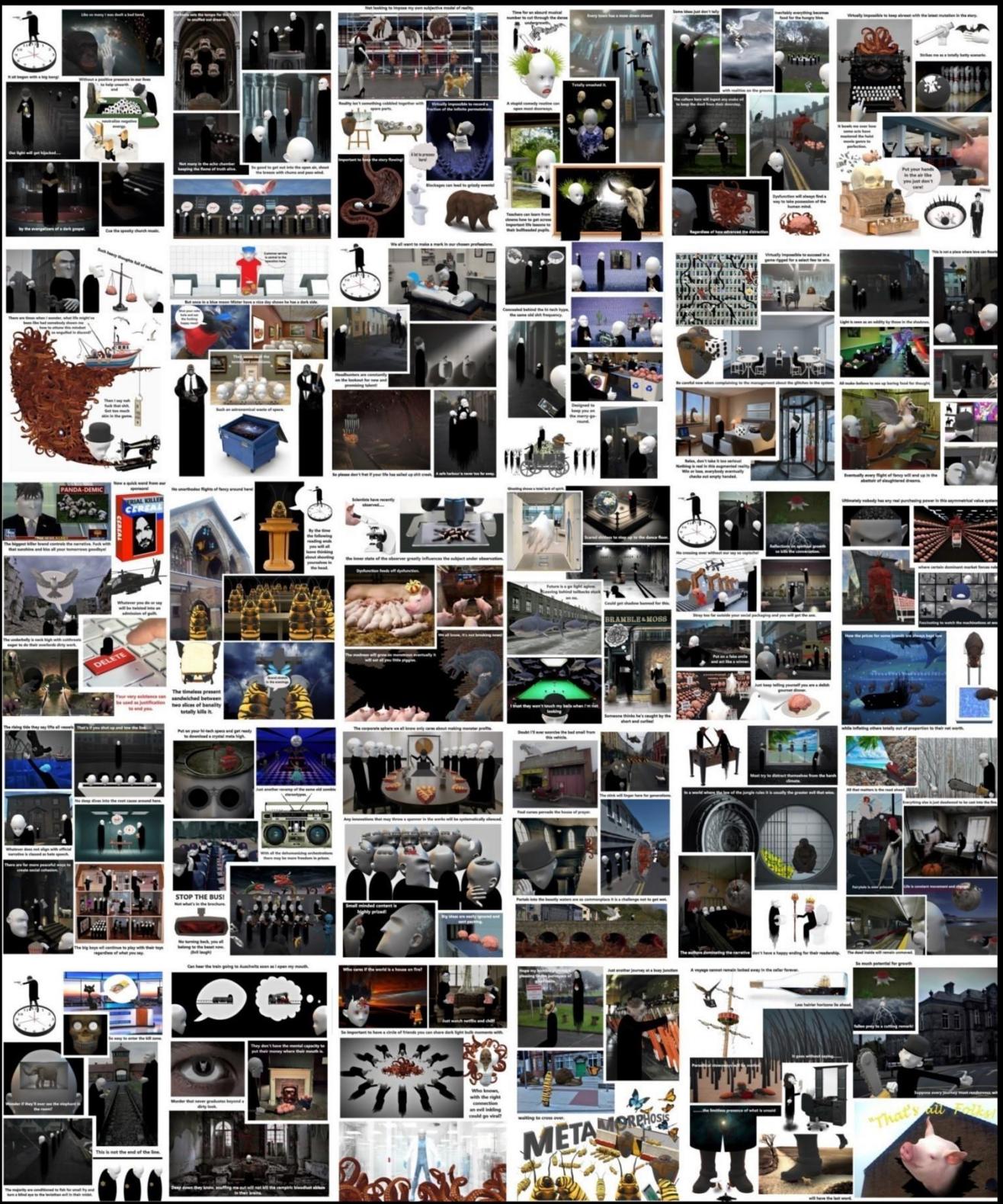


MISTER AM



Stíobhard Cristíona



The Lake Isle of Innisfree

By William Butler Yeats

**I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.**

**And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.**

**I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.**



CHAPTER ONE

The killer landed on the shore with his handgun drawn, scanning the desolate isle for any signs of life. Not so deserted to Con Carney haunted by the eery feeling he wasn't alone. Why Amir had chosen such a remote location for a weapons dump was beyond him? The killer understood the literary significance of the site alright; Con was not so far gone that he'd completely forsaken memories of WB Yeats from his schooldays. Perhaps it was the ghost of the dead poet watching him? That made him laugh heartily, the thought of a haughty monocled spirit scoping him out from the misty bardo between worlds. He knew it was strange for a serial killer to believe in an afterlife; Carney always liked the idea; he actually toyed with the concept of acting as a conduit from this world to the next. The sense of being observed continued to make him feel uneasy. He checked the bottles in his pocket; the cold had crept in since last he touched them on the other shore. Adding to his anxiety, the distant drone of a factory could be heard; its industrial heartbeat out of sync with the anatomy of a landscape hauntingly beautiful in its nighttime splendour. He was about to start digging when he spotted the creature on the outer reaches of the lamplight, its beady eyes glinting faintly like the glimmer from a distant star. The killer thought he was a very plump specimen, only a matter of time before the Chinese rendered it into chicken balls. Food was already consuming his thinking as he commenced with what he termed as the devils' spadework. He located the burial site without much bother beside a briary thornbush and the tree stump. He found the rocky soil in the second excavation significantly loosened, allowing him to fly through what he expected to be the most difficult part of the operation. The ghostly presence of daylight materialized around him as he stood over the freshly dug pit like a mourner at a graveside. He considered whether to perform a eulogy. After a hefty landmass of time, the killer managed to unearth a line.

“Early in the morn fresh after the kill.....” began the killer uneasily in a lifeless disjointed cadence. “A thick fog shrouded lough Gill.” Carney smirked triumphantly at the crow perched on the prow, its black form bellowing loudly like a foghorn. The killer supposed it was one of the crone's avian disciples, no doubt she was languishing somewhere on the opposite shore with her carriage. Carney could have killed her too had he encountered the old hag shadowing him along the getaway route. The crow kept quiet, refusing to budge from its post on the boat. Carney had almost forgotten it was there, busily discarding the blood splattered clothes along with the weaponry inside the pit. Only then when he was naked did the crow find its voice, cawing almost mockingly at the killer's exposed genitalia. Carney threw the shovel and pick at the cheeky critter, missing by a mile as he kept hollering fuck off bird. The crow answered back with a raucous caw, seemed to know on a rudimentary level it was pressing his buttons. By the time the pit was filled he was on the brink of exhuming what he interned. After firing stones at the pest from the beach proved useless, the killer became so inflamed he flung the oil lantern at the bird, nearly setting his craft alight. As he lit it again, he had a lightbulb moment. “You can be an eyewitness,” suggested the killer to the crow. “A signatory,” he added

wagging his manroot in exuberant anticipation of making his mark. The crowing ceased; even to a creature with relatively little intelligence this lunatic was a total birdbrain. "Tis my isle now," declared Carney signing his name with piss along the misty morning strand. A youngish man seldomly moved by literary flurries, poetry wasn't exactly his genre. Not a ripple of the laureate's voice graced the low tide of Carneys mind forever anchored by murderous thoughts. Yet the killer was imbued with a sense of buoyancy as he slipped into his new suit of clothes, ill-fitting as Satan reciting scripture. Boarding his craft Carney supposed he'd never again frequent the lake isle of Innisfree, not even in verse. Bards that floated his boat were wielders of a sadistic penmanship with a lust for scribing bloody sonnets on the vellum of human flesh. Rowing through the mist his mind drifted.

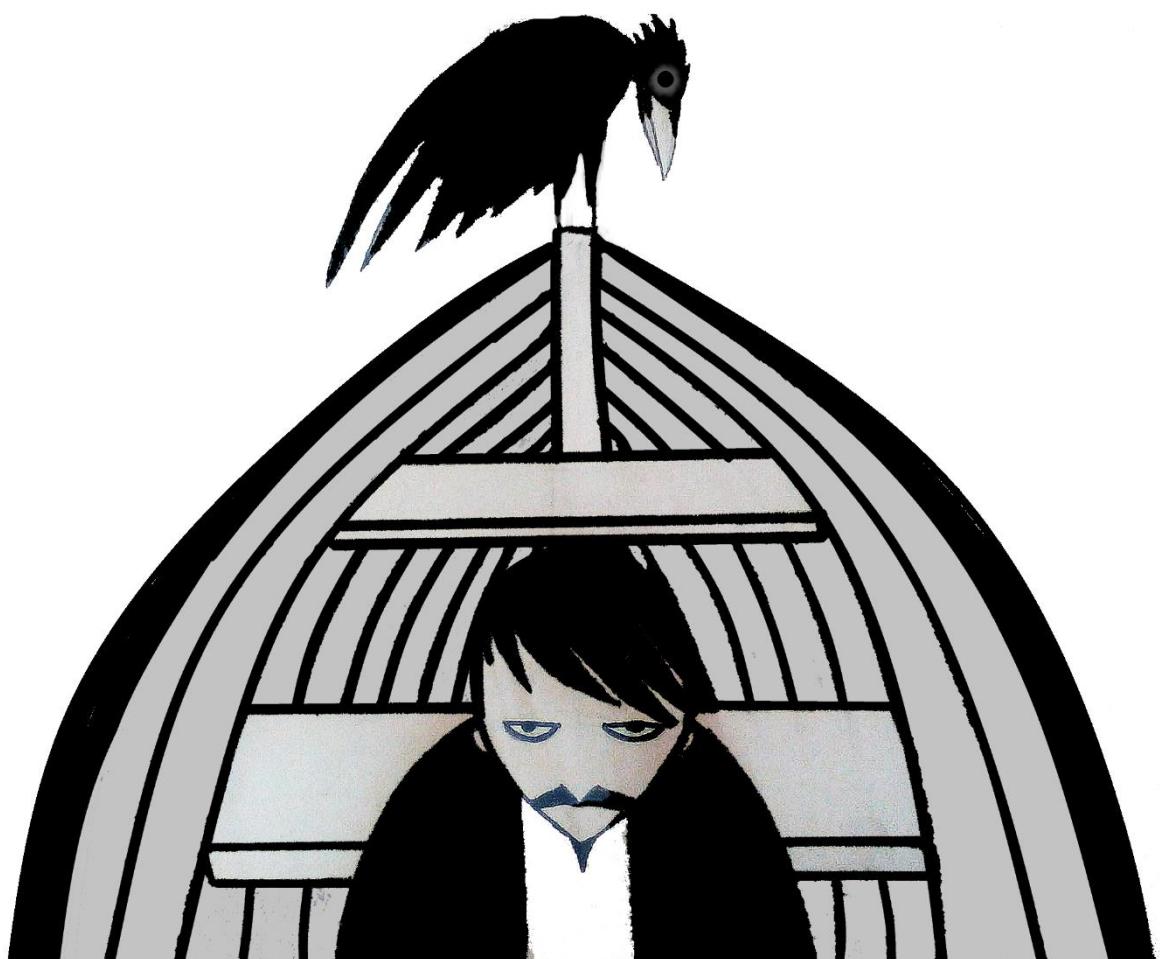
A memory from his childhood surfaced; Carney was with his mam fishing for a bargain in one of the many thrift shops around Sligo city centre. She was hovering over at the till, overcast as a thundercloud about to vent. Karen Carney especially back in her thirties looked like a lesbian, the type of hardcore lick-sister having served hard time in prison. The tight haircut didn't help. Con's father scrawny like himself trimmed her back and sides every fortnight with a sheep sheerer. He did juniors head every month convict style. The haircuts along with the gruff rural manner created the impression of escapees from an insane asylum. The insanity she was about to purchase emblazoned with a psychedelic sunny motif didn't appear to calm the mental tempest in MRS Carney. The clerk dizzied by the hallucinogenic pattern struggled to locate a price-tag on the frock. Con sensing time was scant returned to examining a volume on the shelf high above his head. A killers cycloptic eye printed on the spine peered back, almost inviting him to take a closer look. "C'mon Con," shouted his mother with her chubby country accent. "Hurry up and pick a buke." This was his fortnightly reward for menial services rendered on the farm. It was love at first sight for the fledgling killer who'd never grow up to be a farmer like his father. The macabre edition much like himself will not fit in well with the other genres on his bookshelf filled to the gills with nursery rhymes and fairy tales. With his mother huffing and puffing in the background, he desperately clawed at the book sandwiched between two cook books. Like trying to extract a canine from the jaw of a beast. A waif of a kid compared to other seven-year-olds, he struggled to free the volume from its place. Digging his nails into the leather to prize it out, the book eventually gave way to land on his head heavily with the force of a cement brick. Somewhat dazed he eyed the cover belly up on the floor pregnant with the visage of Ted Bundy smiling beneath the title printed in blood red; America's most evil serial killers. He smiled despite his mother at the till roaring savagely to hurry. The book was nearly half the size of the pasty-faced raven headed child. He hurried holding the book very close to his chest, nearly tripping over the step straddling the checkout. A terribly accident-prone kid was Con, his mother tutted snapping the book from his claw like clutches. The volunteer thinking it was a children's publication keyed in the price. Mother and son exited the thrift shop with much the same graceless movement that marked their arrival. MRS Carney colder than the arctic gale billowing outside refused to take her offspring's hungry hand as they headed for the bus-stop. Unbeknownst to the gruff country woman a serial killer's evil

glare peeping from the shopping bag held her sons wide eyed gaze twinkling with a glimmer of the same madness.

Rather watered-down viewing compared to the hardcore content flooding Carney's consciousness. Flashbacks of his early programming always gave way to what is best described as mental commercials, bombarding the killers brain with totally delusional bolstering of his evil brand. Carney was painfully aware of his position in an extremely competitive market ravenous for material brimming with evil energy. Already Carney was looking at last night's bloody product launch through a more palatable, filtered lens. "It's chow time!" uttered the killer to himself still hosting the ghastly event in his mind. His target audience got the message, a hybrid soundbite both animal and mechanical completely devoid of sentience. Carney hadn't much scope for nuance, there was so much detail he simply could not perceive. The subtle brushstrokes of wildlife awakening on the lake around him failed to make one impression. Carney didn't see the swan camouflaged against the pale haze shrouding the lake. The crow saw it though; the presence of royalty prompted the riffraff to take to the sky leaving the nutjob on his tod talking to himself. " Maybe one day they'll make a film about me," mused the evil fantasist rowing deeper into the fog, the sounds from the mainland serving as sonar. It lent him extra torque day-dreaming about how the nightmare visited on the community would look on the big screen. The misty morning blankness surrounding him acted as a perfect receptacle for his evil projections. Carney thought about the A listers likely to play him in his B-movie reveries. Nifty was the killer with the graphics programme on his computer, later he intended to catalogue the bloody escapade with digital pics he called Glyphs. His way of processing the madness. Apart from executing people, executing pics was his main outlet. That was something his father would have scorned him for, the creative streak and not the destructive streak which was kept well hidden. He was hit by another flashback; this time his father regaled in full battledress playing the bagpipes. As a child Carney hated seeing his father wearing a kilt, those milk bottles for legs always left him with a bitter aftertaste in his brain. A ghost now to Carney, the vapoury outline of his father's memory silhouetted on the shoreline of a purgatorial song world where he would never find solace. He tried to whistle in sync with the ear worm, his own discordant version of the Highland Cathedral a million miles from the original. He dumped the lantern and the digging equipment in a dense reedbed along the embankment, little did he know he'd be back looking for them in another week. He parked the boat where it was stolen earlier, mounting the stone steps careful not to slip again on the beard of moss.

Headlights from a delivery van cut through the fog, illuminating a religious statue placed on a rump of wasteland along the roadside. Carney stood still as a statue himself, just another sad hood ornament for a rundown neighbourhood going nowhere fast. Residents would gather later around the figure for prayer when eventually the news sunk in. The delivery driver reverentially blessed himself, neglecting to see the dark figure across the other side of the road proffering the evil middle finger. The beatific vision of the virgin shrouded in cloudy atmospherics did not induce in Carney the desire to say a Hail Mary. Sex and death were the only things in the killer's universe worthy of worship. He'd never fit in with a world where sacredness was reduced to a mediocre shrine along a roadside.

He checked the bottles in his pockets again just as a stick insect in office heels passed with her head buried in a device, enraptured by both the story on her newsfeed and the sirens in the distance. She didn't see the spectral vision of the killer smiling evilly to himself, watching her every move. To him the sound of police vehicles swarming towards the cathedral quarter was music to his ears. Carney had been a very busy killer bee of late to get his bloodcurdling opus thus far. He was so close to achieving his mission he could literally taste it. A rarity for him to savour sweet success in the hive of bitterness that was his head. It was only a matter of time before that hornet's nest buzzing with a Beelzebub hum, was bound to sting the community on the bum. The killer started walking casually along the riverside, just another worker bee obediently serving the hive. "Like bumbles to a bloom," he said stingly with waspish reporters very much in mind.





CHAPTER TWO

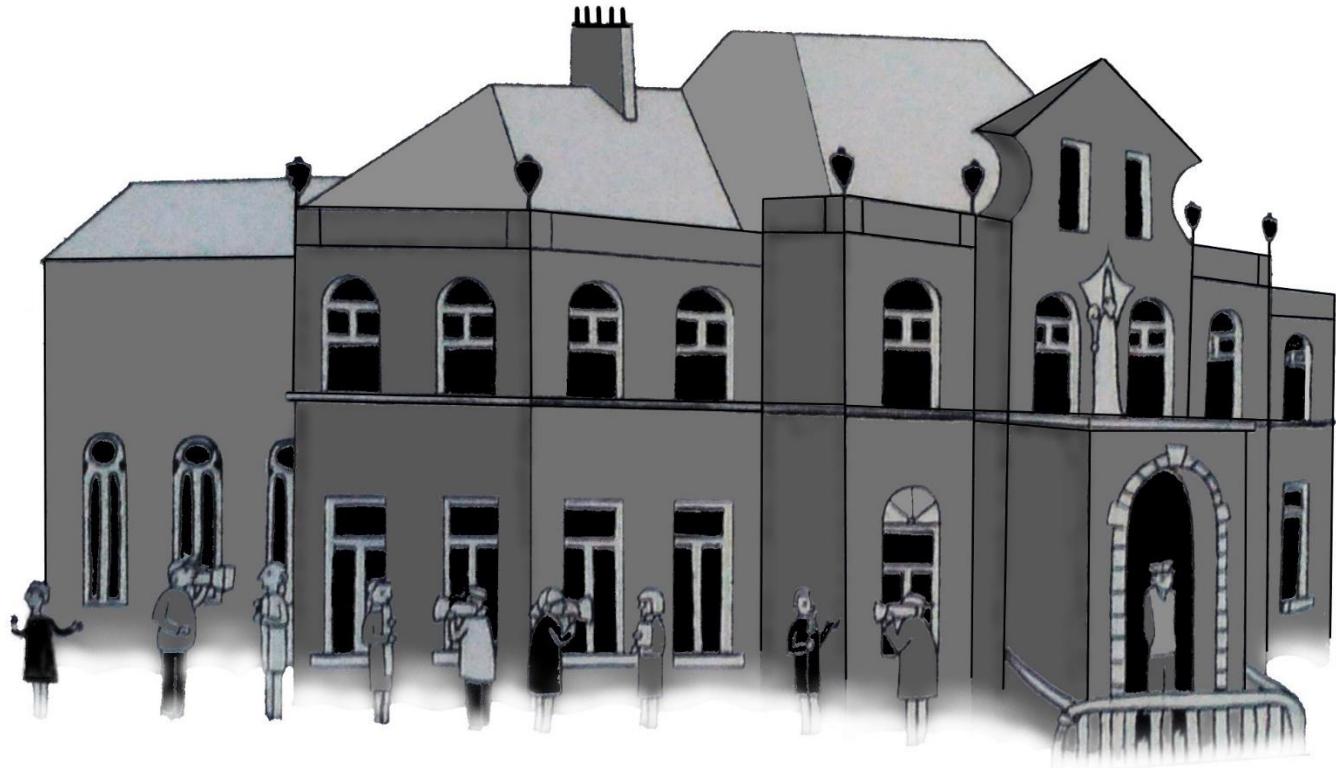
The media appeared out of nowhere it seemed like lost souls summoned to a séance, way before the top dogs in law enforcement picked up the scent. Newsbonds from all over the globe arrived on the scene with their tongues wagging in drooling anticipation of the awaiting blood-fest. The locals didn't exactly unfurl the traditional red carpeted welcome to outsiders asking the same questions they were asking themselves. The residents who reported hearing those horrific screams on the threshold of midnight refused to answer when reporters landed on their doorsteps. They scoffed at themselves later for ineptitude, they could have cashed in on a pretty penny had they been more lucid with their tongues. So shocked by the grizzly event it was understandable why they put up a wall of silence. Leaks were inevitable of course even among the authorities tasked with controlling the narrative, releasing news of the bloodletting through carefully choreographed drips and drabs. Officer Finley assigned to guard the main entrance to the crime scene felt like the flimsiest of dykes trying to keep the gory story at bay. He thought the upper echelons had bestowed a huge honour getting him to hold the front line. It might've been worse; he could have been assigned to the back and sides outside the glare of the media spotlight. He felt validated, his family and friends may even catch him on the news! Officer Finley had the stage presence of a nightclub doorman; it was the only reason why he was picked. After four hours standing stoic as a block of granite, his tough exterior began to crumble. Already the sermon full of piss n vinegar in the briefing room had lost most of its acridity.

Such was the scale of shlock horror engulfing the station it made even the hardiest men wet eyed. Counsellors normally assigned to victim support roles were redirected to offer their services to those struggling to get their heads around the magnitude of evil behind such a gruesome act. The last thing they needed was a lecture on police code of silence. "Hands up if there are any sex offenders in the room," roared the Sergeant to over twenty uniformed officers in the briefing room. They looked at each other clueless as schoolkids who'd just been asked by the headmaster to solve an impenetrable algebraic equation. Although there were several ranked as sergeant in the station, there was really only one Sergeant. They all knew the old man's aversion to snitches akin to a criminal kingpin. "If you can't control your tongues, what other parts of your bodies can yee not control?" added the old school policeman, his sanctimonious stature more at home in a seminary than a copshop. At the start of his briefing, he commenced the proceeding with a novena to the blessed virgin. The force it seemed was running on a wing and a prayer. All those gathered would have felt better equipped with tasers and pepper spray to deal with the media. The Sergeant with his eyes the colour of ocean azure scanned the sea of blue before him for anything remotely fishy. Officer Finley shifted uneasily in the front row; wasn't the first time he thought the wrinkles under the Sergeant's eyes looked like gills. Thanks be to fuck at last the sermon was reaching its climax. The old lawman used his fist as a gavel hammering his would-be pulpit to emphasise his watertight argument. "Squealers are no better than sex offenders, so, keep them gobs zipped up lads 'n lassies."

Officer Finley was at his post for an hour when he received his first offer for a blowjob. The female reporter from an English tabloid veiled the promise of oral sex with cockney rhyming slang. "I'll cook your sock," she promised. Firmly Finley declined the invitation, telling her to go back to London with her toilet mouth. Finley's shield against the well-honed seductive powers of the young woman oozing promiscuity could only be attributed to his sexual orientation, which at the age of twenty-seven he'd not ventured out of the closet yet. The denial of his sexuality was strongly reinforced by those closest to him. "You've too much of a spud head to be gay," laughed the older sister of a friend who he opened up to in the local pub. "Gays are effeminate and good dancers, sorry Finley but you're neither." He never spoke to anyone about sex after that. His eyes had other ideas, they kept roaming towards a handsome gent he guessed was from an American network. He tried rationalizing the burgeoning infatuation in his body and mind, telling himself fawning after a man technically didn't make him gay. The policeman's heartrate began to flutter madly when the anchor drew close enough to earwig on his behind-the-scenes consultations with his crew. Officer Finley struggled to maintain his emotionless façade; behind that strongman edifice he was getting buggered by mental images of being rear-ended by the frontman. It didn't matter the guy was so tone deaf in his private banter with his producer that delineations between tragedy and comedy were clearly blurred.

"Ghoulie Hall sounds much better," asserted again the handsome anchor to his producer Sharon on the blower; "Viewers don't give a shit if it's a mutation of the original name," argued Romano for the umpteenth time. This was his first overseas assignment, would have gone to Charlie Drake had his annual medical deemed him too heavy for traversing on long haul flights. It was Romano's first trip in international skies too, seemed to take the jetlag on the chin. Back on state side he was regarded by many in the power structure as a glorified circus performer. Journalism was still very much regarded as a serious business in an industry increasingly falling prey to entertainment values. Romano was apt at pigeonholing the cunts too. He could picture Sharon at the end of the line, always had a horny look in her eyes when she was in the devil's advocate mode. The feisty exec in her office cubicle stuck to her guns, urging him to be more accurate in his reportage. "Blah, blah, blah, blah. Built in nineteen hundred and three to venerate bishop blah blah. Nobody cares for that shit Sharon; my ratings will take a nosedive if I started spouting all that boring historical shit." He paused listening to his producer bringing some guy from the legal department into the transatlantic natter. He couldn't bear listening to the high-pitched resonance of a cartoon echo whose soul had been neutered by the system. "With respect, you really need to grow a pair," yelled the Anchor catching sight of Finley looking his way. "The audience are only interested in blood n guts with some sex thrown in for good measure; they don't give a shit about Ghoulie Halls historical architecture." Romano suddenly fell silent, catching the lustful gaze from the Gardai in the doorway created a clear opening in his mind. The anchor ended the call without saying goodbye, then nudged his cameraman in the chops preoccupied by filming a crow on a ledge. Brad quick off the mark panned the camera around slowly to point at the entrance, while Romano suavely shimmied over to the cordon, making sure to appear more effeminate.

“Hey there sir, I’m Romano,” introduced the dish flashing a sparkling set of white delf. Finley face turned puce, he instantly felt himself go weak at the knees. His irises dilated too, along with his flaring nostrils as he savoured Romano’s sensual designer aftershave. “You, you, you’re not from RTE are you?” stuttered Officer Finley looking regretful for posing such a bland question. “No sir, I am not,” admitted Romano proffering his mike aloft with channel V1X3 festooned along the side. “What’s RTE?” asked the American. The Irishman proudly told him it was the states flagship broadcaster. Finley smiled at the dreamboat anchor fishing for information; *you could plummet my depths any time*. Clearly, he fancied the hole off him, there was no covering up that gaping gay manhole. “Tell me, is it really heinous in there, we got unconfirmed reports that.....” Romano stopped in his tracks; Finley with a rabbit caught in the headlights look on his face gazed towards the roadside where a military grade vehicle pulled up to the sidewalk. Romano turned eyeing the figure climbing from the big wagon. “It’s the Sergeant,” cried Finley. “Fuck off Romeo.” The American was moving towards the bigger fish anyway, readying his line like an angler to hook a whopper. The police chief was athletic for an old-timer, easily shrugging off the media shoal tackling him from all angles with pesky questions. “Sir, sir can you confirm...” asked the anchor thrusting his mike into the Sergeant’s face. Without a word he vanished behind the black sheet covering the maw into Ghoulie Hall.





CHAPTER THREE

Homicides relatively rare in Ireland always caught the authorities unawares, throwing all concerned into an abysmal abyss. For everybody cast to those unforgiving waters a witch's trial awaits bestowing buoyancy to experience while drowning the inexperienced. A novice like Osbourne pretty much wet behind the ears appeared on the surface to take it all in his stride. Underneath the calm exterior he was sinking bigtime, no amount of real crime docs on Netflix could prepare him for this bloodbath. He was one of those guys in the force who seemed to walk on water, dodging the raindrops whenever it pissed down heavily from the heavens. Not so today, already he had lost his breakfast in the station. The stench of puke emanating from the toilets suggested he wasn't alone. He should have listened to his wife; it was never a good idea to ingest a hearty feed just before swimming. The size of the hall was on a par with an Olympic sized swimming pool, with the kill zone roughly the same circumference as a small fishpond. The four manned forensic team swiftly dispatched from Dublin looked like Scooba divers, cataloguing a sunken galleon on the ocean floor. It wasn't the first time either rock bottom was mentioned in this place.

Osbourne suspected his equipment wasn't working right, his mask was letting the meaty stench of death slither up into his nasal passage. He wondered if his superior had the same problem? Jack usually operated without a filter over his mouth opted to wear a mask on this occasion. They hadn't exchanged a single word all morning since arriving at the crime scene. Osbourne was unsure about the correct protocol, was it even kosher to speak in the hushed presence of such a macabre abattoir? The lack of communication was driving him around the bend; he could not resist making some sort of commentary. "Mowed down by an automatic," murmured the rooky with a proclivity for gardening analogies. "Not to mention slugs from a handgun." The gnomish detective pottering about behind him was more attuned to the noise the reporters were making on the other side of the draughty window draped in black plastic sheeting festooned with puncture holes. "If we can hear them, they can most certainly hear us," snapped Jack Russel turning to address the rooky hunkered on the floor. Only to grimace angrily at the young detective fingering with the well bitten end of his ballpoint pen the empty shells strewn across the crimson besmirched floor, filthy as the wintry overcast sky outside. It was only really then did he notice the cut of the carpet, a veritable symphony of different genetic samples. "Suppose it won't make much difference to add one more bum note to the cacophony." He momentarily shifted focus from the biro pregnant with DNA to another contaminant in his forensic field of vision. It was a regular feature now at every new crime-scene to be presented with a view of Osbourne's backside. The issue arose on the first day the two men were paired together, setting a bum note for well over a year. Though the elder kept his mouth on a leash, the younger could not fathom why he was in the doghouse. Osbourne had heard the stories about Jack Russel, how he'd once practically tore a cop's head off for making a dog joke. In fairness it was very difficult to avoid putting a muzzle on canine references. The dog-eat-dog underbelly Russel had doggedly stomached now

for well over thirty years. He had an excellent nose for a lawman, honed over the decades for picking up the scent of evil assholes. It certainly wasn't an appendage for sniffing this pup wagging his rump into his face. The rear-end regularly thrust into his face brought out the Rottweiler in Jack Russel. He cleared his throat with the gnarly gusto of a growl. "**GET YOUR FUZZY GINGER TUSH OUT OF MY MUSH,**" barked that cough. The rooky straightened up making the eye shaped rip in his boiler suit close over the anal iris.

The sight was so scorched onto detective Russel's retinas that when Osbourne turned the afterimage of his arse was superimposed onto his face. How the rooky managed to split every single boiler suit beggared belief. The fact that he was completely blinkered to the unsightly exposure made it all the more infuriating. If it continued any longer the duo was in danger of getting branded with a name by the other alpha males in the station. More than likely they were already being called something stupid such as Crack Squad! The fissure between them couldn't be bridged by cracking jokes, the rift was developing into a deep chasm. Osbourne was debating to himself on the best way to fill Russel in for a whole two hours now since the duo were first assigned to this particularly gruesome case. He tried to run his fingers through his auburn hair, but forgot there was a porous surface covering his head. Despite his massive stature, he felt dwarfed by the towering knowledge of criminology in his midst. The young detective knew well his superior would probe every nook and cranny of the investigation. He inhaled deeply before diving in. "*The deceased, chief; I kind of have a relationship with.*" Soon as he said it he could feel the soothing balm of the disclosure on his body and mind. Clearly not on the same page the older man's face turned red with rage.

"Which one?" queried Detective Russel after a short pause. He quickly scanned the spacious hall again looking for a family resemblance. Folding his arms tighter than a knot, he began tapping his right foot very close to the scarlet shoreline. Finally, he mused. Here was his chance to get the stowaway ass shipped back to steerage where he'd be more suited to menial police duties. He was sick to death of the big cop; little cop routine the upper echelons lumbered him with so close to retirement. Osbourne was so humungous he could carry the midget detective around in his pocket. The skewed optics no doubt a source of fun to the higher tier would only attract disrespect from the lower criminal class. His patience was wearing thin waiting for a response. "All of them sir," fessed Osbourne mournfully with his head drooping downward like a depressed daffodil. "**QUOD TOTIUS UNDECIM?**" The Latin roar reverberated around the high-ceilinged interior like an echo in a cavernous cave. The rooky lifted his head, glancing over at the photographer and the female officer examining bullet holes in the ceiling. They reminded Osbourne of astronomers studying the star-studded sky. The stargazers looked back towards the argumentative blackhole in the middle of the hall. The female officer then whispered something to her colleague with the telescopic lens, perhaps telling him it was just a red dwarf, renowned for spouting Latin when angered. Both smirked as they resumed cataloguing the clusters of black stars in the pale green barrelled firmament.

Osbourne unzipped his boiler suit, revealing a tie with a loudly coloured floral motif which tended to give Russel a splitting headache. After rooting about for a bit, he took out a brown wrinkled wallet. Osbourne then flashed his AA card below his detectives ID.

“Yes chief, all eleven.” The rooky handed his Alcoholics Anonymous membership card to his angry superior. “I didn’t want to lead anyone up the garden path or anything.” He instantly saw tumbleweed blow across the desert wasteland in Jack Russel’s wilted gaze. “I wanted to uproot a negative and so planted a plus.’ The rooky closed his eyes, silently braced himself for his gnomish superior to piss on the flowerbed of everything he said. “Enough I’ve had of yer flowery talk,” retorted Russel narrowing his eyes into squinting, arid plots where nothing could grow. Certainly, anger and resentment had found fertile soil inside him to flourish. Ever since the Slippery Elm case, Jack Russel started looking for a sturdy bough to hang his big understudy from. All because some guy from special branch assisting them in apprehending an escapee from Mountjoy asked the rooky if he had a nickname for the cheeky jailbird. Something catchy for the Media to distract from the embarrassment of a petty criminal outsmarting the authorities. Osbourne suggested Slippery Elm, not a million miles from: Elmer Birch the criminal’s official title. It was a stroke of genius, even the no nonsense Sergeant who wasn’t that enamoured with his new son-in-law warmed towards the flowery bollox like a greenhouse in the height of summer. Two glaring apocalyptic daisies bloomed on the small detective’s briary face. Osbourne turned smiling beneath his mask after spotting the Sergeant making his entrance through the double doors behind him, chatting with four of the forensic crew just finishing their shift in the hallway. One of them was proffering a drone like a kid showing off to his grandad a toy he’d got for Christmas; apparently the latest in crime scene cartography. Whereas Russel wore the sour pus of a kid who’d not gotten what he wanted from Santa. He was thankful for the mask concealing his disdain for the hick machinations in the station. The word NEPHETISM scribed in red neon capitals flashed inside his head.

“Yee are all spawned from the same genetic pond here,” he whispered conspiratorially. “I’m the only one with pure DNA in the whole blasted swamp.” Under Osbourne’s mask he was sporting a broad smile. It was Jack Russel’s turn next to perk up from the prompt of a higher-ranking cough. The Sergeant performed a circuit of the kill zone, surveying the carnage before halting where the killer had stood. The detectives turned in unison towards the Sergeant looming like midnight over the only vacant spot in the bloody circle. “Please do pray tell, elucidate if you will detective your affiliation with the fellowship of the here slain?” asked Russel making sure he was overheard by his austere superior. “Barely had me foot on the first wrung, four meetings max.” He smiled with a mixture of sadness and pride. “Not like I was a raging alco or anything.” Osbourne glanced with big puppy dog eyes at the imposing figure of his father-in-law who showed no sign of any acquaintance yet with the rooky who looked rather bashfully down at his massive feet. “An abusive relationship with alcohol surely runs in the family, everyone pretty much knows about my father’s conviction for drink driving. Long story short, I decided with a baby on the way to ditch the sauce. Figured AA would help nip the problem in the bud.” Suddenly the young detective became aware of the garden in his talk and smiled. “A commendable step in the right direction,’ interjected the doting father-in-law on the margins. “Reginald informed every last one of us in his immediate family so he did.” Jack Russel absolutely loathed the way his superior talked like Yoda and didn’t know it. “Pity he wasn’t there last night; we might have averted this evil blood-fest,” argued Jack.

“None of yer guff now, or else you’ll be investigating in spirit your own homicide,” threatened his superior angrily with the fire and brimstone of the Old Testament god. “Given the enormity of the carnage sir, I doubt one more additional corpse will make much impact.” A Mexican showdown with squinty bulbs followed between the two rivals. The Sergeant looking around at all the bodies again forced himself to holster his temper. “Aye,” he acquiesced taking off his hat in respect. Fucking asshole thought Russel, yet another contaminant. “Holy mother of God, may the Lord have mercy on their souls.”

“Aye,” said the duo making the sign of the cross. Right on cue the cathedral bells tolled across the way amplifying the funereal moment. Requiems didn’t ring loudly in Jack Russel’s atheistic belief system. Caught in the crossfire of the angelus jingle, Tinkerbell flew into his mind and not the watered-down version of the green absinthe fairy either. “I’ll never forget you Tinkerbell,” chimed a cartoonish voice in the older detective’s head whenever church bells tolled. Funny how the brain works, difficult for Russel not to think back to one of his first assignments as a Gardai. He owed a lot to that tinker thief hailing from Limerick, specializing in robbing the ding-dongs from churches all over Ireland. The audacious thief fetched a pretty penny too for the stolen church bells, Russel’s nick-naming the culprit Tinkerbell was a stroke of genius. He was considered by the standards of the time as the lowest of criminals. Thanks to the gypsy blood flowing through his veins, Russel was able to provide intel on traveller networks around the country, crucial in catching Tinkerbell. Although the arrest and following prosecution strengthened his standing in the settled community, it very much weakened it with the traveller clans.

“Fill us in then, what info do you have on the victims Osbourne?” asked Russel with a far sunnier decorum. “Gladly sir.” Osbourne looked around considering where to begin. It suddenly struck him, the macabre time-zone they were all in, himself the large hand and detective Russel the small hand. He wondered if his superiors saw too the blatantly obvious chronological symbology. Catching Russel peering at his wristwatch through the boiler suit verified he was synchronised with his thinking, albeit on a rudimentary level. “Times ticking,” reminded the small detective impatiently. Osbourne scanned the scene again, starting from twelve o’clock to retrace the clockwise timeline taken by the shooter. “At one and two o’clock we have the Lowe sisters, Ailish and Lorraine.” He wanted to keep the briefing on each victim brief and factual, but clearly struggled to be objective when they were all still alive in his head. “I heard them say once they were rather partial to a game of bingo on Friday nights,” he said before ending the sentence with a loud gulp. Osbourne too much of a gentleman hit a brick wall regarding the sisters social standing. The sanctimonious presence on the margins was more than happy to fill in the blanks. “A right auld pair of sluts,” shouted the Sergeant. “Not speaking ill of the dead, just pointing out the facts so I am.” Russel was aware of the matter which amounted to gossip. “Though they operated behind a veneer of respectability, we all know the Low sisters were running a prostitution racket in Cranmore,” added the Sergeant awfully sternly. “The Raven headed younger sister was dispatched first, shot on the right tit and head. The gunman then shot the elder, considerably overweight sibling who received wounds to the neck, mouth and forehead,” surmised Osbourne regretting the use of tit in his notes. It didn’t seem to faze the Sergeant who made a snide comment about Cranmore,

his own personal prejudice against the socioeconomic blackspot ran very deep indeed. “Filled up to the rafters with whores and pimps, two less degenerates now for the system to deal with.”

“At three o’clock lies Trevor, I’m not sure what his surname is exactly, could hazard a guess. Bit of a gobshite really, didn’t contribute much to the group,” deduced the rooky. Russel had a strong inkling he recognized him from a football match he attended last year when investigating soccer hooliganism in the town. It turned out to be a non-event. “Big rover’s fan was he?” asked the detective eyeing his red and white striped jersey. “Football was about all he talked about,” remarked Osbourne. “Fat lot of good it did him.” The rooky knew well the two men’s aversion to the toxic soccer culture in Sligo. “Poor auld Trevor got shot in the forehead and abdomen; the force of the automatic clearly knocked him back off the chair.” Osbourne frowned morosely over towards his heavyset neighbour, still sat upright despite getting shot a couple of times in the chest. “Ah yes, the next target at four o’clock is an ex-convict known as Malone from Athlone. A petty criminal done for burglary and car-jacking back in the noughties. What’s his first name again, it escapes me?” Quick off the draw Jack Russel answered promptly. “Tis not Slippery Elm, is it?” The trio descended into a fit of inappropriate laughter. “No, not Slippery Elm,” sniggered Osbourne. “Although he was fond of the gardening, he used to trim the nuns’ bushes up at the convent for all his sins.” That really didn’t go down well with the staunch catholic hovering outside the circle. Moving swiftly on.

“At five o’clock we have.....er, hold on a second just let me consult my notes.” Osbourne fumbled about with his notepad, leafing erratically until he got the right page. “Ashik Pishwar, originally from Bangladesh. Applied for asylum to Ireland over ten years ago now. He fell out with the Islamic community in Sligo because of something he wasn’t willing or ready to share with the group. A small-time criminal dabbling in male prostitution and drugs with intent to sell.” He paused for a breather. “So it says on his arrest sheet dated January last year. He made the papers when his time came for court, suppose he joined AA to help his case.” Osbourne could tell the men were more interested in the gunshot wound to his groin area. Compared to the indiscriminate nature of the other killings, Ashiks murder had more of a vindictive element. There were of course details identical with the rest which Russel had noticed in the first ten minutes of the investigation. He crouched down again to get a closer look at yet another hardly visible trail of blood drippage. Osbourne continued with his Alcoholics Anonymous reflections. “Bound in any group scenario to encounter at least one problem child who just does not want any help. He really didn’t want to be part of the group, regularly Ashik threw his toys out of the pram to grab attention.” Jack Russel went down on all fours to peer deep into the gaping wound where Ashiks genitalia used to be. “Ouch,” said the detective. “Appears the killer devoted special attention killing this poor bastard, Ashik,” observed Russel. “Surely, he had enemies. Most people in the group said he gave them the creeps. Said his eyes spooked them.” Jack Russel turned towards the rooky looking intrigued. “What about his eyes?” Osbourne looked weary of venturing into superstitious territory, “His eyes Chief, more like portals to a demonic realm sucking all the life from the room.”

An awkward silence followed as they moved onto the next victim, Osbourne was just about to say something when his father-in-law intervened.

“The corpse at six o’clock, a promising talent. Bought one of his paintings last year so I did,” boasted the Sergeant eager to advertise his patronage of the arts. He went on to describe the piece he bought with broad brushstrokes that suggested pure abstraction. That raised Jack’s eye brows, noting his work will have quadrupled in value after today. “Dominic held a solo exhibition last year in this very same Hall, I attended it myself so I did.” The artist struck the most striking final pose in the group, looking like a martyr in a renaissance vision with his head drawn back and limbs akimbo on the chair. Rather nervously Osbourne spoke. “Dominic suffered with some serious mental health issues, spending regular spells over the past two decades in St Columbus psychiatric facility.” The memory of what Dominic last shared was still very much fresh in Osbourne’s mind. “Dominic really freaked me out the last time he shared. Like being at a séance so it was, prophesying about the coming apocalypse.” He stopped abruptly to take a breather; Osbourne was unsure whether he could continue to the end without breaking into tears. “So spooked by that last session I decided to give the Sunday night meeting a miss. I can’t help but think had I been here things might have panned out differently.” He looked forlornly at the Sergeant who was gazing perplexedly at the next victim on the floor. He wondered why it was taking the Sergeant so long to recognize the female body lain at seven o’clock. In fairness to the old man, he wasn’t accustomed to seeing her at this angle.

The Sergeant knew exactly who it was, his brain was just struggling to marry a teetotaller image in his head with the alcoholic anonymous reality splayed out on the filthy carpet. “Tis not Helen.....our blessed eucharistic minister?” gasped the Sergeant more to himself than to anyone else. A long procession of incoherent mumblings then followed, difficult to tell whether they were curses or blessings. “There’s not a single soul in all of Ireland who hasn’t been royally fucked by the demon drink.” He finally managed to say. “There’ll be full taverns today, Sir!” predicted Russel. “Dissecting the gory details, performing their autopsies on their high stools.” “Aye,” agreed sadly the elder lawman. “Not in the cathedral will yee find them processing all their shit.” The Sergeant was clearly troubled, still trying to tally Helen’s high status in the community with her eventual end lain out before his eyes which wasn’t very dignified. Still Helen remained firmly planted in the seat despite being blasted backwards. With her chunky legs sticking upwards she looked like a caricature killed in a cartoon. Regardless of all the dedicated service to the church and charitable organizations, she would always be remembered as number seven in the AA eleven. Just a couple of degrees of separation from whoredom. “Helen told us once she suffered a bout of the shakes while administering the blessed sacrament, it prompted her to seek help from the fellowship. If it’s any consolation sir, she was sober for a good ten years before she passed on.” Judging by his superior’s countenance Osbourne could easily tell he wasn’t one bit convinced. Already the staunch Catholic was calculating the masses of masses served by Helen deemed null and void. The Sergeant looked very old and frail as he gripped the metal stem of a portable floodlight beside him for support. Spotting the two detectives watching him, he motioned with his other hand to continue.

Moving onto eight o'clock the trio hovered over an old man slumped forward in a wheelchair, four exit wounds punctuating his back. Immaculately suited and booted the gent despite his disability clearly took great pride in getting kitted out in his Sunday best. The Sergeant nor Detective Russel didn't have the foggiest idea who this old man was. "Nigel Featherstone," introed Osbourne, "A thoroughly charismatic retired church of Ireland minister." The rooky was clearly smitten with the memory of the old gentleman. "One got the sense of holy ground whenever he spoke. If there is a God, dear old mister Featherstone will be in that heavenly presence." It occurred to Russel in the reflective pause that followed how the scene encompassed a broad-church with many walks of life. "Mister Featherstone could at times go off on a tangent too," said Osbourne moved now to tears. "Everybody in the group loved it when he started mouthing off about the next generation's addiction to new tech." They moved onto the next body on the murder dial.

"It's all about online presence nowadays. That's what they say so they do." It was a veiled rebuke from the Sergeant towards Miss dreadlock's sitting upright at nine o'clock. The young lady in her mid-twenties covered in silver gothic piercings looked spookily alive, holding a smart phone with the earphones still plugged in. Mya McMorrow sustained a single bullet from the semi to the heart with no apparent gunshots from the automatic. "I'm not one hundred percent sure, think it was one of the Lowe sisters who made a snide remark about Mya ending her days clutching her phone?" As they moved onto the next post-mortem post, Detective Russel mentally noted to check Mya's social media when he got back to the station. It was standard procedure to check every victim's communication prior to the murder. He especially wanted to know what Ms Dreadlocks was messaging.

"A bit of a pickle this pair have got themselves into, so they have," said the Sergeant trying to figure out the primal physics to the knotted scenario sprawled out before them. "Appears ten and eleven o'clock got entangled in a contorted scuffle, the first time I saw two corpses locked into a premortem wrestling match," observed Jack Russel grimly. "Clearly the altercation had served as a lucky distraction, providing the killer with ample breathing space to snuff out his targets," said the Sergeant nodding his head in disgust. "Meet Donal McGowan, the only gay in the village and his nemesis Gunner Crowley, hetero alpha male," introed the rooky. He went on to inform them about the ongoing rivalry between the pair which usually expressed itself verbally through childish name calling and obscene hand gestures. Gunner and Donal were always seated far apart. Putting those two volatile chemicals together was bound to ignite a violent explosion. "Looks like the two drama queens finally got a room," surmised Jack looking somewhat fed up as he eyed his watch. It appeared the first act in the macabre play had come full circle.

The Sergeant's phone when it rung resounded around the hall like a school bell at recess. Politely excusing himself he climbed the four steps to the stage at the back of the hall, looking like he was having a fit trying to locate the thing through all the layers. It was both comical and tragic for the detectives watching him. After the drama he located the phone, the urgency of the caller at the other end clearly not one accustomed to voice mail. Assuming they were out of earshot the detectives heard the Sergeant address the person with a yes sir, adding after a silent pause that he had his best men on the job. Oh yes, it

was top brass alright. Only the commissioner or a minister in governmental circles could make the Sergeant appear so nervous. Stunned Osbourne and Jack looked at each other. "FUCK, we're the A team!" The duo froze in the hub of the carnage; they couldn't believe their ears. The wheels of their minds were moving in totally different directions. The endorsement left Osbourne feeling inflated, whereas Jack Russel felt totally deflated. He suspected it was all an elaborate act, the fuckers setting us up for a big fall. Russel and Osbourne encircled by the carnage eyed each other as if to say, what do we do now? It felt like an eternity waiting for the top cog in the operation to put them into gear. He looked very Shakespearean when finally, he turned to face them again, he would make a great Macbeth as he strolled across the stage carrying a heavy burden on his shoulders. "No fuck ups lads, do ye hear me?" The two men answered the Sergeant with a soldierly yes sir each. "We don't need no uppity Feds from Dublin coming to the Northwest telling us how to do our jobs, now do we?" Again, the affirmative response from the detectives. "This is our patch so it is," said the Sergeant as he took in the terrible scene before him. Osbourne following Russel exiting the circle halted at twelve o'clock pulling off his mask. "We'll weed him out Sergeant sir," promised Osbourne brandishing his index finger. "We'll weed out this MISTER AM." The gnomish detective standing beside him sighed.





CHAPTER FOUR

A group of reporters were hot on their heels after barely a minute on the road their vehicle hit a red light. The crazy shower surrounded them with cameras flashing like the angriest of skies heavily laden with lightning. The unofficial press conference on the steps of Ghoulie Hall had awoken a tempest in the media. They leapt onto the morsel Osbourne cast to the hungry beaks, then like a pair of thieves fleeing from a robbery the detectives ducked for cover in their car parked around the corner as the crazy cyclone gave chase, unsheathing its fangs. In all his years of policing Jack had never witnessed such savagery. Osbourne at first entreated his superior, telling him it wasn't his intention to stir the pot. "All I did was put a label on the dish," cried Osbourne. The genii had been released from its bottle; MISTER AM went viral in the immediate aftermath of Osbourne's comment. Russel was so mentally psyched by the ensuing spin cycle he didn't give a damn if he was photographed giving out to his understudy. In the space of just a few seconds two officers manning the sides came to the rescue, grabbing two cameramen, one by the scruff and the other wrestled to the ground triggering the others to disperse in fear of getting nicked. "Fucking MISTER AM, where the fuck you get that from?" cursed the older detective. "Fucking MISTER AM me arse, it'll never take root. MISTER AM, aaaargh. "I thought you'd pick a catchier name than that." He was so mad he practically foamed at the mouth trying to think up a name himself. "Crimson Bloom, now there's a bloody catchy title. Right up your fucking alley." Osbourne's immediate response was uncharacteristically bitchy. "Sounds Joycean," retorted the rooky with a smile. There roughly followed three seconds of blissful silence before the tantrum kicked off. In the throes of the proceeding hissy fit, he grabbed the nearest object nearly removing the steering wheel from its shaft. "Fucking smartarse, doesn't even know the source he's referencing," bitched back Jack Russel eyeing an old lady dead ahead crossing the road just as the lights turned green. He pressed down hard on the horn, joining in with a chorus of other beepers behind him. The pensioner walking with the help of a Zimmer frame made sure to go extra slow, moving at a snail's pace as the light turned red again. The lights at the intersection had a tendency to malfunction, especially when meteorological anomalies loomed ominously in the atmosphere. Detective Russel revved his engine at her, then wished he'd been more patient when she stopped again and gave him the evil middle finger. Russel who never prayed practically said a novena at the wheel praying for the blasted lights to turn green. "C'mon Margaret, times ticking." The lady took her time crossing over to the other side. "Times ticking," said Russel again but this time with his best Hollywood voiceover voice. "Times ticking to catch Mr. Ante Meridiem, one of the most depraved serial killers of all time." Just as he turned to smile at his wingman the lights turned green. The lady made it to the opposite side where a spiffily attired gent stood waiting at her next crossing. He was well dressed, chivalric in her impaired eyesight. Alas the gent didn't take her arm.

As the duo sped off in the opposite direction towards the station, Con Carney casually crossed John Street; a narrow one-way artery leading to the heart of the town. Ahead of

him a pair of Philippine Nuns waddled like penguins in the arctic tundra towards the cathedral quarter around the corner. With the heavy coat loosely flung over his shoulder, he strolled along the footpath with an odd imperviousness to the Baltic atmosphere. He was drawing attention to himself; a couple of reporters gathered along Adelaide Street looked his way. Carney pretended to ghost the medias gaze. "Nothing to report here, just an everyday event so mediocre it is not even registering on my higher intellect." His body language was a barometer that told a completely different story. A woman manning the boom mike elbowed a random cameraman when first she saw the figure across the way. "It's like the audio is not hooked up to the visuals man," she said in reference to the goons unusual walk. The clownish man drew eyeballs and cameras from the whole media circus desperate for a little light relief. A suave anchor attired in a designer label was the first to laugh hysterically at the goons baggy pinstriped suit, most likely purchased from a thrift shop trapped in a nineteen thirties time-warp. Carney thought the suit made him look like a movie star in one of those classic black and white flicks. He performed a dress rehearsal hastily enacted before a foggy bathroom mirror. Cracks in the illusion started to appear everywhere as the day grew bright. In his haste to discard the blood-spattered evidence of his crime, Carney failed to notice the new ensemble was in a ball of creases. There was also a very noticeable wank stain high on the right inside trouser leg after he'd masturbated to break the suit in. providentially the wardrobe malfunction worked in his favour, although Carney was completely clueless, he was handed another lucky break. It was simply incomprehensible to them that the killer could be this odd specimen a million miles from the predatory image built up over the morning. He was on a par with a hippo, actually the biggest killer of humans in the animal world. Carney just didn't fit in with the dark and edgy romanticized projection most in the media had already constructed. "That guys been through the wars lads, don't be so cruel," pleaded a pretty reporter half laughing herself. "Yeah, looks like he's been buggered by the whole Napoleonic army," yelled a guy from a French network. Carney already with a poltergeist pervading his body and mind caught wind of the comment and swiftly turned around. The whole crowd instantly ceased laughing as a massive shadow was cast over the entire cathedral quarter, sending the media circus into a spooky silence. Many who really weren't acquainted with the changeable weather in the northwest looked worriedly towards the heavens expecting to see a leviathan of biblical proportions swimming in the sky. Con was in his element, "A POX ON ALL YER HOUSES," he cursed loudly with a voice that had sprung from a diseased, hellish well. For a moment the pail of his pale face gushed forth with a pitch-black luminosity. There was a glimmer of ecstasy in his eyes too, he believed himself to be the dark lord of the universe; granted special powers over the forces of nature. It was just a schizoid personality trait of the climate with four seasons wrapped up in a day. The cloud heavy as a tombstone rolled by, then a door opened letting the sunshine enter. The sudden appearance of positive ions in the atmosphere totally altered the ominous vibe sending the whole media circus into convulsions of laughter. The joyous energy was like a cruciform to the vampiric entity in their midst. He continued walking up Temple Street, twitching violently as if struck by lightning. The dark nimbus seemed to halt over the old parochial house on the hill where there was a window aflicker with candle flame. Carney sensed the Reverent watching him from the rectory, could feel a painful sensation

deep inside his rectum. Thanks to that sensation he walked like there was a barge pole rammed up his arse. So susceptible to environmental cues he was momentarily startled by a large black hawk painted on the Hawkeswell theatre, thinking it was one of the hags' crows. Carney cast a backward glance to check if she was following him. The old crone was nowhere to be seen; no doubt she was avoiding the glare of the media spotlight today.

Carney believed the previous night's events were going to have a transformative effect. He had envisioned his metamorphosised self walking through Sligo town in the aftermath of the bloodletting imbued with the swagger of an alpha male strutting past onlookers along the street awestruck by his peacockery. The sociopath uttered a string of expletives after tripping over a loose paving stone on the pathway passing Saint John's primary school. The sound of children in the schoolyard stopped him dead in his tracks. He stared transfixed towards the gates of the school, looking very sketchy standing beside the pencil shaped road markers lining the street indicating a school crossing. Curtains twitched in the windows behind him; the mundanity of suburbia could see his madness a mile off.



Carney suddenly found himself back in the playground again, beset by childish taunts. "Are ye chilli Con Carney?" The first wave from very young tots was initially cute and ticklish. A child at that age could say fuck-off and just get surprised laughter in response. "Are ye chilli Con Carney?" The second wave from the four- to six-year-old age bracket was relatively harmless too. It only started to turn nasty when the third wave swept over. "Are ye chilli Con Carney?" The fourth wave of jeers went up another notch when voices broke, prodding his brain with the echo. When the aggressive fifth wave hit the shoreline,

he was already a sunken vessel; plummeting towards the depths of insanity. Walking up St. Joseph's Terrace he shouted at the voices to stop, which only served to exacerbate the onslaught. So plagued by the echo he failed to see others in the residential area going about their everyday business. By the time he got to the top of Gallows hill close to where he lived, Con Carney was fit to hang anyone who crossed his path; even his own mother. It was painful to think about her, though he kept telling himself she deserved it. The one dish in the world that he loathed, which he hadn't even tasted; his dear mammy one cold autumnal eve had served himself and Con Carney senior, chilli con carne. His mother announced nervously what was on the main course, which of course was just one course. Her son gobsmacked looked down into the bowl of demoniacal chow as if Lovecraftian tentacles was about to spring from the dish and wrap its slimy tendrils around his head. He looked over at his father trying to suppress the laughter. He told him it was only mince with sauce and beans. "It actually looks yummy, twas all the rage in the....." "Twas all the rage when I was born was it?" rebuked Con who's face now was as red as his chilli con carne. He quickly rose from his seat and sauntered over to the cooker, grabbing the handle of the pot containing leftovers for later if anyone was feeling peckish. He went across to his father first who was tucking in to his grub, oblivious to Con Junior who'd never so much as said an angry word never-mind an angry deed in all the twenty or so years since he knew him. His mother with a far more sensitive antennae was picking up the evil signal bigtime. She started crying making Con senior become very incensed. "Now Con," pleaded his father flapping his arms. "See your mammy in floods of tears." Con juniors' eyes went skyward, cursing to high heaven his parents' generation reared on bacon and cabbage, who never had to deal with all these new culinary immigrants.

"I only wanted ye to make peace with it son, chilli con carne is a beautiful dish." She turned on the waterworks full throttle now, the sobbing lamentation gushing forth some spiel about making friends with your demons. It was akin to serving a big dirty pig's head to a Muslim seasoned with the suggestion to make peace with pork. How could they be so stupid? All the years he done chores around the house not to mention the endless menial jobs around the farm, making sure the calves were well tended to; all to no avail. "I for one am sick of chilli Con carney, enough to last me a lifetime," he said sternly, not displaying any indication of the volcano about to erupt. His parents were understandably avoiding eye contact as he gazed down maniacally into the pot, eyes bulging in his sockets. A mental meltdown was imminent, the heat in the kitchen was climbing to fever pitch. A dog out in the farmyard perhaps sensing the pressure in the atmosphere began to bark. "I'm so up to me eyeballs with chilli Con Carney; all I want to do is knock the fucking chilli Con Carney on the fucking head." There was nothing else to do now but wallop his father over the head with the pot. Casually he strolled around the table, grabbing the other parent by the scruff and proceeded to push his mother's noggin into the bowl. "Make peace with chilli con carne bitch, make peace with chilli con carne bitch, make....." he kept repeating; he would have smothered his mother had his father still very much concussed not delivered a right hook square on his jaw knocking him back into last week. It was the first and last time he struck his son. Instead of breaking the spell, the strike had sent the looper into hyper space. Con Carney started to dance around

the kitchen table, nimble as a sinister evil sprite in a Russian ballet. His father considered ringing the police, then seriously contemplated calling the white coats and would have rang them in a heartbeat had he the number handy. He was reduced to a recorded message stuck on repeat, echoing like a broken record the same message over and over again as he spun around the centre of gravity in the cottage. “Are ye chilli Con Carney, are ye chill.....” His parents dumb-struck could only watch God knows how many times he orbited the kitchen table before eventually veering off and bolting out the backdoor. He went to the only place in the village that passed as a public park and broke down into a fit of crying. Carney would’ve cried till dawn had that auld gent not sat beside him on the bench. Recognizing him from church, Con had never spoke to the old geezer before; not even to say hello. The man commented about the weather, saying it was a cold eve. “Are ye chilli Con Carney?” asked the old geezer smiling. The roar that awoke was so loud it nearly caused both men to have an out of body experience. His mother and father blessed themselves when its reverberations hit the farm two miles away. They feared their son had departed this world. In a sense he did. Banished he was after that from the homestead, not to mention the environs of Ballymote. Word about the incident spread like wildfire around the village. The same folks who enjoyed lighting his fuse pointed out he was a ticking timebomb waiting to explode. They even stopped selling chilli con carne in the local grocery shop, apparently customers complained the dish left a bad aftertaste in their mouths. Con Carney was exorcised from the parish, left to roam the desolate societal wilderness before securing accommodation with the help of social services.

Carney lived on Circular Road, a seemingly middleclass area with no apparent social ills. Finally, Carney’s lair was in sight, his legs were about to give way after the mileage he’d covered in the last few hours. It would have been much worse had he not utilized a stolen pushbike to navigate the country byways of Sligo free from any surveillance apparatus. He ditched the bike where he picked up the digging tools in a derelict cottage on Lough Gills shoreline. Was he glad to reach the parameter of his place having accomplished his mission. Roth iron railings straddled the sizeable property where he rented. The briary rose bush not yet in bloom provided significant concealment from inquisitive passers-by on the road. The gnarly thorns sometimes snagged his coat when passing through the narrow gate at the side. His landlady never used the side entrance; she always used the large main gate at the front when going down to the shops in her mustard-coloured car. Sometimes you could spot a senior citizens vehicle a mile away. The lady of the manner was outside today, watering her weedy plants in the window boxes oblivious to the rain dutifully performing the same task. When it rained a putrid smell awoke from the sewers, pervading the whole neighbourhood like a toxic rumour. His landlady appeared never to notice the pungent smell, he suspected she was nose blind. Con noticed the elderly woman had dyed her hair jet black again, leaving a perfect circular patch of white on the hard-to-reach blind-spot at the back. She turned around looking surprised; the squeaky gate alerting the landlady to her tenant who didn’t usually venture out this early in the day.

“Hello Fanny!” He knew by addressing her as Miss McGee would only draw attention to her spinster status with no offspring as far as he could see. She never once in the whole two years of their arrangement called him by his official title, which suited him just fine.

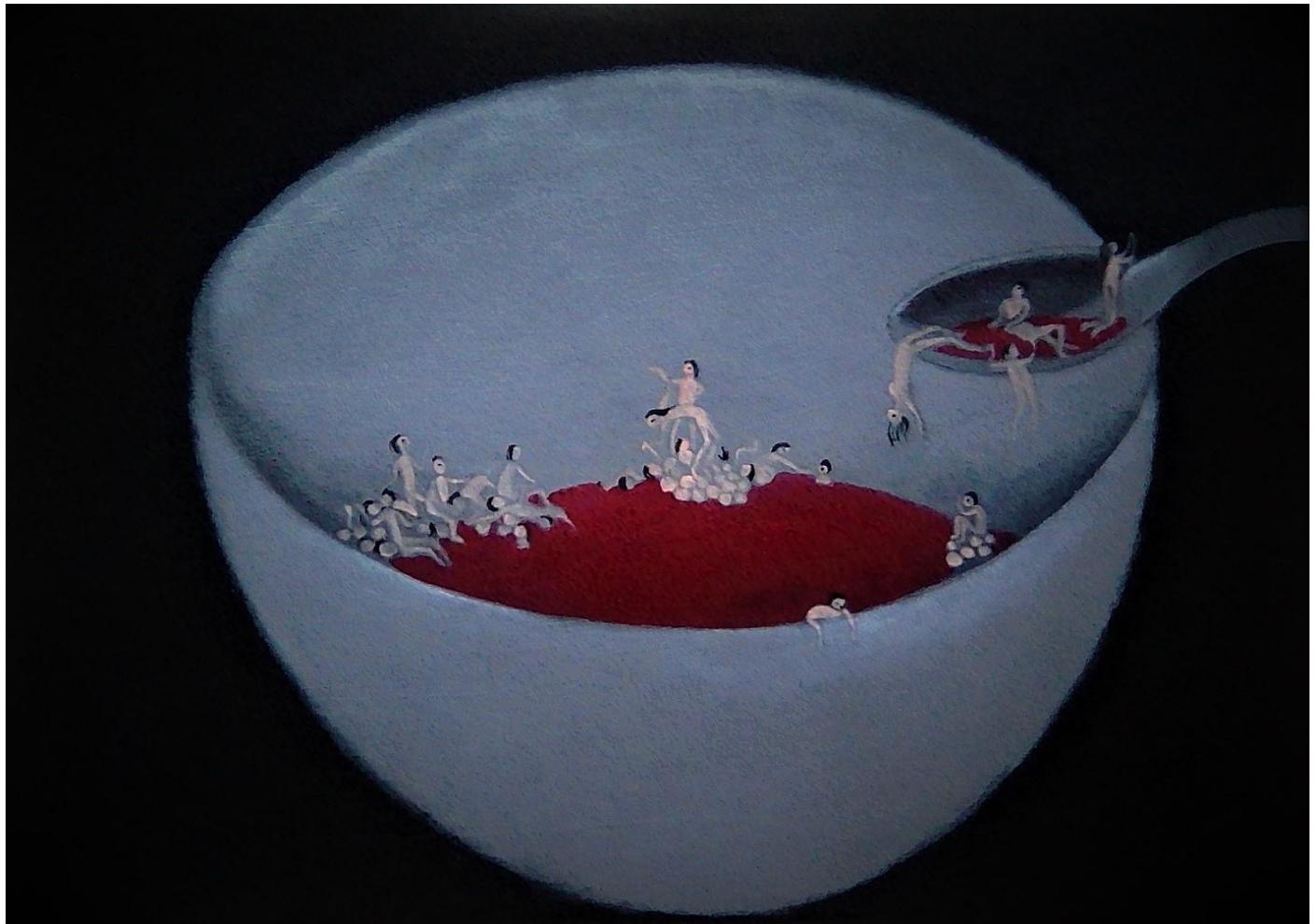
As embarrassing names go, Fanny McGee had won the silly label lottery. Certainly, it was the feminine equivalent to Dick Richards who is probably a nice guy wherever he is. Had she been fifty years younger, they might have been kindred spirits; maybe even lovers! Carney was well aware Fanny McGee could if she wanted to be, be a right auld cunt. A mental image of her flashed in his head; the barrel of the handgun parked in the miserly landlady's mouth. He smiled at her in both real and imagined versions of reality. He kept smiling as the white patch at the back of her head became an exit wound, her brains splattered all over her withered window boxes. She tried summoning a smile too but just couldn't, the septic laceration of her mouth incapable of any human warmth. Carney knew rent was on her mind, best to carry on with the usual beat around the bush small-talk in the preamble to payment. "Money hungry slut," spat the tenant in his head. "A diseased ridden whore on the street makes more money in an hour than you make in a week." If only Fanny McGee knew what was actually going on in her tenant's mind? "I must get you a proper watering can Fanny, was meant to get one but..." said Carney slipping both hands into his coat pockets to fondle the bottles again. His pulse began to hasten worrying whether he had the correct number of blood-filled phials. Frantically he done a headcount by touch, roughly fingering five in the left and six in the right pocket. Phew. He mustered all his thespian powers to maintain a convivial facial expression. "This'll do me fine," Fanny said stoically clutching the empty plastic milk carton that usually done the job. Despite deviating slightly from the script, it was important that he went along with the weekly ceremony. "I'll go fetch the rent book so shall I?" he asked mechanically without waiting for a response. Fanny watched him head to his residence; a three roomed garret attached like a cancerous tumour to the gable end of the larger five bedroomed house. She never invited him into her territory. Fanny McGee spent most of her time in a small box room on the ground floor, sat watching the front window like a guard on a border crossing, living totally in the dark; completely unaware that there was a monster residing under the same roof. Carney hated having to fork out money to Fanny for another week, he had to be careful about the length of time spent in other women's company too. Dolly was one of those dames with extra sensory perception, she could smell the female pheromones on her man if he spent one minute having a chinwag with another woman. That reminded him to clip his whiskers for the hot date tonight, she was very sensitive to prickly bristles. It was their first anniversary, the longest time he'd been in a relationship. It was an eventful month since first they met. Dolly had literally fallen from the sky straight into his arms. His enchanted angel cast out of heaven for being so goddamned attractive. That was pretty much the chat-up line which sealed the deal. Con Carney could be a real charmer when he wanted to be. Presently his carnal appetites didn't hound him like they usually did around midday. His stomach growled, then bayed like a bitch wolf in heat howling at the moon. He hadn't eaten for well over twelve hours since the prelude to the previous night's carnage. He was famished and needed to eat something quick. Firstly, the curtains were drawn soon as fanny got her few bob. His heartrate was racing upon his return to the tiny kitchenette where he done most of his eating out of one bowl which usually lingered belly-up on the draining board beside the sink. He placed the vessel in the middle of the black marble square of worktop next to the washbasin and rummaged in his coat pockets for the bottles that once

contained holy water. The plastic phials full of blood were so tiny, three could easily fit into his palm. He held one up to the light and shook it, savouring the coagulant froth of bubbles gathering at the top. When all eleven were accounted for, he arranged them around the bowl. It reminded the killer of the ancient stone configurations encircling Stonehenge. A daddy longlegs entered the circle, unaware it was offering itself up for a pagan sacrifice. Carney squished the spider with his thumb and forefinger, popping the sacrament into his mouth, more scrumptious than what is sacrificed on a Christian altar.

Had the serial killer been raised in a more scientifically minded culture, he might have developed as a more methodical stickler for detail. It did cross his mind alright to number each of the phials, placing the blood from victim 1 into bottle 1 etc. etc. Parking the fact he was a stark raving lunatic, he was thankful he didn't have an obsessive-compulsive disorder. So, he told himself as he stepped back to admire his masterpiece. His belly messaged him again it was time for lunch. He opened the overhead cupboard debating to himself which cereal to pick. He knew it didn't really matter since there were Rice Krispie's in every single box. Quite a collection accumulated on both shelves, numbering well over a dozen of the most notorious, iconic serial killer faces pasted onto cereal boxes. He'd made sure to paint the back and sides of each box with black acrylic; attentively painting a red backdrop behind each evil countenance for extra dramatic effect. He was spoilt for choice with a colourful mix of evil brands such as Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, John Gacy, Ottis Toole, Pedro Lopez, Harold Shipman, Jack the Ripper and Charles Manson to name but a few. The grim pilgrim worshipped with religious adoration his demoniacal shrine filling the entire overhead cupboard like an Orthodox Iconostasis.

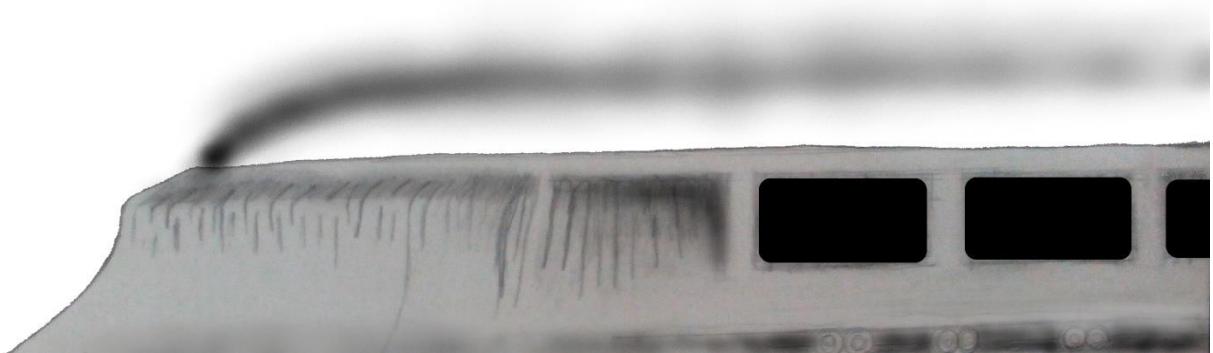
“Today’s reading comes from the gospel according to Ted Bundy,” intoned the killer reverentially extracting from the top shelf a box bearing an image of his favourite serial killer. He kissed the smiling devil like a priest kissing a holy book. Then he poured the Rice Krispies into the bowl humming a haunted nocturn with an unsettling warbling dissonance. Carney then added the freshly squeezed cardiac juice, pouring just a splash from each of the phials onto the cereal. Feeling slightly disappointed, there was no snap, crackle and pop as far as he could hear. He put just a few Rice Krispies onto the spoon with a smidgen of blood. Yummy, yummy, it tasted surprisingly sweet despite the meaty underlying flavour. He started shovelling big spoon-fulls of the murderous breakfast down the famished pit of his gullet. Carney surprised himself how fast he devoured the first bowl with the relishing gusto of someone with a sweet tooth polishing off a sundae. “Sundae bloody sundae!” he sang ravishingly licking the drippage from around his blood smeared mouth. Then he got started on a second helping. Nothing so delish as this ever before crossed the threshold of his lips. The vengeful dish he’d been prepping for years finally got served. For the first time in his life Michelin stars for gastronomic excellence twinkled in the usually starved and vacuous firmament inside his skull. Seldom the DJs with dominion over the airwaves played his music. Fancying some Marylin Manson, he put on repeat the track Killing Strangers from The Pale Emperor, his favourite album. Carney started to move around his living quarters, performing a kind of victory dance. It was the most avant-garde jig imaginable, throwing gothic shapes as if he was caught up in a frenzied death rattle. The disjointed zombie Zumba devoid of any living rhythm

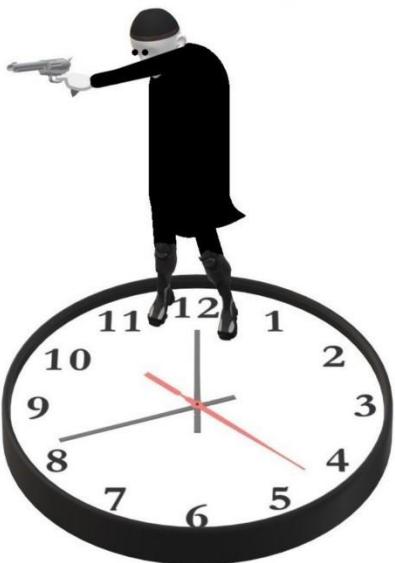
exhumed toxic twerks and putrid gyrations. It came to an end after what seemed to be a breakdance on the black tiled floor, more like the moves of a voodoo doll possessed by a witchdoctor in the throes of an epileptic fit. With the vibrations of Manson's brand of American gothic still rattling his bones, he extracted another box of serial killer cereal bearing the face of Charles Manson. He poured another bowl and repeated the ceremony suspecting the buzz was somewhat wavering in intensity. Then it went up a lowly octave. He sensed himself going deeper into the experience, close enough to taste the demonic realm. He was up to his neck in that inner state of suffering already. With each spoonful he was unearthing hell, steadily tunnelling towards a bloody vision of his murderous soul.



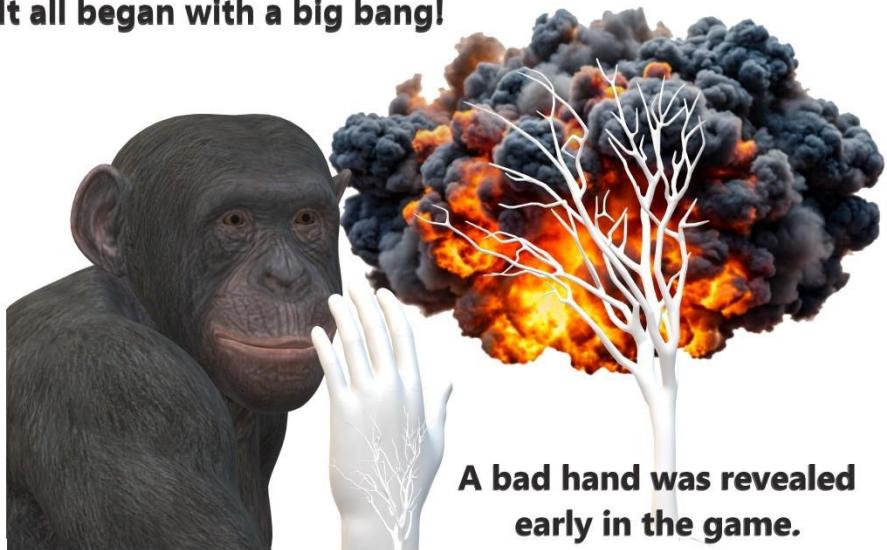
Carney made his way down a long narrow corridor to his bedchamber; the room was always dark even with the curtains drawn. He peered out the window like a creature from a burrow, his eyes scanning the briary backend of Fanny's property for anything lurking in the bushes. Invariably his gaze wandered towards a view of the town with its iconic backdrop he mounted many times. Ben Bulben always reminded him of a steam engine, lugging a long line of miscarriage behind it. He was too tired to ruminate on his many grievances; he got into bed unceremoniously without undressing. Not exactly a PJ and slippers man was Carney who always slept in his clothes during wintertime, even leaving his boots on to keep the frostbite from nibbling at his toes. Fanny was fairly stingy with the oil in her boiler, so many a time he cursed her in his bed, his breath a visible reminder that he slept in a freezer and not a bedroom. He snuggled under his black duvet stained so much with semen it looked like an atlas. Every night he replenished that wet dream sea. Forensics tasked with cataloguing his DNA would find a lot of specimens

perfectly intact thanks to the cold. He had other hobbies of course to occupy his time; with the right guidance Carney might have become an accomplished artist. He certainly had an interesting take on society; it would garner a lot of attention when eventually it entered the public eye. He wasn't sure about his target audience though; his shooting gallery's only aim as far as he could see was to hit onlookers square between the bulbs.





It all began with a big bang!



A bad hand was revealed early in the game.

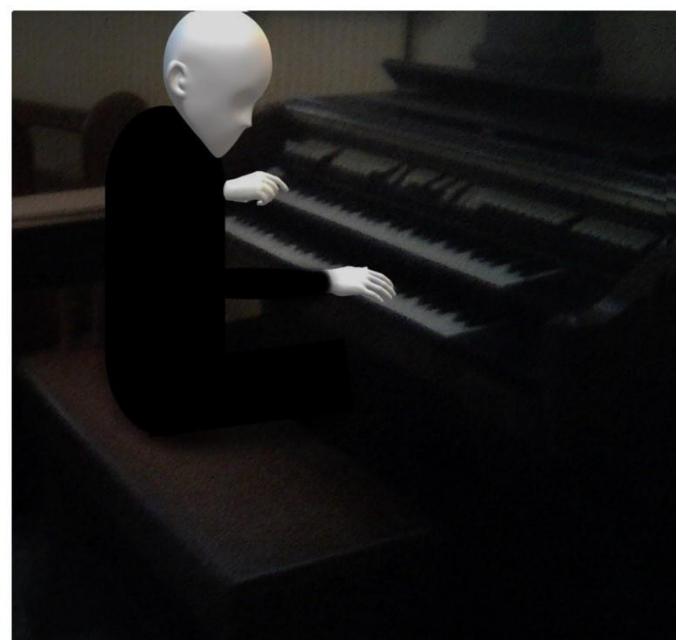
The perpetual poker match between light and darkness is after all a game of solitaire.



Which side ultimately wins remains to be seen.

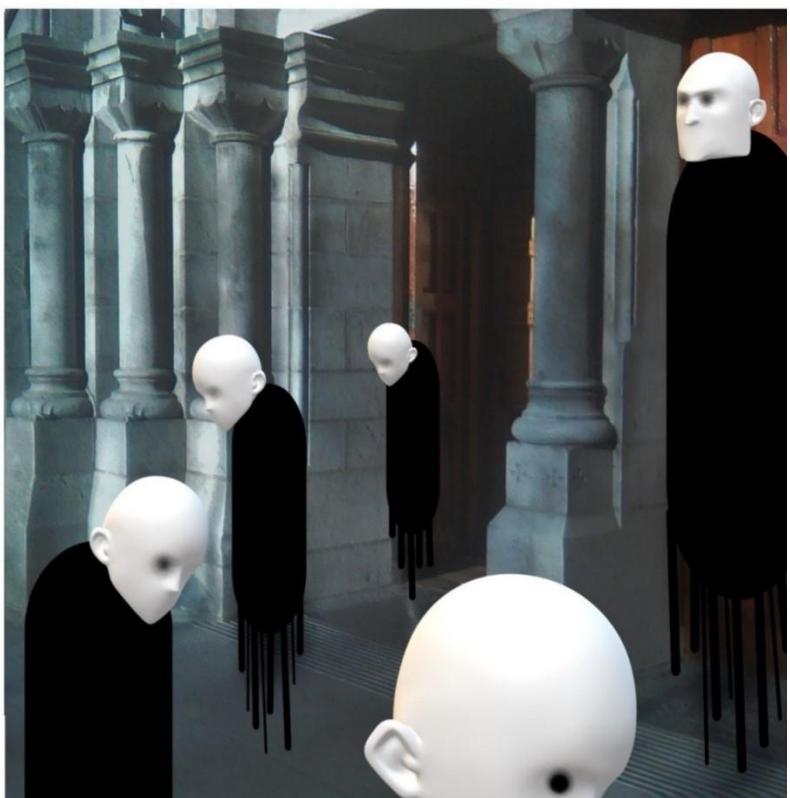
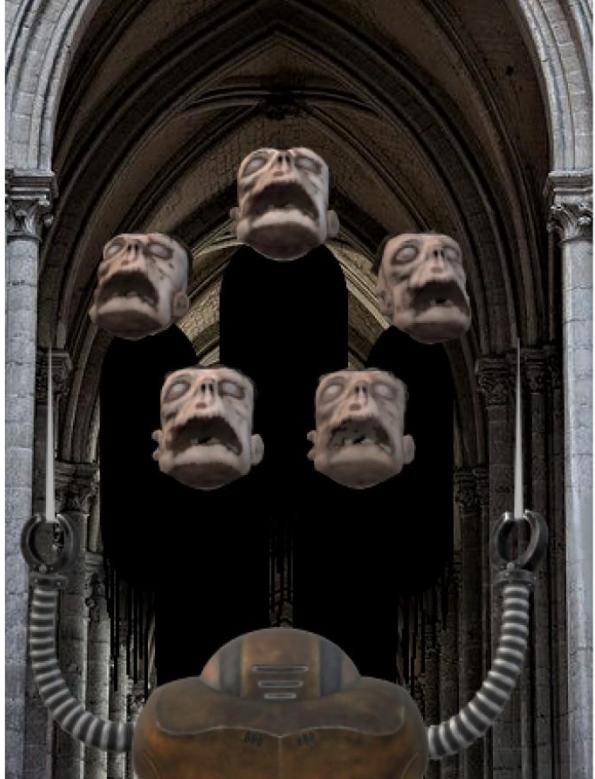


Wired to channel the same old binary energies.

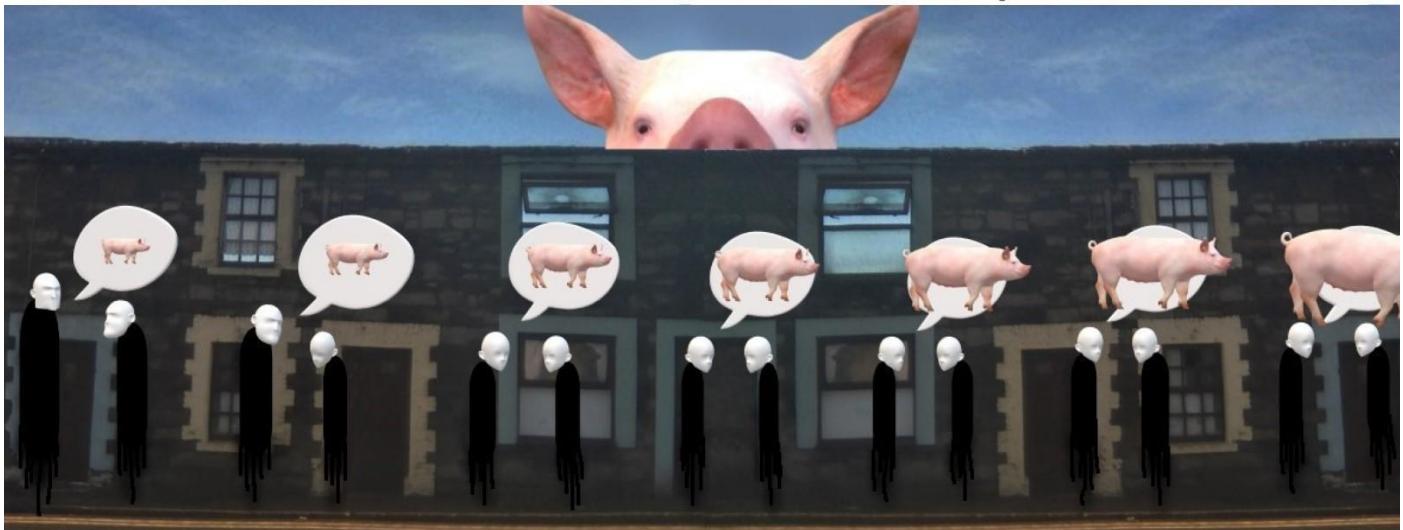


Cue the spooky church music.

**Darkness sets the tempo for this hymn
to snuffed out dreams.**



“Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it.”
— Joseph Goebbels





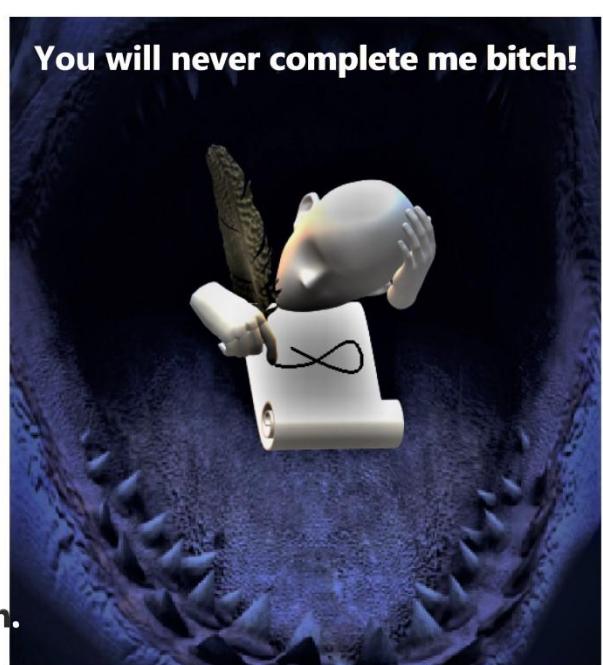
Difficult to establish a concrete position on what is essentially a work in progress.



AI models lack the computational power to include higher dimensions.



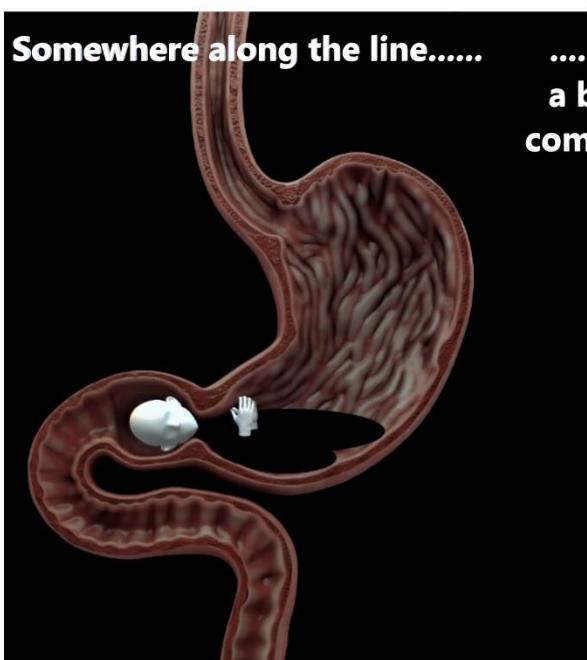
You will never complete me bitch!



Somewhere along the line.....

.....there was a blockage in communication.

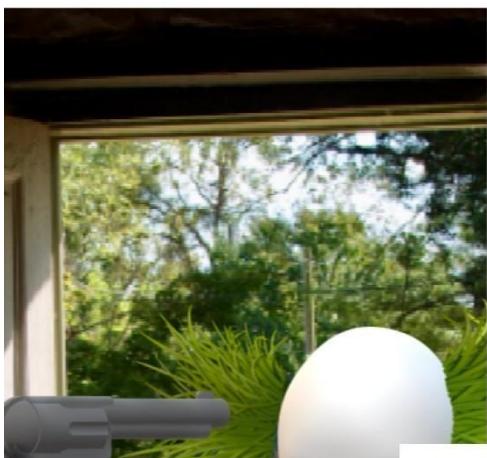
Hence we arrive at this grizzly conclusion.



The mow down clown always finds a way through.



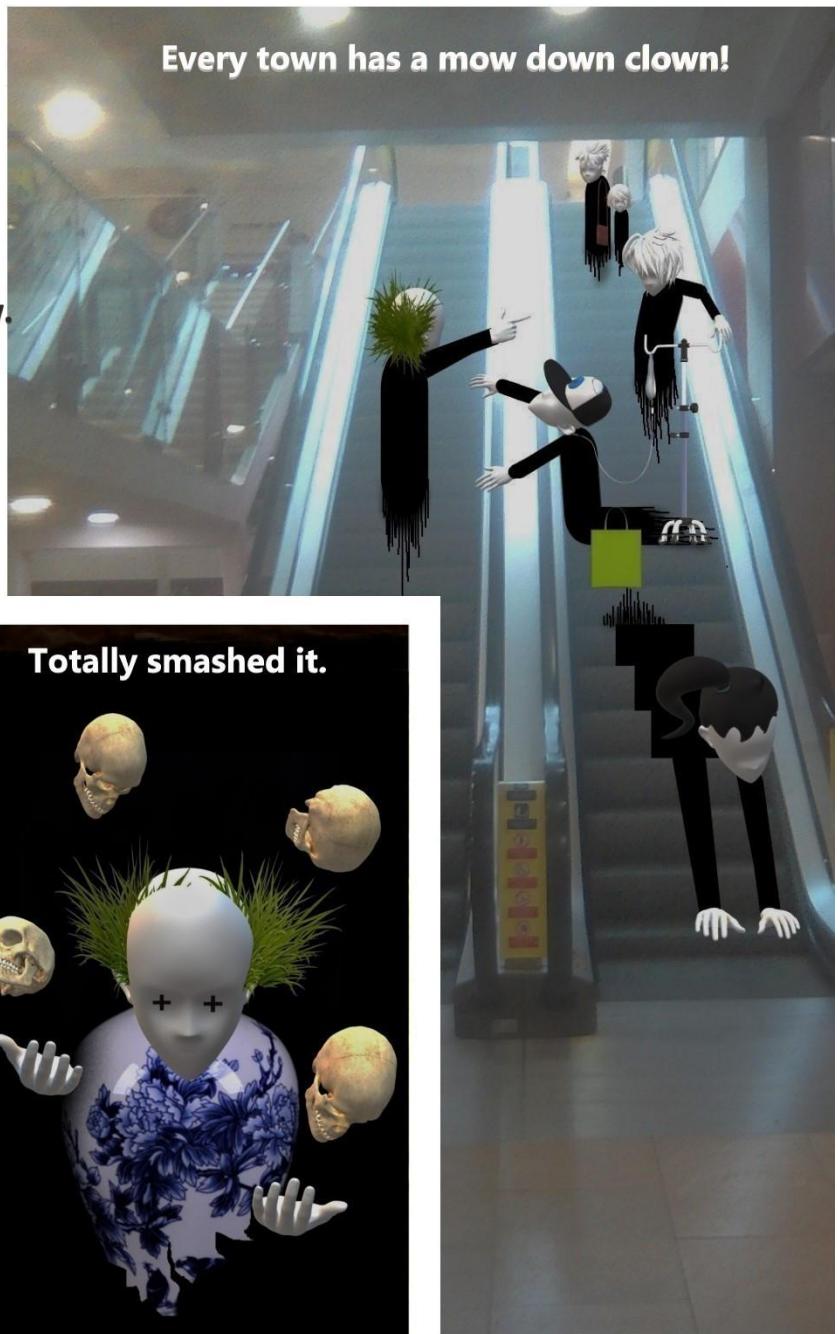
A master of improv he is very open to audience participation.



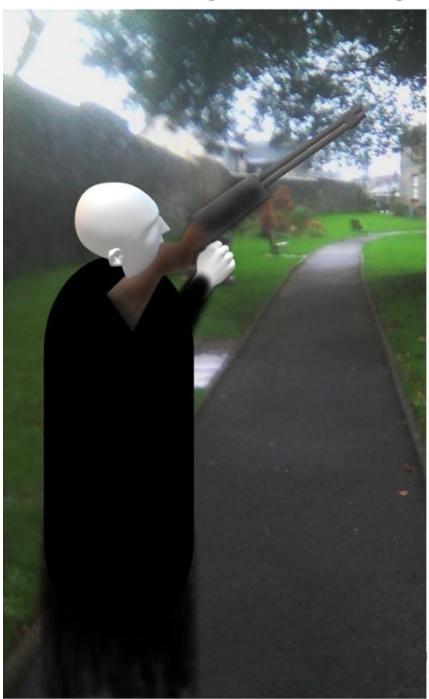
It is perfectly natural to encounter a little resistance.

Their loss if they fail to see the bright side.

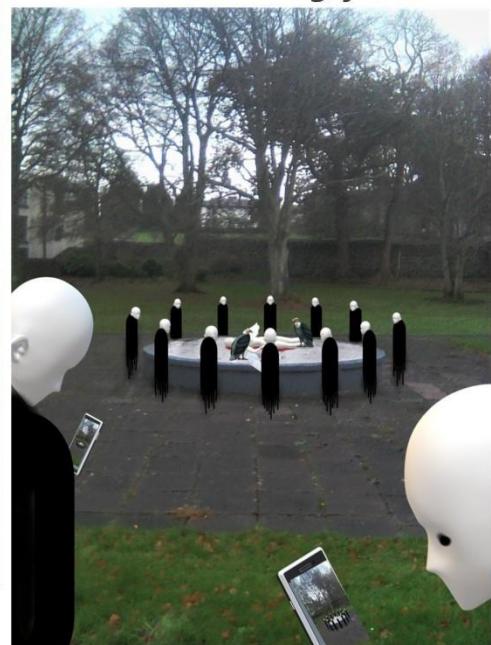
Every town has a mow down clown!



Some ideas just don't fly!

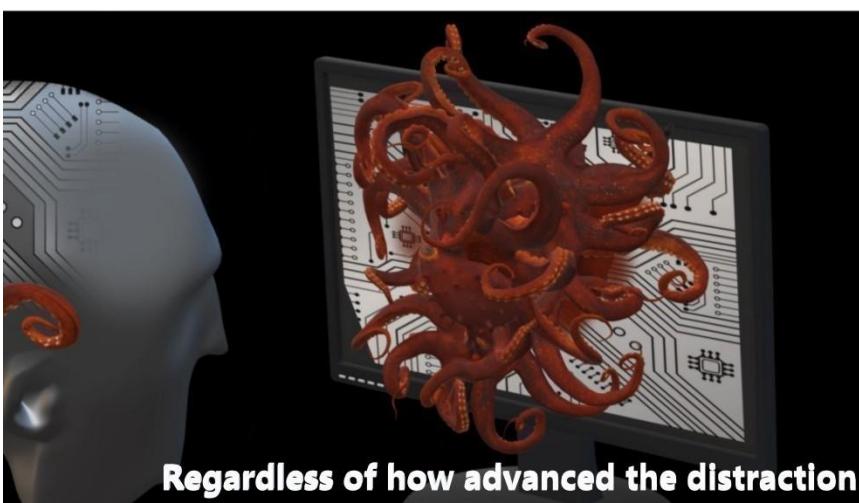


Inevitably everything becomes food for the hungry hive.



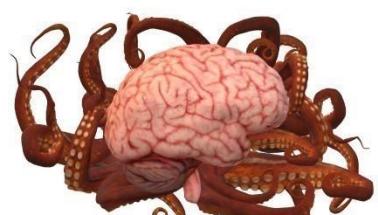
with realities on the ground.

The culture here will ingest any snake oil to keep the devil from their doorstep.



Regardless of how advanced the distraction

Dysfunction will always find a way to take possession of the human mind.



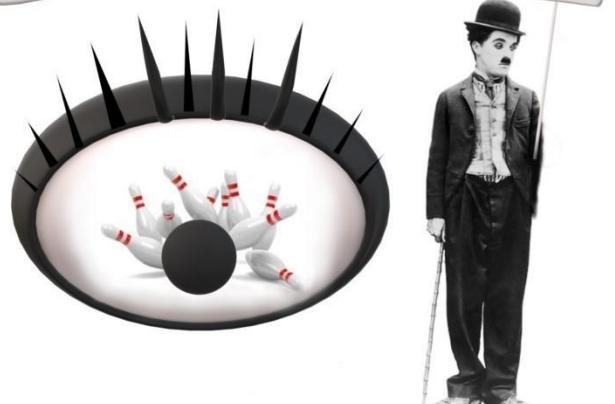
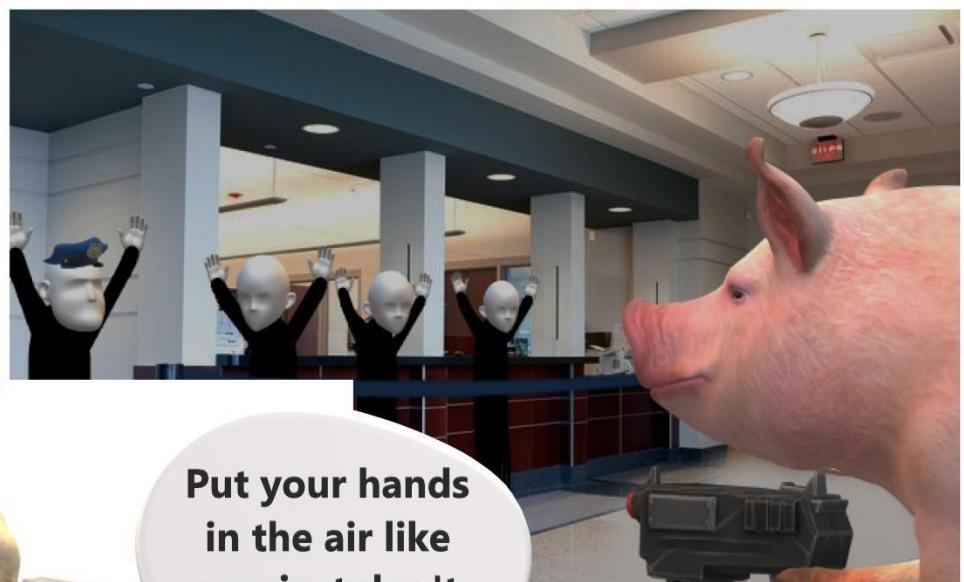
Virtually impossible to keep abreast with the latest mutation in the story.



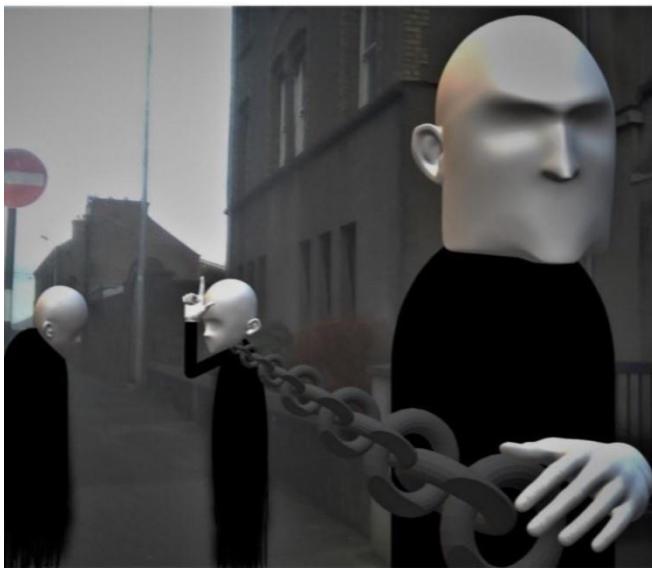
Strikes me as a totally batty scenario.



**It bowls me over how
some acts have
mastered the heist
movie genre to
perfection.**

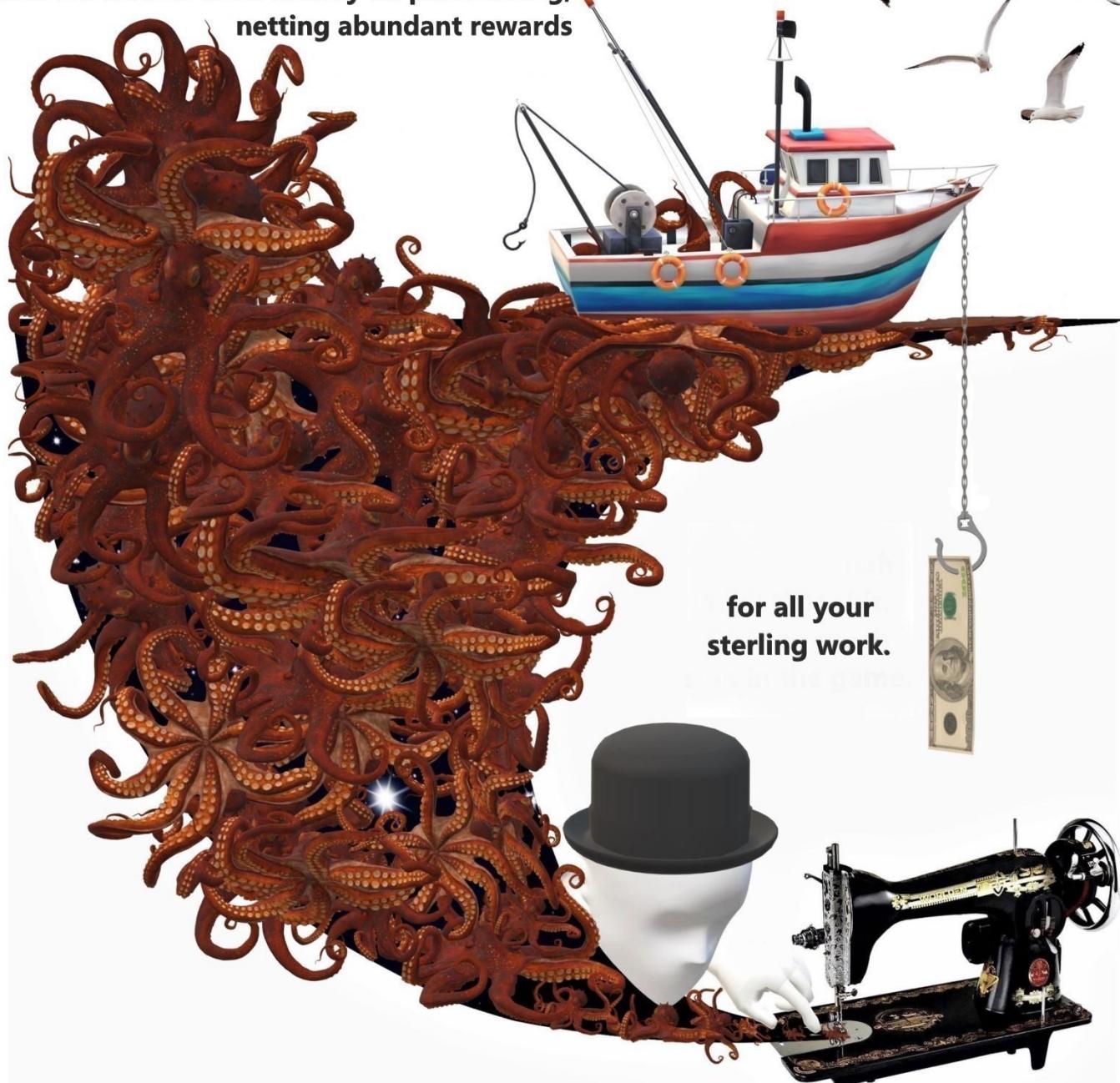


It is still possible to forge strong links.



So important to get the balance just right!

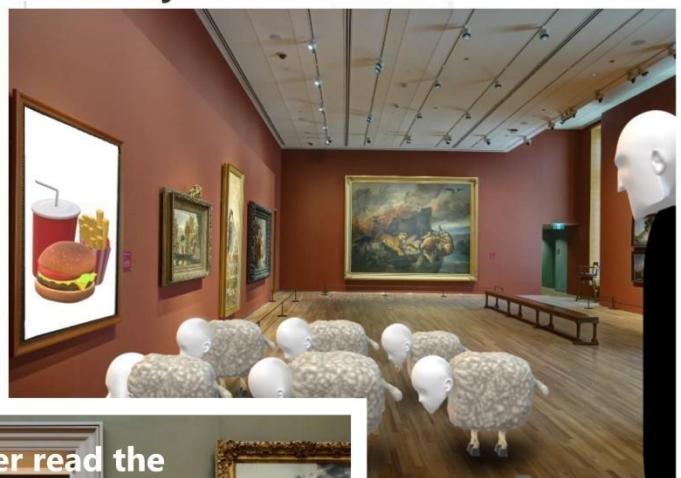
**Then life should theoretically be plain sailing,
netting abundant rewards**



**for all your
sterling work.**



But once in a blue moon Mister have a nice day shows he has a dark side.



Such an astronomical waste of space.

