the air. The meal in which we had poured in endless hours of time and thought was left untouched. It was going to be a lonely family reunion this year.

*Ben Wishart*

*Year 11*

# Into the Storm

Thunder crashed as the two lords met upon the moor. The rain lashed at Lord Beckett's face, the freezing water almost as cold as his adversary's smile. Beckett scowled "My Lord Robert, how may help you on this fine day?"

The ancient vampire's grin grew. "What do you think, oh mighty lord of the great house Beckett? What could I possibly want after you kill my son, enslave my peasants and steal my land?" The black eyes of Lord Robert McAllen flared with hatred and elation. His grin grew. "I will settle for nothing more than you, Joseph Beckett, burning on a pyre, you and all your cursed family. Your men shall surrender their loyalties to house Beckett and swear fealty to yours truly; those who refuse shall hang. And all your lands will, from now on, be under the rule of The Northern Covenant. What say you?" said McAllen.

Beckett rolled his eyes and spat, partly in disgust, and partly because the rain had caused his war paint to trickle down from his cheekbones and into his mouth. He stared at the vampire for a time. At first glance, there was nothing out of the ordinary about him. Robert looked a man of about seventy, his face and hair reflecting this. You wouldn't know that his true age numbered in the centuries. His eyes were typical of a vampire, blacker than this world's future. His teeth had been filed into a shape that would make tearing out throats much easier, something Robert was no doubt a master of. His attire also gave the impression that he was not here for pleasant chat, what with his crimson tabard that bore the Wolf of House McAllen, and his suit of plate armour that covered the rest of him. He was an enemy to be feared, especially with the Rothswells supporting him.

"Well, Beckett? What say you? Will you surrender to the better house? You are outnumbered, you fool. I have at least twenty-five-thousand men, you have, what, ten thousand? Think of your knights, Lord Beckett, think of how many will be butchered if you continue down this route of conflict. What lord puts himself before his men?" said McAllen, raising his voice.

He was losing patience. Beckett winced internally. What his foe said was true, all of it. Two of Joseph's allies, a good four thousand men, had abandoned him to protect their castles from some unseen threat, and the remaining army would fall like grain to the Vampiric knights as well as Rothswell trickery (but he couldn't care less about casualties).

Beckett spoke up "My lord Robert, you think that I'd abandon my men? How dare you! But I have no intention of facing your army in battle, and neither does Lord Alastair. So we have concluded to settle this the honourable way-"

Robert bust into laughter, expecting this answer.

"We have concluded to settle this the honourable way, champion against champion. If the Lord Alastair's champion wins, then you will allow us to withdraw from your lands unharmed. If the Lord McAllen's champion is victorious, then our

armies may fight. This duel will take place tomorrow at noon. What say you to this, Lord McAllen?" said Beckett with a scowl.

Lightning flashed and the wind roared as Robert replied through his laughter. "Very well, I cannot deny this. Tomorrow will be the day of Lord Joseph Beckett's final failure"

"I wouldn't be so sure. No one has ever won a duel against an Alastair!" replied Beckett confidently, knowing what he said was completely false.

McAllen's laughter had died down, and his look of glee turned to one of deadly hatred. "You're going to die tomorrow, lord Beckett. Say your prayers to the Benign, for your magic shan't protect you this time." he said ominously. Beckett smiled scornfully. "Goodbye, My Lord McAllen, may we meet again." And he rode off into the storm.

*Stewart Ashton, Year 10*



*Henry Ward*  
*Year 12*





# Lifeblood

The warm air flows through seas of orange and yellow leaves far above the swirling blue water. The river is a flowing artery, providing life to all around it, everything from miniscule patches of green grass to towering cascades of yellow and scarlet trees. Happy chirping disturbs the silence of nature, echoing along the dirt track that spans the length of the arterial river, their sources fluttering from tree to tree. Eddy's scattered throughout the long blue lazily rotate as the current pushes forwards with a herculean strength, displacing anything in its way. Small creatures dart along the banks, drinking the blood for sustenance, whilst fish of many sizes move effortlessly through the land's lifeblood. Miniscule animals scatter to avoid being seen as children make their way towards the river, emitting shrill laughter as the clear blue sprays up where their feet make contact. Heat from the burning sun causes the sand and stones scattered along the shoreline to be painful to the touch, and the light it emits reflects from the clear blue blood of the artery, denying those who wish to gaze upon its beauty.

As seasons change, the fiery sun seems to darken, as do the clouds that accompany it in its perch in the sky. A chirp is seldom heard, as the feathered creatures are resting or have left for warmer places. In the colder months, the artery almost seems like a bringer of death, rather than life, as the multitude of plants lining the shore are now bleached white skeletons of their previously colourful selves. The artery has slowed in the cold. Small scaled creatures hide under rocks to keep their warmth, not wishing to risk their lives in the frozen wasteland they once called home. Creatures of the larger kind are naught to be found, as the warmth they once enjoyed has all but left their summer playground. What was once a colourful landscape is now blanketed in white, denying the land the personality it once so flamboyantly showed off. Fish, however, do not care for the grievances of the world outside of their waters, and continue to swim no matter the season.

*Christian Avis*

*Year 10*

# Te Totara i Ahua

## (One Tree Hill)

My great arms reach out over the distant city, I stand guard as the wind whips and bends my branches. I have watched over this city for centuries. The sunlight bends through the haze of the city. It appears in the distance as if many hands are reaching up into the clouds trying to take hold of the unseen, always trying to bring down a piece of heaven.

For many years I have heard the growl of the city beast become louder and louder, as the city grew and slowly consumed my fellow kind. But not me, never me, I sit high on my hill. Tranquility surrounds me, broken at times by people coming to share my vantage point.

Humans that once arrived in ships on the shore, now speed around, and make the beast's veins glow at night. They used to come and look at me but less and less these days; it seems they don't have any time to appreciate the view from here anymore.

Before the ships arrived, there was nothing here apart from green grass and trees all the way to the horizon. The koreru song was loud and they would flock to eat, sit in my branches and share tales of sights beyond the horizon. Now, as the beast expands, it closes in on all sides, always growing, always searching for more land to devour.

I have been scarred many times, but they have healed. I still remember the way people would come to me and care for the wounds that had been inflicted upon me. The sound of waiata would help build a bond with those who cared, and wanted to protect me. From this I learnt that there were some that respected my position on this sacred high place.

I love the hill on which I stand but it does not offer much protection. I have grown stronger from these conditions, they have tested me over the years. Through the storms, the memory of the sun warming my leaves gave me strength to endure. I can only take so much wind and rain, now my bark is old and has started to decay. I expect my final days are not far away. I love this hill, watching the life below me grow. Through all these years I have stood guardian. I am no longer alone. Time has seen others join me up on this hill. They can carry on my legacy and watch over the city I have nurtured for them.

*Isaac Cooper*

*Year 11*