

FIRST CHAPTER COMPETITION WINNERS

We are delighted to publish our winning entries below:

Level 216 by Jack Jones, Year 7

Edwald sat in science class learning about cloning. He gazed at the bare, windowless, cream-coloured walls and listened to the buzz of the flickering lights. He glanced at his digi watch and began to daydream about the world long before he was born. He thought about how it must have felt to go outside, breathe fresh air, and play sport.

“Edwald. Edwald?” Ms. Thompson was glaring at him.

“Sorry what?” It felt like the teacher’s eyes were burning holes in his face.

The class sniggered.

“The question was: How many cows can a biotic cloner model 2.3 produce in a minute?” The teacher boomed across the classroom.

“Six,” That was an easy question, anyone could have got it right.

“Good. Class dismissed.” Ms. Thompson groaned and turned back to her computer – it was clear she hated her job.

Edwald stepped through the door and out into the dim-lit grey-walled corridor. He turned a corner and picked up his pace: he was meant to be in the closet in five minutes. He was not due another gym session for two days, so this was good exercise. Suddenly, he slowed to a walking pace. There were guards nearby and he would be asked questions if he was running, which he really did not need right now. After slipping past them, he made his way to the closet. He had made it on time – that was unusual. Edwald rapped his knuckles on the metal plate that was a poor excuse for a door. It slid away letting him pass through.

The closet stank of stale air and sweat. The walls were caked in dirt and dust; most of the light bulbs needed to be changed. It was so much worse than Edwald’s flat even though his flat was only a level above. This might just be the worst place in the whole of the London scraper. That was because this place technically did not exist and neither did its inhabitant.

Edwald flipped on the lights.

“Turn ‘em back off. Turn ‘em off,” Alften yelled at him.

“Why don’t you ever turn them on when you’re by yourself?”

Alften hated questions. “I prefer the dark.” The boy snapped at Edwald, “D’you bring me any food?”

Edwald dropped a packet of crisps into his lap. He gobbled them all up in less than a minute. “Got any more?”

“No.” Edwald sighed. Alften had been wanted by the guards since before Edwald met him. His parents died when he was a baby and he had been raised by the resistance but after his carers had been killed he was left to fend for himself, aged just eight. He would have starved, or been captured, long ago if Edwald and Hollice had not looked out for him.

“That wasn’t much food.”

Alften raised an eyebrow.

“I don’t have an infinite supply of food actually.” After all they had done for Alften it never felt like enough.

“Will the girl bring some?”

“Yes,” Edwald reassured him.

At that moment there was a perfectly timed knock on the door. Edwald glanced through a crack in the makeshift door then stepped back and slid it aside. Hollice leaped through the opening and closed it behind her.

“My food?” Alften demanded more than questioned.

She passed him two sandwiches wrapped in shrinkwrap. Hollice also pulled a weekly news magazine from her backpack. Alften snatched it out of her hand and glared at her. He was suspicious of her because her parents and brother supported Governor Sharde. Most people hated Governor Sharde but concealed it because if the guards found out then you did not survive long. Edwald had known Hollice all his life and he knew she was not like her family, but Alften mistrusted anyone who came from a loyal family.

While Alften was distracted by his magazine, Hollice pulled Edwald aside. “My parents are becoming suspicious of the food I take, where I’m going and who I’m meeting. I don’t think I’ll be able to do this for much longer. We just can’t risk them finding out.” Her eyes were filled with worry.

Edwald glanced down at Alften – they couldn’t look after him forever. His heart dropped. “Should we leave now then?”

“We have to Ed.” She slipped outside and stood there waiting for her friend.

“Leaving so soon? You know I get lonely. Promise that you will bring me more food tomorrow. Okay?” Alften had grabbed his arm.

“Yeah,” Edwald felt so guilty that he could barely look at him. “Tomorrow.”

Hollice and Edwald silently ran home. “My parents think I’m at your house so...”

“Since you’ve invited yourself why not come over.” Edwald grunted. It was Edwald’s father who had told them to look after Alften for the resistance so they could ‘do their bit’. He could not let his father down again.

They went up the steps to level 216, past the school block and through the mall. Neither of them said a word. They turned the corner... Edwald’s front door lay on the ground. He sprinted through the gaping hole. The electric windows were broken, the cupboards had been ransacked and his holo box was broken in two. A note had been left on the table. It was for his Dad.

To Mr. Taylor

We have your wife. We are willing to let her go free but in return we need something. We know you have it and you know what we mean. If it hasn’t been delivered by tomorrow morning 10:00 am your wife will die.

From General Jackson, British Guard force.

No No No.

A Child’s Dream, An Adult’s Nightmare by Tamsyn Lanham-Love, Year 8

I lived in a big house. Five floors. We weren’t rich but could somehow afford this. It was willingly sold to us for £10,000! I know. Who in their right mind would sell a house for this cheap? And a house like this! As a child, it was stunning. When I first saw it, it was like a dream come true. It had a large metal gate, with a long road to a garage. On either side of the road was a flower garden. The most beautiful colours all neatly put into separate plant pots, bushes shaped to form hearts and birds. At the end of

the driveway was a palace. At that time, I was five, so it was a palace. I never knew a child could imagine so much with what they were given.

Realistically, it was different. From my point of view now, it was like a child's nightmare, any person's nightmare. The gate was rusted and broken. The long road was a path of dead leaves and dirt, the garage was a rotted wooden shelter for a car. Moss and fungi settled themselves in every groove and hole. The flower garden was a few concrete flower-pots, a dead and sorrowful looking bush was dumped on either side and... well... the 'palace' was not quite a palace at all. Actually it was the opposite. If you can try, imagine that. Inside wasn't as bad but for the 11 years I've lived here, it's never felt like home. It's never felt right, always giving me the feeling that someone's watching me. Never taking their eyes off me and tearing me to pieces, mentally.

Now I can confirm that the previous owners were in the right mind to sell this. They made no mistake. But my family did. It has ruined my life.

Before we moved into this stupid house, I wasn't confined to a wheelchair like I am now. If we hadn't moved here, I wouldn't be like this. I know there's someone else other than my family living here, I have a feeling, and normally when I have a feeling about something, it tends to be right. I was right about the fire, and the death of my sister, yet I still hadn't convinced my parents to move. They told me I was 'being ridiculous' or 'being crazy'. I'm not stupid, they knew something was wrong, they just didn't want to admit it.

It was the fifth time today, we had got a phone call from a private number saying that we needed to leave the house before it was too late, and I felt sick to my stomach. What did 'too late' mean? Are we going to die? What happens if my parents die? Will I be an orphan? With all the thoughts rushing through my head, I didn't notice the strange smell, but when I did, I felt bile rise up my throat. I swallowed it back down and slowly made my way towards the smell. The only sound was the roll of my wheelchair's wheels on the stone, cold floor. It was a strong, repulsive smell which filled me with nausea, and a sense of faintness. I wasn't ready for what I saw. I couldn't bear it. I pinched myself as hard as I could to check if I was in reality and not some nightmare, I could feel the bruise already start to form. No. it couldn't be.

'MUM! DAD!' I screamed, half in tears, half in horror. 'Mum! Where are you?' I couldn't bear it any longer. The horror, the terror, I couldn't! How? I could just make out through my blurred vision. I felt my cheeks getting red-hot and my teeth gritted.

Then I heard a giggle. I felt goosebumps rise from my skin. A wisp of coldness brushed against my bare neck. Then there was a knock. Then nothing. And another knock. Then nothing. I was frozen to my chair and couldn't, wouldn't move a muscle. Then there was a voice. 'Ugh, silly girl, open the door.' The voice belonged to someone familiar. A child's high-pitched, harsh-toned voice. 'Fine, I'll come in, in three...' I had nowhere to hide. '...two...' I knew it. '... one...'

I was going to die.

I watched the door handle slowly turn, the sound of the door opening filled the room. I couldn't move. It was like I was paralysed. I wanted to move. I wanted to disappear. I wanted the ground to swallow me. A child's small foot stepped onto the grey floor. She wore white shoes that looked to have red ink splattered all over them, they looked old and torn.

I stared in horror as I examined the girl. It couldn't be – she'd died seven years ago. Right in front of me. I had watched her die. It didn't make any sense. 'Wh... wha...ho... whe...' I tried to speak but I couldn't make any sense of words. I couldn't understand. She grinned. Her face looked like it had been stretched just to fit that grin. However, it wasn't the comforting one. It wasn't the one that people do when you've made them happy. It was the one when you knew something about that person wasn't quite right. She glanced over to the oven and her grin grew wider. What was in the oven?

Mum, Dad? Where are you?

She wore a white cardigan that was two sizes too small, ripped and covered in vile splashes of blood. Her hair sat unappealing on her shoulders knotted and messy. Her pleated skirt had holes in every spot to the extent that the skirt was hardly there. Her face. Her face was twisted, scarred, bloodied. It was like a horror movie just looking at her face. But I knew exactly who was standing in front of me. I knew who had confined me to a wheelchair, caused my huge scars, caused the loss of one of my legs.

It was my sister...

The Road by Vasilis Alston, Year 9

It was just past 6 o'clock on the 14 November when it first happened. At first, I didn't notice it, it was just some lorry driving through the neighbourhood. That was quite unusual, we didn't get many lorries in this area, but it could happen I suppose. It was getting dark by then, so I couldn't see what was written on the side of the van. I thought nothing of it and, after saying hello to Mr Filch, I went home, where everything was very normal. As I went through the front door, I spotted Mr Filch looking thoughtfully at the lorry that had just passed.

The next morning, I woke up to the sound of rumbling and raised voices. Looking outside I saw another lorry. That caught my attention. We lived a long way away from any factories or businesses and if a shop were big enough to have a lorry that big for deliveries, it would be in the shopping centre, in which case the driver would get there via the motorway. Turning my attention to the raised voices, I saw Mrs Williams, the elderly lady from across the street shouting at a man who had just stepped out of the lorry. He was a massive person with a build that was more suited to a wrestler than a driver. It seemed like Mrs Williams had backed her car in front of the lorry driver and was now blaming the driver for the collision.

Suddenly, I realised that because it was morning, I could now see the writing on the side of the truck! Quickly, I grabbed a piece of paper and pen and began hurriedly writing down what was printed on the side of the van. When I was done, I looked at what it said. *Anderson and sons*. That was it, there was no phone number, or service description or slogan, just the words 'Anderson and Sons'. To be honest, that should've rung alarm bells for me, but I just found it a bit odd, even when I googled the company and found nothing. I guess I just assumed that the company was a sort of commercial company that supplied food for restaurants or another service that wasn't available to the general public. I did ask my family whether they had ever heard of *Anderson and sons*, but nobody had. What did make me suspicious was the fact that one of these lorries would drive up in the same direction every day. I seemed to be the only one that noticed that, apart from Mr Filch, who I caught staring strangely at the lorries on more than one occasion. To me it seemed as if he knew something about them.

On my way to school, I decided to ask him about them. I said, "Mr Filch, have you noticed all these lorries coming down our road?"

He replied, looking at me out of the corner of his eye, "Yes what about them?"

"Isn't it a bit odd that there are suddenly so many coming down our road?"

"Is it?" he replied again, slightly warily.

"Well, yeah", I told him, "and also, I googled the company that owned the trucks, and it didn't come up with any results."

Mr Filch stared at me suspiciously for around ten seconds and then turned round and stalked back into his house slamming the door behind him.

I sighed and went to school. I didn't see Mr Filch for an entire week after that, and, from what I heard nobody else had. Apparently, the neighbours had tried ringing or texting him, but nothing got through. All the calls went straight to voicemail. To me it seemed as if Mr Filch had simply shut himself off from the rest of the world. What kept bugging me was that his isolation had started immediately after I had tried to talk to him. I didn't think it was a coincidence, because, as far as I could tell nobody had seen him since 8 o'clock the morning I spoke to him, 5 minutes before. As I looked at his house, I began to suspect that he had abandoned the house not long after I spoke to him perhaps during the night when nobody could see him.

That evening, after the sun had set, I was scrolling through my messages, I saw that a company named *Wendersons* had purchased a large, abandoned car park only 2 miles to the east, right where the lorries had been going. I searched up *Wendersons* on the web, and it appeared to be another unadvertised company. Now, I did find that suspicious. I thought that there might be some sort of connection between *Andersons* and *Wendersons*, the names did sound similar after all. Just as I was leaving my room, all the lights went out. I looked towards my phone and saw that the Wi-Fi had also, gone down. Staying very still, I listened to see if I could hear anything, like my family returning from the trip to the shops they had gone to. I heard voices and heavy footsteps coming up the stair. I thought I heard the words 'Asking too many questions'.

The door to my room was thrown open and I was blinded by a bright light. Raised voices blared at me. I felt a sharp pain in the side of my neck. Everything was spinning. And darkening...

The Masked Parade by Georgia Cartwright, Year 10

Bittersweet. Two sides, polar opposites yet somehow they manage to balance each other out. Bittersweet. It's a nice word isn't it? The combination of such a sugary sensation and a sour buzz that crawls through your mouth. So sweet and sugary but with the bitterness battling your taste buds.

Two sides arguing for the top, are they the same, is one seen as the better side, why and what led them to be what they are? Why are they so different? Why and how does one's past affect their life?

23/7/2043, Tokyo Japan.

Ashes rose from the ground and fluttered through the smoky sky like a butterfly in a gust of air. Cries had sailed across the river with city lights of hundreds of buildings reflecting off the river's dark blue appearance. The maniacal laugh of those who had set alight the block had merged with those who had seemed to have lost everything. Their arms wrapped around each other with the orange lighting shining from below, their masks covered their gleeful faces. A total of 5 had caused a ruckus through the city, moved unpredictably, sly and seen with no true reason behind them. They were known to be as sly as the now nearly extinct animals that roamed around the world. Many had observed their masks with many speculations as who they were, slithering snake, serenity butterfly, sly fox, swift hawk and finally the spotted tiger. They were only known by these names.

The red bridge had now shone with red and blue lights, and with the ringing sound of the sirens. They had dispersed like a crowd of rats.

In the semi-run-down building nearby, there sat Lynx, a 19-year-old boy with black hair with red highlights. His long silky hair flew through the air with such elegance; the slightest of gusts would force his hair into a majestic dance, one of a kind which you couldn't describe. For his age he was quite short. He watched for a distance with his bright blue eyes. He had been waiting a while at this point although he didn't mind it. Watching such a horrific sight was new for him. It was weird, as if he wasn't

meant to see. In his eyes the villains were not good, causing chaos without a cause or excuse. But the same go towards police; is anyone good?

Do villains even have a cause, a reason?

The aftermath of the smoke still rising, flying to the heavens. Crackles of the rubble had emerged from behind him. Behind Lynx had appeared a guy. With hair dark as the night's sky, a mixed skin tone that highly complemented his hair, his emerald green eyes had always such a warm and secretive glimmer and scars placed from head to toe. Lynx's close childhood friend, Sora.

Unfortunately, it had been a while since they'd last met. Sora had changed. His hair was now particularly shaved on the side, his right eyebrow was now slitted and for some reason he had more wounds than usual. He was always a very reckless person; it truly made Lynx worry about him. He was always happy to help, he was always able to help with small tips he had picked up from medical school. But what made this worse was Sora never opened up. How, why or when he got into these incidents.

Sora's number one downfall was opening up, really about anything. It was honestly quite upsetting to see him in such a state but to never have an explanation.

Along with hiding himself away or keeping himself as busy as a bee, he'd wish he was open more, at least with Lynx. In the middle of his two shoulder bones on his higher back, a wound had appeared. Just from the look of it from the hole in his shirt, Lynx could already tell that this was not just a little accident. It was draping down his spine like a deadly serpent.

"Sora! The wound on your back looks dreadful. Sit down now. I have to take care of it. You're lucky I know you well enough to bring equipment."

"Yeah, haha, thanks." Sora's laugh, it seemed too cold and emotionless.

Sora had peacefully sat down in front of him with not a sound. The pains in his voice when treating the wound, his agonising twitches had made him feel even worse for him. The world around them was quiet with only the occasional cars or talking between people.

"So do I get to the pleasure of knowing how this accident occurred?"

"It was nothing that important, nothing worth sharing."

He knew he was always going to respond in a similar way but what else could he do? It was better to ask than to do nothing.

"You know this'll scar like some of the others, you really need to be more careful. I'm here if you need me you know." Dead silence steadily followed. He had so many that it felt painful to even look at. He had always been this way.

"Hey, I'm sorry for everything and all of this. But thank you for being here it means a lot."

Lynx had never expected these words from him. "Of course, Sora..... I-I just want to help."

The city sounds from across the river occupied the space as once again silence had pursued.

"Can I tell you the truth?"

"Of course, Sora, I'll always be by your side."

"Well, um... I've gotten into a really bad predicament and I can't find a way out."