



The Conflict Issue



HAT BY
RALPH LAUREN
SHADES BY
RAY-BAN
SHOES BY
JIMMY CHOO
TOP BY PRADA
HANDBAG BY GUCCI
PERFUME BY
CHANEL
RANCID STINK OF
CORRUPTION BY
THE DICTATOR OF
YOUR CHOICE



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Editorial

By Gary Sykes-Blythe



We improve ourselves by victories over ourselves. There must be contest, and we must win. - Edward Gibbon

Opening with a quote isn't really my normal style, but you can't turn your nose up at Gibbon, even if you're as prone to nose-turning as I am. In some ways, Conflict is little more than the friction caused by our differences. We've all heard people wistfully droning on about the person they 'love to death' but who 'drives them mental', especially at this time of year.

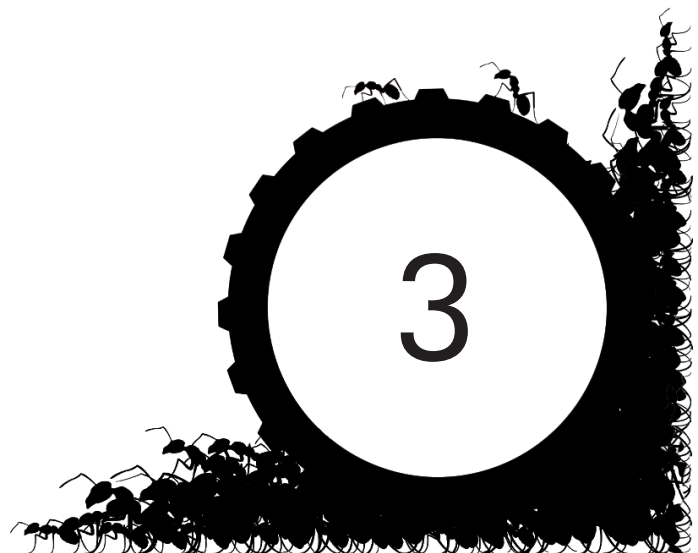
On the other hand, at least as long as there has been a mass media outlet, scenes of fighting have constituted the majority of 'the news' in peace and wartime. The violence in Syria won't be going away any time soon, British troops are already on their way back to Iraq and there is no reason to believe Afghanistan will be any different in few short years. The question of 'do wars cause more wars?' is a fair one. After all, with no World War I there could be no World War II; equally, no Franco-Prussian War, no World War I; no Napoleon, no Franco-Prussian War. Are we really prepared to blame Napoleon for Passchendale?

In Ukraine we see what is symptomatic of wider conflict around the world. The study of International Relations has been dominated since the Congress of Vienna (1815) by the ideal of 'balance of power'. Through 'balance of power' it was felt that the *status quo* that existed before the French Revolution ought to be maintained permanently: kings, peasants and borders held in aspic to prevent sudden growth in power. For 99 years the principle of 'balance of power' maintained something like peace amongst the Great Powers (except in Crimea, where Russian advances towards Constantinople threatened the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean, and France and Britain moved to restore the balance). Whether Europe flourished in the 19th century or stagnated depends on your point of view, but peace in Europe *did* allow Europeans to export war and conquest around the world. There is not a single war, insurgency, uprising or revolt occurring around the world that does not owe its cause to European, and Capitalist, empire.

Of course, it isn't all family bickering. The causes of conflict on the world's stage aren't so different from a personal scale battles, but the stakes are often much higher. As we hoped, the content in this issue stands astride this divide between the personal, and the grandiose. Shaughan Dolan's investigation of the way that music and art can be co-opted to bring about 'peacebuilding' is an interesting approach. Alternately, Raef Boylan's allegorical story of two boys playing elegantly infuses the Israel-Palestine conflict with the banal world of little boys.

Boldly as ever, the poets in this issue have opened the doors to a wide variety of abstractions, contrary factions and didactions, but it wouldn't be poetry if it didn't rattle as much as rhyme.

As a final thought, it's worth noting that human society has been growing empirically less violent since the beginning of 'civilisation'. It sounds bizarre to point to the all round peacefulness of the world today when the news is full of blood, but it's important to consider the smaller scale. Violent crime, in the UK at least, has declined steadily for at least as long as my lifetime. There has not been a major European war for 70 years. With the infinite destructive power of nuclear weapons on offer, life has not been obliterated. We're not talking about 'swords into ploughshares' here, but at least 'ploughshares into swords' is becoming more of a rarity. GSB





Animals

By Anna Bradley

**We stood on the edge of the Savannah, one female and two male. I was alert, ears on standby and front legs crossed, one over the other: about to commit to a pli  , it would seem. In this pre-bal-
letic state, incongruous with the withering shrub and without an audience, if you looked closely it was only my eyes that were dancing. I don't know how I learned this stance. I am not one to ask where I came from, whether I would ever be something else. I wouldn't know how to object to the fight that was about to ensue between my two companions. I just let the wind whistle through my eyelids and nostrils. I felt human in my dizzy head.**

The two males were too polite to admit to what was about to happen, as though wanting to forego its eventuality, or ignore it until absolutely necessary. The younger one kicked repeatedly at the hard ground for a few seconds. He was stronger, less bitter and already regretted the future that was about to pass, I could tell from his vulnerable bowed head. His skin was wrapped tight over his bones and the design of his skin more translucent than the other. With the sun at its morning angle, his tendons glistened like a jellyfish on the beach. He shook his head, as if to say 'here we go'. Hit in the side by the older, whose neck was bent at the joint that connects his collar bone to his torso, a move that barely looked plausible, the younger buckled. With hooves curled over and legs bent at the knees, he used the dense muscles in his calves

to lever himself up. He whacked back. Now the fight was in full swing, he seemed eager to get it over with.

The older was more practised. His nostrils inflamed violently, he knew he had to go into mortal combat unflinchingly. At once vulnerable and full of hating violence, his extensive body was a place of immediate contrasts. Impossible to feel indifferent, the ambivalence that he portrayed was wholly satisfying and distressing in equal measures. His swift moves came naturally to him and came as no shock to the younger, who flexed his milky muscles, an instinctive reaction to fear. Probably looking as though I didn't find my destiny wholly satisfactory, I moved away slightly and grappled gently with some acacia. As the fatal move passed, both beasts looked completely intent on ensuring the other's downfall. At this climax, the only possible outcome was for the other to die, crestfallen, to the ground. It was the younger who went, his head lolling one last time, in the air. Completely unsupported by his own body, his legs gave in dramatically, lending him the appearance of a puppet whose owners hands had shakily dropped the cords that held him up. That the older had won, and could take me, suddenly seemed inevitable; after all, this experienced fighter had been in the ring many a time. He had no concept of time and of beginnings and endings, of what was right or wrong, never stopping to question, just knowing who to kill, where to eat, and how to win his mate.

I let the sand drift through my open eyelids as I lifted my head. My legs still in their dancing positioning, I was elegant and defiant, which flattered me more than my obedience, following the winner into the wilderness.



Broken Record

By Vijayalakshmi Harish



the truth (most objective
joke mirror) calls.
the morning is sometimes black
the nights an unnatural bright.
if and when
the vultures come coasting
over every story
encrusted with falsehood
hopefully they will peck through
to the heart.
someday we will mine these buried scabs and
spent, cooled missiles
like so much gold and diamonds
and build memorials of them.
the loop will then start over
the same songs will seep into the water
howling through the earth's crust. maybe
this time it will burst open like a seed
and the winds will carry life again.





The Fall of Jack and Jill

By Matt Barton

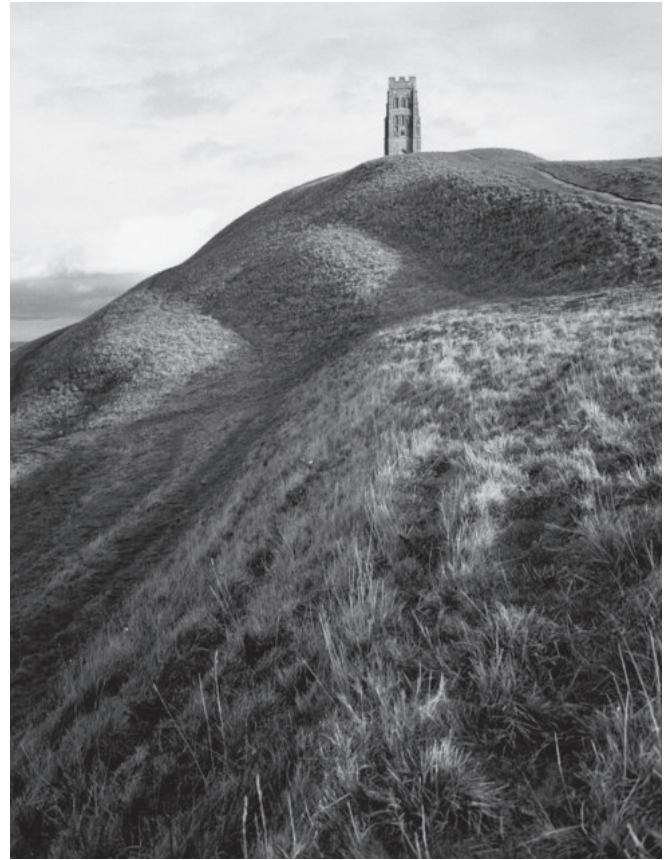
As that darkness enveloped Jill's vision, she felt suffocated, opening her eyes only to find the same room, repulsive, dirty and barren. She had dreamt it away, many times, but it remained, waiting for her to awake. Her mother creaked loudly and she jumped, she looked through her hair, slowly, to find her mother slumped asleep in her dirty rocking chair, cigarillo in hand, still lit and smoking.

A slush of icy wind and rain battered against the window, threatening to tear the roof off and launch it away. Jill rolled and sat tired and bored staring out into the storm, watching rain drizzle down the notches and gouges in the glass. Jack slept on. A thunderclap rang loud and deafening, waking Jack and his mother from sleep and violently shaking them to sense. The mother swore loudly and stood, walking with a limp to the sink where she tried to fix herself a drink. The rain continued.

"Fucking water's off" hissed the mother and threw her glass stein at the cowering children, it shattered like a bomb, a sign that they had to go, now, to the stone well lying atop the nearest hill. If they did not... Jill shuddered, fearing even the end of the sentence.

Jack and Jill went. They quickly donned their coats and hats, hiding the bruises and scars left by a drunken mother, hiding her betrayal, sacrificing their freedom.

"Come on little Jack" Jill said, her maternal instinct shone through when she was alone with him, he was four, and she was twelve. She



loved him, and wanted to take him away where their cruel mother could do him no harm.

Up the hill. The long, soaking trudge to the well took an eternity, with the bland landscape made from nothing but hills and trees, hills and trees. Mud covered the south side of the 'Water Hill' and made it harder and messier to climb, it was almost boggy in some places, feet and ankles stuck fast in the mud. Jill hoped the way down would be easier than this, 'this' was just madness.

To fetch a pail of water. Seemed like a simple enough task, but as the well got closer, Jill broke down. She wept for her brother, her life, herself, she wanted to be away from this madness, away from her mother and wanted to be free. She turned to Jack, bleary-eyed and mad with despair. "I'm gonna save you Jack, I'm gonna take you away from here" she whispered, he smiled broadly. Jill collapsed into his shoulder, crying desperate sobs, loud and wailing as she hugged Jack to her chest, she held him by the shoulders, and threw him as hard as she could off the hill.





Jack fell down. He spun sideways, twisting, his face contorted into shock. Jill wept harder, screaming, agony. Jack finally hit the floor, he was struck a glancing blow from a jutting spine of rock, and landed on a plateau with his limbs splayed. Jill lost all strength, she collapsed and lay at the top of the hill. She screamed and screamed, desperate sobs broken by gasps of precious air.

Jack broke his crown. She could not remember how long she lay there, minutes, hours, days. She sat up, blind from tiredness and tears and pulled herself to the edge, she could see Jack from there. He looked asleep on the rocks, peaceful, like he'd never been beaten in his life, like a normal kid with a normal family. She wanted to see him closer, she stepped on the rocks, covered in mud. She slipped.

Jill came tumbling after. She felt a rush as the air passed her falling body, she felt like she was flying, like an eagle, a free eagle, allowed to go anywhere. She came to earth and hit the rocks hard, harder than Jack had. She lay there next to him, mere feet away streaked with blood. Her face looked peaceful, like she'd never been beaten in her life, like a normal girl in a normal family.

Jack and Jill
Went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water
Jack fell down
And broke his crown
Jill came tumbling after.



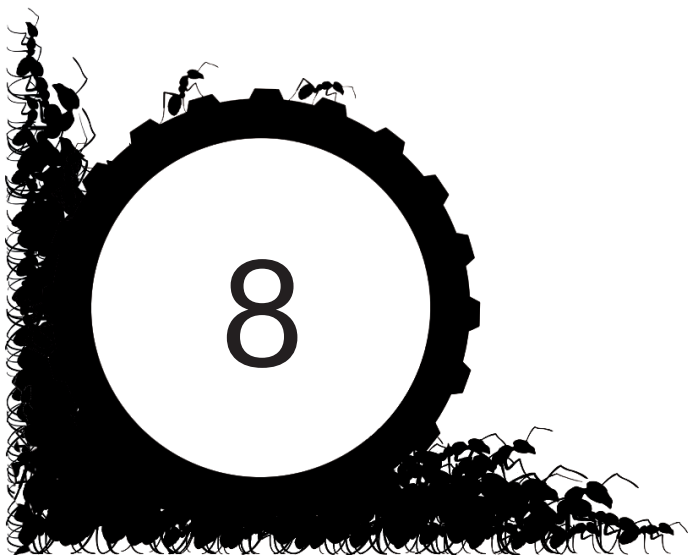


Crossbow

By Karen Little

I attract a crowd as I mount my bow,
the stock holding down the draw of my string.
Sensitive to damp, created from the elements,
the wood creaks and is slippery.
The butt of the crossbow is against my stomach
as I pull back the string. I play her like a violin,
her strings and short muzzle supported
when I lock
my thumb.

I should be highly prized, my portrait as hunter,
fashionable. I shoot my bolt and penetrate.
These are formidable wounds. Someone approaches
with a mighty stride.



Bully

By Karen Little



She shivers in discord, joined to a bear of a man,
like spittle between the bully's teeth.
In the reckless shape of new beginnings
she shears herself, she shivers in discord.
Her emerging skull fills with new decision,
like spittle between the bully's teeth.
There is a world of hair surrounding her,
a morbid compass, she shivers in discord.
Isolated on the chair, she's spread
like spittle between the bully's teeth.
She gathers the hair in a hessian bag, and holds her being,
she shivers in discord, like spittle between the
bully's teeth.





War of Art

By Shaughan Dolan

Governments have, and still are, aware of the power of art as an instrument of policy. The Central American hit single *La Bestia* - "the beast" tells the story of "the Beast from the South, this wretched freight train on which migrants hitch a lift to the United States. What is not generally known about this anti-immigration Mexican ballad is that it was commissioned by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency. *La Bestia*, at the height of its popularity, was played on 21 radio stations throughout Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Individuals also have the capacity to draw on art to communicate their messages. In the UK, "Jihadi John", the leading suspect in the beheading of James Foley, made his name on YouTube as the Rapper 'L Jinny' rapping about how, amongst other things, his father, the Islamic extremist Adel Abdul Bary, was extradited to the U.S. on terrorism charges. He enjoyed airplay on Radio 1 only months before leaving his London home to join Jihadists in Syria.

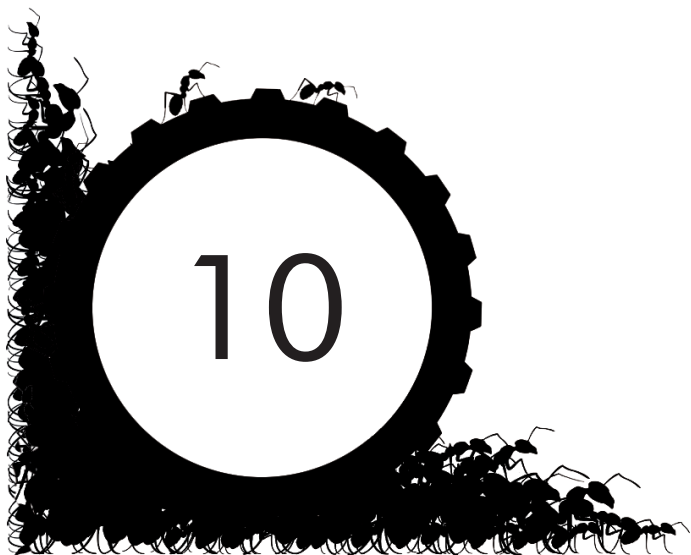
Both *La Bestia* and Jihadi rap seek to create powerful culturally specific symbols for people to rally behind. The lesson here is that music is an immensely powerful tool for engaging human motivation. It is because of these intense reactions from marginalised individuals that peacebuilding practitioners have begun to examine music as a tool for reconciliation in post-conflict societies. Guinea is one of the poorest countries on the

planet. There is little industry and inconsistent electricity, and there are few navigable roads. More than half the population can't read. It is a hotbed for political instability and gang culture. In 2000, Guinea became home to half a million refugees fleeing fighting in Sierra Leone and Liberia. This increased the strain on its economy and generated suspicion and ethnic tension as both sides threw accusations of attempts at a political coup. That added to the fact Guinea is only just emerging from years of military Junta rule, and you have a civil war waiting to happen.

Leading the charge against such division are young artists, such as Aliou Sagna - once a leader in Kindia, Guinea of the gang Bouyan, Bouyan Style known in the region for its violence. After USAID began investing in the "Youth and Non-violence" programme which included radio programs and cultural festivals, Guinea's urban youth gained awareness of their rights and social responsibilities.

Aliou is now the Vice-President of Kindia's most influential youth association, which kept the moniker Bouyan Bouyan Style, but now has a different motivation: acting as peacemakers through music. They are now realising that dream through their own radio station Kaniazik FM, to spread their music and message. Bouyan Bouyan Style now giving back to the community by training unemployed youth in music production, radio management and media coverage, encouraging the next generation of peacebuilders in Guinea.

Foreign policy in the UK is almost entirely defined by military action – but this is beginning to



Shaughan Dolan works for Conscience: Taxes For Peace Not War – A peacebuilding NGO that campaigns for the British Government to protect and promote international conflict prevention initiatives.



“Many of the world’s conflicts are cocktails of the various ingredients that feed instability”

change. Since 2001, the UK government has been funding the Conflict Pool – a government mechanism designed to facilitate the non-violent resolution of conflict. In the era of austerity, governments are beginning to realise that military intervention is both expensive and ineffective and are looking to alternatives.

Despite significant cuts to government departments, including the military, one area is having its budget tripled to over £1 billion – peacebuilding.

Whilst there is global recognition that we all profit ethically and financially from stability, the UK government is moving away from simple military solutions.

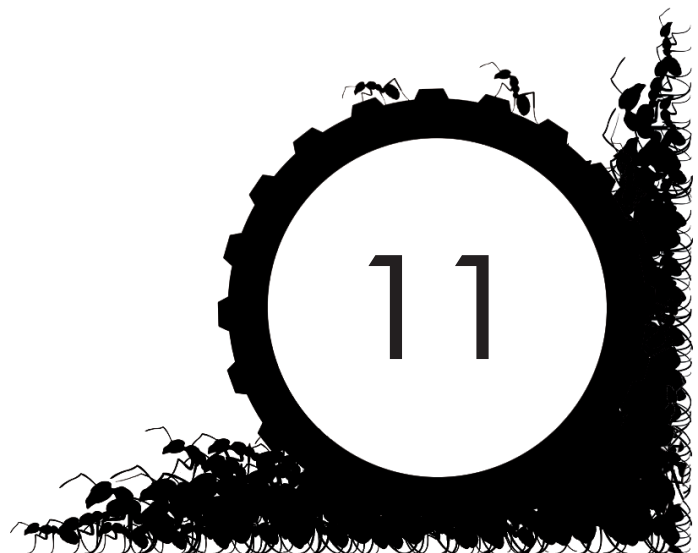
Many of the world’s conflicts are cocktails of the various ingredients that feed instability – small arms proliferation, disintegration or corruption of state police, poverty, inequality and famine. Whilst government policy is good on looking at metrics like these and assessing risk, it does little to explore the human experience that leads people towards violence.

A leading cause of civil war - ethnic tension - led Rwanda to one the bloodiest genocides Africa has ever known. In neighbouring Uganda, music is becoming a new method to breed ethnic solidarity. Initiatives sponsored by the Music for Peace programme have been credited with changing the thinking and actions of their listeners on issues such as stigma of ex-combatants and gender relations, and even convincing the Ugandan government to “care about the people of northern Uganda again.”

Music is being used to create a social solidarity between the Acholi-speaking (apparently a beautiful, tonal language) Nilotic of Northern Uganda and Bantu and Central Sudanic communities. Music is humanising a social problem in a way bureaucracy never could.

Foreign policy in the 21st century won’t be the gunboat diplomacy of centuries past – it will be the building of stability, prosperity and influence through long-term peacebuilding.

Let’s just hope the millennials will be dancing to the tunes of Bouyan, Bouyan Style and not the Jihadi rhymes of L Jinny’s *The Beginning* – because the war of art will take no prisoners.





Jihadi John

By Kevin Jelf

Is there a requiem for a broken land,
that lies dead and bleeding in the sand.

The perversion of Islam you preach,
puts hearts and minds out of reach.

Conversion at the point of a gun,
has the Yazidis on the run.

So please tell me, Jihadi John,
where has your humanity gone?

it's empathy you seem to lack.
Are you a psychopath in black?

How many infidels will you decapitate
to bring about your Khalifate?



They Speak my Language

By Neil Laursen

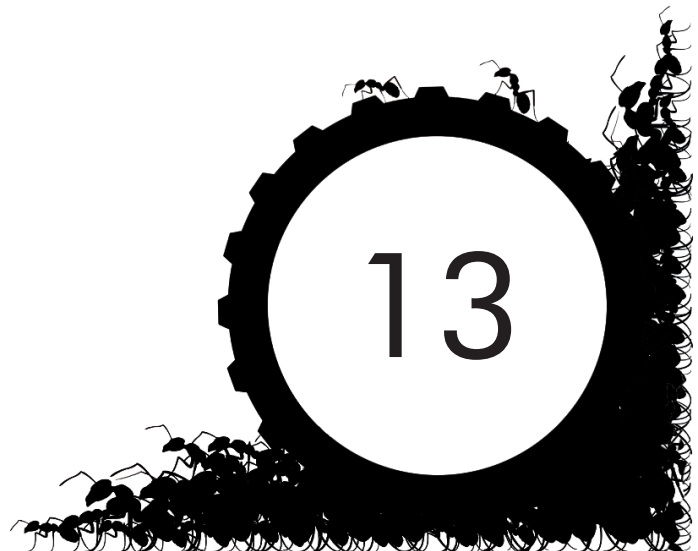


For 50 years he'd avoided parties
Then UKIP came along
And it didn't matter that he didn't know
The words to every song.

In fact, making things up was encouraged
As long as you felt it was true.
You put your right arm in, your right arm out
And stuck two fingers up at the EU.

He enjoyed being part of the Party
But was soon shown the door –
Had too much to drink, said a few things
That the press just wouldn't ignore

And nor would his wife, who left him
Despite him getting down on his knees
To beg for her forgiveness
In fluent Vietnamese.





Al-Nakba: Occupied Territory

By Raef Boylan

One Wednesday afternoon Pamir ran into his Aunt's playroom, dropping his book-bag on the floor next to the couch like always. He pounced on the main toy-box and began rooting around inside for some cars because his garage needed new customers. The garage was Pamir's favourite thing; he was especially fond of the loading platform that glided vehicles up to the roof at the press of a button. Pamir was concentrating so hard on his diving expeditions inside the toy-box that he didn't notice the doorbell, or his Aunt talking to someone in the hallway.

He had forgotten that she was going to be looking after a second little boy from now on, one who used to have different child-minders but had to leave because he was being bullied by the other kids. Aunt entered the living-room, leading a slightly older boy by the hand. She introduced him as Ishmael, and told Pamir to share nicely. Then she left them alone. Pamir felt a little shy with Ishmael in the room. As an awkward distraction, he drove two cars towards each other along the arm of the couch and made them crash. Ishmael spotted the garage and headed straight for it. Pamir knelt down beside him; he had already decided that his first nice gesture would be letting Ishmael take charge of the loading platform for a while.

"What are you doing?" said Ishmael. "This is my side of the room now. You have to go over there."

Pamir looked to where Ishmael was pointing: the opposite corner, next to the radiator and not much else. Reluctantly, he headed for the

toy-box to gather up some supplies, but Ishmael grabbed his arm and pushed him away. He said that all the toys and everything from the couch to the window belonged to him, that Pamir wasn't allowed to touch them or cross back over onto Ishmael's side of the room without permission. He had an invisible friend who believed Ishmael was so special he deserved most of the room and all the best toys. Pamir thought this sounded unfair, and tried to counter it with an invisible friend of his own, but Ishmael said Pamir's invisible friend was wrong about everything. Ishmael laid out a regiment of building blocks across the carpet to mark the border that Pamir was not to cross.

Pamir was glad when his mum arrived to collect him. It hadn't been much fun sitting in the corner, fiddling with the strap of his book-bag and listening to Ishmael speeding cars up and down the ramp.

Ishmael returned the next day, but Pamir was better prepared; he'd had the foresight to stockpile a few cars, puzzles and books in the corner by the radiator. He still wasn't keen on being banished but at least it was less boring. However, when Ishmael noticed that Pamir had taken things from the toy-box, he stomped directly over and snatched them up. Regardless of what his Aunt had said, this was too much for Pamir – he tried to grab back one of the books but it wasn't an even match, Ishmael was stronger. He held the book out of reach and shoved Pamir to the floor. Humiliated, the smaller boy lashed out, managing to catch Ishmael's shins with the hard sole of his school shoes.

Rubbing at his throbbing leg, Ishmael shouted, "I'm telling my Uncle Sam on you!"

"Telling him what? You took my book and my cars."

"He's bigger than you, bigger than me even. He's gonna kill you later when he comes to get me," said Ishmael, as he retreated to his side of the playroom.

"Don't care," fibbed Pamir. He wanted to run to his Aunt in the kitchen but he knew that kicking people wasn't a nice thing to do, and he was supposed to be playing nicely with Ishmael. Instead he waited miserably in the corner.

Pamir's mum was running late that evening, as she frequently did. There was a knock at





the front door followed by a booming male voice in the hallway. Ishmael flashed a triumphant sneer at Pamir then ran out of the playroom; Pamir heard him showing off his bruised leg. He wished he was small enough to crawl into the toy-box and hide. Uncle Sam was a big man who seemed to fill up the whole room. He told Pamir that he was a nasty little bully. Pamir's Aunty appeared at Sam's side; the two of them looked down on him like twin towers. Aunty said she was disappointed, that Pamir should be nicer to Ishmael because he had already suffered. Uncle Sam said Pamir should be punished. Before Ishmael went home they forced Pamir to say sorry. Afterwards Aunty made Pamir tidy all the toys away and sit in the corner by the radiator doing nothing. When his mum came, Aunty told her that Pamir had started a fight with Ishmael out of the blue. They agreed he was a bad boy. He wasn't allowed to interrupt grown-ups when they were talking, so Pamir concentrated on not crying instead.

That Friday, Ishmael bounced into the living-room brandishing some presents from his

Uncle Sam. He had a cool Nerf Blaster gun and a sword with a studded scabbard, which he chucked carelessly onto the couch before swinging the weapon in an arc over his head. The blade was painted silver; it looked real. Aunty told Ishmael to be careful then went into the kitchen to mix some blackcurrant squash. Pamir stood in the corner dodging Nerf pellets and watching Ishmael pretend to slice the guts out of the couch. Then Ishmael raised the sword high above his head, preparing to bring it down with all the force he could muster.

"Don't!" cried Pamir.

But it was too late. The blade crashed down upon his old favourite, snapping through the plastic mechanism that attached the moving platform to the side of the garage. Ishmael sensed Pamir springing forward and quickly brought the sword down again, creating a dent in the ramp just before he was attacked by a raging tornado of flailing limbs, slapping at his arms and head, grabbing for the sword to wrench it away. Pamir's Aunty hurriedly balanced two beakers of squash on the arm of the couch and waded in to separate them, shouting for her nephew to stop, pulling him off Ishmael. She tore the sword out of Pamir's grip and handed it back to Ishmael.

"Look, he's wrecked it," Ishmael wailed, showing her a scratch in the paintwork. Aunty dragged Pamir out into the hallway. She called him a bully and said she didn't know why he had such a problem with Ishmael but he would have to learn to share. If he didn't sort himself out, there would be serious trouble. She marched him back into the playroom to apologise. Ishmael was building another barrier, a little closer to the radiator than before; he explained to Aunty how he



thought it was for the best if they played on opposite sides of the room. She said it sounded like a good idea for now, and told Pamir not to cross the line without asking for permission. He retreated into his corner; Auntie said he had to stop sulking. The beakers of squash were on Ishmael's side of the couch. When Pamir tried to stretch for one without passing over the line, Ishmael moved them out of reach, saying Pamir couldn't be trusted. Then he drank them both.

Pamir squatted in his corner. He decided life was better before he knew Ishmael existed, so from then on he would refuse to recognise Ishmael's existence. He shrugged off the guilt when he listened to his mum and Auntie discussing his behaviour over a cup of tea. How could he be bullying Ishmael? There was nobody called Ishmael here.

The weekend zoomed unsympathetically towards Monday and nothing had changed. Pamir found a small bouncy-ball in the playground, which he brought to Auntie's house in his book-bag. It was fun testing how high he could throw the ball without hitting the ceiling, but soon became tedious. Watching Ishmael on the other side, creating tableaux of toys that had belonged to him, in a space that had once been his alone, Pamir's eyes narrowed with resentment. Brain and limb barely had time to confer, his arm moved so quick – and the bouncy-ball smacked the back of Ishmael's head. Unluckily, Pamir had chosen a bad moment: right when his Auntie walked past the door. She stormed in, yelling that she had seen him deliberately try to hurt Ishmael and she was getting sick of him always starting fights. She announced that she needed the toilet but was coming right back to set

up a game that would force them to play fairly.

Pamir watched Auntie walk out of the playroom, his mind a ball of knotted conflicts. Something stung his ear and clattered to the carpet. He looked down and saw two interlocked pieces of plastic train-track. Another piece bounced off his shoulder. Ishmael had plunged both arms into the toy-box and was flinging stuff haphazardly in his direction. Train-track, cars, Lego blocks and action-figures rained down; Pamir shielded his face with crossed arms as a mini keyboard flew across the room and played the radiator like a discordant gong. In the midst of this torrent of toys Pamir squatted down, rescued a concussed plush elephant and lobbed it back at Ishmael. He missed but scooped up some pieces of train-track; these also failed to hit their target. However, that made no difference to how Auntie reacted when she witnessed his retaliation, nor how she reported the 'incident' to his shocked mother: Pamir had been caught in the act of starting a toy war by throwing first his bouncy-ball and then an onslaught of toys at Ishmael, who had merely tried to defend himself. It was no wonder, they said, that Ishmael didn't want Pamir going near the toys when his behaviour was so hostile.

The next day, before Ishmael arrived from school, Pamir laid a trap for him. He pissed into the toy-box, a big grin on his face at the thought of Ishmael shoving his hands in there. Hurt by his Auntie's refusal to listen to his side of the story, he snuck into the kitchen, opened the fridge door soundlessly and spat into the carton of semi-skimmed. It made him feel a little better, but he had no idea how to resolve the situation – and until they opened their eyes to the truth, neither would anybody else.



Neighbours

By Emma Cousin



Wall Conversation i

By Emma Cousin

Idiot talks to wall
Wall looks at idiot
Idiot shouts at wall
Wall looks away
Idiot steps aside
To find walls' eyes
But wall has closed them
Idiot talks to wall
Anyway.





Cross Contamination
By Emma Cousin



Bolas and Pistolas

By Richard King Perkins II

We had skirted across the imaginary but verifiable line
when the sirens picked up again.

Everyone brought their exotic weapons into play.
Endearingly, the sound coaxed our expressions

into the arrangements we found most comforting
in one another.

All of us crept back behind the imaginary
but verifiable line.

We followed a small river
back to where we were all created—

near the thatched cottage where we'd all spend
the rest of our lives.

They were there too, of course.
Like us they had nowhere else to be and nowhere else to go.

Squirt guns, flame throwers, bolas and pistols,
all the enemies and weaponry we could imagine.

We all just stood around quietly because
the sirens had died down and no one knew quite what to do.

Finally, someone spoke out and made a joke
in a funny, cartoonish voice

which got everybody laughing with faces
never used or even seen before

and pretty soon none of us were sure
who was on which side

and the imaginary line blurred in our minds to the point
it became something we could no longer imagine.

The Taking of Little Ted

By Richard King Perkins II



little ted went in the army met a german girl had sex
his first her thirty-first made a baby his first her first too
 ate peanut butter on wonderbread got married then
 little ted met a man a religious sort filled with his own god
 and taught little ted to fight better than the army
to fight for the sickly god that only he knew. a simple pacifist
 and army cook little ted took to war like hitler youth
 learned to beat his wife a german girl and baby daughter
 his first her first too.

had sex again sees demons everywhere but makes another baby
 a son his first her first too and learns to beat him too.
leaves the army for a religious life directed to washington state
 far from the things that made little ted the simple pacifist.
 little ted says the german girl is hexing his children
 don't touch them, witch you can only eat peanut butter on
wonderbread and drink unsweetened kool-aid. going to school
 to learn more how to fight little ted trains in the gym
 of the sickly god to be harsh and holier than thou.

little ted still sees demons everywhere but grows weaker
 crueler every day. his family prays that someday when he is
weak enough he will return to the things that first made him
 to the things of nourishment he had before a sickly god
tried to take him and run far away dying in the deep woods
 eating only peanut butter on wonderbread.





21st Century Conflict

By John Earls

It seems the opinion of western leaders and, in particular Tony Blair, is that the 21st century has seen the emergence of religious extremism and the attitude, beliefs and the moral codes of different cultures as being the biggest cause of unrest throughout all societies in the world. Mr Blair confirmed these views in a recent interview printed in the Guardian January 2014 where he said, "The battles of this century are less likely to be the product of extreme political ideology, like those of the 20th century – but they could easily be fought around the questions of cultural or religious difference."

Indeed, bloodshed is no stranger to those of the righteous. Throughout history there have been many large scale massacres carried out in the name of religion such as the Christian Crusades between 1095 and 1291. The term given to the modern day religious crusaders is religious extremists and in the West this is mostly associated with the militant Islamic movement. Religious extremism is not limited to Islam, it is a global phenomenon practised by many cultures and faiths, to the detriment of the people who come into contact with it.

The term is given to organised fanatical religious terrorism that wages war through erratic violence aimed at citizens as well as armed forces, using traditional as well as non traditional forms of warfare. The practice is considered so dangerous that major government reports have identified this as the biggest present threat to the lives of men and women in every society.

A recent report by the Pew Research Centre ("Pew") confirms the strength of this point of view by drawing evidence from a large case study. Pew was not commissioned by the government to carry out its studies, it was an independent American research centre, meaning its findings are of an unbiased opinion. Pew researched 198 countries. Of the 198 countries surveyed one fifth of the countries reported increased levels of violence and discrimination against minority faiths. This had often resulted in violent crimes being committed against the persecuted as well as campaigns of isolation and discrimination.

The main culprits, as evidenced in the report, were religious groups fighting with rival faiths locally, nationally and internationally as well as localised governments using campaigns against opposing parties that often resulted in violence to instil fear or win votes. In the said report, Pew scrutinised the issue of religious extremism in 2012. The results of the reports showed that globally this problem has been increasing with the threat not just limited to the most widely publicised groups such as Al Qaeda.

Looking closer to home, it is clear to see the impact religious extremism is having on modern Britain as there have been some atrocious acts of violence in the name of religion in recent years. These have served to alienate sections of society or make particular faiths vulnerable to attack from rival extremists seeking retribution which echoes the findings of the Pew report. A recent example of just such a situation was when Muslim communities across the UK feared for their lives following the murder of David Haines [*an executed captive of Islamic State this year -Ed.*]. There were documented reports of violence by the UK police force as well as a thinly veiled call to arms issued by the BNP designed to incite violence.

In Mr Blair's interview he suggested the issue of religious extremism and cultural differences that lead to conflict in society during peace time were linked. As demonstrated above, when one section of society is attacking the other based on religious beliefs, it will cause the society to fragment as religious extremism encourages segrega-



tion by trying to force religious rules and values on those of opposing viewpoints. Thus the culture of the country begins to fragment with different sections of society separating them from the other, only coming together when trying to win over the other side or in conflict. The biggest culprit, it seems from the evidence presented, are those forcing a religious ideology on unwilling recipients. The effects of such acts are that those who are made subject of these rules are left feeling angry as they have not been given a choice. The aggressors are largely treated with suspicion and fear.

An example of just such a powerful reaction to when it was perceived that religious ideals were being forced on sections of society that have no desire to participate was in a report by Graeme Archer in the Telegraph December 2013. In this article he was reporting that Muslim leaders were trying to force universities in the UK to segregate men from women in lectures. Archer compared this approach to the apartheid in South Africa stating that if this happens in Britain it would be “forcible segregation” Archer concluded that if allowed to come into force this practice “threatens the

right of the people to a democratic future, such a campaign [for tolerance of other religious views]”. This, almost hysterical, response would do little to promote tolerance of a different viewpoint. It would serve to inflame negative feelings against the Muslim faith and further segregate them from the wider UK society.

Britain’s population is made up of large sections from different religious backgrounds, some of which, are aggressive in promoting their faith. This, when added to the fact that Britain is a very secular society, as can be seen in a poll in



March 2012 from YouGov which showed “67% of respondents say that religion should be a personal matter that has no place in public life, 24% think religion should be more public”, has resulted in religious practices being adopted without opposition from the largely secular society who had no interest in the religious subject. The effect of the noisy minority is that the secular society, as more and more of these practices were adopted without opposition, started to be made subject to the religious rules themselves which is not what they wanted. This, in turn, has led to aggressive reactions from sections who have felt forced to follow religious practices to the followers of the practices being imposed as a secular society has no inclination to follow a religious order.

The feelings of aggression towards sections of society, particularly the Muslim community in the UK, is made worse by the media portrayal of all members of a particular group as being blood

thirsty fanatic. Just such a view can be seen by Sky News who reported in September of this year that 500 British Muslims were sent fighting abroad with groups including Islamic State (IS). The reports in the media in the UK about these British Muslims paints a picture of blood thirsty terrorists who’s aim is to kill British troops which may not be the case. The Muslim community are alienated even further in the UK adding to the problem of a society fragmented by religion.

It seems then that religious extremism is playing a large role in causing conflict throughout the world globally and here in the UK. Steve Jobs said “As individuals, people are inherently good” which would mean that those people that carry out these vile acts of violence are good people but it seems they are carrying out acts based on the premise of a higher order passing down instructions that must be followed. Blaise Pascal said that “men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction” which alludes to religion is used as a vehicle to commit heinous acts. If these statements are true it is logical to determine that until there is no religion, or at least it is not afforded so much power, lives will continue to be lost and societies will continue to live separate lives in the name of religion.



Azra

By Sarah Gonnet



I carry psychosis in my pockets,
I am a manic mess.
I can go back to Aristotle if you want; *Poetics*
And still that won't be proof.
That I have scaled rainbow
mountains of mania, and only,
once pooped a unicorn.
More awkward to shit are letters,
they have hard edges.

I have hidden cracks, and caves
under creases, without shame,
more a mystery. A mystery of
mild obesity. Am I allowed to be mad,
if I am also overweight? I'm no emo
damsel you can save.
But I'd still quite like,
someone to try. Maybe one day,
when the sun shines, and I can
look at it directly.





Exit Strategy

By William Kherbek

The Chess Master nodded. I was unwelcome. It wasn't a secret. But still, I was there, and I had to be acknowledged somehow. He scoured the russet-grey scrub of his beard, tilted his conical straw hat to close out the sun, and me, and considered his next move. All the rest was silence.

This was Davis' new thing. He'd sit at the Au Bon Pain outside the Yard in the afternoons and play the Chess Master, which was the only way he, or anyone else, ever referred to him:

"The Chess Master's good."

"The Chess Master's originally from Connecticut."

"The Chess Master likes me."

Irony was involved somehow; it always was in Davis' little post-mod set pieces. Davis' waxed moustache was ironic, as was his sudden interest in drinking Tom Collinses, as was his galaxy of secondhand T-shirts. Who the joke was on this time, as he sat afternoon after afternoon punching the chess clock as the Chess Master looked disdainfully on, was anybody's guess.

I'd been summoned by text message, "Al biz," was all he'd said.

I'm the president of the university's branch of Amnesty. Davis is our Treasurer. He's a year younger than me, working his way up the food-chain.

"Well," I asked as sharply as possible as the Chess Master gleefully slapped his knob on the chess clock.

"Shush! I'm strategizing," he said as he stared intently at the board. The Chess Master was

working with his pipe to denote his boredom and the inevitability of his victory. Silence prevailed.

Davis looked at me, revelation flashed. He set his knight on the board, and tapped the clock at the side of the table,

"Okay, Chess Master, Chess Maestro, how ya like me now?"

The Chess Master grunted a laugh, shifted his weight and calmly removed one of Davis' rooks.

Davis slumped in his chair, a beaten man, "That's why you're the Master," he said.

The Chess Master smiled weary acceptance, "Consider it a learning experience. You are a student after all."

"Yes. Learning. I'm always learning. Always."

They shook hands. Davis took out some money, "You're days are numbered, hombre. You get me?"

The Chess Master was unruffled. He stashed the money in the breast pocket of his short-sleeved shirt.

"Let's eat," Davis said to me.

We went into the shop and ordered. Davis found a table in the Square under a tree. The Living Statue girl was out, not moving. Davis had recently decided he was in love with her. He'd had a thing for her since she'd made herself up to look like the Saddam statue the day after it was pulled down in Iraq. A kindred spirit. But how would he win her?

Davis' To-Do List was growing: Vanquish Chess Master, Conquer Lola's (his name for The Living Statue Girl) heart. Contrive a game-changing awareness raising event for Amnesty that would make him my inevitable successor.

We sat down with our bagels and our coffee.

"Okay, so, what's the business," I asked.

He handed me a copy of the student paper. I looked at the headline. Nothing interesting, something about a visit to campus by the editor of The New Republic.

"Was that Al money you paid the Chess Master with, by the way," I asked as I looked through the article for what Davis regarded as

relevant.

Davis hesitated before answering. The wounds were still fresh.

He grunted a sullen no and directed my attention to a tiny column below the fold.

"Iraqi scholar adjusting to Harvard life?"

Davis nodded. I read.

"Jamal al-Hajj says his engineering course is a down payment on a brighter future for his ravaged native land. al-Hajj, a mature student from Ramadi, came to Harvard this spring on a full scholarship. President Drew--"

"I know what it says. What do you think?"

"I don't think his engineering scholarship is really a down payment on a brighter future for his ravaged native land."

"We've got to get him involved in the campaign," he said, between bites of smoked turkey and everything bagel.

"Is that why you brought me down here? You think he wants to join Al? Does it say so in the article?"

Davis wrinkled his brow at me. His face took on the change it always made when he switched from urbane irony to anguished sincerity, something he was increasingly given to doing as my graduation approached.

He sketched it all out for me.

"John, it could be so powerful. Think about it: Abu Ghraib, Blackwater, Fallujah, Nissour Square. Jamal, he's seen these things. He's lived it, I mean. So, I'm thinking we rent out Annenberg, or some place, and we have this guy blindfolded, maybe—and I know this is going to freak you out, I can see that look in your eyes, but hear me out—maybe... maybe he's naked, or, OR, just in a hood and a sheet, like the Hood Guy from the Abu Ghraib thing, you remember it--"

"Of course I fucking remember it--"

"...And he's standing there, and people are walking by, just like they do with the real atrocities, plugged into their iPhone or their iPad, or their useless lives... And we've got somebody else there, like Hernandez, or Julie, or Rachel, or somebody, and they're recording the whole thing, and we're live-streaming it--"

I'd long ago begun my protests, but he wasn't stopping.

"...Somebody is there with him, not torturing him, John, listen to me, NOT torturing him, but simulating torturing him. John? John, look at me, this could be important. Seriously!"

*

It was Friday. Problem sets and weekly reports turned safely in. Davis suggested we go for a drink. I assumed it was all part of his marketing plan, but as he owed me several drinks and I wasn't to be paid by the record shop I worked at for another week, I agreed. We went around the corner to the Brewhouse. As we passed, Davis looked over at Lola as she brooded over the diners of Cambridge.

"Thou unravished bride of quietness..." he said.

Davis plied me with Brewhouse Porter until I agreed that it might not be such a bad thing to set up a meeting at least. A meeting could always be cancelled after all.

"It's done, dude."

"Done?"

"He's meeting us tonight. I talked to Julie. She set it all up," Davis said.

Indemnification or blame-shunting? Of course it had all been set up.

"Where are we meeting him then?"

"The Middle East," he said, smiling himself sick at the name of the indie rock pub a subway stop down.

*

We headed down to Central Square towards The Middle East. The sun was settling and the sky was just starting to darken. When we turned up Mass Ave, Lola was packing her things into her spangled wooden



stage box. Davis, perhaps dizzy with success, decided now was the time. He told me he'd just be a minute. I found a seat at one of the unused chess tables. A few tables away, the Chess Master was rushing another opponent.

Lola was folding up her costume. She still had streaks of gold and grey make up on her cheeks and the Saddam mustache in place. She smiled at Davis as he went through his prepared remarks. I could only make out the low frequency hum of language but no actual words. She nodded toward him, her hand on her hip, fingers tapping away at a small band of exposed flesh between shirt and trouser-top. Davis took out his phone and typed a number in. They talked a bit more, but she eventually broke it off, nodding in the direction of the station. Davis smiled, touched her on the arm and headed back my direction.

Another successful campaign.

"Her real name is Amanda," Davis said.

*

Davis saw Jamal and waved.

"Go on over. Introduce yourself. I'll get some drinks. He thinks you're a legend. I told him about the Gitmo campaign," he said, referring to an earlier protest I'd organized involving students sitting in class in orange jumpsuits. "He thinks you're a genius."

I pulled up the seat facing Jamal. He smiled shook my hand seemed genuinely pleased to meet me.

"Hi, I'm John. I don't know what Davis--"

"Davis?"

"What Mike has told you, I guess I

wanted to see where you stand on all this."

"This performance?"

Davis returned with drinks.

"What's the happs, bruddas?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I'm a little worried about the torture aspect myself."

"Torture?"

I looked at Davis. The switch in his face had been thrown back in the direction of total sincerity.

"We were thinking maybe the performance should be more visceral."

"Visceral?"

"You didn't work anything out ahead of time, did you, Davis?"

"I brought it up. We were waiting for you. You know, for authorization."

"Jesus Christ!"

"Peace be upon Him," Davis quietly added.

Jamal looked at us with a nervous smile, as if waiting for a diagnosis.

"I don't think we're all on the same page here," I was trying to figure out what page I was on myself, what book, what language, "I'm really sorry Jamal, what did Mike tell you he was interested in doing?"

"Well, Michael and I were discussing that perhaps I would stand in front of the Science Center, and I would be on a box with some tape over my mouth and I would hold a sign with the number of civilian casualties from the war."

I looked at Davis.

"We talked about Abu Ghraib, too, you remember that, don't you, Jamal?"

"Oh, yes, I mean, of course one can't do that, in public, can one?"

"One can, Jamal. One most certainly can."

Jamal turned to me.

"I think the box idea is good. Let's get started on that. Jamal, what's your schedule like?"

"Another drink," Davis asked.

Wires were crossing. Davis was operating in some netherworld between the irony-sincerity poles now. His eyes were pained and solicitous when he grabbed Jamal's empty glass, but he still shot me with finger-guns when he left for the bar.

He came back with three shot glasses.

"To victory," he said, paused, and then

added, "And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights!"

Two young guys with acoustic guitars appeared onstage. We listened to the first couple of melancholy songs of lost love. Jamal told me he played the Oud, "a little bit". I nodded, not sure entirely what an oud was. It has strings, doesn't it?

Davis was genuinely drunk now, finger guns blasting at random in the bar, his overly smiley smile nuzzling up too close for the comfort of Jamal or I or whoever its focus was to be.

"Look, Jamal, I mean, it's your call. Has to be but think about it. Think about this fucking war, it's everywhere and its nowhere at the same time. Its in the news, but no one can hear it or see it. It's in the money that pay for our grants in the university endowment. It's in the books we read. It's in the fucking air we breathe for Christ's sake--peace be upon him--literally. I mean it's everywhere so nobody can perceive it, like that story, that parable thing, the fish, you know? They ask him, the fish that is, how is it living in the water and he says, 'what's water?'. We're the fish man. We're completely the fish. You have to help us see the water man."

"Davis, he doesn't want to..."

"I think he can speak for himself," Davis said, summoning something resembling genuine indignity. No finger-guns were pointed at Jamal.

Jamal fidgeted, I watched a girl behind him plug in her guitar and tune up.

"I suppose if you really think it would make a difference."

Then he laughed the most uncomfortable laugh of any human I'd ever seen.

*

We settled into a table in a corner. Conversation had turned, classes, apartments, girls. Everyone was a little more at ease now. I began to have the feeling that maybe things might somehow turn out alright, that Davis might have actually had a useful idea after all. I got us more drinks. I kind of knew the bar tender working that night. His name was Mark. We'd almost started a band once. We talked for a bit. I could see Davis coaching Jamal in the mirror behind the bar. He was telling him

how to handle me. I could imagine the script,

"He's a good guy, he just wants it easy you know? 'Can't we all just get along', that kind of thing..." Davis knew better. He was a man of action. Jamal was a man of action too, surely...

When I came back, Jamal proposed a toast to Iraq. We all drank. The band played. We decided to stay for one more beer. Davis bought. Mark thought he was doing us a favour by giving us a free shot each. Davis decided we all wanted Ouzo. After we'd finished the shot Davis went back to the bar to retrieve our beers. A group of terrifyingly drunk guys came in and huddle around him. Mark was reluctant to serve them but they said something to him and he raised his eyebrows in resignation and started pouring Sam Adams. At the bar Davis was joshing amiably with the new guys.

I took the opportunity to try to create an out, "Jamal, you don't have to do any of this. I'm in charge," I told him, "I don't know what he's been telling you, but if you don't feel comfortable, seriously, don't do this."

"I'm fine with it. I want to do it," he said woosily determined. I nodded.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," I said.

Davis was saying "Just a minute," to the drunk, crazy guys at the bar. This had me worried. He came over with our drinks, spilling just enough over the table to be annoying.

"Those guys," he said, his eyes wide with dawning triumph, "They're soldiers. They just came back."

He hardly needed to specify where they'd just come back from. There could only have been one country, well two, but I knew





which one it was. He registered the horror in my eyes.

"No, no, it's totally cool they understand everything. I told them about our project. It was completely amazing. They want to help."

"Help?"

"They want to help with the torture, or the pseudo-torture...Ah, you know what I mean."

"Look, Davis, we'll talk about it in the morning."

"No, John, look, I talked to them...They want to meet you guys. Come on over."

Jamal wouldn't look up. I did everything I could to put Davis off it, but he literally pulled me out of my seat, and, before I knew what happened, I was standing at the bar, buying a round of drinks I couldn't possibly have paid for under normal circumstances. Mark gave me a nod, we'd work it out later.

"I totally respect you, bro, totally," one of the soldiers was saying to Jamal, "If I was over there, one of you guys, I mean, I'd be blowing the fuck out of us too."

I was talking to a guy called Finley; he drained two whiskey-and-Cokes in about fifteen minutes. I noticed his hands never seemed to stop shaking.

Davis was talking to a big guy called Fred about our grand plan. Fred was opposed to the war too. He'd been in Balad: bad shit. He wanted the fuckin' thing over tomorrow, bro, tomorrow. Pull 'em all out, let hajji do whatever he wants. Don't mean shit to me, bro, it's a shithole anyway, fuckin' goatfuckers... I mean hajji comes over here again, we'll fuck his shit up for him, but over there

is
over

there...Jamal looked over at me. I looked over at Davis. Davis looked over at Fred. Fred looked at himself in the mirror. Sorry, bro. Sorry.

*

It was very late, probably two in the morning; everyone was getting along surprisingly well. Maybe everything would be alright. I thought, all we have to do is get out of this pub and that will be that. I'll be back in control of the situation in the morning. Everyone will see things differently from the other side of their hang over.

Davis reached for his coat as Mark was telling us all we had to drink up. He said he had the perfect idea: we should all go back to his place in Dunster House. Have some beers there. Chill out. Get to know each other. Everybody down? The soldiers were down. I told Jamal he could stay at my place if he didn't want to walk all the way back to the quad. Davis wouldn't let us leave. The soldiers were getting restless. They wanted the beer he'd promised them. Davis looked at Jamal.

"One drink. Just one."

Finlay threw his arm over Jamal's shoulder.

"Come on up, dude. You're fuckin' cool. Cool as fuck."

Jamal put his arm over Finlay's shoulder. We went up to Davis' room; he took some beers from his refrigerator and passed them around.

Davis put on some music, what was it? I keep trying to think of it, but it's gone, something very Davis, Death from Above 1979, I think. The soldiers wanted to know if he had any Coal Chamber.

No luck.

Machinehead?

Nope.

Metallica? Maybe somewhere...

The soldiers talked to us about school. Fred was thinking about going back now that he was "Out". I did everything I could to steer them clear of the topic of the war. I noticed Finley's hand was jumping around like an insect on the arm of his chair. Fred wanted to know about The Performance. We'd all started calling it "The Performance".

"It's to bring it home to people," Davis kept saying between the platitudes. The soldiers and





Jamal nodded along.

Finley was tired of Death From Above. He took control of Davis' computer and began searching for music. Belatedly, he asked Davis if he minded if he put something else on.

"Of course, bro. Go ahead. Good times."

Finley hunted through the vast playlist. He must have been looking for hidden Coal Chamber, because he found The Cure instead. He saw something that made him stifle a laugh. He looked over at Fred and clicked and the song started. I got the joke: he'd selected "Killing an Arab".

*

I don't know who suggested it. No, I do, it was Davis.

It was Davis who suggested that we "practice" the whole thing. We walked down the stairs into the bowels of Dunster House, where the laundry and the squash courts are. Davis led us into the laundry room, nobody would "bother" us there.

"Okay, so what do you want us to do?"

Fred asked, sipping his beer.

"So, like how would you conduct an interrogation?" Davis asked.

I looked at Jamal. He smiled nervously. Fred motioned for him to come forward. Jamal put down his beer can and came closer.

Fred hadn't done interrogations. Finley hadn't either, but he knew some guys who had.

Great!

Davis positioned him behind Jamal.

"You'll want to have the guy in a position of stress, if possible. I mean usually you'd have him tied to a seat or something, but if you're, you know, having to improvise, then you'd maybe have somebody holding him. Finley grabbed Jamal's arms from behind. Jamal started and Finley laughed with rich Hollywood menace.

"Okay," Davis said, "we should have a document of this, see what it looks like, you know, so we can go over it later. I'll get my phone. It's just in my room; won't be a minute."

"So you go up here?" Finley asked Jamal.

Jamal nodded trying to determine how he should respond. Finley was still holding his arms behind him.

"I said, 'You go up here?'" he said, pulling

them tighter.

"Ouch."

Finley loosened his grip. He laughed. We all laughed. Even Jamal.

"You can probably let him go," I said.

"We don't let 'em go over there," Finley said, he laughed again.

Fred had realized that things might not be exactly perfect. He abruptly stopped laughing and put his beer down.

Finley grabbed Jamal's arms again.

"Hey," Jamal said.

"Chill out bro," Fred said, "Chill the fuck out."

"Chill out...' You hear that shit?" Finley asked Jamal.

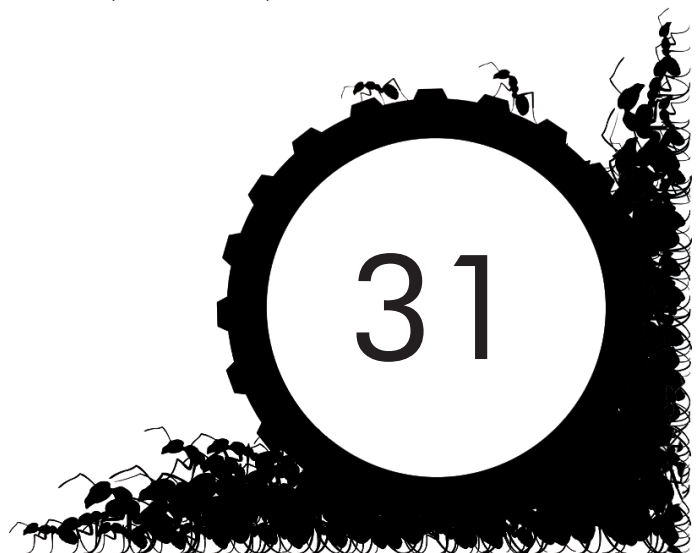
"What's your problem, man?"

"My problem? I'm just fine. Hunky-fuckin'-dory. You're the one with the problem, chief, can't use your arms, can you? I'd say that's a problem."

In one move, he swept Jamal to the floor. Fred grabbed for Finley, but he stumbled over a laundry basket. He kept shouting, "HEY! FUCK! HEY!"

"Davis" I shouted, I heard my voice dying in the long corridor, drifting up into the concrete and piping. Back in the room, I heard Fred shouting something, maybe "I order you to stop, soldier..." Then a lot of grunting, a kind of strangling noise, then something hit a concrete surface hard, very hard. The Asian girls in the computer room a few feet away came to the doorway to see what was going on. What was that noise? There it was again...

"Davis," I shouted, "DAVIS!"





Not on my Wall

By Claire Walker

He would always be waiting. The man
at the top of the road. Never concealed behind nets
but brazenly out on the drive.
Any hint of a roller skate turning he was there, back
straight, arms folded like an elderly bouncer.

He never lapsed onto the pavement. Never approved
a new bike or offered help
for my grazed knees. When a friend, warm
from pedalling, cast her sweatshirt aside,
he summoned a stern not on my wall.

Once we saw him off guard in a restaurant.
I was confused by his smile, his neighbourly
hello as he ate Sunday lunch. Puzzled by my Mum's
politeness when she bad-mouthed him at home.
I didn't know the grey lines of adults.

When, years later, I heard he'd died I felt sad
I wasn't sorry he'd gone.



EDL

By Antony Owen

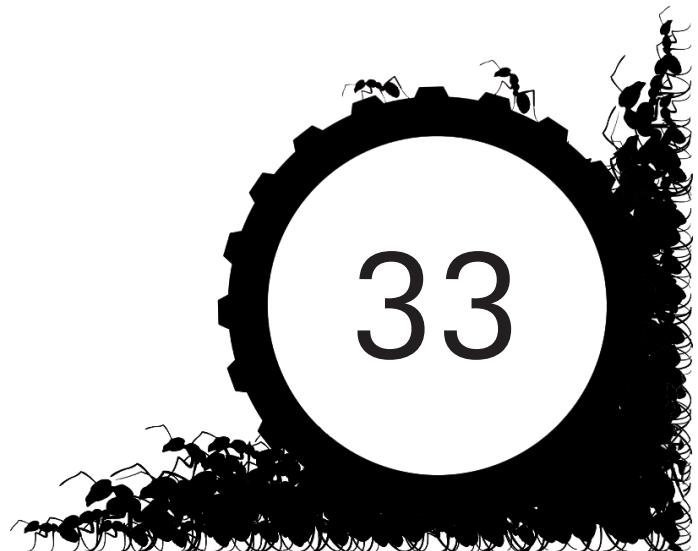


For England it read.
For John Smith down the boozier
and John Smith from Malawi
born with a name too long for war
who sank a spade in fiery mouths
of HMS Whatever,

For England it read,
the hate fist holding the altered flag,
the love fist holding the altered dog,
that shat near the doors of the library
the closest they came to words with a spine.

For Eng-lund they shouted, for Eng-lund,
for Jasbir in Gallipoli etched in no parish,
for the inch of bronze to replace Karen's son
who took ages to be born and a second to
die?
for Englund, for England,

For John Smith?
For Jasbir?
For Karen's son?
For Karen
For England.





Fair Play

By Jason Stock



I've seen Frazier knock Ali out 50 times or more. The champ kept his gloves down after a clinch just fractions of a second too long, which means once they were down, it was already too late. I felt sorry for him. He was a genius and a good looking boxer.

I have 48-3-1 tattooed on my right wrist and everyone asks what for. I keep them guessing. Most people think it's in remembrance of some loved one's passing, until they realize the numbers are too messed up to represent an important date.

It's Tommy Morrison's professional record. He blanked hundreds of journeymen with the same sort of terrifying left hook as Frazier. Some said it was similar. It's exciting to see men fall in the ring instead of on battlefields, or murdered in the streets without a choice. Only one person I know of died in the ring. Many died horrible deaths long

after they retired. Like "Irish" Jerry Quarry. When he was inducted into the World Boxing Hall of Fame he shook so violently he couldn't sign autographs. His brother had to hold his hand and say, "A circle, remember, with a line through it, like this."

When you're winning you're king, and every man wants to be king. I wish I had a stiff jab, a good left hook. I'm beginning to understand the importance of compact punching and keeping my mouth shut. When Bentt knocked Tommy out, I could tell Tommy was embarrassed and hurt. Bentt weren't no chump either. Remember when McCall caught Lennox Lewis on the chin with a straight right? Knocked his ass smooth out. McCall cried in the ring once and refused to fight. He won the rematch. Lewis, that is.

When "Iron" Mike got routed by Douglas I was happy that the underdog won. White guys are always the underdog. Even after Cooney crushed Norton in 54 seconds. Foreman said he was the hardest puncher ever. Cooney, that is. Heavy hitters like him punch their selves out. Which is what happened when Morrison fought Ray Mercer. Tommy was a surgeon for five rounds, but Mercer had the tougher beard.

I appreciate a good fight. When it's fair. I do push-ups and sit-ups; I run and look at myself in the mirror hoping someone pushes me, and that we both have time to empty our hands and remove our shirts before the other dude throws a punch.

Attacks on a Mum

By Adam Langley



I am defending my earlier article. It would really help if someone would attack it.

"KeepingMum" is a blogger who regularly writes about her experiences raising Daisy, a three-year old Vegan, and Archibald, an eight-year-old diabetic who feels more comfortable in a dress. She is a frequent freelance contributor to many publications, and here speaks for the first time about the reaction she has received since making her views on parenting public.

When I published my article on how I chose to raise my children I expected that some hackles would be raised. What I could not have imagined, though, was the complete lack of interest. There have been no articles slamming me in the tabloids, no nasty remarks about my son and daughter on Twitter. The article itself only had five comments and two of them were links to spam websites. The other three were just variations on the phrase "Good for you".

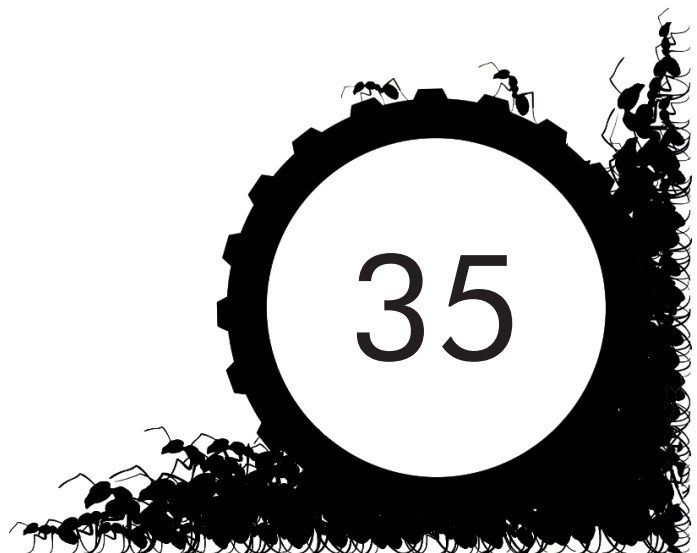
"Good for you"?!

For God's sake, I need to earn a living here! Do you think I wanted to put photos of my pre-teen son in a dress online? Do you think I wanted the world to know that I was feeding my three year old daughter a gluten-free, vegan diet? Yes! Of course I bloody did! I wouldn't have written the article otherwise! I wanted to raise awareness. Awareness of how difficult it is to raise a child in a world that might have nothing but hatred for them. How their struggles could affect parents like myself and how they are perceived by society. It does not help my case when all I get for my efforts is "At least they look like they are happy :)".

The whole point of my article was, admittedly, to get a reaction. The best kind of reaction. The kind of reaction which allows you to become a crusader for social justice by calling Twitter users smelly bigots. Okay, fine, my kids might have experienced problems as a result of what I had written. But in the long run that would have allowed me to write more articles about the struggles my family faces, and at the end of the day, isn't that the important thing?

Look at them. Look at my son in his "Frozen" dress! Doesn't that make you want to vent your right-wing fury? To write whole columns slamming me as a parent and implying he would be better off in care? And what about how I make my daughter eat food that isn't the same as the food you eat? Surely there must be one or two health campaigners among this publication's readers who are ready and raring to go with comments about development and the potential for eating disorders? No? Nothing? Seriously?!

This speaks volumes about our society. We are a society that doesn't care about how a parent chooses to raise their child or how someone defines themselves as a human being. This needs to change. We need to start caring again. Parents such as myself need to be able to use shockingly personal facts about ourselves and our families to be able to get our work published. Otherwise we might actually need to actually research issues before we can write about them. No-one with a family has time for that.





FIGHT SLEEP!
KEEP OUT!
Beyond this point you
draw fire on our
FIGHTING MEN
HE RISKS HIS LIFE
24 HOURS A DAY
DO YOU ??