

The Winners

TSF Short Story Writing Competition for 9-14 year olds

The Journey: Jonathan and the Ghost Boy

By
Alice Evans

Gosforth East Middle School

The Victoria tunnels, Jonathan shuddered at just the name of it.

"Now I'm sure that you've heard some ghost stories about the tunnel but there is nothing to worry about," Jonathan didn't exactly believe the tour guide. "Now, I think we are all ready so would you like to follow me". They walked down a little entrance then turned right to find themselves in the main tunnel.

Jonathan started day dreaming. "Here you can see that it's a special type of stone discovered in 1854 by....." The tour guide blabbered on whilst the adults hummed intently. Jonathan's mind soon became overrun with pictures of ghost sightings and sounds.

What was that? Jonathan thought to himself, as a flat cap appeared floating in the air and started moving. Jonathan followed. It stopped then disappeared. *Just my stupid mind* Jonathan thought once more. By now the adults were really far away and Jonathan started panicking.

"Mum, Steve, Aunty Jane are....are you here?" He stammered.

"Follow us, like." A ghost stood in front of Jonathan's shivering body. Grime covered cheeks looked just right in a long, thin face. Shaggy locks of mud brown hair hung out of a grey and green checked flat cap.

"Are you a ghost?" Jonathan questioned.

"I divin'na, but what I do know is that I'm Mucky an—"

"You certainly are! Do you want a bath?" Jonathan was confused.

"Me name's Mucky."

"Oh, sorry."

"Can ya' help us like?" Mucky pleaded.

"Mmmmmmmmm, I don't know. It depends, what *type* of help?" He didn't really trust a Geordie ghost just yet.

"I was the one that pushed the cart like,"

"You've got me lost already".

"Didn't ya' hear the story, about tha' three men killed by tha' load'a coal."

"I don't pay attention to these things, it's not really my thing-sorry." By now Jonathan was really wishing that he had been paying attention to the guide.

Mucky's voice was no longer bright and cheerful. "Me and my friend Al were down here messing around when it was a working mine. I thought it would be a great idea to push the cart that the miners used to move coal with Al in it and race it to the other side. You see, there were three men in the tunnel that we didn't know about—"

Jonathan gasped.

"It's okay, you didn't know they were there"

Mucky was getting emotional.

"All three killed. Because of me. Me. Well after that my life was horrible, no more fun and laughter, just boring and sad, during one night I prayed to die in bed and I did. Now I'm a ghost.

Ya' have to help us, come back in time with 'we and stop them deaths!"

The boys ran down the main tunnel, beckoning to stop, Mucky pulled into the side-a secret tunnel! What Jonathan saw next made him pinch himself, a room full of Victorian objects from copper teapots, bicycles, skipping ropes, shoes and even chamber pots all perfectly formed to make a time machine. In the middle was a platform with a button beside it reading 'TRUVL'.

"'TRUVL', interesting."

"Sorry about tha' spellin'-neva' went'a school." Mucky explained.

"Don't be! I love it! How do we get going?" Jonathan hadn't been this excited in years. "I'm sorry like, I haven't told ya' everything. Ya' see, when 'wes gan back in time 'we won't know each otha. But divint' fret pet, I'll give ya' this note it'll remind ya' what ya' doin' and what I look like, how to get back to 2017 and what the time machine looks like, like." Mucky said. "Here, see this platform hop on man. Now be careful it can ge'a bit bumpy, like."

"Can I press the button please?" Jonathan pleaded.

Mucky sighed, "All reet, three, two, one, go!" Mucky stood there waving goodbye.

The time machine started spinning in the air, getting faster and faster every second until, finally, it went so quick that it disappeared.

Bump! The machine landed with a crash in the year 1879, as Jonathan stepped out, he could see that he was just outside the tunnel. Reaching into his pocket he felt a piece of paper, Jonathan took it out and read it, it said this:

'Go to thu end ov thu tunl

Yu wil see a boy in a cart abut to be pushed

Stopp thu pusher

Go to thu brij in thu west side and yu wil see a lott ov objets

Clym in

Pres thu buton sayin 'TRUVL'

Hold onn'

"Okay, go to the end of the tunnel, I'm all-ready there. You will see a boy in a cart about to be pushed. Where is he? There! Stop the pusher." Jonathan read to himself.

Running over to the boys Jonathan yelled, "Hey! You there, don't push it!"

"Oooooo, look oot Al he's gonna' to tell us what'a do like, get ready to run, aaarrrr!" Mucky mocked.

"Trust me, I know you it sounds stupid but you will regret doing it in the future.

"Year reet, come on Al let's do it another time " Mucky and Al walked away.

"Go to the bridge on the west side, North, East, South, West-that one!"

As Jonathan was walking he caught a glimpse of a machine sitting on the ground. "Goodness me! Climb in, press the button saying travel, hold on. Here we go!"

Once again it started spinning until it disappeared. When it arrived back in 2017 Mucky jumped straight up.

"Did ya' do it like?!" Mucky asked.

"Yes I did!" Jonathan replied.

"Oh thank you, thank you, thank you!" Mucky was a bit crazy. He tried to hug Jonathan but forgot he was a ghost and he went straight through him. They both laughed. "Ya' should gan back to ya' family now." Mucky suggested.

"Are you sure?" Jonathan asked.

"Ya' need them more than I need ya'. Anyways, I can remember ya' can't 17" "I guess so, goodbye Mucky."

"Goodbye pet, mind how ya' gan!"

Jonathan smiled, outside was a troubled looking family pacing back and forth.

"Mum!" Jonathan yelled.

"Ohhhh, Johnnybobs where on earth have you been?" She asked

"Places" Jonathan replied. They both giggled including Mucky from his spying hole in the wall.

The Journey

By

Elise Kenny

Hawthorn Primary School

At this point, Violet could have lost her life, I was doing everything I could to prevent this. I was in the depths of the bank with the mud oozing in-between my toes. Every breath Violet took I thought would be her last. I hear nothing else by myself mumbling about how much I was regretting ever taking her with me. All I could taste was the bitterness of the river, which was horrible. Suddenly, a thought hit me like a lightning bolt. These thoughts turned into memories, upsetting memories. I couldn't stop thinking about these memories...

Earlier that afternoon, "Howay man it's just the littlest bit further, which I'm sure you can make" I panted. "Ahhhh!" screamed Violet, who fell over an anonymous object. "Gosh you found the raft before I did and I was the one that built it. Quick, help me push it into the filthy water below us" I exclaimed excitedly .

"I'm not so sure about this anymore Josh" replied Violet looking worried. "Come on whimper what is there to be afraid of?" I said without thinking. "Em, maybe I can't swim dummy" Violet replied fiercely. "You can't but I can, I'll keep you on the raft I'll swim in the freezing water drama-queen and the raft is stable" I said with a smile wiped across my face. I received a look saying it's going to take a lot more than that to get me on that thing.

I was about to jump onto the ancient doors when I was grabbed by my arm and pulled back onto the bank. "Josh, you know you can't go alone" Violet said with a sigh. "That is why I have made the decision to come with you. Josh promise me we'll be back by teatime" she continued. "I promise" I replied. "This is the start of a great adventure".

We jump onto the raft; it was a shaky start but we soon got used to it. We passed all kinds of buildings (old and modern). All familiar to us both. But there was one (a factory in fact) that was important mainly to Violet. She stared at it and smiled. Then fear took over her emotions. She was shaking, tears welling up. She said "That's my Dad's factory". Now she was wailing about how much she missed her dad.

I knew what had happened to the factory. It burnt down. Her father was the one who had started the fire: his business partner wanted all of the money he'd made. He had no idea the fire was going to spread as quickly as it did. He was helpless because he was locked inside of his office. Violet told me that his partner (Michael) locked the office door; those are just rumours. There had been a long silence until she said she had been in the factory before. The journey had been a disaster until we passed the bridge.

We went on in complete silence; I was about to tell Violet it was time to return home when I caught a glimpse of the bridge. All the memories came rushing like waves on a beach. This bridge is no ordinary bridge: this is where Violet and I met. I was homeless and needed food so I asked Violet for money. She handed it to me and asked for my name. "I'm Josh, Josh Smith ma'am" I told her feeling

like an idiot. "I'm Violet, nice to meet you" she replied. Immediately, I knew we were made to be best friends. We walked up and down the bridge and talked about ourselves. I could smell the salt and vinegar in the air – off the fish and chips. I could see some posh fellows eating the fish and chips. Violet must have seen me looking at them because she offered me some. This was an offer I couldn't refuse. A day well spent.

Suddenly there was a big bang. That soon snapped me out of my daydream. Violet was shaking and we were both drenched from head to toe. We were stuck in a thunder storm. The raft was moving side to side and then... there was a huge wave! The wave crashed into the raft.

We were then left to plunge into the muddy waters below. I could see Violet but could not reach her. I was trying to get to her; the more I tried the further we drew apart. Finally, (when the storm calmed) I reached the surface and could see poor Violet lying on the bank. Still. I ran over to her and realised this was my doing. I cried tears of helplessness. She flinched. I did everything I could to help her without knowing the day just got a whole lot worse...

Unspoken

By

Samaha Shahid

Gosforth East Middle School

Have you ever had that feeling, where all you want, in the whole miserable world, is silence? Like when something really bad has happened to you and you want to permanently hide in a shadow. Away from all kinds of socialization you can think of. But you can't. Doesn't matter how hard you try. All you can do is run away. But even that won't help. However, it's the only thing you can do. But what is the point of running? I guess there is no point: sometimes it's the best thing you can do. And maybe that is enough. Xavier's life is so quiet, it's almost piercing. He is mute after all.

A weird tingling sensation cascaded up and down my body as I walked down the narrow and pristine hallway. Here there is no such thing as being free, unique. Here that is counted as dangerous and pure evil. Here it is counted as being an outlaw. Nothing shines here. You are only accepted if you are the same and perfect. Well that is what Gwenyth says. And no one dares to stand up to Gwenyth.

At her age she should have one foot in the grave. But no. Her skin is snow white. No wrinkles whatsoever. And eyes of emeralds. Oh, and an important detail, she erased our memories so that we can't remember our past lives. Or that we want to. She also manipulated us so that we could not have any feelings. I remember that day. It was unspeakable. Children screaming. But not crying, just screaming. The sounds echoed through the hallways we're walking through now. I can still hear them screaming. It is ringing in my head. And it will never stop. No matter how hard I try. Gwenyth is the reason I am mute, killing my parents shut me up in many ways her beady bloodshot eyes haunting me, like a wolf does to a sheep at night.

Me and my two best friends, Cosmia and Dante, walked beside me.

"It seems very weird and claustrophobic being in this corridor" Cosmia gasped. Because of the fact that I am mute, Cosmia and Dante learned sign language. I do not know how to feel about it. Should I be happy or should I say that they are wasting their time. But they are the only people in this whole lab that actually understand me. And they have not been experimented on. Yet. Neither have I. Hopefully, I will not be here. I don't know how we can escape. But we will find a way. Maybe.

'Yeah, why would Gwenyth make us wake up in the middle of the morning, and make us go to the hall?' grunted Dante.

'Something to do with getting a letter, remember' I replied.

'I was a bit too tired to listen to what she...' A tall and bulky man went up to us, it caused Dante to stop talking. It was probably for the best, he probably going to call Gwenyth something rude anyway. The man was wearing a lab coat. And his bald head reflected the dim light of the hallway. He said a few words. He said that the meeting was cancelled. His face was not happy. However before he left he gave Cosmia a letter.

Dear Children

This letter is about a very special occasion. I am here for announcing the first ever Revrikil. A Revrikil is a celebration where we celebrate me. Doesn't that sound fun! It will be held tomorrow children. Robert and Christopher will come to remind you. Come outside. And you will see me standing on the stage giving a speech. Don't be late.

From Gwyneth

We gave each other one look and I knew that we had the same idea. We cascaded down the pristine hallway into our dormitories; we sat on the bed and listened to each other talk

'WE COULD ESCAPE TOMMORROW!' exclaimed Cosmia. 'Okay, here's the plan'

I couldn't sleep that night, the excitement was coursing through my body, I began to grow impatient but I soon fell asleep; dreaming of what was hiding beyond those silver gates which I wished to see so many times.

"WAKE UP YA DIRTY PIGS, GET OFF YOUR LAZY BUNS! AND GET DRESSED, TODAY'S THE BLOODY DAY!" screamed Robert at the top of his lungs. Cosmia, Dante and I raced from our beds into the corridor. I nearly tripped over a little boy, but he was okay... I think. We all dressed in our best clothes, which were very tatty, but after all, they were all we had. We raced into the garden, not wasting even a second gazing upon the black and white decorations; Gwyneth never really fancied colours, and that never really was going to change. The whole field was lined with chairs, I could make out thousands lined straight, but I had no time to waste, the plan would soon fall into action.

We purposely were right in the middle of the line where Mr. Rodgers was counting the children like sheep in a pen, so when he counted us, we quickly ran out of the line and headed towards the gates. Of course, there'd be some guards, but because today was Revrikil day, everyone had to attend the party; so there was one guard at the door. But we thought of this already, Dante got a red rock and threw it at the window, the glass shards scattered all over the gravel path causing a commotion which attracted the guard. This was it, it was a 2 mile run to get to the gates, Cosmia calculated that it would precisely take 1 minute and 30 seconds for the guards to return to his post, and it'd turn out to be the most important 1 minute and 30 seconds of our lives. We steadied our feet, got into our running positions, and seemingly flew towards the gate.

I ran, I ran as fast my legs could take me, exceeding the 1 minute 30 seconds time limit would cause complications too beyond our abilities, the sun illuminated the ground, making our shadows run with us, and our sweat to join the gravel on the ground. But we made it, 5 more centimetres and we would be out of these grounds, and into the new life which has been always waiting for me. The knee length grass tickled at my calves, Cosmia screamed, ecstatic that we were out and nobody could hear us, and Dante did all that he could do, he tripped over his own feet.

We camped underneath the stars at night, the rain drizzled on us, we only laughed. The next morning when we woke, we ventured into a nearby forest, running like wolves. We stopped when we read a sign saying Newcastle. It seemed a bit odd at first, we knew this was our home, forgetting our past and planning our future.

Epilogue

The day I left that place that was my inciting incident, after entering Newcastle, the sun shone on days when you would never expect it, and it rained when you would never expect it as well, soon realised that I fell in love with the soft, and sometimes violent, noises of the rain. There are many trees, I remember running through the bunches of them, whispering stories to each other, silently protecting me, encasing me in their leaves and drowning me in their scent. It was hard finding a place to live for 10 year old children and finding a job wasn't any easier. But we found a farm owned by a family of chipper people, they greeted us with hay bales and warm arms, we soon put ourselves to work, living alongside the farm people for the meanwhile and saving our pennies, they also gave us an education. For a while we lived in a shed, 10 years later and we all live together, well Cosmia and Dante living closer than normal, who would've known that they would have had a gorgeous set of twins... and that I would be looking after them half the time. They named the children Peter and Gwen. I tried to tell them to bring the wicked name into our lives again, but they said that all in all, it was a beautiful name, and anyways, we aren't scared any more.

I also had a person of my own, Stephanie was a girl in a book store, and now she is wearing a ring that I gave her. This is where it gets interesting though, I was walking down a street one day, when I stumbled onto a graveyard, I was going to walk away when I saw that one of the stones read a name which I thought was long gone from my memory. Gwentyth.

I walked closer towards it and saw a piece of paper... addressed to 'My children'. I pulled it out of the weeds and opened it up, it read,

I am sorry, with ounce of blood in my heart, I am sorry. I know that nothing in this world will make up for what I did, but I must tell you that I am sorry. They say that people go mad from love, but my dearest children, living without it is what caused me to lose myself, my whole life I was rejected, pushed around tortured, and that made me hurt in unspeakable ways, much more than I ever have hurt you, because you see my dears, as horrible and as wicked I seemed to you, I would never hurt you like how people hurt me, never. I am sorry once more children, and I must say, you have courage Xavier, Cosmia and Dante, to run away like that, and I am glad, after you left, other children followed in your footsteps, leaving me to be the sad old wicked witch that I am. I hope that you all have moved on now, have families, have homes have... love, I hope with all my black heart. Because a witch, I am, but a human, I was born, and human feelings are what I was left with, and what I leaved with. I am sorry children, I am sorry.

Wiping the tears from my eyes I set off into the woods towards our house. I showed everyone. Their tears fell just the mine did. Their faces reacted the same way like mine did. But one thing was different. I felt how the tears fell from her face like how they fell from ours.

Have you ever had that feeling where its like you came out of a cocoon. Or maybe the first time you touched snow. Well all these things have something in common. They are all about starting a new beginning.

I did have a life that was so quiet it was piercing. But now I have a life that is so loud it feels comforting.

The Journey
By
Bryony Agar
Haydon Bridge High School

Lost in the darkness, I creep through the cool, silent earth searching for a way out. I slither like a snake through the tight crevices, searching, searching....

A light! At last, a faint circle of hope, glimmering in the gloom. With a new urgency I speed up, a new strength filling me. The light grows larger, and with it the tunnel. I push on, moving small rocks and earth - nearer and nearer and nearer and-

Freedom! I burst out of the ground, laughing and chuckling with the pure joy of existing. Leaping over rocks I rush down the hill, dancing and swirling in the warm caress of the sun. The whole world leaps towards me, just begging to be explored. Swiftly, I dive down a narrow gully, twist and twine through clumps of reeds, rush round rocks and stones. Down, down, down.

The ground becomes marshy. Slender reeds stretch up to the sky, guarding small pools. I hesitate, pausing to watch with quiet fascination as frogs lay their jelly-like eggs. Their soft song enchants me, deep and grating.

As I round the bend, I see them. Two young children, giggling together as they play with a small toy boat. They toss it towards me. Quick as a flash, I snatch it, pulling it just out of their reach. Come on! Come and get it! I spin it around, laughing. They grab at it, but I am faster. Always teasing them, taunting them. But not cruelly: they shriek with laughter as they just miss it every time. Suddenly, the boy grabs the tip of the sail, but with a final flourish, I seize it and run off down the hill, chased by the duo. They'll never catch me! But after a while, I see them lagging, their little legs tired and I leave the boat for them to find on a rock.

A new energy fills me! I rush on as the sun rises ever higher, a glowing eye, eternally watching. Faster, faster! Joy explodes through me as I accelerate, laughing, on, on, on! Never slowing, I plunge into a wood, crashing wildly over rocks and old rotting logs. With a roar of delight, I dive into a hollow, pausing momentarily as if in a half-hearted attempt to catch my breath.

A group of people join me around the corner, all clothed in a rainbow, helmets on heads and paddles in hands. We play together, laughing, tumbling, chasing and rolling - again and again and again. They somersault and I catch them, our hearts joined for a one second eternity of blissful elation...

Tiring of the game, I move on calmly, weary from crashing through the wood. Tall trees stand over me, watching my passing. They stand like tall pillars, roofing the forest with a lattice of branches. I peer upwards seeing the sapphire sky, fragmented like a stained glass window by leafless branches. Such a beautiful, calm place. A rustle. A snap of twigs. A twitch of a damp nose. Two shining black eyes stare at me mournfully. A doe. With the caution of one hunted she gracefully steps out of the undergrowth. Nearer, nearer. She drinks quickly and then at the caw of a crow she is gone. Invisible once more, like a ghost.

I meander on, slower now, as the trees fall back to reveal a patchwork of fields, scattered with toy houses. I bask in the warm kiss of the afternoon sun, relaxing and simply enjoying life. Two

cyclists glide along a winding weather beaten track. I watch them as they laugh-two bright sparks of happiness. There is a fulfillment in watching others. So much to see. A few minutes later they halt, smiling and gazing back at me as if we have some secret, some mutual understanding of the world. And then they're off, whooping with glee.

As I reach a small town, I slow to watch. People rushing to and fro, cars glinting with a sharp light, dogs barking and children laughing and lights and fumes and horns all busy, busy, busy. Why? Do they enjoy it? People get so caught up in the wave of life that they forget to stop. And breathe. And look. There is so much to appreciate in this world, so much to see, and yet they miss it all, living such busy lives.

Long shadows begin to form as the sun descends. It's like an embarrassed child, blushing deep red and sneaking away... A lone silhouette of a heron flies overhead, its huge wings beating a steady rhythm.

It's dark as I enter the city; great buildings looming up out of the gloom, millions of eyes glowing like fire. Lights reflect in great paths, sparkling and shimmering in the inky blackness. Near the old warehouses a black mud reigns. I see three figures- children afloat on a raft, clinging together in fear.

Suddenly it's darker than the night and I glance up to see the great black arc of a bridge sweep over me. Then as soon as it comes, it is gone and the stars return, scattered thinly as if trying to avoid the moonlight. The moon itself is a ghostly galleon, tossed upon the cloudy seas. Serene and beautiful.

I relax, feeling the cold night air around me and drift almost aimlessly towards a greater darkness. On... And on...

Suddenly, a line of fire appears on the horizon, beckoning me ever closer. A cacophony of piercing shrieks echo around the silken sky as seagulls swoop and dive towards me, I feel so...tired. Pale light reaches out towards me as the sun, a hazy golden eye, peers almost cautiously over the horizon. I have travelled so far, seen so many things. I drift peacefully towards the light, the world; the noise and bustle and lights all fading into oblivion, the taste of salt filling my mouth.

Tired. So tired. With a sigh, I slip softly into eternity; merge into everything.

I am endless.

The Journey

By

Charlie Booth

Hexham Middle School

Fred's alarm clock peeped impatiently. The boy opened his eyes very slowly. It was Friday morning and school. It was still dark outside. It was always harder to get up on Winter mornings. It was nearly Halloween and the day was grey and cold. Fred looked around his room and got out of bed. He pulled the quilt straight and neatened it. He liked it when things were neat and tidy. Walking over to his desk, he scanned his comic shelf. He enjoyed reading comics and they fed his imagination. Battles, baddies, good versus evil. He thought his real life was safe and easy, but his comics gave him excitement. He had more DC comics than Marvel because he liked the artwork more. His packs of game cards were on his bedside table. He could kill monsters and ghosts without even going out of his bedroom. He could journey in his imagination to other worlds and be brave and heroic. In real life, he wasn't either of those things. He put on his school uniform and picked up his school ruck sack. His best (and only) friend Cameron had promised to come over after school to play with him. Fred carefully organised his 'Magic, The Gathering' gaming cards into a neat pile ready for his evening with Cameron. He noticed that the very top card was a poltergeist and shivered. Even though he loved playing the game, it frightened him quite a lot. The idea that there might be monsters in real life terrified him.

He hurried downstairs and into the kitchen where his mum had made him toast. There was a rap at the door and Cameron walked into the kitchen. Snatching up his toast, Fred called "bye" to his mum and putting on his coat, hat and gloves, he went outside into the cold winter morning with Cameron. If anyone saw the two boys, they would wonder why they were friends. They were totally opposite to each other. Fred was always neat and tidy, but small for his age. Although he was 14, the other kids at school towered over him and thought he was timid and a bit strange. Cameron was tall, athletic and very scruffy. A typical teenager. He wore his cap backwards and always looked miserable. Fred liked school, but Cameron hated it. "Are you still coming over tonight" Fred asked. "Yeh, sure" said Cameron exhaustedly. They walked side by side to school along the usual route on a journey they almost every day, so they could stop at the corner shop for sweets.

The bell sounded for the end of school and Cameron breathed a sigh of relief. "great", he thought, "A whole weekend of gaming coming up", he said to Fred. Hurrying back to Fred's house, it was going dark already. It would soon be night time and although he didn't know why, a shiver went up Fred's spine. They talked about how they were going to defeat the monsters and demons from the comfort and safety of Fred's bedroom. They didn't even have to leave Fred's house to be heroes and adventurers. They could go on a quest in their heads. Opening Fred's front door they kicked off their shoes and threw down their school bags. After raiding the fridge for snacks and a drink, Fred ran upstairs to pick up his 'Magic, The Gathering' cards. He thought it was a bit strange, but the poltergeist card that had been on top of the pack that morning had gone. Back at the kitchen table, Cameron pulled his scruffy pack from his pocket. As they set out their cards, Fred couldn't see the poltergeist card in his pack anywhere. That was weird. The game commenced and Fred travelled to a world of monsters, ghosts, demons and entities. He was leading a quest, journeying to find an object to save the world. In his mind he was like a medieval knight battling evil and terror.

Suddenly, Fred caught a movement out of the corner of his eye. It was a smoky flash just behind Cameron's head. "Did you see that" he asked his friend. "What?" Cameron said. "Oh nothing. I just thought I saw something. It must be the game getting to me". "Yeh", said Cameron. "If this game

was real, I would be the one saving you all the time from something scary". Just then there was another smoky flash in the corner of the room and this time Cameron saw it too. Suddenly there was an impatient hammering on the back door. Both boys stared at each other in wide-eyed terror. "What's going on" stammered Cameron. Fred slowly got out of his seat and crept towards the back door.. The banging had stopped, but his heart beat rapidly. He noticed his missing poltergeist card on the kitchen floor just in front of the door. Cameron hung back terrified, while Fred put his shaking hand on the door knob. He turned it slowly and opened the door just a tiny bit. Since he was little, Fred had relied on Cameron to look after him. Cameron was the strong, brave one, not him.

Through the crack in the door, Fred peered out into the darkness. It was silent out there. He whispered to Cameron to look out with him. In the dark night, they saw a strange sight. It looked a bit like an airport runway. Little flames lit the way along the path to the garden gate and turned along the road. Fred started to go out to follow, now on a real life quest. Cameron shouted "No, don't go out there, you don't know what might be out there". "Don't you see, Cameron, it's a sign that we would go on a journey, a quest of our own. Don't you want to find out what might be out there. Go and get torches, coats and shoes"? Reluctantly, Cameron crept out and followed Fred along the path.

There was no one about as they moved through the streets of the town. They followed the smoky flames that lit a pathway. It was very eerie, but Fred felt like he should follow the path. The boys turned into a road which they had never seen before. Fred wondered why they had never noticed the road or the old, abandoned mansion that sat at the end of the road before. The windows were dark and broken. The garden was overgrown and the paint was peeling. Fred marched straight up the path, following the tiny flames. There was a strange wispy mist at the door that looked a bit like a figure. Cameron tried to stay close behind Fred. It wasn't a journey he wanted to be on.

Fred felt he needed to carry on the quest and slowly opened the front door of the big., old house. He pulled his torch out of his coat pocket. As he pushed it open, it creaked and groaned. There was a small card on the floor. It was the same poltergeist card he kept seeing, but how could it be there. Next to it was a card showing a medieval knight on horseback fighting a demon. Fred picked it up. This was meant to be his quest, his journey. Cameron was terrified. Fred realised that he was the brave one, not Cameron.

Fred moved into the house and noticed that one of the ancient doors was slightly open. The rest of the house was falling down and very dark, but this room was newly painted black and frighteningly silent. The room was empty except for a TV in the middle of the room. It suddenly turned on and crackled. Fred reached out to touch the screen, but Cameron pulled him back. But it was too late, Fred's fingers touched something warm and scaly coming out of the screen. He instantly let out a scream and froze. He realised he was touching the hand of a demon. He had only ever seen it on his game cards. He turned to Cameron as he was pulled through the screen on a journey into a terrifying magic world. "Ha, ha, I won the game Cameron because I was the one prepared to go on the journey". Something touched his shoulder. It was shaking him. He felt himself flying through space.

With a start Fred opened his eyes, to see Cameron standing over him. He was sitting at the kitchen table, holding 3 cards. The poltergeist, the knight and the demon. "How can you fall asleep while you are playing 'Magic. The Gathering'" Cameron laughed. "Still you did win the game". "Fancy another quest before I have to go home". Fred just smiled "It was a very interesting game, but I think I've had enough questing for one night". "Maybe tomorrow" he said.

The Journey
By
Megan White
Hexham Middle School

Before

Ellie squealed in excitement as I spun her around, her arms almost popping out of their sockets. Mum and Dad were out at some school function and I was left to babysit.

"Again, Jack, again!" Ellie screamed. When Mum and Dad were around Ellie would be quiet and shy, just listening. But when they left for functions and parties and I was chief babysitter she would burst with words and fits of giggles.

Ellie acted younger than she was, but only to escape her burdens. She was highly intelligent; the school was very keen on having the right learning environments and challenges for pupils, even at her age. Ellie was only 9 but was already being pushed to the limit by her teachers. I knew she didn't like it, and because she didn't talk around Mum and Dad for fear of being yelled at, I would offer to babysit.

Mum and Dad were controlling. Ellie was intelligent, but they forced her to go to extra maths tutoring and writing workshops, science clubs and German lessons because they'd always wanted a super smart child. I was not that child. I was the disappointing child who'd much rather sketch or paint than be in controlled testing conditions with an hour-and-a-half on the clock.

Despite the pressure and disappointment Ellie and I both felt, we loved life before the fire.

After

I stormed up the stairs of my aunt's house but couldn't go any further as I was ensnared in leathery purple vines escaping from the white fluffy carpet of the staircase. "*Push through with all your might. Get past, Jack, get past*" It was Ellie's voice in my head. Ever since the fire she'd been talking to me, helping me. I looked up. Ellie was there, her arm outstretched, beckoning me to grasp it. I reached forward and grabbed for her hand, but instead my hand clasped thin air.

I knew Ellie wasn't there, I knew she was gone, I knew she was dead, but I wanted to believe that she was still here. *No!* I screamed in my head, *she's not alive because you killed her, it's all your fault, it's all your fault!* She was in my care and she died. I killed her. I killed my own sister.

The vines holding me captive released me and with them Ellie disappeared. I ran up the stairs and into my cousin's room, slamming the door behind me. I had been told to make myself at home, but how could I when my real home was burnt to the ground with my little sister inside it?

Now

I don't know where I'm going or what I'm doing, just that Ellie will guide me. I glance upwards and see her constantly moving forward. A master of the unknown terrain, Ellie bats the alien-like plants and creatures away as if they're harmless animals, not terrifying carnivorous beasts all trying to get a chunk out of me as if I'm a rare delicacy. One of the snake-like creatures opens its mouth, row upon row of blood-covered teeth dripping with saliva. I ready myself for the worst and just as I think it's the end Ellie grabs the creature by the body and twists it until it lies limp and lifeless.

We carry on through the night, always moving forward, never looking back. What I see both astounds and disturbs me, for the beauty of the land is immense, but the blood-thirsty beasts that lurk in the shadows are far from lovely.

Huge psychedelic tree towers above me with creatures peering out of windows larger and stranger than any I've seen before. The ground is ragged and unkempt with decapitated corpses littering the path. A dense forest full of strange plants and animals, but unlike most enchanted woods, these aren't friendly and around every corner is another hungry creature.

As we run Ellie motivates me. *"You can do this,"* she says. *"just a few more steps,"* and *"Fear just makes the creatures hungrier."*

"All of a sudden we stop. Ellie turns to speak to me. *"You've made it. Now, for the final part of this you have to go in there,"* she points at one of the many trees in the forest, *"and go down into the earth. I'll be with you, always, but you must make the decisions yourself"* There is something slightly menacing in her lyrical voice but I ignore it, the smile on her face overpowering the chilling tone. *"I'll be right behind you. You must lead the way."* She points ahead and I slowly move forward. *"Faster!"* she screams, *"we don't have much time."* I lurch forward and before I know it I am in the tree.

Ellie is behind me as I descend further and further until I see a dried-up river. The bed is deep and the bank a steep incline.

I jump down to escape the ravenous creatures eyeing me up as if I could be dinner. As I jump they start shrieking in a strange language. They reach down trying to grab me and I run along the riverbed, hoping to escape.

As I'm running I hear a deep rumbling. I look up but see nothing. Then suddenly a huge wolf appears, running toward me on the riverbed. Its iridescent eyes glister. I am transfixed. I know it won't stop. I can't go back and I can't go forward so I stand there rooted to the spot, staring at the wolf.

Ellie is behind. I expect her to whisk me away but all she does is whisper four simple words in my ear: *"It was an accident"*

The veil is lifted. Ellie is gone. The creatures are people trying to save me. I am in a train station. It's not a wolf coming towards me at full speed, it's a train. As it flies towards me and rips me to pieces I know that I didn't kill Ellie. It wasn't my fault. It was an accident.