

ASLS/Robert Burns World Federation Schools Writing Competition Winners October 2011

Game Over

First Prize: Charles Hordern, Lomond School, Helensburgh

It was just another Saturday afternoon at 9 Graham Road. Nothing odd or strange was happening, and certainly nothing to indicate the events to come. The calm before the storm. My dad was asleep, and who could blame him? I don't think that there was a minute of this week that he hadn't spent working. He said he'd need all the strength he could get in order not to explode when he went to tea with Auntie Meg. Mum was fly-mowing the back lawn. Well, when I say lawn, I actually mean a few blades of grass in a square of land smaller than Scotland's chance of winning the six nations. I was sitting on our front step, waiting. At the time I thought I was waiting for the new *Assassin's Creed* game for my laptop.

My parents had no idea that I had ordered the game. Endless "they have ratings for a reason" and "I don't care what Daniel's mum says, I'm your mother, and I say you can't". And that's why I was waiting there. It had been about half an hour before the delivery van hummed into view and pulled up beside our house. The man got out of the van and as I got up to greet him, he walked across the street and knocked on Number Six's door, just as another van pulled up on the other side of the street. An almost identical man got out, collected a parcel from his van, walked over to my house and asked me to sign for it. I eagerly obliged and rushed upstairs to my room, took out my penknife and opened the box. As soon as I could, I slotted the disc into the drive in my computer and opened what I thought was "Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood". At the time I thought the TOP SECRET message on the packaging was just for effect, but I was about to learn a very different truth.

As you might expect, it came as a surprise to me that the disc was actually a top-secret decoding program. Unfortunately, I didn't have MI5's phone number, but I thought they would find out about their mistake, and sooner or later they would come to collect the CD and everything would be settled in a calm, on-threatening manner . . .

Meanwhile, just across the street, the MI5 agent, codename CLASSIFIED (*as if* I didn't sign the Official Secrets Act) had just taken delivery of the latest video game in the *Assassin's Creed* trilogy. And he was not pleased. Not that he was normally pleased, but now he was feeling especially displeased. . He threw the disc into the paper bin (he wasn't one for recycling either) and stormed out of the house in the direction of the nearest secure phone line. Obviously, he had no idea he was being watched.

The man in the nearby Merc worked for a top-secret terrorist organisation and, ironically, seemed like an altogether more reasonable person at a glance. He knew all about the secret identity of his target, and the decoder he had received. Breaking into an MI5 agent's house should be very difficult for a terrorist, but the house's occupant had left the house in such a hurry that he'd barely remembered to lock the front door. Hardly a minute had passed before a member of the world's most dangerous organisation was trying to find the nation's most important computer disc. Another minute passed before he found it. "Intriguing disguise," he thought to himself as he slunk out of the house. Of course he hadn't found the real disc, or even a replica. I had the real one, as he was about to find out.

My parents had just left for Auntie Meg's when I heard a knock on the door. I assumed it was a man from British Intelligence (a term I have always found a little ironic), come to collect the misplaced CD. Well you would do if the man had said, "British Intelligence, come to collect the misplaced CD". I let him in, completely oblivious to the fact that he was in fact a member of the largest (and frankly scariest) terrorist organisation in the world. "I'll get the disc," I told him as I went back upstairs to fetch the disk. I think it was pure luck that the local MI5 agent burst through the door, and bad luck that he didn't choose something else to shoot ... ■

Second Prize: James Scott, Viewforth High School, Kirkcaldy

The Scots Piper

The story you are about to read is similar to the story “The Pied Piper”.

Once upon a time, a small village in the Scottish highlands called Auchtermuchty had a terrible plague of the diseased, but tasty breed of haggis. Haggis are good to eat on Burns Night and on St Andrews Day but they carry a deadly disease that makes people talk in a series of words that only people who are infected can understand. Words like tatty bogle (scarecrow) and byoord (table) are a few of the words used. The disease also causes a change of colour in the victim’s hair turning it a bright orange known as ginger. After many years the people of Auchtermuchty decided that they had had enough. They must try to put a stop to this contagious disease.

They had three options: one, lock up all victims and put them in quarantine; two, move out and sell their homes to the haggis; or three, get a haggis exterminator!

The people of Auchtermuchty wisely chose option three. The following morning, the head of the village council travelled to the city of Edinburgh and put adverts in all the major papers saying,

**Haggis Exterminator Wanted
£1000 for extermination
of all Haggis**

Now when you put an advert in a paper saying “Haggis Exterminator” you really expect a handsome, well-built guy, in a hazmat suit, with an extendible claw stick with an electric shocker on the end. Instead, what they got was a roughly shaven “ginge” (clearly already a victim of the disease) wearing a balmoral.

What’s more, instead of being armed with a claw shocker, he was armed with a bagpipe. He marched up to the village hall in his tartan kilt and walked right into the office of

the head of the village council and slammed the cut-out advert on the desk.

The councillor looked up casually and smiled.

“You start ASAP.”

From the outside this was a sweet little village, with thatched cottages, a local bakery, butchers and green-grocers and an ancient post office run by the community. However an evil mastermind lurked within.

As I said it was a village council, but I didn’t say it was a good one.

This £1000 offer was indeed worth £1000, but, it was £1000 worth of haggis!

It’s a plot, a scam, a scandal and it would all be over before the piper knew it. The print on the advert was microscopic, therefore invisible to the naked eye. What the council didn’t foresee were the forthcoming events.

The next morning, at the break of dawn, the piper set out into the town. He walked through the town right to the signboard saying

**Welcome to
Auchtermuchty**

He turned on his heel and blew into his bagpipe. A strange and magical tune then chorused throughout the village. Every one stopped what they were doing and listened. The haggis emerged from their burrows and listened, but this was probably the haggis species’ worst mistake ever (even worse than not hibernating on Burns Night). The tune instantly put them in a trance. They danced along the road behind the piper. This dance is known as the “Highland Fling”. The piper continued through the village with his hypnotised followers growing by the second. By the time he reached the signboard saying

**Thank You for Visiting
Auchtermuchty**

there was a crowd of haggis with eyes like pinpricks and arms weighed

down by their sides. The head of the council then came out. “Where’s my pay?” asked the piper.

“Standing right in front of you,” replied the councillor.

“The haggis?” said the piper, “I don’t even like the stuff.”

“Well you obviously didn’t read the microscopic print.”

“You will pay for this!” said the piper and with one blow of his bagpipe the haggis were released from their trance. The piper then continued to play on his bagpipe. Suddenly, bottles of whiskey started to wobble out of the shops. “No!” screamed the villagers as their precious whiskey was drawn away from the village. The haggis suddenly swarmed round the people. The disease infected the village within hours and by the end of the month Scotland was a land of crazy ginger people. Over time the disease spread far and wide across the globe. However, people became more accepting of it and its symptoms were regarded as simply a type of personality. People who are born in Scotland have this personality. They are known as Scots. ■



Left to right: John Hodgart (ASLS), Liz Niven, James Scott, Charles Hordern, Hannah Mackenzie Wood, Bob Stewart (Vice-President, Robert Burns World Federation)

Third Prize: Hannah Mackenzie Wood, Dumbarton Academy

Isle

Isle! Git yersel doon here right noo!” cried a muscular woman, standing in the doorway of a ramshackle but and ben. An angry expression contorted her face as her yell rang round the glen. The woman’s hair was tied in a tight bun, exaggerating the wrinkles engraved into her forehead and ruffling the tartan shawl that slouched over her washed-out, grey dress she barked again: “Isle! Ye wee scallywag, am going tae skelp ye one, if ye dun git doon here richt noo!”

The sun slipped further into the glen, coating the brae in a golden glow as a bitter wind nipped the long strands of grass. Suddenly a blurred figure appeared at the top of the hill. The small silhouette came racing down the brae, her figure in mucky, black clothes with her tangled brown hair catching violently in the wind as she ran. Scowling, Senga hobbled to meet the minging wean just along the roadie. Clipping the lass around the ear, Senga stared at her daughter.

“Whit have ye been doing! Ye look like someone has harled ye throu a buss back-rans! Ye wee scallywag, I have a richt mind to skelp ye ane!”

Isle looked at her feet, either trying to bury her head in shame or more likely, trying to hide her even

dirtier face. Her mother tugged at her dirty sleeves and ripped fabric of her ootrig.

“Come awa,” Isle’s mother said in a long, drawn out sigh. Once inside Senga asked with a raised eyebrow, “Sae, are ye going tae tell me whit happened?”

Isle turned to look at her mother. “Weel ... Jimmy taunted me, ‘Isle! Bet ye can’t kep us!’” and pulled at ma hair, fair vexing me.

“Haud yer tongue Jimmy Jefferson! I could kep ye easy, And bog off!” I replied, shoohing him away.

“Alright then,” he smirked, “Three, two, one, GO!” Suddenly we were off like two bullets racing through the mede. I was gaining on Jimmy and I had a grin from ear to ear for Jimmy wasn’t exactly a skelf and he puffed and panted like a tired train. Just ahead was a wire fence. Jimmy struggled to scramble over it, but I was feeling more than a little confident, and wi’ one daring leap I flew through the air. A sudden jerk brocht me swinging back with a forceful pull. Ma breeks had caught on a piece of wire that had come loose, and I was dangling fae the fence, flailing ma airms about trying to loosen mysel.

“Stop laching like a egit and help me doon!” I shouted to Jimmy but

he couldnae dae onything cos tears wir streamin’ doon his face and I wis left hinging there, swinging back and forth.

“‘JIMMY!’ I screamed, ma face red wi anger and I wis sair affronted.

“Alrecht, keep yer hair oan,” Jimmy replied. He tried pulling at ma ootrig but couldnae release me fae the fence. Suddenly there was a horrible ripping sound, and I fell to the ground right into a great muddy puddle. Jimmy erupted into laughter again, as I hurriedly organised ma ootrig tae hide the tear in ma breeks. ‘A’m gonnac kell ye, Jefferson!’ I screamed, launching marsel at Jimmy. As I pounced, we both lost our balance, and in one terrible second started rolling doon the ither side of the brae!

“We came down in a ball of rags and messy hair with the occasional glimpse of a horror-stricken, mucky face. At the bottom of the brae was a small pond, and with a sudden *SPLASH!* We both fell in.

“Then we looked at one another and cried, ‘My mammy’s go’n ter kill me!’”

Isle finished, Senga was too busy laughing to listen to any more.

“Ach Isle,” Senga smiled, giving the lass a great, big hug. ■

Schools Writing Competition Winners October 2010

An Adventure at the Castle

First Prize: Megan MacDonald, Dumbarton Academy

Standing in the sweetie shop giving Mr Broon the money for his mixture, Bobby called to his pals, ‘Haw, I’m bored oot ma nut, mon let’s go doon the castle.’

‘Whit’s there doon eh castle?’ mocked Jimmy.

‘It’s closed fir the winter, so there’ll be naebody there tae tell us aff. We could just kick a baw about,’ said Rab.

The four boys set off on their journey to the castle. Tam, nine, trailing behind trying to keep up with his friends; Bobby, Jimmy and Rab, all aged ten, shouted to him, ‘Mon Tam, keep up.’

Once they reached the castle, Rab started showing off his new football to the rest of th boys. ‘Ma granda gave it tae me fir ma birthday last week.’

‘Aww naw. It’s ma maw’s birthday the day and I didnae get her anything. Ma dad’s gonnae be well annoyed wi me the night,’ Tam complained.

‘Just say ye lost it or somethi ...’ Rab started. ‘NOOO!’

‘Whit is it, Rab?’ shouted Bobby.

‘Ma baw, it’s gone through the gates,’ he said. ‘Wait a minute, why are the gates open anyway?’

‘I dunno, but if we want tae get your baw back the we need to go in,’ Jimmy said.

‘Tam, since it wis you who kicked the baw intae the castle, you keep a look oot and make sure the gates don’t shut behind us,’ Bobby said.

‘Eh ... Awright,’ Tam said shakily.

The three boys crept into the castle, trying their hardest to tiptoe and not make a sound. ‘Tam, make sure that door doesnae sh ...’ Rab started.

BANG!

The boys slowly turned their heads round simultaneously to look at Tam, who was standing there with

a sorry little puppydog expression on his face. Jimmy sighed. ‘Tam, ye had one job, one job tae dae and you couldnae even manage that.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Tam stammered, trying to talk over the tears he was choking back, ‘I just couldnae stay oot there masel, it wis scary. You try standin oot there yersel, it’s hard even for a big boy like me.’

‘Never mind, let’s not be too harsh on him. He’s only nine,’ said Bobby, smirking.

‘And you’re only ten. That’s only one year older, so shut it,’ said Tam.

‘Look, it doesnae matter, all that matters is we’re stuck in here overnight, so we may as well huv some fun,’ Rab said, pointing to the kilts. ‘Let’s play sodjers.’

‘Aye, Ah bagsy the blue kilt!’ exclaimed Bobby.

As the boys were playing soldiers the night became dark quickly, and everyone started to get hungry and scared.

‘See, cos it’s ma mummie’s birthday the day, we were gonnae huv a treat fir supper. A chippie, mmm. Ah can tast the vinegar on the chips,’ said Tam.

‘Aye, and the batter on the fish!’ Jimmy joined in.

‘Eh ... Ah hate tae spoil the fun, but can anyone else hear that?’ asked Rab.

‘You hear it too? Ah thought it wis just me,’ answered Bobby.

The boys kept hearing muffled voices and creepy noises, so they decided enough was enough.

‘Tam, you were the one who got us locked in here, gimme yer vest. Rab, dae you still have that torch you found?’

‘Aye, why?’ Rab said, giving Jimmy the torch.

‘If I shine the torch ontae the vest somdae’ll see it and come and get us,

cos the polis’ll be oot looking fir us and oor mummies will be worried sick,’ answered Jimmy.

Sure enough when the boys shone the torch and waved the vest out the window, the police saw them and came rushing over. When they arrived and freed the boys, each one of them ran straight into their mum’s arms.

‘Mummie I’m sorry, I missed ye so much and I never got ye a birthday present, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,’ Tam said, slurring his words over the tears that were now running down his neck.

‘Son, that’s awright, having you here alive and well is the best birthday present anyone could want,’ Tam’s mum Jessie said.

‘By the way,’ Jimmy said, ‘there’s a ghost behind that big door hing.’

‘I’m sure there’s no, but if it’ll put your mind at ease I’ll open it,’ said the policeman.

As he unlocked the door and peered into the room, four eyes glittered in the darkness, and the policeman nearly jumped out of his skin. Behind the door were two men, robbers to be precise, carrying two sackloads each of jewels. Right there and then the men were arrested and when the policeman came back over to talk to the boys he game them each a small jewel.

‘This jewel is to congratulate you four boys. You all got yourselves in a bit of a pickle tonight, but you also managed to help us catch the thieves who have been stealing jewels and money for weeks. Well done, my sons.’

‘Mummie, I want you tae have this jewel. As a late birthday present,’ said Tam.

‘Aw Tam. Thank you,’ said Jessie.

And with that all the boys and their mummies went home to a nice fish supper and a can of Irn Bru. ■

MacNonnik

Scond Prize: Rozlyn Little, Dumbarton Academy

Want a grape?’ asked Kayleigh.

‘Och aye please, but don’t lit th’ Nonnik see ye,’ replied Eilidh. The Nonnik – real name Mrs Mac Nonnik – was Kayleigh’s and Eilidh’s teacher. They thocht th’ Nonnik treated them unfairly by giving tay much homework wi wee notice. Silently the grape was passed on; however it wisnae wheesht enaw.

‘Kayleigh, Eilidh, put your sweets away reit noo,’ said Mrs Mac Nonnik. The burds turned away discreetly, shirdlen their smiles fre Mrs Mac Nonnik’s serious coupon. ‘Ah hae dates fur your diaries,’ said Mrs Mac Nonnik wi a cheery tone. A loud thunderous groan escaped the mooths of the unenthusiastic pupils.

‘Miss, that’s not fair! Ah hae a life!’ shouted Shug Butterscotch.

‘Tay bad, tay sad, Butterscotch,’ replied the Nonnik.

‘Ah cannae dae homework that’s due THAT early. Ma dad’s teachin me

about th’ fowk business. In fact, he’s takin me tae the workplace,’ shouted Edward Thistle. ‘That’s whaur Ah’m gonnaw work whn Ah lae skale.’

‘Whaur wood ’at be?’ asked Mrs Mac Nonnik wi sarcasm in er voice.

‘The Ginger Company doon th’ road. That’s whaur Ah’m gonnaw work, Ah’m learnin the sacred recipe fur ginger,’ said Edward, wi a proud swatch oan his coupon.

‘Ah am sae jealous,’ replied Mrs Mac Nonnik. ‘Just dae it!’ The class scuffed their sheen angrily as they gart their way oot ay class.

Next day the bairns walked intae class, shooders hunched.

‘Class, swatch at th’ books Ah hae given ye,’ said the Nonnik. ‘We’re reading *Th’ Haggis in th’ Tartan Pyjamas*. It’s a story of a haggis experiencin hardship an th’ difficulties ay bein different frae th’ ither haggises. Th’ haggis is marked by his distinctive tartan pyjamas which aw the ither haggises wear. These haggises

ur considered nae tae be haggises at aw. A story ay innocence in a warld ay ignorance, it is truly breathtaking.’

‘Na!’ shouted the class simultaneously. ‘Nae anither haggis novel. We’ve already reid *Haggis Goes Tae Paris*, *One Mair Haggis*, *Red Haggis Runnin* and *Mary Kate an Haggis in Rome*.’

Mrs Mac Nonnik droned on, the class half asleep. The bell rang. As the class ran oot Mrs Mac Nonnik shouted, ‘If ye don’t like this book ye’ll love th’ *Mary Kate an Haggis Tois Ay a Kin* book series that we’ll be reading next month.’

Kayleigh an Eilidh quickened their paces, desperat tae getting the France frea the haggis-novel-obsessed Mrs Mac Nonnik. The class disappeared, arm in arm, th’ thocht ay Mary Kate an Haggis quickly forgotten. ■

The Heroic Wee Jock

Third Prize, Amy Stenhouse, Dumbarton Academy

Come haur laddie!’ cried Big Jock, shootin efter Wee Jock, the black Scottish terrier. He hud looded eftir Wee Jock since he foond him as a pup, doon by the fast-flowing burn at the fit ay the ferm he owned. Wee Jock wis faithful, affectionate an fiercely defensive ay his maister. Whaur hud his name come frae? Big Jock chose wisely an named him eftir himself. It wis a funny sicht as the tois ay them cam doon the glen thegither. Big Jock a hulk ay a chiel wi hauns the size ay shovels an Wee Jock sae wee at times he disappeared behin rocks an the brammer purple heather at covered the hillside.

Big Jock wi an auld-fashioned smiddy, the best in the area. Fowk cam frae afar tae hae things gart an repaired. He main hae fixed thousands ay sheen ontae cuddies’ hooves. Wee Jock stopped in his tracks at the soond ay his maister’s boomin voice. The surroondin sheep wood be glad, as the wee terrier lood tae gang in amang them an chase them aroond. ‘Let’s gang Jock, back tae the ferm fur oor tatties an needs!’

When they arrived back at the fermhoose young Anne wis waitin fur them. She wis a bonnie wee lass, nine year auld, an Big Jock’s only niece. She wis the aipple ay his een. ‘Uncle Jock,

can Ah tak Wee Jock doon the glen tae the caber wi the auld rope swin?’

‘Not yit lassie, he’ll be wantin his tatties an needs first. Ye gang an check oan the hens, see if they’ve laid onie eggs.’

Annie went oot tae the yerd, skip-pin happily. Big Jock got the kettle oan an gart a cuppa. He cooked Wee Jock’s favourite dish, a heaped bowl ay porridge oats. He lit the open fire an gart a yummy piece wi cheese an pickles. He enjoyed his piece in the warmth ay the fire. When he finished his scran Wee Jock laid himself doon ower the big man’s feit an they baith fell asleep.

It seemed like oors later when Big Jock awoke wi a startle. *Och, Ah almost forgot ... where's wee Annie awa tae?* he thought tae himself. The tois Jocks got tae their feit an scrambled oot intae the yerd.

'Annie! Annie!' Big Jock roared at the tap ay his voice, but tae nae avail. He stertit tae panic: 'Whit could hae happened tae Annie?'

Big Jock ran back intae the hoose an took a body ay Annie's baffies. He placed it in front ay Wee Jock an lit him hae a guid sniff. Hopin he'd pick up the scent, Wee Jock tok aff like a leopard, headin doon the glen. The big chiel only jist managed tae

keep up wi him, every noo an again losin sicht ay the flash ay black fur. Big Jock's heart wis beatin faster, dreadfu thochts flashin ben his min, thinking the warst: if only he hadnae fell asleep!

Suddenly he wis brocht tae his senses as Wee Jock began barkin sae lood it echoed athwart the glen. Ay coorse! The swin Annie said she wanted tae gang tae. Wee Jock wis the hero. He hud foond Annie, she wis haverin at the fit ay the caber. Tae his surprise she wis unconscious. She main hae faen aff the rope an banged her heid. Tear ay joy filled the big man's een as Annie cam

tae, cheers tae Wee Jock lickin the coupon aff her.

'Uncle Jock, Ah'm sae sorry – Ah shouldnae hae gan aloyn!'

'Wheesht lass!' the big chiel said softly as he scooped her up, cradling her in his huge erms. 'You're alricht an that's the main hin, but please dinnae come haur oan yer ain again, it's tae radge!'

Annie suin forgot about the accident but she niver went aff oan her ain again. She aye gart sure she hud Wee Jock, the heroic black terrier, by her side. ■

Teaching Scottish Literature in the USA

Andrew Hook

I recently taught a course in Scottish literature at an American university. Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, founded in 1769, is an Ivy League university. Hence its students are well-qualified, bright, and keen to do well. I began by asking them to write down why they'd chosen to take this course and what exactly they knew about Scotland. The answers were not particularly encouraging. One student wrote 'I know very little about Scotland', and admitting as much he or she might well have been speaking for the whole class. What they did know was sadly very much as one might have predicted. In this post-*Braveheart* world, William Wallace has acquired good name-recognition, and *Trainspotting* continues to reverberate. Otherwise there were references to Highland Games (one question asked was whether 'log-tossing' was as popular a sport as football or rugby), the clan system, kilts, whisky, haggis, and Burns' Night. One student knew of Charles Rennie Mackintosh while most were vaguely aware of a

history of conflict between Scotland and England. Confusion reigned over the precise nature of Scotland's political status. On the other hand, most of the questions raised which they hoped the course would address were perfectly intelligent. Were literary movements in Scotland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries similar to those occurring in England and Ireland? Was there a Scottish national literary movement comparable to that in Ireland? What is the contemporary dynamic in cultural relations between Scotland and England? Is postmodernism an influence on contemporary Scottish writers? How important is religion in modern Scottish writing? All good questions and ones which I hoped the novels I'd chosen for the course would allow us to discuss.

The choice of material for the course had inevitably been for me a major issue. The course title was Culture and Society in Modern Scottish Fiction. The class would meet twice a week for two hour seminars over a ten week term. I opted for a reading list of nine novels, each one

to be discussed over two seminars. For Dartmouth, 'modern' meant from 1900 to the present, so the question was which nine? Beginning in 1900 meant there was no problem over the first text: George Douglas Brown's anti-kailyard *The House With the Green Shutters* was a must. My students would be off to a good start having to recognise what a dire society and dreary culture Scotland had on offer at the end of the nineteenth century. I also knew where I wanted to end. And in between there were some inevitable choices: Gibbon's *Sunset Song* and Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, for example. But this was Dartmouth College in 2007 where Women and Gender Studies were big across the campus and in the English Department. Muriel Spark was great but she needed support. I thought long and hard, consulted colleagues, even read around quite widely. Jessie Kesson, Naomi Mitchison, Willa Muir, Violet Jacob, and especially Nan Shepherd were contenders, and among contemporaries there were Janice Galloway, A. L. Kennedy, and Candia

YouthLIT

Burns Federation/ASLS Schools Writing Competition:
Winners October 2007

Fine Tuning

1st Prize: Hannah Westwater, Queensferry High School

THE SUN WAS determined to blind Benz, tempting her to open her eyes, seductively telling her it would all be OK.

“BENZIN!” A stern voice sliced the air. Gritting her teeth, Benz slowly opened her eyes and turned around.

“Yes?”

“Quit muttering to yourself and get to work! These papers aren’t going to check themselves!”

Leader Lexmar’s slim frame played host to an electric-blue suit. He walked with the air of someone with power, someone in control, patrolling the rows of wooden booths which stretched as far as the eye could see. In each booth sat a teenager dressed in a shirt and three-quarter-length trousers of the same electric blue. All had bare feet.

Scowling, Benz swung round in her chair to face a stack of papers about a foot high. Each sheet bore the same inscription:

Behind the sun lies the darkness
which we do not wish to know;
the holy Fire brings our spirit
to roast its path below.
Go not to the space afar
for one shall lose track of time,
the Darkness’ soul is one of no
reason or rhyme.

Benz reached for the top of the pile. As her fingers closed around the highest sheet, she was filled with the customary sense of dread. After

checking for any mistakes she brought down the metal stamp with such force that a circular dent appeared on the right-hand corner of the sheet. Swearing, she looked with loathing at the red sun which had been stamped on it.

This was Benz’ life. She lived in a cave-like space underneath her booth. Her only belongings were a bed, a pen and notebook and her most prized possession – a radio. If any team-leader saw or heard it, it would be confiscated. This radio had proved a lifeline to Benz. It was her reason to wake up in the morning. The first time she’d flicked the power switch she had fallen in love; in love with the music it delivered; in love with the voice, the beat, the melodies. But it was the words which really inspired her. She knew that these words were written for her, to her. She knew they came from behind the sun, where the stars sparkled. The unseen stars spoke to her. They comforted her when the lack of signal meant she couldn’t hear the music.

Benz could barely remember her life before the booth, but she knew she hadn’t had the sun’s unbearable heat pressing down on every inch of her. It had been calm and cool.

Above, it was night. She was tired after her long day’s work but she could feel a sense of safety in the air. She sang quietly along with the radio. She could feel the air rushing to and from her lungs. She

didn’t care if she was overheard – she would be gone by morning. Tonight she would flee her prison. No more proof reading. No more longing for something more.

The atmosphere changed. The creaking she had assumed to be the wood cooling down evolved into footsteps and urgent whispers. They were moving closer and closer, the grim voices becoming clearer. Benz was silent, heart-pounding. For a heart-stopping moment, the voices seemed to linger over the trapdoor – a sickening stillness ensued. Benz was paralysed with fear.

A key turned in the lock and the trapdoor was thrown back. Three pairs of wild eyes met those of Benz.

“We heard voices and — oh, look what we have here,” Lexmar mocked. “A forbidden object? An unauthorised piece of machinery? I **am** sorry to spoil your fun, Benzin.” A cruel grin spread over his face.

Benz felt a tight grip close around her wrist. She was hoisted upwards, she saw Lexmar eagerly snatch the radio and throw it against the wall. She knew her heart was breaking into as many pieces as the shattered radio, whose components lay scattered across the floor.

“You’ll bring no good to your legion. You must be disposed of.”

She was being quickly lead away. Fingers were mercilessly crushing her wrists. A black cloud engulfed her. ■



2007 ASLS/Burns Federation Schools Writing Competition prizewinners. From left to right: Robyn Caldwell, Hannah Westwater and Leah MacKenzie

A Punishment

2nd Prize : Leah MacKenzie, Dumbarton Academy

HERE AH AM stuck in the detention room fir bein naughty. I've been given six o the belt and ma hauns are loupin. Now I'm supposed to be writin lines, but Ah'm no dain it, Ah'm writin something else. It wis Miss McLaughlin that pit me in here. Ma Da'll go ballistic when he finds oot. Ma Maw's deid, so ma Da gets easily upset. Don't think "Och ya poor wee soul." Its fine, Ah'm used tae it. Ma Maw died when Ah wis a wee bairn so Ah can hardly remember her, but

that disnae mean Ah dinna mind when people insult her. That's the reason Ah'm in here, let me explain.

Ye see, we were paintin pictures in art an Ah wis paintin ma Maw. I thought ma picture wis pretty good so I went tae pin it oan the board at the top o the stairs in the lobby, that's where a' the pretty pictures go. So I wis pinnin my picture on the board when this wee loon Rab comes up –

"Who's that?" he asked pointing to ma picture

"Ma Maw"

"Why are her lugs sae big?" Ye see a wee quine in ma class told me that some ladies wear things coad dangly earrins to show that they are rich and pretty, so I thought ma Maw would look pretty with some dangly earrins so Ah put them in ma picture. Awright, maybe Rab didnae know they were dangly earrins and well, ok, maybe the picture did make her lugs look big, but no need for that abuse.

"Her lugs were no big!" Ah shouted and shoved him doon the stairs. Then Mrs McLaughlin came out and saw Rab at the bottom of the

stairs with blood gushin oot his nose ontae the lobby flair. So that's why Ah'm in here. Ah mean, it wisnae ma fault. Disnae everyone that's shouted at fir nae gid reason shout back.

It's no the first time I've been in here. Like the time me and some of the loons had a race tae see who could eat the maist boilin sweetsies in one minute. Unfortunately for me the heidy came oot intae the playground at 36 seconds (Ah wis

timin) and shouted at us fir eatin tae many sweetsies before dinner time. But yet again, Ah shouted back and got hau'ed in here.

Then there wis the time Ah wis playin fitba. There wis this loon that wis real braw and naebody could get the ba aff him. So Ah thought Ah wid tackle him. Ah did this braw slide tackle, but unfortunately Ah wis covered in mud fae head tae toe in the process. So when I came back in

Mrs McLaughlin shouted at me, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Mrs McLaughlin says that Ah'm the most boisterous one in the school. Ah wisnae sure wither or no tae tak that as a compliment, though Ah'm pretty sure it wis an insult. She often says things like that tae me. Do you know whit she did tae me once?

"You know Jeanie; sometimes I swear you were meant to be a boy." Cheek! ■

Seven Trunks Tae The Rescue

3rd Prize: Robyn Caldwell, Garnock Academy

A wis runnin hame fae ma mate's hoose, in the poorin rain, A knew that A wis awready twa hoors late! When A ran doon the metal stairs A fell an scratched aw doon ma erm. Finally A got tae ma hoose. A tiptaed in through ma ha, "An whare huv you been?" Ma maw asked me.

"Ehh . . . Ye wulnae believe wit jist happened tae me!" A said, walking through the livingroom.

"Wit noo?" She said.

"Weel, eh, A wis walking hame, richt, an a big dug ran efter me!"

"A big dug?!" Ma maw said. She didnae leuk like she believed me!

"Eh . . . aye! It came oot o nae place, it did! It wis the size o hooses! An it chased me aw roon the place!" A ken a hud tae hink o sumhing fur hur tae believe me!

"An wis this 'big dug' broon wi red een?" Ma maw asked me.

"Aye!" Huv ye seen it afore, jumpin aboot sleverin oan folk, YUCK!" A said hoping that she wid be stupid enough tae say aye.

"Dinnae be daft! Course A've naw

seen it an A ken you hivnae either." She sounded ragin.

"But maw, A'm no feenished. A can prove it tae ye!" A said, A began tae swither.

"Oh, can ye noo? An how dae ye plan oan dain that?"

"Well, ken how A'm aw drookit . . . the dug slevered oan me! An aw these scratches, the dug attacked me!" Jist as A thocht a hud hur fooled . . .

"So, how did ye get awa without the thing squashin the hoose?"

"Ehmm . . . A'm gled ye asked, richt, A wis stul rinnin awa fae this big green dug . . ."

"Green? A thocht ye said it wis broon?" She interrupted me wae a big grin slapped oan hur face.

"Aye it wis, but it chynges colour . . . Onieweys, A wis rinnin fae . . ."

"A colour chyngin dug wae rid een the size o hooses?" She began tae laugh a wee bit.

"Dae ye mind! An as A began tae run oot o braith a big purple elephant type 'hing wae . . . three . . . no seven trunks . . . came oot o nae place, it did, an then they sterted fichtin, et first

the seven trunked hingy got the better o the colour changin dug, but then as A thocht A wis safe . . ."

"The dug birrled roon an bit the ither hing oan the bahookie!" She sterted tae get oan ma wick et this point, wae hur buttin in.

"Naw, actually mair dugs came oot an they aw ganged up oan this elephant hing."

"Really?!? Then wit happened?" Somehow A thocht she wis bein sarcy.

"Well, A ran doon tae Joke's Burn, an A fun a robot! A climbed inside it an sterted fichtin wae aw the ither dugs, an frichent them awa!" A said. A began tae swither even mair. Wit if she didnae buy it? That wid mean mair chores.

"Well, that was an amazing adventure! A'm sorry A didnae believe ye, but that ending . . . WOW! Richt, noo ye go an get yer jammies oan an A'll make supper."

A walked up the stairs wae a big grin oan ma face, "Cannae believe she believed me!" A said tae masel.

"Cannae believe she thocht A wis that stupid!" Ma maw said. ■