

**‘Like a monstrous ball of dough’:
Challenging fat boy tropes in young
adult novels.**

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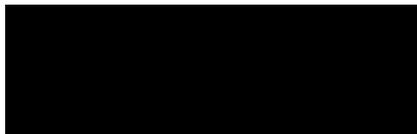
Abstract

This thesis, “‘Like a monstrous ball of dough’: Challenging fat boy tropes in young adult novels,” which consists of a young adult novel, *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, and accompanying exegesis, aims to examine and challenge the common tropes of fat boys in young adult (YA) novels. This work is significant as there remain large gaps in research into young, fat male bodies in both Fat Studies and young adult literature. This thesis argues that there are cultural structures of power that enforce anti-fat sentiment in our society. The young adult novel reflects this by frequently depicting tropes of the fat boy as weak, stupid, a bully, a victim, or a glutton. This thesis aims to critique these tropes and proposes an alternative by means of the characterisation and narrative trajectory of the creative project. Drawing upon Michel Foucault’s theories of Biopower, the panopticon, and the disciplined body, I examine how dominant obesity discourse and anti-fat sentiment impact young adult literature. Moreover, by utilising close reading of four young adult novels, beginning in the 20th century, the period in which fat bodies began to be represented negatively in literature, I can determine the language writers use to depict fat boys and offer examples of how these tropes can be challenged. This thesis is divided 70/30 between the young adult novel 70% and the exegesis 30%. It is intended that chapters 1 and 2 of the exegesis are read before the creative work and chapter 3 is read after.

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

I, Sean Joseph Ryan, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Like a monstrous ball of dough': Challenging fat boy tropes in young adult novels, is no more than 75,000 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature:



Date: 20/12/2022

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Introduction

Why the fat boy in YA novels?

Are there any depictions of fat boys in literature that aren't written with the intention of repulsing the reader? Force-feeding themselves, bullying the small boy, lying, stealing or being terribly lazy are just some of the tropes readers have come to expect when encountering a fat boy character. Descriptions of the fat boy are seldom complimentary either, as evidenced when Roald Dahl described Augustus Gloop, the fat boy in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), "like a monstrous ball of dough" (p. 21). This thesis serves to counter the stereotypical tropes of fat boys in young adult (YA) novels.

Throughout this thesis, I argue that depictions of fat boys in YA novels rely upon and perpetuate stereotypical and overwhelmingly negative tropes. Positioning fat boys negatively in young adult novels can create and perpetuate anti-fat prejudice in society. I argue that writers use fat boy characters to quickly communicate to readers that the fat boy should be read as lazy, stupid, gluttonous, a victim or a bully or of generally low moral standing. The aim of this thesis is to challenge the traditional tropes of fat boys in young adult novels by examining the social systems of power that perpetuate the negative tropes of fat boys, understand the ways in which the fat boy has been written, beginning with literature from in 20th-century, and finally, by offering my novel *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, as an example of how a YA novel might challenge these unfair tropes.

Research questions.

My analysis of YA novels suggests that they seldom offer positive representations of fat boys. The term ‘positive’ can be somewhat nebulous in definition, but as fat activist Jes Baker (2015) states,

When fat bodies do appear (significantly less often than slender bodies do) in television shows, movies, political comics, literature, and animation, they are consciously presented in highly curated ways, all of which are meant to initiate knee-jerk reactions (p. 55).

These reactions can include disgust, pity, humour, and resentment. A positive representation would therefore subvert the stereotypical and traditionally negative representations of fat boys. As such, the purpose of this thesis is to address the following three questions:

1. What societal and cultural systems of power perpetuate stereotypical tropes of fat boys in young adult novels, and what systems and discourses can be used to challenge them?
2. How have fat boys been depicted historically in young adult novels?
3. In what ways might a young adult novel such as *The Determination of Taffy Futt* challenge the traditional tropes of fat boys in young adult novels?

As a specific methodology, my creative artefact will serve as an example of a YA novel that depicts a fat boy character without relying on cliched representation and negative adjectives that writers too often use when describing their fat boy character. I have chosen to focus on young adult literature as I believe it is more prudent to challenge harmful cultural stereotypes in young readers, with the intention of negating or minimising the anti-fat stigmas and prejudice that can be learned in YA literature, rather than try to battle a fully formed belief in

older readers. This, however, is not a critique of Fat Activist strategy, which often responds to fat phobic attitudes in society that are espoused by those who have solidly formed anti-fat sentiments, but rather an expansion of the ways in which anti-fat sentiment can be combatted by attempting to challenge those sentiments before they form. As Linda Wedwick (1998) states:

Breaking the cycle of the reproduction of (fat) prejudice requires us to find those experiences where the stereotypical imagery exists. One common experience for many readers is children's series fiction. Children have begun to internalise fat stereotypes long before they begin reading series fiction; however, children's series fiction plays a role in reproducing and reinforcing the prejudice against fat people. Children reading series fiction may unknowingly internalise fat stereotypes since they are repeated again and again in each of the series books they read (p. 20).

It is my intention that my creative piece, *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, can serve as an interruption to this repetition of anti-fat messages that are so prevalent in YA novels through stereotypical imagery and tropes of the fat boy character. Although there is sometimes overlap between books that are classified as children's or young adult literature, I am focussing on novels for young adults. Moreover, I aim for this novel to show how changes to the traditional language writers use to depict fat boys can be changed to counter unfair and damaging tropes.

Genesis of the project.

The genesis of this thesis began in my childhood with my first reading of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the chocolate factory* (1964) and the fat boy character, Augustus Gloop.

Described by the Oompa Loompas as “the great big greedy nincompoop” (p. 78) and their assertion that “however long this pig might live, we’re positive he’d never give, even the smallest bit of fun, or happiness to anyone” (pp. 78-79), it was a crude introduction to the dominant depiction of fat boys in YA novels. The vivid image of Augustus flailing in molten chocolate and being sucked up into a pipe seems to me an intended metaphor for disposing of waste and seemingly an acceptable social comeuppance for the fat boy’s perceived greed. Despite an exhaustive search since my first encounter with Augustus, I contend that YA novels have not conventionally offered positive representations of fat boys.

The fat boy in history.

The negative depiction of fat boys is not a new phenomenon and can be traced back to fairy tales from the 17th century. Often appropriated from oral folklore, fairy tales were used to educate upper-class children on manners and social values (Daniel, 2006; Zipes, 1985).

Authors often used depictions of food consumption and the enjoyment of food as tropes to illustrate gluttony and poor behaviour. As Wendy Katz (1980) added, “The practice of using meals as a measure of the child’s adjustment to the social order, the child’s observance of social requirements, is especially pronounced in English children’s literature” (p. 193). By the 19th century, depictions of food in texts for young readers focussed on the evangelical discourses of gluttony and children who ate with enthusiasm as greedy and unrestrained.

These depictions of the greedy or gluttonous child became significant factors in creating the “cultural construction of the overweight child” (Webb, 2009) of which fatness became a key indication. It was at that point that associations between fat bodies and poor moral character became entwined.

What is YA?

As Hill describes, YA literature remains one of the most difficult categories of literature to satisfactorily define, and of which there is not yet a consensus (Hill, 2014). YA literature tends to follow similar genre patterns as adult literature, but there remains an ongoing argument as to the age group that it is intended for. Ostensibly, YA literature would seem to apply to ages 12 – 20 (Dean-Ruzicka, 2017; Randall, 2014; Nilsen et al., 2014) however, given the cultural anxiety around what is considered appropriate for young readers, it could be argued that this definition is too simplistic. YA literature, which often focuses on the experiences of young people's 'coming of age' experiences including explorations of sex, sexuality, drug use and defiance of authority figures, is often the reason why some refute the claim that YA literature is suitable for people as young as 12 years. While I will not attempt to add to the ongoing argument of defining YA literature, I do, for the purposes of this thesis, and certainly, when considering the appropriate age for the reader of my creative work *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, agree that YA literature is generally suitable for readers aged 12 – 20.

However, two of the books that I have chosen to analyse in Chapter 2, predate the official recognition of young adult literature. Michael Cart (2016) states that it was the publishing of S.E. Hinton's *The outsiders* (1967) and Robert Lypsite's *The contender* (1967) that created the classification of literature for young adults as a marketable category. I have chosen to analyse *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* and *Charlie and the chocolate factory* as I contend that even though some may argue that they are children's books, I believe they are still applicable for older readers also. Both books were published before the official classification

of young adult literature where literature was categorised as either for children or for adults. These two novels don't sit comfortably within either classification. As mentioned above, attempting to separate and define children's and young adult literature is a difficult task with Peter Hunt (2004) stating "There is no single or widely used definition of children's literature" (p. 15). Roberta Trites (2000) differentiates young adult literature stating, "young adult novels are about power" (p. 3). This power, she contends refers to both the power of the individual/adolescent/reader or the character depicted in the literature. This power is also the power that operates "upon the subject in adolescent literature" (p. 3). Young adult literature therefore is separate from children's literature in that it focuses on the ways in which the adolescent is both the repressed and the liberated, and how they respond to the power structures in which they live in society. As both Billy Bunter and Augustus Gloop are depicted as fat boys living within a societal power that denegated their fat bodies, then the books from which they are from can fairly be described as young adult literature.

Why I have chosen to focus on young adult novels.

I have chosen to focus on the YA novel in this thesis, as I propose that it is possible to educate, inform, enculture, and challenge young minds positively through YA novels. As I discuss in greater depth in Chapter 3, YA novels are an excellent tool for combating and reversing learned prejudice. One of the most effective ways to do this is to challenge the stereotypical ways in which marginalised groups and individuals are depicted in novels. Disrupting pervasive tropes, allows readers to consider social issues such as race, sexuality, gender, and bodily difference, for example, from different perspectives and potentially allows the reader to consider how damaging prejudice and stigma could be. I contend that a younger

mind is not so readily invested in adhering to learned biases and is therefore open to alternative ways of understanding cultures, people, and bodies different to their own.

The need to reconsider the fat boy.

I contend that much of the scholarship surrounding fat bodies is conducted through a feminist gaze and the effect on female bodies. This is understandable considering Fat Studies is founded in Feminist theory. However, this has meant there are significant gaps in inquiry into the experiences of males with fat bodies. I have chosen to focus on ways in which to reconsider the fat boy in YA novels, in order to build upon the existing scholarship and help fill in the gaps. This work focuses not only on male bodies but on young male bodies. At an age where young people are becoming encultured through social media, television, movies, and literature, it is critical that there be a dissenting argument to the stereotypical depiction of fat boys.

I also acknowledge that fat theory is often integrated into Disability Studies. Of course fat people can have disabilities and disabled people can be fat, but when considering fat through a Disability Studies gaze, my concern is that it continues to pathologise the fat body as unwell or requiring medical intervention. Fat itself is not inherently a disability, a point of view shared by multiple governmental agencies around the world (Malone & Malone, 2019; CDC, 2018; *Extreme Obesity Alone Is Not a Disability*, 2019). As such, I have chosen not to include disability discourse in this thesis, as I feel it would be contradictory to one of my key arguments.

Despite a change in fat female characters, there are insufficient positive depictions of fat boys in YA novels. Within the last six years, there have been very specific challenges to the ways

in which fat female bodies are represented in YA novels. Titles such as *Leah on the offbeat* (Albertalli, 2018), *Fat Angie* (Charlton-Trujillo & Press, 2013), *Dumplin'* (Murphy, 2015) *Puddin'* (Murphy, 2019), *The Summer of Jordi Perez and the best burger in Los Angeles* (Spalding, 2018), *Undead girl gang* (Anderson, 2018), *To be honest* (Martin, 2018), *If it makes you happy* (Kann, 2019), *I'll be the one* (Lee, 2020) and *Melt my heart* (Rutter, 2020) are all examples of books that have deliberately sought to antagonise the stereotypical depictions of fat girls in YA literature. These new representations show girls who refuse to lose weight at the demand of others, who ultimately refuse to be ashamed of their fat bodies and choose to live their lives unencumbered by social stigma. Seeing an increase of conversations about body positivity and the potential positive outcomes for young girls, has led me to the inevitable question, what about the fat boys?

Key conceptual frameworks

Fat Studies and key theorists.

This thesis will contribute to the scholarly enquiry of Fat Studies, and has primarily drawn upon the works of Fat Studies academics such as Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, Marilyn Wann, and Charlotte Cooper. Fat Theorists Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, in their seminal work *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) describe Fat Studies in the following way:

In the tradition of critical race studies, queer studies, and women's studies, Fat Studies is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes and stigma placed on fat and the fat body. The field of Fat Studies invites scholars to pause, interrupt the everyday thinking about fat. (p. 2)

While Rothblum and Solovay note that Fat Studies often falls within the humanities and Sociology discourse, I have chosen to research the fat in literary studies as this is an area with limited inquiry into it. However, much like Rothblum and Solovay, I am concerned about the negative assumptions of fat and the stigma placed upon those with fat bodies and have built upon their scholarship in order to combat it.

Fat activist and academic, Charlotte Cooper describes Fat Studies as

An emerging interdisciplinary academic field, which is ripe for sociological exploration. Fat Studies is complex, features multiple actors and perspectives, has potential for exciting theoretical and empirical research, combines popular and high academic discourse with social justice concerns and is beginning to articulate an area of human life where there is a hunger, pun intended, for clarity and understanding (p. 1020).

Much like Charlotte Cooper, it is the desire to combine social justice with academic discourse that has fuelled this thesis. Moreover, in her book *Fat Activism: A radical social movement* (2016), Cooper explains that within Fat Studies “different kinds of research methods are needed in order to unlock knowledge that has already been generated by fat people” (p. 2).

Again, it is the need to explore depictions of fat in YA literature that I consider critical, but there is also a need for this kind of knowledge to come from within fat discourse and not from those who frame fat as a medical or social failing, thus perpetuating negative stereotypes. As Fat activist, speaker and author Marilyn Wann (2009) states, "Every person who lives in a fat-hating culture inevitably absorbs anti-fat beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes, and also inevitably comes to occupy a position in relation to power arrangements that are based on weight" (p. xi). It is the challenge to these power arrangements which are particularly applicable to my research. Also, Wann's assertion that "Word choice is a good

place to begin to examine assumptions" (p. xii), allows me to build upon this idea that negative word choices can have a detrimental impact on young readers, but conversely, when challenged, they can be a particularly useful way to change minds and reverse bias. *Fat Studies* serves as a counter argument to popular obesity discourses, specifically the dominant obesity epidemic narrative (Evans et al., 2008). However, this thesis will not engage with this narrative in a scientific or sociological manner; instead, this work seeks to change negative perceptions of fat bodies through YA novels and thus potentially challenge negative perceptions before they form. Through literary narrative, it is possible to shape and reshape our experience and understanding of the world.

Understanding the difference between fat and obesity.

I choose to use the word 'fat' to reclaim, normalise, and reinterpret positively a traditionally oppressive term. Throughout this thesis, I will use the word 'Fat.' I acknowledge that this word carries with it multiple negative cultural, social, and medical assumptions. Dominant anti-fat assumptions that are prevalent in our culture can negatively influence educational opportunities, home life, access to health care, and employment opportunities (Andreyeva et al., 2008; Roehling, Roehling & Pichler, 2007). There is a pervasive and damaging association that frames fat bodies as inherently unwell and a medical ailment in need of curing (Upadhyay et al., 2018; Koliaki, Liatis & Kokkinos, 2019; Robinson et al., 2020). I similarly acknowledge, (much like Wann, 2009; Rothblum & Solovay, 2009 & Tovar, 2018), that readers will come to any given work with their own culturally constructed understanding of fatness. However, in this thesis, 'fat' is used as a descriptor, just like blue eyes, black hair, and short or tall are similarly used as descriptors. Moreover, much like (LeBesco, 2004; Parsons, 2016; Wann, 1998), I prefer the term 'fat' over euphemisms such as 'chubby',

‘chunky’, ‘plump’, ‘big boned’, or ‘cuddly’ as they perpetuate stigma and negative attitudes toward fatness. Throughout this thesis, I will occasionally use the words ‘obese’ and ‘obesity.’ I similarly acknowledge that these are words that can evoke negative connotations due to a history of those words being used to “medicalise human diversity” (Wann, 2009, p. 16). In keeping with the tradition of Fat Studies, I will repeat these words where others have used them in relation to medical discourse but not in advocacy of this word as an alternate word for fat.

Foucault and power dynamics.

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher, literary critic, and political activist. His theories were frequently concerned with the relationships between knowledge and power within cultures and how these power relationships could be used as a form of social control.

Foucault (1998) asserted that “Power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” (p. 63) rejecting the idea that modern power dynamics were controlled by a sovereign power.

Instead, as will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 1, his work suggests power is willingly maintained and enforced by the masses through a series of daily performances of discipline.

Foucault’s theories have been especially useful when understanding the ways in which societies respond to the materiality of bodies. In his book, *Discipline and Punish* (1979) Foucault likens the body to a ‘site’ of which there are multiple scientific, gendered, social and economic forms of surveillance and in a modern regime, control is asserted through bodies. For the fat body, the term ‘Biopower’ is a particularly applicable concept as it describes the ways in which people with fat bodies are subjugated for being perceived as not

adequately adhering to social expectations of self-discipline such as food restriction, weight loss and exercise. Furthermore, within Fat Studies, Foucault's theories have been used to argue that the negative attitudes around fat bodies are social constructs and result in a systemic power that seeks to marginalise and oppress the fat body and negate lived fat experiences.

Masculinity and the fat boy.

This research focuses in particular on the experiences and the representations of the fat boy as represented within YA novels. As such, this thesis will consider constructions of masculinity and the ways in which fat bodies can alter perceptions of so-called masculinity. Although it could be argued that my work fits into 'Boyhood Studies' which considers masculinities in boys under the age of 18 years, it is not a discourse which is separate from traditional Masculinity Studies, so I refer to masculinity throughout this thesis in reference to both boys and men. As mentioned above, most of the enquiry into fatness has been framed around female bodies, enforcing the perception that fat is only a female or feminist issue. However, as Forth (2009) and Gilman (2004) note, fat has been gendered as 'feminine' and carries a generalised cultural association of fat manhood with immorality, weakness, and cowardice. This is supported by Trautner et al., (2013) who similarly note, "Studies demonstrate that individuals hold preconceived notions about what it means to be fat and document a long list of negative stereotypes associated with fat individuals, including laziness, unintelligence, and incompetence" (p. 383). Similarly, Bell and McNaughton 2007; Monaghan 2008; Pyle and Loewy 2009 found that the masculinity of males is often called into question based on the changing state of their bodies.

It is commonplace for writers to use the fat boy as an antithesis to acceptable forms of masculinity. Placing a fat character beside a thin boy is used to make that thin boy better by comparison, usually more intelligent, virtuous, and important. Averill (2016) confirms this idea, stating that in earlier novels fatness “signifies a character’s failure” (p. 19). It is the intention of this thesis to challenge the ongoing perception of the fat boy as removed from masculine traits and therefore a signifier of failure.

Methods of analysis

Close reading

In order to provide an overview of conventional representations of the fat boy within YA novels and to indicate ways in which those representations and ideologies they contain, be challenged, this thesis utilises a variety of strategies.

As a methodology, close reading is used to derive meaning from text “without any reference to external evidence such as the author’s intention/history, biography or the socio-cultural conditions of its production” (Mambrol, 2016). Close reading is derived from *Practical criticism* by I. A. Richards (1929) and *The seven types of ambiguity* by William Empson (1980) and draws upon linguistic elements such as images, rhythm, and metaphor to create meaning. I have chosen close reading as a method of analysis to understand the ways in which writers create fat boys. In Chapter 2, where I conducted a close reading of four YA novels p, my goal was to derive the social meanings placed upon the word fat and the fat character. It is my contention in this thesis that it is essential to understand the tropes writers traditionally use to challenge them. Novels are cultural products, which both reflect and informs the society in which it is produced. A close reading, therefore, offers insight into how

society understands and reacts to issues, in the case of my work, the depiction of fat boys in YA novels. Close reading is an effective tool to draw the often-used phrases, images, words, and themes which perpetuate the negative associations with the fat body.

The books I have chosen for close reading all contain a fat boy character, each the protagonist except for Augustus Gloop who is a deuteragonist. I have chosen these particular characters as I contend they each typify dominant fat boy stereotypes. Billy Bunter, as I will argue in chapter 2, was the original fat boy character, and given the rarity of depictions of fat in literature for young people at the time, arguably became a prototype for the representation of fat boys to come. Billy Bunter was characterised as both a victim and a bully, lazy, stupid, gluttonous and greedy. As I argue in chapter 2, the ways in which Billy was written is still mirrored in modern fat characters.

Augustus Gloop, as mentioned in the introduction, is the first fat boy character to make me consider the representation of fat boys in YA novels. Like Billy Bunter, Augustus was portrayed as greedy and gluttonous but my focus on Augustus is to consider the common trope of punishing the fat boy. I argue that the punishment Augustus receives for eating, is completely out of proportion to his perceived crime. This trope is also repeated on YA novels, with the fat boy often receiving physical or verbal punishment for being fat.

I chose Jimmy Winterpock in *The fat boy chronicles* as he represents a moral imperative to lose weight that has arguably, become a more recent trope in YA novels. This character contends with both peer pressure and religious obligation to be thin.

Finally Marshall/Butter in the final book I chose, represents the new ways in which the media, particularly online forms of communication impact the fat boy in both real life and in literature. Butter represents the fat body through a medicalised viewpoint, which is a dominant way of understanding fat in westernised societies.

Fat Studies – How I will use it.

As mentioned above, Fat Studies offers an alternative way to consider fat bodies and fat experiences within society, outside of a traditionally negative gaze. I am using Fat Studies to question why the fat boy is so frequently depicted negatively in YA novels. Looking at fat bodies without the influence of a medicalised or pathologized rhetoric, allows me to consider fat bodies without the social judgements that are too frequently applied to fat bodies. As Fat Activist Marilyn Wann argues, you cannot claim to be "doing fat studies, [if you're] advocating weight loss and constructing fat as a disease" (2009, p. ix). Fat Studies allows an analysis of fat bodies and fat experiences from outside a biased perspective. Analysing YA literature using a Fat Studies ideology means I don't come to the work with the assumptions that fat is morally wrong or that fat automatically equates to poor health. Indeed, a Fat Studies lens is important to determine where writers have shown a societal bias in their work, which can be challenged when creating a fairer depiction of the fat boy.

Production of my creative project.

For this thesis, I have written a YA novel titled *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, which seeks to interrupt the dominant, mostly negative depictions of fat boys. I will be undertaking practice-based qualitative research which will be contextualised within a theoretical discussion. Candy & Edmonds (2018) describe this as "an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice" (p. 63). Moreover, they explain that "If a creative artefact is the basis of the

contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based” (p. 63) as opposed to practice-led, which leads to new ways of understanding the practice itself. “For practice-based researchers, making an artefact is pivotal, and the insights from making, reflecting and evaluating may be fed back directly into the artefact itself” (p. 65). The process of creating this book was partly to create a positive representation of fat boys and partly to understand how the writing process can be utilised to achieve that.

Reading this thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters and a creative work. It is intended that the first two chapters are read before my novel and the third chapter after. In the following section, I will summarise the chapters and the novel, focussing on the ways in which each seeks to answer my thesis questions.

Chapter 1 – Power and Ideology in young adult novels.

In this chapter, I explore Foucault’s concepts of Biopower and Panopticism, arguing that these systems of power produce and enforce the bodily controls of self-discipline. These bodily controls include but are not limited to weight loss, food restriction, exercise, and a willing adherence to conform to anti-fat rhetoric. In turn, popular media can, both reflect and enforce anti-fat bias and subjugation of people with fat bodies, through the negative depiction of fat in cultural artefacts such as television, movies, online content, and of course YA novels. However, whilst Foucault argued that such controls existed in society, he also stated that wherever power existed, there too was a resistance to that power. This thesis is intended

to serve as a resistance to the overwhelmingly negative representations of fat boys in YA novels.

Chapter 2 – Traditional fat boy tropes in young adult novels.

In Chapter 2 I have used close reading to analyse four YA novels, *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* (Richards, 1947), *Charlie and the chocolate factory* (Dahl, 1964), *The fat boy chronicles* (Lang & Buchanan, 2009) and *Butter* (Lange, 2012). To challenge the ways in which fat boys are depicted in YA novels, I contend it is necessary to understand the ways in which writers have traditionally written them. I have selected these four novels as they are particularly representative of the ways depictions of fat boys have both reflected and influenced representations of fat boys.

The Determination of Taffy Futt

The intention of my novel is to offer an alternative depiction of the fat boy where he is not depicted as unintelligent, lazy, greedy, weak or unlikeable. Having done a close reading of YA novels in Chapter 2, I am able to subvert the common tropes that are so frequently applied to fat boys and create a positive representation of a boy with a fat body. My protagonist, Taffy Futt, is liked by his friends and the people in his town. His fat body is not maligned by the locals and his fat body serves a purpose in a town where everyone is employed by the abattoir. When a nefarious company comes to town with the intention of making all the teenagers lose weight, Taffy refuses. This contrasts with a very common trope

in YA novels where the fat boy protagonist is expected to validate himself by losing weight. I have also depicted Taffy as the hero. It is highly unusual for the fat boy character to prove heroic. Usually, the opposite is true, and he is either a foil to the hero, the sidekick or the villain.

I also aimed to create an engaging novel that would maintain the interest of young readers as they are introduced to socially contrary ideas of fat acceptance or at least tolerance of fat bodies. As discussed in Chapter 1, there are systems of power that maintain anti-fat sentiments in our culture. These are reflected in YA novels so it is feasible that this novel would be the first time a reader encounters a positive narrative about a fat boy. In order to maintain the interest of the reader I have included some dark humour, a supernatural subplot and what I hope is a protagonist that is likeable, and readers can identify with and have empathy for.

Chapter 3 – Challenging the tropes – A counter-narrative.

In Chapter 3 I provide an exegetical discussion of my creative practice and the ways in which I have used it to offer a challenge to depictions of fat boys. Choosing a genre that allows me to create a world in which fat bodies are accepted was critical. I discuss how Speculative fiction has been critical in allowing marginalised groups to portray worlds where they are accepted. I will also offer examples of close reading from my novel to show the language choices I have made that subvert typical ways of describing the fat boy.

In my novel, pigs feature quite prominently throughout, in Chapter 3 I explain the use of pigs as both a device to make sense of the abattoir in town and as a metaphor for the way fat people are viewed in our culture. I will discuss dehumanisation as a common trope when

depicting fat boys and how I attempted to subvert it. Finally, I will discuss the importance of offering counternarratives in literature as a way of dispelling harmful narratives and of exposing readers to alternate depictions of bodies.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, I will summarise what I have achieved through the thesis and indicate the wider implications that my work has uncovered and offer examples of where further enquiry is required.

Chapter 1

Power and ideology in young adult novels.

In this Chapter, I contend that negative tropes of the fat boy in YA novels began and have been maintained as a result of societal systems of power that situate the fat boy as either morally bereft or diseased and in need of medical intervention. In this chapter, I draw upon Michel Foucault's theories of Biopower and Panopticism, in particular, to explain the ways in which fat boys are denigrated and marginalised in YA novels. Moreover, I will also consider the ways in which Fat Studies can interrupt negative discourses around fat boys, using Foucault's theory of resistance to power to understand ways in which to challenge negative depictions of fat boys in YA novels.

What is Biopower?

Biopower, according to Michel Foucault in his book *The history of sexuality, volume 1*, (1978), is "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (p. 140). Biopower is a set of political technologies that can control entire populations through the use of disciplinary institutions which become encoded into regular social practices and human behaviour, to which individuals will willingly acquiesce, largely unaware of the implicit control of bodies by the state and its prevailing ideologies. Throughout the eighteenth century, in westernised cultures, traditional forms of social control, such as public torture and execution gave way to a sense of personal individualism and a cultural shift focussed on the ways in which the body could be utilised

like a machine and the human body could be disciplined to make it both useful and docile, to work hard for the benefit of the state but not argue against disciplinary measures. Biopower, Foucault suggested, began with schools and military institutions but soon operated within hospitals, prisons, and factories. Each institution demanded discipline from the body.

Whether paying attention in class, fighting at war, or remaining compliant with the rules of educational institutions or state incarceration, the disciplinary practice of the human body became a fundamental form of control in society.

Fat and biopower.

As noted in the introduction, the term ‘fat’ carries multiple cultural, social, and medical assumptions and it is often used as a derogatory term. Culturally, the associations that people make with fat can have dire consequences. The dominant anti-fat beliefs prevalent in our culture negatively influence educational opportunities, home life, access to health care, and employment opportunities (Andreyeva et al., 2008; Roehling, Roehling, & Pichler, 2007). A pervasive and damaging association frames fat bodies as inherently unwell and the fat body as a medical ailment needing curing (Upadhyay et al., 2018; Koliaki, Liatis & Kokkinos, 2018; Robinson et al., 2020). The relationship between medical discourse and fat highlights the negative impact of fat bias in our culture; however, the focus of this thesis is to interrupt the channels through which fat prejudice begins to impact young readers. When I use the word fat throughout this exegesis, I am situating it outside of pathologised and medical definitions. This is neither a dismissal or refutation of the myriad discourses around fat and medical issues, it is rather a refocusing of discussions of fat outside of those dominant discourses.

Within comparatively affluent westernised societies, being fat is marked as a failure to undertake the expected regulations and performances of the self (Rich and Evans, 2005) such as buying gym memberships, excessive exercising, and food restriction. At the same time, the thin body is given recognition as reflecting control, virtue, and goodness. For young people, messages that seek to reinforce cultural controls come from multiple places, such as family, friends, the education system, the media which encompasses the internet, music, television, and of course YA novels. More than just simple forms of entertainment, the influence of the media has an enormous impact on the ways in which young people relate to the world. What they watch, interact with, and read holds power and influences their still forming perceptions of the world and influences the bodily regulations they adhere to.

Biopower and young adult novels.

Significant scholarly work has been done regarding biopower and the novel (see De Boever, 2013 & Ayyıldız, 2020). However, it is my contention that there are societal systems of power, particularly the diet, weight loss and fitness industries, that enforce the idea that the thin body is superior, that citizens are consistently exposed to this idea and are also expected, both implicitly and explicitly, to alter their bodies to adhere to this idea. Moreover, I contend that these ideas can be introduced and normalised in YA novels. To be more specific, like all examples of literature, the YA novel reflects the attitudes of the culture and society in which it is published and distributed, as well as the point of view of any particular author. Young readers learn of the world through that which they read (Zunshine, 2006; Keen, 2007; Vermeule, 2011). The depiction of anti-fat sentiment or of weight control and dieting normalises this idea, thereby tacitly suggesting to the reader through the process of persistent,

recurring tropes, that they too should control their bodies in line with the social expectations they have been exposed to in novels. Young adult novels can serve as a tool to subjugate the fat boy's body and assert bodily control by perpetuating the idea that dietary control and weight loss are necessary bodily controls required to achieve the thin body which is desired in westernised culture.

This is an idea supported by Jen Pylypa (1998), who, in her article 'Power and Bodily Practice: Applying the Work of Foucault to an Anthropology of the Body,' suggests that as a society, people have "habituated to external regulation" (p. 22). Through social structures such as schooling, the medical system, our families, and our peers, we learn to place more value in the words and mandates of those with power. As a society, we learn to self-regulate and discipline our bodies to conform to standards of acceptable body size, weight, and appearance. Arguably, being "fit, thin, and a healthy body" has become a dominant mandate of the medical industry and allied corporations; however, we reinforce this belief as individuals and society. One of the most prolific and harmful arguments is that it "is the individual's fault – they are lazy, gluttonous, idle, unvirtuous" (p. 25).

These very arguments are frequently mirrored in YA novels and serve to reinforce the idea of the fat boy body as shameful, and disgusting. Through the YA novel, the persistent negative depictions of the fat boy fortify the dominant arguments of the medical industries and instil the beliefs that fat bodies require treatment. This, in turn, encourages the young reader to enact regulation of their bodies under the conviction that they are doing the responsible thing.

Jan Wright (2009), supports this idea, linking the YA novel and Biopower in her article 'Biopower, Bio-pedagogies, and the obesity epidemic', suggesting that current health discourses support and promote the self-regulation and performances of the self and advocate a social preference for a thin body. Wright contends that "the 'truths' of the obesity epidemic,

as they are recontextualised in government policy, health promotion initiatives, web resources, and school practices have consequences for how children and young people come to know themselves” (p. 1). This suggests that the influence of the novels and other forms of media that young people are exposed to as a part of their education and daily lives can have tangible negative impacts on how those young people perceive fat bodies and themselves.

I acknowledge that a counterargument would suggest that excess fat causes poor health outcomes and does indeed need to be treated. There are many studies contesting issues of bodily fat and obesity rhetoric. However, it is outside the scope of my thesis to debate the assumed poor health outcomes of fat bodies, I am instead focussing on the idea that novels for young people can often serve as devices through which young readers first learn anti-fat sentiment. Moreover, with insufficient positive counter-narratives of fat people’s experiences, the negative depiction of people with fat bodies becomes the dominant narrative and reinforces anti-fat beliefs and assumptions.

Foucault’s theory of Biopower can be used to understand the disciplinary requirements that dictate how populations adhere to bodily rules and regulations, psychologically internalising, and therefore reproducing, such governing principles. These regulations include the demand for thin bodies and, in westernised societies, punitive discipline for those who have been considered failures in achieving this. Moreover, this societal demand for thin bodies and a rejection of fat is frequently exposed to young people through assorted forms of media, including novels. However, while the link between biopower and the harm it can cause to young readers exists, there remains significant scope for further research. Within the field of YA literature, it is critical to understand the language that authors use that perpetuates self-regulatory behaviour and instils anti-fat sentiment. Moreover, the increase in positive depictions of fat girls in YA literature highlights the gap in research into the fat boy in YA literature.

I contend that YA novels have been used as a mechanism to reinforce these prevailing rules, especially the rhetoric about weight loss and anti-fat sentiment. It is important to acknowledge that although YA novels reflect dominant social ideas, they can also challenge them. However, as a cultural artefact that reflects and creates meaning, I propose that there is a danger when YA novels perpetuate anti-fat rhetoric. Young adult novels such as *The weight of it all* (2018) by NR Walker, *Losing it* (2012) by Erin Fry, *Food, girls and other things I can't have* (2009) by Allen Zadoff, *The downside of being Charlie* (2012) by Jenny Torres Sanchez, and *Fat boy swim* (2006) by Catherine Ford each position the fat boy as needing to lose weight, that his life is unpleasant because he is fat and can only be improved through weight loss. When the dominant discourse around fat bodies demands weight loss, books that depict fat characters negatively support the rhetoric that a fat body is unacceptable in society. For young readers, this repetitive message in novels of fat being unacceptable serves, as Foucault suggests, as a tool of societal control. If the characters through which the reader identifies are expected to lose weight, then the reader is going to take on the social instruction that they too need to be thin.

Panopticism and the fat body.

To further explain the societal pressure to adhere to disciplinary regimes of bodily control, it is important to consider Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon as he describes in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1979). Originally a central surveillance point within a penal context, Foucault uses the concept of the panopticon to suggest the controlling of societies through enforcing the belief that citizens are constantly being watched. Therefore, citizens

willingly obey prevailing rules through the fear of being 'caught' not adhering to the rules (Foucault, 1975).

Foucault's concept of a Panoptical society was based on the prison design created by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham. (1791) The Panopticon was created as physical and psychological imprisonment. Bentham believed that if prisoners were never sure when they were being observed, they would behave as if they were constantly being watched. Foucault named this behaviour "self-policing" (p. 202) as "he who is subject to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" (p. 203). Not only would the members self-police, but they would police the behaviours of others around them; the prisoners in Bentham's prison and the wider society would be aware of the acceptable standards of conduct expected of them, and they would be complicit in following these standards of behaviour to avoid further punishment.

Michel Foucault (1975) states a panoptical society is a society with the authority to maintain control and power by simply presenting the idea that individuals are constantly under observation. However, this system can only succeed if individuals internalise the power dynamics through an inability to recognise if or when they are being monitored. In this perpetual state of not knowing that they are being monitored, people will behave according to societal expectations, as if they knew they were being observed.

Foucault added that to keep the group from questioning the role of authority, those in control would create a type of 'crisis' to maintain control of the population and to convince them that the authority's standards were worth following (p. 199). I contend that the declaration of an obesity epidemic exemplifies this type of crisis. In response to their declaration of an epidemic, The World Health Organization released a 'Global strategy on diet, physical

activity, and health' recommending various control methods to curtail the 'obesity problem,' including instruction, surveillance, and evaluation (WHO, 2006).

In 2006 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared obesity a disease, and the world was experiencing a "global obesity pandemic. This followed the American Surgeon General Richard Carmona comparing obesity with terrorism, saying, "Unless we do something about it, the magnitude of the dilemma will dwarf 9-11 or any other terrorist attempt." (Tumulty, 2006). Since these assertions, and many others like them across the world, a dominant obesity discourse has emerged that has situated fat bodies as having an assumed relationship with lack of exercise, poor diet, and poor health (Campos, 2004; Evans et al., 2004; Oliver, 2005; Gard and Wright, 2005; Orbach, 2006; & Evans et al., 2008). Dominant obesity discourse enforces a stigma that assumes fat people either don't possess or willingly ignore the knowledge, willpower, or commitment to 'control' their bodies (Glassner, 1989; Elliott, 2007; Gilman, 2008; LeBesco, 2011; Moffat, 2010; Smith & Holm, 2010; Antin & Hunt, 2013).

Weight loss, exercise and dietary programs are the most recognisable disciplinary responses to the 'obesity problem'. Sandra Bartky (2020) and Susan Bordo (2004) agree that dieting is one of several disciplinary practices played out on the body becoming a subject and the subjected and consenting to the process of potentially endless dieting itself. As recently as January 2023, the weight loss medications Orlistat, Saxenda, Qsymia and Wegovy have been approved in the US for children as young as 12 years (NBCnews.com, 2023). This now enforces children now participate in these disciplinary practices at increasingly young ages and expanding the crisis to those who were often excluded.

I would argue, however, that the control methods as advised by the WHO, also fortified, and perpetuated the negative depictions of the fat boy in literature. The fear and reticence to offer

positive depictions of fat bodies seemed to be whipped up by a media and cultural anxiety of ‘glorifying’ fatness or obesity. Gauchet (2006) supports the idea that the media induce a state of permanent surveillance and judgement around societal insecurities about physical appearance and beauty standards. Through media consumption, viewers/readers are constantly reminded that non-conformity of physical appearance will be recognised, leaving them open to gossip, discrimination, and a fear of punishment. The media can serve as daily recrimination and warning of the potential horrors suffered by those who fail to adhere to acceptable beauty standards. In response, members of society willingly alter their bodies, hair, clothes, and myriad outward appearances. This creates a ‘cosmetic panopticon’ where it is the physical features of an individual which we believe are under surveillance.

Whilst Bartky, Bordo and Gauchet are helpful for understanding panopticism in our culture, they focus almost exclusively on the repercussions of the female body. This similarly exposes the need for greater examination of the effects on the fat male body. Moreover, while acknowledging the impact of mass media on the population’s self-policing, there remains a gap in current discourse about how specifically YA novels propagate and disseminate self-policing behaviours.

Obesity discourse

I contend that one of the most significant examples of a social institution of control that enforces the belief that people are being watched and judged based on their body size and simultaneously commands the adherence to self-policing and bodily modification behaviour is the current obesity discourse. Obesity discourse informs multiple responses to the fat body and can be understood in many ways and encompasses many different forms of discourse.

However, what I am referring to is the medicalisation of the body and situating it within discourses of pathology. The medicalisation and pathologisation of the fat body have become the dominant way in which the fat body is perceived. This medical framing places an assumption of ill health upon fat bodies to the detriment and exclusion of other forms of perceiving the fat body. I am not refuting any link between fat and health outcomes, what I am challenging is the *dominant* ideologies that automatically link fat and poor. Whereas in the past, the fat body was more likely to represent greed, gluttony, and poor moral character, now fat is more likely to represent a health condition requiring treatment. For those who are considered to be inadequately adhering to the social requirements of weight loss or food restriction, then the associations with greed, gluttony, and moral character, reappear.

For the fat boy in YA literature, the reader is frequently conditioned to assume a defect of the fat boy character. The basis of prejudice in any culture promotes difference in relation to the majority, either a physical or moral failing. Current medicalised obesity discourse restricts opposing ways to perceive the fat body beyond a diagnosis and removes humanity from the fat person. This, in turn, I contend, perpetuates, and enforces a negative depiction of fat boys in YA novels and seldom allows for alternate representations.

The impacts that dominant medicalised obesity discourses has on the lives of fat people is similarly well documented, showing that discrimination is commonplace for fat people when attempting to access healthcare (Phelan et al., 2015; Lee, 2019), accessing employment (Schulte et al., 2007; Giel et al., 2012), in the workplace (Friedman et al., 2008; Hayden et al., 2010) even interpersonal relationships with family and friends (Puhl et al., 2008).

Dominant obesity discourses often identify young people's bodies as a source of concern, following the theory that solving the perceived obesity problem in adults should begin with the bodies of the young (Evans et al., 2008). Although portrayals of fat boys date back to the

early part of the 20th century, the hegemonic role of obesity discourse over the last few decades has meant that despite the gains of fat activism, there remain few positive depictions of the fat boy body. In a society that deems bodily fat as a threat to the health of young people, it makes sense that it would not be depicted in a positive light in YA novels. It is also essential to consider the cultural anxiety surrounding fat bodies, particularly young ones. The medical industry and the demand for people to adhere to their rules regarding health are considered a “moral imperative” (LeBesco. 2011). They have conflated critique and non-conformity of these rules with failed integrity and responsibility. According to Tina Moffat (2010) in order to create a political issue, childhood obesity has been scrutinised and publicised by health professionals since the early part of the 20th century, yet it has only warranted medical intervention in the last 25 years (p. 3). Buoyed by the media, a declaration of an ‘obesity epidemic’ was declared, and discussions of fat bodies focussed on the “social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of the issue” (p. 2). However, to consider fat from a purely medical frame is to extinguish the experiences, both lived and imagined, of fat people. Love, life, death, birth, happiness, and sadness, the themes are not just the experiences of the thin. Fat people are a part of society with stories that are equally valid.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to combat the scientific body of knowledge regarding fat and health. Instead, there remain significant gaps in current research regarding other ways of viewing the fat body beyond a therapeutic model. As a system of control, obesity discourse arguably has the potential to do considerable harm. This thesis seeks to divert discussions away from the medical and towards the literary and understand the ways in which literary representations might reproduce or challenge generalisations of the fat body which are enforced by dominant obesity discourse.

The novel and resistance to power.

In the previous section of this chapter, I have discussed what I contend are some of the societal systems of power that maintain negative depictions of fat boys in YA novels.

Building upon the Foucauldian idea that power is never unidirectional, it both constructs and constraints at the same time, in this section, I will argue that wherever dominant systems of power exist, there is always resistance to that power. Through this resistance depictions of fat boys can be challenged and changed. Michel Foucault (1978) stated, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (p. 95). Within obesity discourse and the positioning of the fat body as diseased, there is resistance. Indeed, this thesis is intended as a form of resistance against what I argue are unjust depictions and stereotypes of fat boys in YA novels. Three tools of resistance that I have adopted to challenge negative depictions of fat boys include the academic enquiry of Fat Studies, the impact of the YA novel and representations of fat in the literary.

The novel.

The YA novel fulfils a crucial pedagogical function through which its readers learn to respond to the world. Through its depictions of particular characters, it can inform, both negatively and positively, how the reader will understand and respond to people who embody those depictions. Young adult literature, therefore, serves as a cultural artefact that can risk steering young people into prejudice and stigma, but importantly, can challenge it too.

Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000), supports this idea, defining YA literature as “an institutional discourse ... which participates in the power and repression dynamic that socialises adolescents into their cultural position” (p. 66). An ongoing exposure to tropes of fat boys either dieting or being subjugated for being fat instils the idea of fat being negative. The potential result, as the reader self-polices, is to alter their body in order to fit into society’s ideals or show complicity for these societal rules through the expression of anti-fat sentiment. Much like the prisoners locked up in the panopticon, being seen as complicit may help to avoid further punishment.

Fat studies

As discussed previously, within western societies and as reflected within textual production, fat bodies have tended to be viewed through a medical and pathological gaze. However, the field of Fat Studies seeks to question and challenge dominant narratives of fat and fat bodies while acknowledging that this is contrary to prevailing cultural ideas surrounding fat, fat bodies, health, bodily difference, and how different bodies are portrayed within our culture.

Within Fat Studies, the word fat is preferred over obesity as “obesity medicalises human diversity” (Wann, 2009). Cultural theorist Samantha Murray (2008) suggests that informed by medical discourse, 'fat' is viewed as a defective, repulsive, and moral and aesthetic failure. In contrast, Charlotte Cooper (2016), a fat scholar, fat activist, and performance artist, defines fat differently. She says fat is “any size, shape, texture, colour, sometimes has a mind of its own and will not behave. A delightful, gorgeous thing, a source of physical power much-maligned and fretted over.” These two quotes illustrate opposite beliefs about fat bodies; however, beyond a pathologised definition such as the BMI index, there is no cultural or

socially agreed definition of fatness. In other words, what is too fat? What is too thin? Who can decide when a body crosses over from thin to fat? Such factors complicate height and weight indications of fatness as race, age, and socioeconomic circumstances. Instead, if we borrow from the body positivity movement, those bodies considered 'deviant' are reinterpreted and challenged by their owners, thus creating a subcultural identity (LeBesco, 2004).

In her book *Fat Activism: A radical social movement* (2016), Cooper explains that within Fat Studies, "different kinds of research methods are needed to unlock knowledge that fat people have already generated" (p. 2). As such, this work is not only prompted by my continuing search for positive representations of fat boys in YA literature but also to add to knowledge within the academic field of Fat Studies by researching an area that I have identified as having a significant gap in scholarship.

Fat Studies serves as a counterargument to popular obesity discourse, specifically the dominant obesity epidemic narrative (Evans et al., 2008). However, this thesis will not engage with this narrative scientifically or sociologically. Instead, this work seeks to change negative perceptions of fat bodies through YA novels to challenge negative perceptions before they form potentially. It is important to note that resistance to power is seldom a defeat of power. Although Fat Studies is a critical voice in the resistance to the dominant and negative responses to the fat body in our culture, it will not eliminate anti-fat sentiment. However, it does have the potential to modify and to change it. Foucault (1980) states "... power can retreat here, reorganise its forces, invest itself elsewhere ... and so the battle continues" (p. 56). This suggests that with resistance, the response to fat bodies will change but will reform into something different. Whatever that change, whether negative or positive, there will be resistance to that too.

The impact of the young adult novel.

As mentioned previously, literature for young people can be used as a tool to manipulate young readers negatively. However, as an act of resistance, the YA novel can also be used to challenge and change negative depictions of marginalised characters. The stereotypical depictions of the fat boy have long served to warn readers of what might await them should they get fatter. The Panoptical society is prevalent in contemporary works for young adults. Many highly popular titles have featured protagonists who have attempted to extricate themselves from the ever-present gaze of the state. *The hunger games* (Collins, 2008), *Divergent* (Roth, 2011), and *I AM number FOUR* (Frey & Hughes, 2010) each feature young protagonists that seek to escape the control and influence of external forces. Young readers naturally enjoy themes of escaping control and acquiring freedom as many of them would undoubtedly feel external pressures from parents, teachers, coaches, and extracurricular pressures. However, while feeling empowered by reading these works of literature, most young readers would fail to see that the YA novel itself is a form of surveillance. Roberta Seelinger Trites, a YA scholar, argues that YA literature is “an institutional discourse (that) participates in the power and repression dynamic that socialises adolescents into their cultural position” (p. 54).

Of course, it is not my aim to disparage or malign YA literature. Indeed, this thesis aims to use it to reimagine subjugated members of society. The YA novel is an effective tool for generating positive ideas; Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry (2004) argue that YA literature is “inherently pedagogical” and a “powerful teaching tool (that) encourages young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitising or predisposing them to political action” that

would change their society. Indeed, the creative work *The Determination of Taffy Futt* seeks to do just that; to teach, challenge, and understand the politicisation of the fat body. Hintz argues that novels written by adult authors have the power to reveal the “cracks” in the “social foundations of our world” and position adolescents against adults, democracy versus totalitarianism, and individual freedom versus oppressive governmental authority (pp. 7-9). However, Trites argues that “adolescent literature written by adults is influenced by their authors’ socio-political beliefs” (p. 24). Depending on the political and moral leanings of the author, the book can be either conservative or liberating. The dominant ideology currently is a conservative anti-fat ideology.

Despite the vigorous competition from social media, targeted advertising, online gaming, digital streaming, television, and film, traditional literature is still a critical element responsible for the acculturation of young adults in our society. For adolescents, physiologically and psychologically, the brain changes how it perceives and processes stimuli. Moving beyond childhood wants and demands, the young adult brain learns to control their emotions and begins to learn how to prioritise the emotions of others (McGilchrist, 2009). Therefore, it is a common trope for storylines in YA literature to mirror this transition. Through the character, the reader is invited to confront their own choices and consider how to balance their own emotions, ethics, desire, duty, egoism, and altruism (Nikolajeva, 2019). When formulating their own value system, young readers will use fictional characters to navigate fundamental moral problems (Vermeule, 2011). They will decide who is 'good,' who is 'bad,' and what acceptable ways to behave in society. Through fiction, young readers can encounter conflict without any risk (Nikolajeva, 2018). Grief, fear, romance, responsibility, and acts of heroism can all be experienced safely through characters in books. Following the lead of the protagonist in a story, readers are encouraged to relate to

and share their emotional and ethical choices. Naturally, different genres will emphasise different values.

In her book *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Trites (2000) argues that “power is even more fundamental to adolescent literature than growth” (p. x). Like Foucault, Trites suggests that institutions such as school, religion, and identity politics alternatively repress and enable adolescent characters. She means that YA literature then functions as an institution and socialises adolescents to accept their place in extant power systems. Therefore, it is a common trope for storylines in YA literature to mirror this transition. Through the character, the reader is invited to confront their own choices and consider how to balance their own emotions, ethics, desire, duty, egoism, and altruism (Nikolajeva, 2018). When formulating their value system, young readers will use fictional characters to navigate fundamental moral problems (Vermeule, 2011). They will decide who is 'good,' who is 'bad,' and what acceptable ways to behave in society.

Through fiction, young readers can encounter conflict without any risk (Nikolajeva, 2018). Grief, fear, romance, responsibility, and acts of heroism can all be experienced safely through characters in books.

Whether intentional or not, writers will imbue their work with their own ingrained biases and prejudices. Of course, civil rights movements can affect social change, which may be reflected in the work of YA authors. However, some human rights issues are more visible, arguably afforded more media focus than others and thus, receive more publicity and representation in all kinds of literature, including young adults. Some issues remain highly controversial, which mainstream publishing companies may be reluctant to publish work about, while other topics have not yet raised social consciousness or are not considered important enough to challenge. Arguably, representations of fat boys fall into the latter

category. One of the most significant criticisms of including fat characters in YA literature is that the writer is 'glorifying obesity.' There is particular anxiety about promoting an alleged lifestyle to young and impressionable readers. Again, it can be challenging to determine the writer's intention and whether they believe a negative depiction of a fat boy ultimately serves to dissuade readers from gaining weight or to lead a 'healthy' lifestyle. Regardless, it is essential to acknowledge that a writer's bias will be present in their work. The negative, stereotypical and persistent representations of fat boys must be recognised as a source of prejudice.

Exposure to literature, television, film, and digital media exposes young readers to a "secret education" where there is the risk of "domination of one sex, one race, one class, or one country over a weaker counterpart" (Christensen, 2017). A thin character always being depicted as the protagonist, hero, chosen one, or the 'good' character educates the young reader on a social hierarchy of perceived importance, placing thin characters at the top and fat ones at the bottom. The negative consequences of this do not just affect the fat reader or the fat boy in society, "prejudice stifles a child's intellectual, social and emotional development (Katz, 2003, p. 11), and although much of this research has focussed on race and the way young readers adopt racial prejudices and overexposure to white characters, it can be argued that underrepresentation of characters with fat bodies achieves a similar outcome. By only ever viewing fat characters negatively, it skews the way young readers perceive fictional and real people with fat bodies. It prevents them from looking at others through anything but an altered frame of reference (Manning, Baruth & Lee, 2017).

Therefore, it is essential to offer stories that directly challenge these negative depictions of the fat boy. While young readers are engaging with these stories and building knowledge and an understanding of the world, they are similarly engaging with ingrained societal prejudices that they risk-taking with them to work, home, and other aspects of their adult lives.

Currently, too few YA books have sought to sufficiently alter the opposing narratives of fat boys. The ingrained prejudices that young readers are exposed to cannot be adequately confronted until we begin to see books about fat bodies depicted beyond the familiar tropes available until we move beyond reading the single story.

Dominant depictions of fat.

The initial focus of this thesis is to argue that depictions of fat boys in YA literature have tended to be overwhelmingly negative in portrayal: in so doing it will provide an analysis regarding how fat boys have historically traditionally written within the YA genre to date. The fat character frequently represents negativity. Writers use fat bodies, which are recognisable to readers as unfavourable, as literary tools to portray unpleasant qualities quickly and easily in their characters. It is almost impossible to create a positive fat character with this pervasive societal attitude. However, there is significant research to argue that anti-fat rhetoric can cause actual harm to young readers. This, I contend, needs to change.

Lindsey Averill (2016) argues that “What we learn from YA novels is that thin is beautiful, and “normal” and fat is pathological and bad” (p. 15). Averill contends that thin bodies have come to represent or are metaphors for “moral control, modernity, sophistication, and civilization” (p. 15). In contrast, the fat body becomes a physical representation of the “marker of humanity’s uncivilised animal instincts, which need to be controlled by the civilised and sanctimonious mind” (p. 15). This creates a dualism in YA literature which positions the thin character as instantly recognisable as virtuous, reliable, and desirable. In comparison, the fat character is then recognisable as morally bereft, nasty, greedy, and

untrustworthy, “the fat body signifies a character’s failure and not just (her) failure to be thin—but her failure to be decent, successful, and suited for heroism” (p. 19).

This view is reflected by Rebecca Rabinowitz (2003), who argues that,

Many things in literature are symbolic, but fat carries a damaging influence that is common but often unnoticed. Fatness is used overwhelmingly to connote corruption of inner character, weakness, immaturity, and flaws that need to be fixed. The message is sent through both fat characters, which are two-dimensionally flawed, and fat characters, which are complex but lose weight as they mature. (p. 1)

Supporting this argument, Linda Wedwick (1998) argues that fat-phobia is commonplace in YA literature and widely accepted. Wedwick argues:

Children have begun to internalise fat stereotypes long before they start reading series fiction; however, children's series fiction plays a role in reproducing and reinforcing the prejudice against fat people. Children reading series fiction may unknowingly internalise fat stereotypes since they are repeated in each of the series books they read (p. 20).

This is important to understand the actual harm the anti-fat sentiment can cause to young readers. Moreover, I contend that the anti-fat feeling is accepted and legitimised without adequate counter-narratives, becomes a ‘single story,’ and remains unquestioned. This wider idea is supported by writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (TED, 2009), who argues that a single or hegemonic story is always dangerous. And in most cases, it reinforces a “deficit-oriented” stance toward marginalised teens, which focuses on the limitations of race, ethnicity, culture, and language. Adichie explains: “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

To expand, the single story, when not adequately challenged, can enforce the concept of ‘the other’. Studied from multiple perspectives including psychology, criminology, philosophy and of course literature, otherness is “the condition or quality of being different or ‘other,’ particularly if the differences in question are strange, bizarre, or exotic.” (Given, 2008). At its worst, being relegated to the other in society can lead to social exclusion, marginalisation, racism and prejudice which in turn leads to “economic, housing, career, criminal justice, educational, and healthcare disparities.” (Cherry, 2023)

The issue of positive representation of fat boys in YA novels remains under-researched. Although important resources for considering the role and representation of the fat boy, the previously mentioned authors focus almost entirely on the female body in YA literature. This probably has much to do with fat bodies and weight loss industries focusing primarily on women. However, as 20th century literature has made a point of vilifying the fat boy body, I argue that there needs to be further research on why and how to change it, thus the motivation for this thesis and my novel, *The Determination of Taffy Futt*.

Chapter 2

Traditional fat boy tropes in young adult novels.

To challenge this prejudiced fat boy trope in YA novels, it is essential first to examine how the fat boy has been depicted historically. In this chapter, I will undertake a close reading of four YA novels between 20th – 21st centuries that feature prominent fat boy characters, *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* (Richards, 1947), *Charlie and the chocolate factory* (Dahl, 1964), *The fat boy chronicles* (Lang & Buchanan, 2009) and *Butter* (Lange, 2012).

In Chapter 1, I argued that there are societal systems of power that produce negative depictions of fat boys. To best understand ways in which to challenge these depictions, it is necessary to understand the ways in which the fat boy tropes have historically been produced. This chapter will use two intersecting methodologies, Fat Studies as a theoretical framework and close reading to trace continuities, note similarities and show that although there have been changes in the representation of the fat boy since the original *Billy Bunter* series, the changes have not been substantive and negative tropes of the fat boy persist.

I have chosen to focus on literature beginning in the 20th century as I contend this was when the shift to the anti-fat representation of the fat boy began, and society started to change perceptions of fat bodies and actively stigmatise fat people. Historian Peter Stearns (1997) supports this idea noting that the twentieth century brought about pervasive stigmatisation of fat with a cultural shift that first saw the widespread belief that “people could preserve or even enhance their health and also establish their moral credentials by disciplining their bodies through an attack on fat” (p. 59). Similarly, Kathleen LeBesco (2004) stated that as a reflection of these changing moral values, and the moral superiority that was assigned to a

slender body within a binarised social structure, the fat body came to represent the opposite of good moral standing. Instead, the fat body was constructed as a moral failing, and fat was increasingly characterised as “repulsive, funny, ugly, unclean and, more importantly, something to lose.” (p. 16).

In this chapter, I am building upon research in Fat Studies that focuses on the ways in which fat is produced and depicted in popular forms of media. While media refers to newspapers, radio, television movies, and online content, it also refers to myriad forms of print media, of which YA novels can be categorised.

Despite the push within Fat Studies to depict characters “unrestricted by old paradigms” (Byers, 2018, p. 159), fat bodies are mostly invisible in popular culture (Kent, 2001; LeBesco, 2004). Most characters we see portrayed in the media are thin, and are idealised, abiding by the social norms that dictate body size, showing evidence of dieting, or are eating disordered (Kyrölä, 2021; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991). When fat bodies are shown, they tend to be within very specific contexts, particular genres, and modalities (Kyrölä, 2014). Fat bodies are depicted outside of ‘normalcy’ and are frequently used to depict the perceived deficiencies of fat and not as representative of humanity, good and bad, complicated, superficial, annoying, sympathetic, boring, and exciting (Kyrölä, 2021; Mosher, 2001).

As mentioned in the introduction, there are significant changes in the ways in which the fat girl is depicted in YA novels. Within the field of Fat Studies and Fat Activism, it has been noted that there is a movement away from the traditionally negative depictions of the fat girl body. As Fat Studies scholar Michele Byers notes in her article “Fats,” futurity, and the contemporary YA novel (2017)

Historically, fat characters in YA literature played the role of “before,” cautionary tales, or lonelies. Today, a growing number of novels center fat characters

unrestricted by these old narrative paradigms, and, as such, open up alternative avenues through which to imagine futures long denied them (p. 159).

This thesis aligns with the desire to drive the dominant depiction of the fat boy beyond being a cautionary tale or warning but acknowledges that there remain significant gaps in scholarship or indeed recently published works of YA literature that support this desire. This, I argue, is due to the systems of power discussed in Chapter 1. However, identifying such gaps offers great scope for my own work in identifying and then challenging the ways in which the fat boy can be depicted.

In this chapter, I am using Fat Studies to disrupt ideas about fatness, explore intersectionalities, trouble obesity discourses and establish a need for a critical perspective of fatness (Haney & Sitter, 2021; Pause & Taylor, 2021). As Fat Studies Scholar and activist Charlotte Cooper suggests, Fat studies defines fat as subjective, fluid, shared experience amongst those in fat bodies, moving away from fatness as pathology (Cooper, 2010). As a theoretical lens, Fat Studies is essential for understanding fat outside of medicalised binaries, and for reinterpreting possibilities for the fat body.

It is my contention that writers of YA novels use the fat boy as a literary trope in order to comment upon societal characteristics which are deemed to be wrong or lacking in perceived social standards. Writers often make a character fat to easily impart to readers that a character should be read and perceived negatively. Joseph Miller (1990) states that “a literary trope is the use of figurative language, via word, phrase or an image, for artistic effect such as using a figure of speech.” (p. 9). The fat boy in YA novels has so frequently been portrayed negatively that it is simple to impart the idea that a character is greedy, lazy, stupid, or weak simply by depicting them as fat.

Arguably, the fat boy trope began with the character of Billy Bunter in the early part of the 20th century. Created by Charles Hamilton under the pen name of Frank Richards, Billy Bunter began as a minor character in a weekly newspaper for boys called *The Magnet*, which ran from 1908 to 1940. The popularity of Billy Bunter was such that after the newspaper closed, Frank Richards wrote 38 Billy Bunter novels. I propose that Billy Bunter became a prototype of sorts for the depiction of fat boys in YA literature.

Billy Bunter, *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* by Frank Richards.

Most likely unrecognisable to modern YA readers, Billy Bunter was once lauded by the English novelist George Orwell (1970), as “one of the best-known figures in English fiction” (p. 530). References to Billy Bunter in modern times are rare but can occasionally be found in medical articles about children’s obesity, as a warning that our children will be a nation of Billy Bunter’s, considered lazy, sly, and greedy, lest more be done, and as quickly as possible (See Pettigrew, 2008; Hancox, 2007). Others use Billy as an example of possible diseases he may be equated with, within a modern context, that were mostly unheard of when he was published, such as Prader-Willi syndrome (Couper, 2002), cancer and immunity suppression (Mitchison, 1988) or eating disorders (Van Toller, 1994).

Within the field of literary studies, however, more was written about Billy Bunter as an example of the antithesis of the “muscular Christian hero” (Webb, 2009; Flanagan, 2012) which was the dominant protagonist in literature intended for boys. Depicted as physically proficient and a faithful servant to the empire, the muscular Christian hero served as the preferred image of young English masculinity in YA literature. Moreover, much of the discussion of Billy Bunter, which doesn’t focus on his fat body, instead considers the *Billy*

Bunter series from a class perspective. (Hinton, 2014; Hill, 2006; Robinson, 2019; Boyd, 2003). Set in the fictitious elite boarding school, Greyfriars, much humour was derived from the fact that Billy was from a lower-class background than his classmates with a mismatched uniform given that his family were too poor to provide the correct one.

For this thesis, however, I have chosen to examine Billy Bunter from a different perspective. Using Fat Studies and close reading theories, I am now going to analyse the language that was used to depict Billy Bunter, arguing that his fatness was used as a tool to educate young readers on the acceptable ways to behave in post-World War II society. As a result of this depiction, in an age where fat bodies were an anomaly given the deprivations of war, the negative ways in which Billy Bunter was depicted served as a prototype for future depictions of fat boys in YA literature.

Billy Bunter was portrayed as lazy, stupid, cunning, and extremely greedy. This has proven to be a very popular trope when describing fat boy characters. Even in contemporary YA novels, there are reflections of Billy Bunter, the fat boy character. In the *Harry Potter* (Rowling) series, the fat boys, Dudley Dursley and Vincent Crabbe, both emulate the tropes of greed, cunning, and stupidity that was popularised in Billy Bunter.

The first novel featuring Billy Bunter, *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* (Richards, 1947), introduces the hapless protagonist with:

There were many things at which Billy Bunter was not good. He was not good at games, he was not good in class, he was not good even at such simple, easy things as telling the truth, but when it came to sleeping, Epimenides himself had nothing on Bunter (p. 7).

This introduction positions Billy Bunter as physically and morally inferior. As a teenage boy, there may be an assumption that Billy would be interested in and enjoy partaking in sporting

activities or ‘games’ however, suggesting that he is “not good” at it invites the reader to assume his fatness prohibits his ability to excel in physical activities. Similarly, indicating that he was “no good” in class situates Billy as unintelligent; describing him as “no good” at telling the truth, characterises Billy as a liar. The comparison of Billy Bunter to the semi-mythical Greek Philosopher Epimenides refers to the famous bust which portrays Epimenides with his eyes closed. This comparison situates Billy Bunter as lazy and frequently asleep.

While depicted as an unpleasant character, these descriptions alone do not necessarily associate Billy Bunter’s fatness with a lack of moral fibre. However, Billy Bunter is also described as “old fat man” (p. 11), “fat slacker” (p. 13), “fat villain” (p. 18), “howling ass” (p. 27), “fat junior” (p. 35), “fat owl” (p. 39) “fat scoundrel” (p. 45), “fat chump” (p. 61).

Constant insults mixed with the word ‘fat’ shows that Richards wants the reader to associate Billy Bunter’s fat body with his perceived moral ineptitude. Even without being portrayed as fat, Billy Bunter could have arguably been a dislikeable character. Indeed, Billy did cheat and lie and steal. However, it needs to be questioned why Richards chose to portray Billy as fat. What benefit was there to denigrating fat bodies in a period when fat was something of a rarity?

The first Billy Bunter was published in 1947. Despite the YA genre not being recognised until the 1960s (Cart, 2016; Sands-O’Connor, 2022), Billy Bunter was intended for a younger readership. Despite the end of WWII in 1945, rationing continued in the UK until 1954 (Imperial War Museums, 2018). Even with the end of active fighting and the return of military personnel, citizens were still expected to ‘do their bit’ for the war effort. A system of ration books and shortages of basic supplies meant that people often missed basic foodstuffs (Imperial War Museums, 2018). Trade in black market and ‘behind the counter’ goods were available to those who could afford the inflated prices. However, besides being highly illegal, taking more than one was entitled to be considered the highest social anathema (Imperial War

Museums, 2018). Debasement and ridicule of those who sought more than their fair share proved popular in comic strips and novels.

I contend that the physical representation of those perceived as taking more than their entitled rations was a fat body. Just as modern obesity discourse frames fat bodies as a medical issue and prescribes various pharmaceutical and lifestyle changes, the fat body was framed as a moral failing in post-WWII society. As such, ridiculing the fat body became an acceptable way to castigate those perceived as not following society's rules.

The removal of Billy's humanity served as a literary tool for the writer, enabling what would otherwise be considered horrendous acts of violence to be perpetrated on Billy, encouraging the reader to laugh. Instead of feeling sorry for Billy, the reader was encouraged to take pleasure in the multiple occasions he was physically assaulted.

Billy Bunter had what would become a catchphrase of sorts. "YAROOOOOH" was an exclamation that Billy Bunter would make after being hit by either his teachers or the other students at his school. This is first encountered when Billy is caught in his teacher, Mr Quelch's office, eating a jar of jam he had just stolen from one of his classmates. Upon discovering this, Mr Quelch demands Billy bend over a chair so he can be hit with his cane six times. After the first swipe, Billy cries out, "YAROOOOOH." This sound, I suggest, is reminiscent of a mule, a braying donkey, or the sound of some other beast of burden in distress. This, I would argue, was one of the first times, but certainly not the last, that the fat boy character would be likened, even implicitly to an animal. In Chapter 3 I will discuss the concept of animalism in greater depth. For Billy Bunter, however, this dehumanising howl is readily ignored and read not as unnecessary corporal punishment but as a suitable comeuppance for his behaviour. Once associated with a beast, the reader can more readily dismiss any empathy for Billy's pain and find the humour in him getting hurt.

Another common theme throughout the novel *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* is Billy's constant desire for food. Billy is depicted as constantly being caught in the pursuit of or having just stolen food. "Once already this term, Bunter; you have been caned for taking a pie from the pantry" (p. 24). This phrase suggests that Billy constantly steals food but is unrepentant and incapable of learning to stop stealing food or to cover up his tracks better. In addition to stealing food, Billy was portrayed as being single-minded in his desire for food, and incapable of thinking of other things. "It was true that Bunter was thinking more of the ices at Uncle Clegg's tuck-shop in the village" (p. 35). Richards made it clear that it was Billy's fatness that situated him as untrustworthy. "Where's the cake, you fat villain?" (p. 51). This constant search for food and even stealing it further enforces the animalistic image of the fat boy being unable to control himself. I will discuss animalism in greater detail in Chapter 3, but in this context, Billy's character is demeaned by equating him with an animal. Furthermore, the idea mentioned above of Billy Bunter eating a jar of jam, a type of food of such richness and sweetness that it cannot be eaten in one sitting, suggests animalistic greed. Instead of eating the jam in portions, Billy attempts to eat the entire jar full, despite the assumption that it would make him sick. This suggests a removal or ignorance of common sense and human reasoning and becomes reminiscent of an animal eating without regard, an action that is associated with a pig.

Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School would not have been considered a book specifically for young adults, as it pre-dated the official classification of YA literature by approximately 20 years. The *Billy Bunter* series however fell into what is referred to as the 'school story' genre. *The Governess, or The Little Female Academy* (1749) by Sarah Fielding is considered the first example of a school story about young ladies at an exclusive boarding school. This genre extolled the importance of honour, friendship, a sense of community, and social responsibility (Foster & Simons, 1995). The popularity of this genre and its focus on the

morality of young people rose in popularity. Classic novels such as *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, *Dombey & Son* (1848) and *David Copperfield* (1850) by Charles Dickens all had school story elements but the genre was firmly established with *Tom Brown's school days* (1857) by Thomas Hughes. The school story genre, while partly a form of entertainment for young readers, was also instructional. As the popularity of the school story began in the era of strict class division, it reflected the experiences of the children of the upper classes. Education was segregated by sex and the narratives were traditionally situated around morality, virtue, dignity, and aspiring to find an agreeable position in societal order (Briggs, Butts & Grenby, 2008).

For Billy Bunter and by association, the fat body, the instructional intention to be imparted to young readers through the *Billy Bunter* series was that the ramifications of being fat were more than just a moral failing, rather it was a lack of virtue and dignity, a warning that you risked being ostracised from your social class and all the benefits that came with it. By setting Billy Bunter in a school, positioned with the assumption of routine, order, and of potential opportunities afforded to very few, the antics of Billy, while presented as comedic, were cautions against behaving or presenting in any way outside of the socially prescribed doctrines, lest you risk being ostracised and excluded.

Billy Bunter was a very popular character, whom readers took pleasure in deriding, and was arguably one of the first and most prominent fat boy characters in literature for young people. Billy was portrayed as morally corrupt, a thief, a liar, and more interested in eating than learning or physical activity. The constant beatings, putdowns, and humiliations that Billy experienced were included in the novel as a tool to elicit humour. To encourage the reader to disregard empathy for Billy Bunter, his actions and dialogues were depicted as animalistic.

Augustus Gloop, *Charlie and the chocolate factory* by Roald Dahl.

Augustus Gloop was the fat boy in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the chocolate factory* (1964). Dahl does not hint at social displeasure in relation to the fat boy; Dahl instead pointedly suggests an utter disgust. The 1960s was a time of protest, countering the status quo and questioning the social structures of power that actively benefit certain groups over others. Books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) and *The Contender* (Lypsyte, 1967) were well known for highlighting racial inequality, while *Slaughterhouse five* (Vonnegart, 1969) made an anti-war statement. Considerably radical, was *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* (Kesey, 1962), bringing to popular culture the idea of agency for those with mental health issues. However, the 1960s was also a critical time for young adults to question and reject social instructions and pressure to conform. Literature from the 1960's mirrored the cultural shift of young people reimagining their place in the world and reconsidering the values and beliefs that went with it.

Given the tumultuous changes happening in society with teenagers demanding greater agency in society along with greater awareness of sex, drugs, and bodily autonomy, I contend that Roald Dahl wrote *Charlie and the chocolate factory* to warn young readers to reassert the moralistic codes of conduct that he may have perceived as being eroded by the challenges to societal values. Regardless of his intent, I offer that the depiction of Augustus Gloop is intended to evoke disgust in the reader.

The character of Augustus Gloop is introduced as;

A nine-year-old boy who was so enormously fat he looked as though he had been blown up with a powerful pump. Great flabby folds of fat bulged out from every part

of his body, and his face was like a monstrous ball of dough with two small greedy curranty eyes peering out upon the world. (p. 21).

The onomatopoeic name Augustus Gloop even evokes ideas of excess. Although never stated as the origin of his name, 'Augustus' is reminiscent of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. This, in turn, evokes images of the great lavish feasts of the emperors, displays of debauchery and power that demanded guests gorge themselves until they were bilious. Similarly, the name 'Gloop' suggests a sloppiness or sticky liquid, a substance that might repel people if they saw it oozing from them, just as the phrase "fat bulged out from every part of him." (p. 21) From his name, we can surmise that Dahl encourages his reader to feel repulsion for the fat boy and that he uses the trope of the fat boy as disgusting.

This repulsion is enforced by stating Augustus looked like he was "blown up by a pump." This image suggests an inconceivable level of fatness. Dahl isn't just suggesting that Augustus has a large body; he is applying morality to his body. Dahl, has represented the fat body as immoral, representing his fatness as a moral flaw. Augustus isn't just committing the sin of gluttony; he is doing it to such a level that his body is now unimaginably fat, beyond that of even a regular fat boy. Moreover, Dahl describes Augustus' "curranty eyes," which suggest a slyness, a rat-like feature that both suggests his eyes are almost swallowed by his fat face but also that there is cunning about him, that much like a rat he may steal or even spoil food when he touches it.

Dahl reinforced the idea of an intentional arrogance with the line "Augustus was deaf to everything except the call of his enormous stomach. He was now lying full length on the ground with his head far out over the river, lapping up the chocolate like a dog." (p. 72). This image suggests a wilful disregard for authority as both Augustus Gloop's parents and Willy Wonka told him not to drink from the chocolate river, the phrase "lapping up chocolate like a

dog” associates Augustus with an animal. This leads the reader to view Augustus as bestial and unwilling to observe expected social etiquette when eating, such as using cutlery or eating with one’s mouth closed. Instead, the reader is encouraged to have disdain for the fat boy as he presumably contaminated the chocolate by putting his tongue in it, lapping it up like a farm animal might.

Despite all the children and indeed the adult characters being invited by Willy Wonka to enjoy all the edible treats at the Wonka factory, only Augustus is portrayed as gluttonous. While all the children except Charlie Bucket, the protagonist, receive some form of punishment for their perceived transgressions, Dahl arguably set his story in a chocolate factory because he knew it would resonate with young readers and fulfil a young person’s fantasy. However, he ultimately punishes Augustus for enjoying the sweets. This suggests that it isn’t necessarily overeating that offends Roald Dahl but rather fatness itself.

S.D. Yanya (2020), in her article about semiotics and character names in *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, argued that Roald Dahl’s characters in the novel represent the seven deadly sins. According to Long (2016), the seven deadly sins refer to a set of seven behaviours or cardinal sins in the Christian religion that are forbidden. Dahl made it evident that Augustus Gloop represented the sin of greed. Presumably created as a fable to warn children of the dangers of the seven deadly sins, I would argue that Roald Dahl sees greed and the fat body as the worst of them all. While it is true that all the children, except for the protagonist Charlie Bucket were punished for their perceived transgressions, in comparison to the other characters in the novel, Augustus Gloop’s punishment was the worst and the statement that Dahl wanted to make about fat bodies the most severe.

After going too close to the chocolate river and being berated by the adults for drinking the chocolate; “Suddenly, there was a shriek, and then a splash, and into the river went Augustus

Gloop, and in one second, he had disappeared under the brown surface” (p. 73). Having fallen into the river or conceivably been pushed by an enraged Willy Wonka, Augustus Gloop flailed around in the chocolate water, gasping for air, like he was drowning. “Augustus Gloop’s face came up again to the surface, painted brown and chocolate.” (p. 73). Dahl needed to impart the level to which Augustus was coated in the murky brown chocolate before describing the fate of Augustus, “The powerful suction took hold of him completely, and he was pulled under the surface and then into the mouth of the pipe.” (p. 74). It is not made clear whether Augustus Gloop survived falling into the river. The Oompa Loompas launch into an extended song after Augustus is sucked through a large vacuum, part of which stated, “A hundred knives to slice, slice, slice; We add some sugar, cream, and spice; We boil him for a minute more Until we’re absolutely sure that all the greed and all the gall is boiled away for once and all.” (p. 79-80). Unsure whether they are serious or not Charlie Bucket questions his grandfather who replies “Of course they’re joking... They must be joking. At least I hope they’re joking” (p. 80) alluding to the possibility that Augustus could well be dead.

While the beginning of *Charlie and the chocolate factory* is seemingly a traditional fantasy, or what Farah Mendelson (2002) refers to as “intrusive fantasy” (p. 177) set in the real world but where the fantastical brings about chaos. However, once inside the chocolate factory, it shifts to speculative fiction, or a mixture of genres (which I discuss in further detail in Chapter 3) with a world of magical elements, such as edible plants and flowers, lollies that taste like three-course meals, chewing gum that doesn’t lose its flavour, ice-cream that doesn’t melt and Oompa Loompas, Willy Wonka’s otherworldly slaves. The children ride on fanciful boats and machines and encounter impossible machines that create impossible treats. Building upon the idea of the seven deadly sins, I contend that the chocolate factory represents a kind of heaven, not a traditional image of heaven with fluffy clouds and angels,

but rather what children might consider heaven; a chocolate factory filled with assorted lollies and sweets. The ultimate moral transpires to be that Charlie is allowed to stay in heaven after it is gifted to him by Willy Wonka. From a religious perspective, the other children have exhibited the seven deadly sins and are thus not permitted to stay, missing out on all the good things inside. For Augustus Gloop, the punishment he receives is particularly ‘hellish’. I contend that the imagery of the watery brown chocolate that covered Augustus’ face and body, along with the pipes that sucked Augustus from the swirling brown mess, was used to create a very vivid image of Augustus being treated as sewerage. As the ultimate statement of disgust, Augustus’ departure from the story is reminiscent of human leavings being flushed away, in an inference that Augustus is a turd and that as a fat boy he is disgusting.

Jimmy Winterpock, *The fat boy chronicles* by Diane Lang & Michael Buchanan.

As discussed in Chapter 1, YA novels can be used as tools to implicitly or explicitly instruct young readers on the social behaviours that they are expected to willingly perform as a method of social control. While all the books I have chosen to analyse have the potential to do this to a certain degree, I would argue that *The fat boy chronicles*, with its religious subtext, is more conspicuous in its desire to enforce systematic power in order to control fat bodies.

Using religion to enforce weight control is not a new concept. Overeaters Anonymous (*How Did OA Start?* n.d.), *The Hallelujah diet* (Malkmus, 2006), BOD4GOD (Reynolds, 2009), *The maker’s diet* (Rubin, 2013), *Weight loss, God’s way* (Morenzie, 2020) and *The Daniel plan* (Warren, 2020), and are all books based on programs that are grounded in principles of

the Christian religion that claim to aid weight loss. Religion, according to Michel Foucault is a system of Biopower that produces entire populations. In contrast, is what Foucault referred to as ‘Pastoral Power’, which produces the individual. Foucault based the concept of Pastoral Power on Christian traditions of the shepherd tending to his flock, a metaphor for the power a religious figure has over their congregation, Foucault, in his article ‘The subject and power’ (1982), when describing Pastoral Power, stated:

This form of power is salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblativ (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualising (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth-the truth of the individual himself (p. 783).

As such, when religion is combined with weight loss, it makes the body a specific site of control. Pastoral Power is framed as ‘salvation’ placing upon it, a particularly strong moral obligation to succeed. To place this moral obligation on a young person, I contend, is unfair and even quite cruel. I have chosen the book *The fat boy chronicles*, as an example of fiction for young readers that typifies this type of Pastoral Power. As I mentioned in the introduction, evangelism heavily influenced the way food was depicted as immoral and gluttonous in children’s literature. In *The fat boy chronicles*, Jimmy’s fat body is framed as sinful, although only tacitly. As Abigail Saguy (2014) argues, that when fat is framed as immoral, fat is seen as slothful and gluttonous, or at the heart of the argument – sinful. When Christian moral language is used to describe issues around fat bodies, it then situates fat as a sin, and the cure; stricter adherence to Christian values and morals (pp. 40-41).

The front cover of this book, beneath the title, states that the book is “‘inspired by a true story”, adding the seeming veracity and gravitas of real life. The use of the term ‘inspired’ as

opposed to ‘based on’ suggests the book represents a very loose interpretation of the truth. In an interview with the authors Diane Lang and Michael Buchanan, for the blog Overdrive (*An Interview with Diane Lang & Mike Buchanan, Authors of the Fat Boy Chronicles*, 2015) they were asked how the idea came about to write the book. Diane Lang explained:

A young teen approached us and asked if he could tell us his story... When he was in junior high, he was very obese and bullied by his classmates, similar to Jimmy Winterpock in ‘*The fat boy chronicles.*’ Mike Buchanan and I decided to tell his story to help kids who are bullied because of their weight or because they seem different from others and to help kids understand how much their bullied peers suffer. (n.p.)

Arguably, the intention of the authors, when writing this book was to help young readers see the harm that bullying can do. However, I suggest that this desire to help was muted by making the protagonist, Jimmy a victim and portraying him as being at fault for being fat. Including the church youth group in the narrative was supposed to suggest a supportive network for him to lose weight, but instead reinforced the systems of power with society, that the church rejects fat bodies, and that salvation can come through weight loss.

The fat boy chronicles is presented in epistolary style and is about fat boy Jimmy Winterpock who keeps a journal as part of a school assignment. Jimmy’s journal entries are addressed to his teacher and tell of his experience of being bullied, and his attempts at weight loss. The reader is introduced to the protagonist Jimmy in the first passage of his journal,

“I’m the diet-challenged kid who sits in the last seat by the door. I’m probably bigger now than I was this morning because your class is right after lunch and homeroom. I stay in the back, so you don’t have to constantly hear, ‘We can’t see around Jimmy.’” (p. 7).

The phrase ‘diet-challenged’ is a euphemism for fat. By choosing not to use the word ‘fat,’ the authors enforce the idea it is a shameful word, and, by association, a fat body is similarly

worthy of shame. Jimmy expresses this shame as he jokes that he is now bigger due to having lunch recently. This suggests the fat character is cognisant of the need for fat people to perform shame about their bodies. The authors want to position the fat boy character as suitably ashamed of his body, or in terms of medicalised discourse, offering evidence that his body is causing harm, psychological, if not physical, and therefore in need of treatment. For young people who read this book, it is made clear very early on that fat is to be read negatively.

Jimmy and other teenagers at his church are spoken to about the dangers of drugs and addiction. In his journal, Jimmy writes, “I don’t have excuses like other kids with addictions – my parents would do anything for me. That makes me more determined than ever to stick to my diet. Not that it’s a real diet, I just have to watch my choices and portions. I am amazed that it really works” (p. 139). By associating fat with drug addiction, it implies a more intense level of shame, danger, and self-induced harm upon the fat body. Drug addiction is often framed as pleasure-seeking, and drug addicts driven by their desire to get ‘high’ again. To correlate drug addiction and fat bodies suggests a similarity, that fat people are replacing drugs with food, but are still selfishly devoted to personal pleasure through excess food. However, by stating that he doesn’t have excuses like other kids with addictions, Jimmy is positioned as greedy, that it is not a real addiction or eating disorder that may require treatment, instead, this suggests that Jimmy’s body is a choice of which he is to blame. This of course ignores genetics, education, and the socio-economic situation of Jimmy’s family and how that may impact his relationship with food.

As the protagonist Jimmy starts to lose weight, he is invited to speak about his experience to his youth group at the church. “I’m not sure my faith in God helped me with my weight loss, but my faith in God gave me faith in myself. Even when I was really big, and kids and adults laughed at me or didn’t want anything to do with me, God always made me feel like I was a

good person” (p. 181). The reader is being warned that it isn’t just people in society that perform acts of surveillance of fat people; it is God too. This is a particularly severe form of social manipulation. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to debate the functions of religion, it is important to note that for those who believe, especially young people, religion is tied to ideas of sin and the soul beyond death. As such, to ascribe weight loss as a religious issue and that to be fat is sinning against God is the ultimate manipulation. The authors are positioning fat as an issue that could lead a person to hell (the worst outcome after death in the Christian religion).

Butter/Marshall, *Butter*, by Erin Lange.

The most recent of the books I have chosen to analyse, *Butter* deals with the very modern issue of the effects of online bullying on young fat people. It is an unfortunate fact that fat youth are more likely to experience bullying than non-fat peers (Griffiths et al, 2006; Lumeng et al, 2010; Puhl, Luedicke & Heuer, 2011; Bradshaw et al, 2013; Puhl, Luedicke & DePierre, 2013) and this is reflected online (Cassidy, Jackson & Brown, 2009; Mishna et al, 2010; Hamid, 2018). The author of *Butter* has attempted to expose the potential ramifications of online bullying but instead creates a narrative that ultimately attributes blame to the fat boy while advocating extensive medicalised intervention.

The social impact of social media is intrinsically linked with the theories of Foucault. However, unlike his theory of the panopticon where an individual feels they are being watched by those in control, Romele et al. (2017) suggest that for users of social media, the dynamic is reversed “because the controlled, the user is alone in the middle of the prison, the sociotechnical system, and the controllers, the other users, are all around her or him” (p. 205).

Despite the knowledge that they exist in a space where they are both being watched and watching, the evidence suggests that this has not reduced participation in social media usage. Ritzer and Jurgenson, (2010) suggest that even though social media users are aware of surveillance exercised by and through social media, it does not alter their online practices. Romele et al. (2017) go further stating that despite feeling “forced and cheated” (p. 3) into becoming reliant on social media, and indeed an inmate of a world wide panopticon, there is a general acceptance of whatever that brings, as users consider that they did “voluntarily submit to it” (pg. 3). For Butter, despite being ridiculed and bullied online, he does seemingly submit to it voluntarily by agreeing to stream his suicide online.

The effect on the fat teenager who willingly participates, along with the rest of their peers in social media can be brutal, yet self-removal from those forms of social interaction is seldom considered an option as it seems to be intrinsic to the identities of younger people. In her book, *Butter*, Lange has attempted to highlight the ways in which fat people can be treated on social media, but ultimately places blame upon the fat character.

Butter is the nickname given to the protagonist, Marshall, after bullies force him to eat an entire block of butter. “Do you know he actually ate an entire tub of butter in one sitting? My friend was there. He saw the whole thing. The guy ate the entire tub and didn’t even barf. That’s why everyone calls him Butter (p. 57). Sick of being bullied and ridiculed, Butter decides to kill himself on live stream via the internet. Even the prospect of this stunt makes Butter something of a cult figure within his school. After experiencing popularity for the first time, Butter almost loses his resolve to attempt suicide.

Lange has depicted the fat boy in an ‘unbroken’ home. Butter has both parents living at home. This depiction of a happy middle-class, seemingly affluent family situation is used to frame Butter’s fat body as his own fault, in that blame cannot readily be attributed to

negligent or uncaring parents or to stressful home life that readers may assume have contributed to him gaining weight. An ongoing subplot throughout the book is Butter's mother's attempts to force him to diet tacitly. Either by reducing portion sizing or withholding certain foods, these attempts fail. Butter notes, "Mom may have stopped talking to me about my weight, but around the time I tipped over four hundred pounds, Dad stopped talking to me altogether" (p. 14). Within Fat activist circles, people often define themselves as small fat, fat, mid-fat, super fat, and infinifat (Gordon, 2020). These categories are, of course, applied by the owner of the fat body and not attributed to them by a third party. In contrast, Lange's depiction of Butter's mother talking about diets and his father no longer talking to him suggest that 400 pounds is the arbitrary number that she suggests is the point of hopelessness. Depicting his father as no longer speaking to him, Lange reinforces the idea that Butter's body is so worthy of shame that it would be fair for his father to stop talking to him.

The school life of the fat boy in *Butter* (2012) is no better than his family life. Reflecting the influence of social media and the impact of that on the surveillance and policing of young bodies, *Butter* (2012) depicts online bullying of the fat boy in addition to social pressures to conform to particular bodily standards. Feeling overwhelmed and unsupported by everyone, Butter declares, "You think I eat a lot now? That's nothing. Tune in December 31st, when I will stream a live webcast of my last meal. Death row inmates get one. Why shouldn't I? I can't take another year in this fat suit, but I can end this year with a bang. If you can stomach it, you're invited to watch... as I eat myself to death. – Butter." (p. 3). Within the narrative, no one attempts to stop Butter from going ahead with his plan, instead exhibiting apathy for Butter's welfare. This I suggest is related to a somewhat recent phenomenon of fat people being used as a source of entertainment. Television programs such as *The biggest loser* and *Dance your ass off* popularised the debasement of fat people as a form of entertainment. This

is reflected as Butter is depicted as wanting to televise his own suicide by overeating. As no character was depicted as wanting to stop Butter, it devalues the humanity of the fat boy and positions him as disposable and unimportant.

After attempting to kill himself, Butter wakes up in the hospital. His parents are present and speak with the doctors in hushed tones. “*The institute*. I was wide awake now. I held perfectly still and listened. ‘And his diet and fitness routine are included with the tuition?’ Dad asked. Except for food, that depends on whether you board” (p. 318). Despite the horrendous bullying and the apathetic attitude of his father, no one is held to account or repentant. As such, Lange not only excuses but suggests such vilification of fat people is to be expected and is the responsibility of the fat person themselves, going as far as to have the protagonist exclaim, “It’s all me. It’s nobody’s fault but my own.” (p. 323). It could be argued that Lange has included this line to encourage the reader to consider who should accept responsibility when a teenager is considered by society to be ‘obese’. However, while it would be expected that Butter would receive mental health care after a suicide attempt, instead the story ends with Butter agreeing to spend a year in a juvenile weight-loss hospital. Farmed as a happy ending, Lange fails to depict the fat boy with any bodily autonomy. Instead, in line with dominant obesity discourses, Butter is treated as diseased and requires treatment. By showing him as leaving town, it evokes further shame, reminiscent of decades earlier, when the fear of being socially shamed drove young unmarried pregnant women to go away and return only after their baby had been adopted. Butter similarly needed to go away as the perceived shame of being fat was too great.

Butter serves as a succinct illustration of a fat body within a society organised bio-politically. As a genre, *Butter* could arguably be categorised as literary realism. For younger readers, communication through devices such as computers, Ipads, and smartphones is standard and ordinary, thus pushing the narrative into realism which attempts to portray reality, the

everyday and even mundane aspects of life, as opposed to fanciful or speculative narratives. The inclusion of a teenage boy declaring he will kill himself via live stream is horrific but does not push the story into a horror genre as it doesn't contain the requisite gore. Rather, *Butter* reflects the digital lives people live in a westernised culture. It is the nature of social media to be seen. However, we rarely have control over who watches our interactions. This exemplifies the concept of the panopticon as social media users will internalise the panoptic gaze of self-policing (Kedzior & Allen, 2016) and alter their behaviour accordingly. At any given time, we are being watched, but For *Butter*, he is literally being watched, and the punishment for his perceived transgressions is severe, his potential death. By positioning *Butter* in a realist genre, it increases both the fear of fat and the fear of the ramifications of having a fat body. I contend though, that it is damaging to ultimately have *Butter* attend an inpatient facility without those who taunted him being held accountable.

In this chapter, I argued that writers use the fat boy as a literary trope to carry a range of negative or problematic associations. To make a boy character fat is a literary device to quickly allow readers to perceive that boy negatively. In the past, the fat boy in YA novels was frequently depicted as greedy, lazy, stupid, or weak; in more contemporary fiction, the fat boy is depicted as requiring medical intervention. In this chapter, it was important to examine the familiar tropes in which the fat boy has been depicted historically by performing close reading on four YA novels from the that span from the 20th to 21st centuries, so that in Chapter 3, I can show how those tropes can be challenged.

The Determination of Taffy Futt

You shall eat the flesh of your sons,
and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.

Leviticus 26:29

For the chosen shall, in body

Be thrice gifted.

Be they thrice the size

Thrice as wise

Three marks, there be

Or three eyes to see.

The great tome of the Anhänger

Part I

Verification

1

The last of the Anhänger sat around the fire. As the young woman approached, their eyes turned to her, each trying not to show their desperation. From her satchel, the girl pulled her offering, a human arm severed just beneath the elbow. She held it aloft as the Anhänger cheered and applauded her.

The young woman placed the arm on the fire, and the acrid stink of burning hair filled her nostrils.

She had come around to the idea of bringing about a new world order quicker than most. She accepted the responsibility unflinchingly. The Anhänger, who were once legion but had dwindled in number to just seven, took this as a sign of her sovereignty.

Her life to this point has not been pleasant. She was teased mercilessly as a child for her polycoria, an uncommon condition giving her two pupils in her left eye. Each of her pupils was the most brilliant gold colour, and this was irrefutable proof for the Anhänger that she was the one who had been prophesied.

The fresh tattoo of a yogh, the number three in old English lettering, still stung her arm. She was now, irrefutably, one of them.

The oldest Anhänger turned the arm over with barbecue tongs. Sprinkled salt and pepper on the arm and added a sprig of rosemary. As the girl observed, all three of her gold pupils glimmering in the moonlight, the arm was sliced thinly and placed on a silver platter.

At 3:33 on the morning of the new moon, the prophecy was set in motion, as all who had gathered began to eat the arm.

FETOR LEVEL

3

CLEAR SKIES AHEAD

2

Taffy Futt had a feeling that something bad was going to happen. He yawned as he reached for his miasma mask, which he kept beside his bed on a small set of drawers. Taffy stretched his arms, hoping to loosen his back a bit after tossing and turning for most of the night. **The Determination Day manual** stated, “it is perfectly normal for recruits to feel some nerves about such an important process,” but Taffy thought this rolling sensation in his stomach was more than just first-day nerves; it felt like something dangerous was coming.

At 7 am, the fetor alarm sounded over the town of Plightpool, three short sharp blasts. Taffy smiled as he placed his breathing apparatus back on his drawers.

“Won’t need you today.”

Taffy rubbed his eyes and scratched his head. The ceremony started at 9 am, so he had plenty of time to wash and dress. Taffy pulled the towel off his bedroom door that he had hung on a day earlier to dry. As he stepped out of his bedroom door, he stood on an empty bottle of Welsh’s dry ale.

“Dad!” Taffy shouted. “Put your rubbish away when you’re finished with it.”

Taffy inspected the sole of his foot; the bottle hadn’t cracked this time, so there were no splinters. Taffy picked up the bottle, brought it to the kitchen, and added it to the pile of nine empty bottles of Farquhar’s creamed stout in the sink.

Taffy opened the pantry and grabbed a handful of crispy mustard pigtales from the jar. As he nibbled, he looked around the kitchen and found a spent red wine bottle under the dining table, a depleted gallon drum of Babinski's malt liquor peeking out from inside the oven, and four more beer bottles scarcely secreted behind the kettle.

"Dad", Taffy shouted; he turned his ear towards the door, hoping to hear where his father Parry ended up the night before. Taffy couldn't detect his father's usual machine-like snores, but he didn't have time to look for him.

There was still plenty of the monthly allowance of hog lard soap left. Taffy remembered that the panel checked for cleanliness, so he scrubbed eagerly behind his ears, under his arms, and between his toes. As he sat in the bath, he also carefully cleaned all the grime out from under his fingernails. There was a rumour that a girl had been busted down to *Level 2 - Scrape and Smear* because of her dirty hands the previous year.

After Taffy had towelled himself dry and combed his short mousy brown hair, he slapped some of Parry's seldom used aftershave under his arms. Taffy winced as the cologne stung his armpits, but he figured today was definitely not the day to skimp on hygiene.

Before leaving the bathroom, Taffy gently eased the cap off the toilet cistern and glanced inside. There were no brandy, sherry, or vodka bottles stashed there. Taffy figured that Parry must have discovered that Taffy was pouring out small portions of his grog whenever he used the bathroom and had settled on a more secure hiding spot.

In his bedroom, Taffy stood naked in front of his mirror. He rubbed his hands over his large belly and down his thighs. He turned from left to right. Taffy thought his neck was definitely thicker and maybe his backside too. He scratched his hand over his chest, wishing he had a little more hair there and on his top lip, but still, Taffy smiled. **The Determination Day manual** explained, "The very tall, the very fat, and the very strong hold a natural advantage

over other recruits. This should not be seen as discouraging. Even bodies lacking natural exquisiteness serve a purpose.”

Taffy was the fattest boy his age. This could almost guarantee a **Determination** as a *Level - 5 Bacon Mason* or even *Level 6 - Porktrician*. Being able to shove and heave was viewed with particular reverence, as was thudding and hauling. Taffy’s best friend, Mafuta, was tall but very lean. Much to Taffy’s bemusement, he would moan that it “wasn’t fair.”

“I eat all day but never get fat. It isn’t fair.”

“I’m Just the chosen one, I suppose,” Taffy would counter with a wink.

Taffy had always been fat. Even as a baby, he was bigger than everyone else his age. Taffy had tried to ask Parry why he thought Taffy was so big when Parry himself was quite wiry. Taffy soon learned that it was pointless asking about the past; Parry’s eyes would glaze over, his lips would tighten, and he would just reach for another bottle.

Once when Taffy was younger, he was playing in the yard when he had heard his neighbour tell her friend about “That poor boy next door.” Taffy knelt behind the shared fence to listen better and heard her say,

“In a box, they found him, a wooden crate of Lucas & McAvan’s caramel taffies. No one knows how long the poor little blighter was there, but he had eaten the entire crate full of taffies by the time someone noticed him.”

Taffy buttoned up his shirt, zipped up his special occasion pants, and slipped his arm through his blazer. Taffy pushed his toe under his bed, hoping to dislodge his leather shoes that he had polished a few days earlier. Instead, a sealed jar of homebrew rolled across the floor.

On any other morning, finding Parry’s homemade hooch would be the last straw for Taffy. He would find his Father and yell at him, demanding he clean up his mess; today, however,

Taffy was preoccupied. He couldn't risk being late for the ceremony and wasn't in the mood for an argument.

Occasionally Taffy would feel sorry for Parry, thinking about what his life must have been like before he found his son on his doorstep. Parry never liked to talk about the accident he had had just months before Taffy came into his life. Taffy learned very early on never to ask Parry about the metal hook he would attach to himself when he went to work. As desperate as he was to know, Taffy never asked his father how his arm had come to be severed just below the elbow.



Taffy closed the door behind him. He inhaled deeply. It was rare to have such a clear day. There was no brown mist and only a very faint stink. Taffy looked to the distance; no dust was blowing off the crud mountains.

Taffy walked to the end of his cul de sac and turned into Main Street. A shiny, black statesman drove past him. Ordinarily, this was not something Taffy would notice, but it was new and so *clean*. Taffy and his father couldn't afford a car, but those who could only ever gave it a polish on special occasions. Taffy remembered hearing some of the others talk about clubbing their money together and hiring a fancy car to drive them to the ceremony. This particular car wouldn't fit too many people in it, Taffy thought to himself. He had read about the great long stretch limousines in the cities beyond the boundaries. They'd be big enough to fit all the recruits inside. As Taffy crossed over to the other side of the street, a second black car drove past him.

Taffy walked towards the *Level 7 - Souk and supply*. He kept on good terms with the older couple, Voreen and Nally, who were **Determined** to run it. When Parry used up all his credits buying drink, Voreen and Nally would still let Taffy book up some essentials. The bell above the door rang as Taffy entered.

“Good morning, love.” Voreen smiled. “I bet you're excited for today?”

“Morning, Voreen; bit nervous, actually.”

“Nothing to be nervous about,” Nally offered without looking up from his crossword, which he sat hunched over on the shop counter. “Best day of your life; enjoy it.”

Taffy smiled, he wanted to enjoy the day, but the feeling he had woken with, the sense of something bad coming, wouldn't shift. Taffy grabbed the broom that rested on the wall behind the Nally and began to brush the floor around him.

“Nice day today.” Taffy offered.

“Too right it is love, don't get many like this anymore. It's nice to take a deep breath.”

Voreen exhaled a long puff of smoke from the cigarette that hung off her bottom lip.

Taffy swept a pile of dust into the middle of the floor and turned to grab the dustpan from the shelf. From the front window, Taffy saw two more black cars drive down Main Street. He turned to see if anyone else had seen them, but Nally and Voreen were both busy with customers. Taffy discarded his sweepings in the big metal garbage can to the left of the door.

“Good work, lad. Help yourself to a couple of sweets.”

Nally pointed to the row of chocolate bars in front of him, still engrossed in his puzzle.

“Thank you very much, don't mind if I do.”

Taffy grabbed two chocolate curds, his favourite since he was a child. An unfortunately shaped chocolate, the little log confection was incredibly sticky. Taffy and his friends took immense pleasure in unwrapping a chocolate curd, shouting “Chocolate turd” before hurling it at an unsuspecting victim. The victim could then either eat the treat or peel the log from their person and hurl it towards someone else.

“Good luck today, love. It’ll be great.” Voreen rubbed Taffy on the arm. Taffy had never noticed how tiny Voreen was compared to him. Her grey hair was always pulled back away from her face, she was thin, and her skin had an ashen hue from all the cigarettes, Taffy supposed. As she patted his arm affectionately, Taffy noticed that Voreen had a tattoo. He thought it kind of looked like a number three but old-fashioned.

From across the room, Nally finally looked up from his crossword and waved.

“Yes, good luck, lad, a big fella like you will do very well.”

Taffy noticed that Nally had the same matching tattoo on his inner arm for the first time.

Taffy waved goodbye to Nally and Voreen. The doorbell rang again as Taffy left the shop.

Taffy stopped on the street so he could slide his chocolates into his pocket. A shiny black statesman car drove past him. Taffy craned his neck to see where the car was going, but it was too fast.

As Taffy continued down the street, he wondered if Nally and Voreen had been in a band when they were younger. That would explain the matching tattoos. Taffy chuckled to himself as he imagined the tiny old shopkeepers up on a stage thrashing about with their electric guitars.

Taffy checked his wristwatch. He still had plenty of time before the ceremony, but he wanted to be early, “tardiness is an inexcusable attribute and will not be tolerated,” the manual stated.

As Taffy turned to cross the street, three more black cars drove past him. The car on the very end was different from the others Taffy had seen that day. It was a little bigger, and unlike the others, the windows were not blackened out. Although it was driving quickly, Taffy could make out a woman sitting in the back seat. It was her hair that Taffy noticed first. It was a

brilliant red colour and pulled tight, into a ponytail. The woman's eyes met with Taffy's for a brief second before she sped away.

Perhaps, Taffy thought to himself, a special convoy had come to attend the **Determination Day** ceremony. Maybe there was something special afoot? There had been rumours for years of the Hogsnuuff expanding operations, which would mean more jobs and better **Determinations**. Taffy grinned to himself; the feeling of foreboding he had woken with was giving way to excitement.

"Nothing to worry about," he echoed Nally's words out loud to himself. "Just enjoy it; everything will be fine."

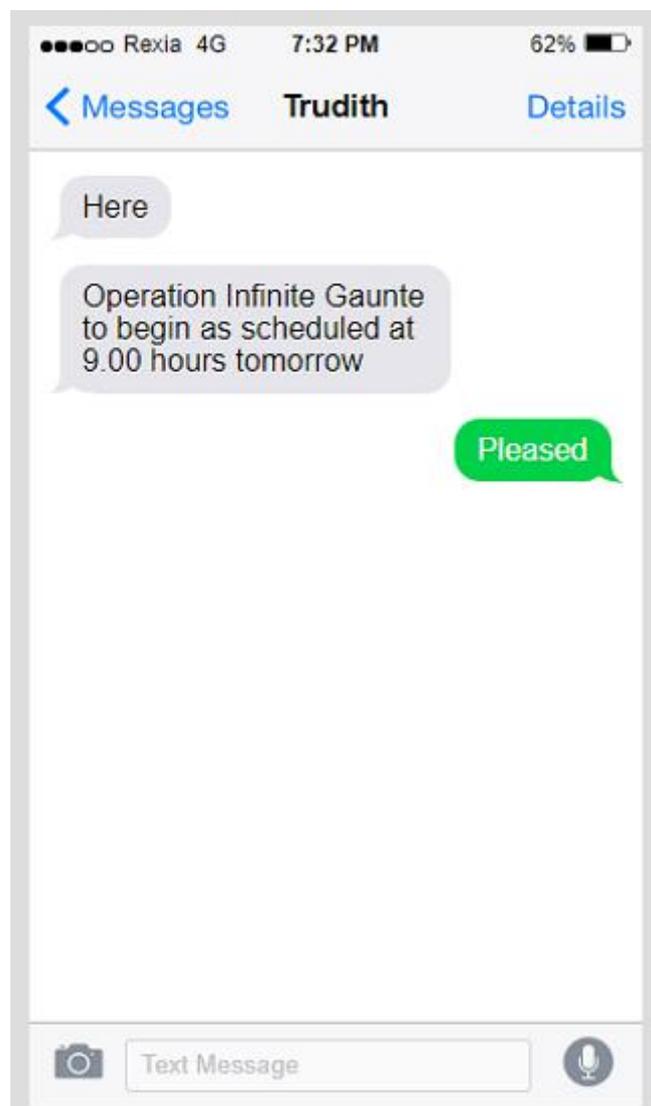
At the end of the street, Taffy could see the school building. Bunting, streamers, a brass band, and people everywhere milling around the entrance.

"Everything will be just fine," Taffy whispered as he hurried towards the school.

-

In the back of the last black shiny car Trudith B. Lumia ran a hand over her red hair and adjusted her ponytail. Her lip curled at the sight of all the young, happy people outside the school. As she pulled her mobile phone out of her purse, she grinned scornfully.

"Enjoy yourselves while you still can."



5

The smell of incense, Taffy noticed first. As he came closer, bunches of flowers, streamers, and animated conversations blended in with nervous laughter. Young people wearing their best clothing, feigning smiles with similarly disinterested siblings for a barrage of photos and flashes. Prayer groups, incantations, pep talks, and parents trying to calm anxious young people.

Taffy eyed off the crowd. His best friend Mafuta was always easy to find. His head stood towering above everybody else. Even from a distance, Taffy could see Mafuta's usual amiable grin was replaced with staunch irritation. As Taffy waded through the deep throng of people, being careful to dodge camera flashes and sidestepping group hugs, he made his way closer to his friend only to find him being circled by an old woman who carried a ridiculously large swath of peacock feathers. To the right of Mafuta, his parents in an almost hypnotic state chanted something in unison under their breath while the old woman batted Mafuta over the head.

Mafuta caught Taffy's eye just as Taffy burst out laughing and silently mouthing out the words

“What's going on?”

With an ostentatious eye roll, Mafuta replied,

“It’s supposed to bring good luck.”

Upon hearing him speak, Mafuta’s mother gave him a sturdy poke in the ribs.

“Pay attention!”

The Priestess brought the feather fan back down on Mafuta’s head another three times.

Suppressing the need to sneeze, Mafuta whispered again, “She’s sweeping away bad luck.”

Mafuta winced at the second poke in the ribs from his irritated mother.

Taffy stared at the bundle of feathers with bemusement. “Is this something from your old country?”

“NO” Mafuta returned, irritated. “She lives next door; she charges a fortune for this nonsense, but my Mum is worried because I’m thin. She says I need all the help I can get.”

“I’ll see you inside,” Taffy said as he saw the outstretched fingers preparing to give Mafuta yet another jab to his now tender rib cage.

As Taffy turned to walk toward the school building, he screamed out as a pain shot through his right foot,

“Taffy! I’m so sorry! I’m still learning to drive this wheelchair.”

“Hi Rassie,” Taffy smiled cordially secretly wishing he could swear to relieve the pain in his foot.

“This is a nice-looking ride, Rassie. Where’d you get it from?”

Rassie pulled an oil-stained rag out of the pink sequined clutch purse that matched the taffeta gown she was dressed in. Seeing Taffy regard her choice of wardrobe Rassie interjected

“I know, I know, a departure from my usual overalls and sump oil uniform, but today’s the day to put in a bit of effort ay? I’ve been going over to the *Level 9 - Engine and thrust* most

afternoons, my brothers all work there, *Level 6 – Grease and tyre* and they've lent me their tools and shown me how to upgrade my old chair. The things this baby can do now, Taffy!"

"I am impressed," Taffy squatted down to inspect the engine. "Double turbine?" he asked in awe.

"Sure is. Internal methane combustion purrs like a kitten."

"Excellent work Rassie, you'll get a *Level 5 Projection* for sure."

"Thanks, Taffy, the legs might not work so well anymore, but the rest of me is roaring to go. You're going to do great too, Taffy, you fatties always do."

"Smile." The fleeting blindness of the flash interrupted.

"Move in closer to Rassie, Taffy, and SMILE."

Rassie gave Taffy a look from the corner of her eye.

"Sure, Momona, happy to. Taffy copied Rassie's extravagant smirk while the rapid-fire clicks of the camera went off.

"You two look so cute together," Momona purred. "Killen, Ora, don't you think they look so cute together?"

"Not these three," Rassie whispered.

"Oh Rassie, you look so... different," Ora said, making a show of looking down her nose.

"Yeah," Killen added, "you might even get mistaken for a girl," the three giggled.

"Good luck today, Taffy, I'm going over to say hi to some other people, I'll see you later."

As Taffy waved, Rassie spun her wheelchair around and slammed the accelerator to the floor blowing a cloud of thick black exhaust fumes over the trio as she sped away.

Fervently making a display of dusting their clothes off and pretending to cough, the group of three each turned to a smiling Taffy.

“Oh look, Taffy has *tried* to dress up today. Doesn't Taffy look nice Momona?”

“Why, yes,” Ora joined, “you look... nice, Taffy. I like that outfit more and more every time I see it.”

Taffy knew that most recruits would buy new clothes, shoes and haircuts, beauty remedies, and body bulking treatments. After Parry had bought his beverages there were very few credits left for any such luxuries. Normally Taffy made-do, but he would have liked to have gone to the *Level 4 - Cut & Scrub* for a hair trim rather than shaving his own at home.

“You three are so witty as usual, but if you'll excuse me.” Taffy turned to leave.

“Taffy,” Killen shouted after him, “I've had a look around and I can't see your father. He is coming today, isn't he?”

Taffy stopped in his tracks. His back was still turned to the nasty trio, so they were unable to see the filthy words he was muttering under his breath. They did however see Taffy's hand ball up into a fist.

“What did you say, Killen?” Taffy turned to face them; his cheeks flushed red.

The three smirked at Taffy as they backed away.

“Just say hi to your father from me when you see him” Killen replied from a safe distance.

They laughed again and then slithered into the crowd.

Looking around on the ground for a clump of dirt, a dog turd, or something equally smelly that he could throw into the back of Killen's head, Taffy remembered the chocolate curd in his satchel. He ferreted around in the bottom of his bag, eventually pulling the chocolate log

out. Before he had time to unwrap the confection, Taffy felt a hand press down on his shoulder and a deep voice.

“What do you think you’re doing with that?”

Taffy spun around to face the freshly washed and pressed uniform of Sergeant Borghust Sail *Level 11 - Law & Correct* staring down at him.

“Um... I was just feeling a bit peckish.”

“Taffy Futt, I have known you for your entire life, and I know that you are a hopeless liar.”

Taffy and Sgt. Sail regarded each other and then burst out laughing.

“I heard what they said, Taffy. Pay no attention to them, they’re not worth it.”

“They’re right though, everyone knows he won’t be here, I’ll be here on my own.” Taffy turned his face, a slight lump welling up in his throat.

“Don’t talk parp. It’s a beautiful day, no need for oxygen. I could be laying back and relaxing, but I’m here, and I’m going to be cheering you on.”

Taffy burst into a genuine smile. He exhaled as Borghust patted him on the back. They turned and walked into the hall together, passing Mafuta as he was given a final brushing of peacock feathers.



Item four on the program

A reading from *The History of Plightpool* by Verreth Moss

“And so, it was decided that their third sibling, the sister Irenka, should join the brothers Vilhelm and Werhard Plightpool on the voyage across lands. For she was the most gifted with edged blades, and accusations of her lack of propriety, and violent tendencies would, for sure, be forgotten the further from shore they descended.

Arduous was the journey across the seas and over lands, travelling for a nine-month, but determined were the three. Encountering both friend and foe, civilised and savage, acquired were six good breeding swine and a cheery disposition. Channelling her desire to cut and slice, the Plightpool brothers did open a Butcher shop. While Irenka made pleasure from butchering the swine, Vilhelm and Werhard schooled themselves in the admirable arts of bovine husbandry and sausage making. In scant time the reputation of the three was exceedingly well known. Yearning for Plightpool pork products increased dramatically. T’was reported widely across the world whence her majesty Queen Maurette IV secured an implacable craving for Plightpool saveloys whilst heavy with Prince Parpforth.

Demand for hog meat increased, so'eth did the requirement for pigs. A larger production of swine made necessary for the provision of a proficient system of waste management. For the stink of pig crappe had covered the town in a blanket of stench and the flies it were said, hung together in such numbers that it was oft-times impossible to tell the difference between night and day. Yet a sanitary system was beyond the interest of the Plightpool family whose fame had garnered them invitations to royal banquets, ship launches, and tickets to the opera. Given the climb in social standing it was understandable that little attention was given to animal leavings.

The discarding of pig plop was left to a stout young lad with a barrow. A load he would take a mile out of town for dumping. Increased production saw the lad travel, laden with his poop-filled barrow out a ten times daily. As the popularity of Plightpool hog, ham and smallgoods increased further, the lad acquired a cart and a robust bullock to lug the pig crud away. In a five year, the singular bullock had increased to a team of thirty, and all of the lad's friends were employed to carry the unyielding supply of pig poo out of town.

It was after only 20 years that the constant dumping of crap had made a mountain as big as any other in the world. The hot sun solidified the mass, making it sturdy enough to grow trees upon. A second mountain was formed beside the first and in due course, a third. With the original Plightpool siblings long since departed, the children of their children employed available technologies which allowed for superior means of feculence disposal.

The Turd Mountains, as they came to be known, proved unpopular. Whilst they did offer occasional shade in the summer, and attracted climbers from around the world, on hot windy days the pooh-dust that blew off the mountains did cause mayhem about the town. Thick was the faecal fog, with a stench indescribable. The need to wear breathing masks on particularly foggy days became common. Added to work and school uniforms were miasma masks and

oxygen tanks. To the outsider, the town of Plightpool may appear no less than hellish, but to all who live there, we know it is quite the opposite. Beyond the borders, behind the Turd Mountains afar there is discontent. Countries are at war, Governments fight their own people, and families quarrel with the intensity of wild beasts.

There is a legendary truth that all from Plightpool know. Whilst we may have our disagreements, we care not for the colour of our skin, for in Plightpool the dust turns us all sepia brown eventually. We care not for religion, we care not whom one invites 'tween the bedsheets, we are bothered not if you are man, woman, a mixture of both or none at all. The simple, unifying truth, the unyielding success of Plightpool is thanks to every one of us smelling like pig shite.

All the great wars have begun when one group of people believed themselves better than another group of people. In Plightpool one cannot cast a judging eye upon another when both are covered in crud. One cannot be judged by the coat on his back when chances are his neighbour is wearing the same. You may look different to your sister, but she will smell the same. Those coming to us from distant lands may seem strange to us, speak in odd ways, and have peculiar ideas. However, working together amongst hog guts and intestinal excretions shows us all we have more similarities than differences.

Whether born or travelled, all are welcome at Plightpool. There is a job for everyone. There has never been a person of willing disposition who has been turned away from Plightpool. Whether you like to raise the young hoglets in the Porkergarten or process them in the Hogsnuff, we can use you. We have yet to meet anyone so feeble of mind or body that we didn't have a place for them here.

To work is a privilege, an exquisite obligation, and reward. It eventually came to pass that a system should be made to assess the skills of all those recruited. It makes scant sense to have

a short person grasping items from far above them. Why assign a thin body to heave large objects around when a fat person is naturally gifted to achieve such tasks. A person with no hearing is especially suited to the snuffery room where the constant screaming of pigs will cause no anguish. So, it was decided that a process of **Determining** who was suited to a particular job should occur for all those who turn 16. Whilst some **Determinations** may seem to hold more prestige, and indeed may offer higher recompense, all who work at Plightpool know that they are wanted, they are needed, and they are loved.”



Mr Hegg tapped the microphone, the squealing feedback drew groans from the crowd who were sitting in the large airy school auditorium.

“Thank you, Madam Delen Plightpool, – Figgerington, for the brief history of our fair town.”

The crowd gave a polite round of applause as the Plightpool ancestor returned to her seat on stage beside her husband. She smiled at the crowd in appreciation, whilst elbowing her husband who looked perilously close to falling asleep.

The excitement that everyone had upon entering the building temporarily weakened as the mayor, school principal Lufta, and assorted people of great importance were brought on stage to offer speeches, congratulations, readings, and advice.

On the back of the stage, the three enormous portraits of Vilhelm, Werhard, and Irenka Plightpool had been placed as a backdrop. When some of the speeches became too monotonous to hold Taffy’s attention he instead focussed on the images behind the speaker. Werhard Plightpool, Taffy thought, had a nose so big that he must have used a bedsheet as a handkerchief. The portrait beside it was of his brother Vilhelm. It was the size of Vilhelm’s hands and feet that intrigued Taffy, they were huge in proportion to the rest of him. It was well known that Vilhelm was of remarkably short stature and when age made him unstable on his feet he took to riding a large Cumberland boar, complete with reins and saddle. The

final portrait, of Irenka, was unsettling. The sharp eyes were inescapable, Taffy found there was no place in the auditorium where he could stand without the eyes of Irenka seemingly staring right at him. Her hair was grey and her teeth sharp, while the rest of her was bejewelled. Diamond earrings, pearl necklaces. Her bare arms were almost covered in assorted bangles and bracelets, each laden with precious stones. On each of Irenka's fingers were grand rings, each brighter than the last. As Taffy chuckled to himself thinking about Irenka washing all the pig blood off her fancy jewellery after a hard day's work he noticed on her left arm the same tattoo that both Voreen and Nally from the *Souk and supply*. Like theirs, it looked like a number three but like the calligraphy that Taffy had seen on a wedding invitation once.

"Get up," Taffy snapped back to the present.

"It's time to go up." Taffy had not heard the cue for all new recruits to walk onto the stage.

A raucous applause and camera flashes lit the auditorium like a whirling disco ball. Proud parents shouted out words of encouragement as their offspring ascended the stairs to the stage. Handfuls of flower petals and sprigs of rosemary thrown in the air to attract good luck. Ahead of him, Taffy could see Mafuta manoeuvre to the side to avoid the priestess who had lain in wait for one last opportunity to feather him again.

Taffy's heart was beating fast. Excitement, a little fear, and apprehension of what was to come. From the back of the hall, Taffy saw The Sgt. smiling and applauding along with everyone else. Taffy smiled back, his shoulders relaxed and along with everyone else, bowed once to the dignitaries who were sitting on the stage and then once to the audience.

In a flurry of hand gestures, Mr Hegg attempted to assuage and calm the passionate crowd.

“And now before we adjourn to the grand room for tea and a sampling of the best of Plightpool’s pork products, we want to ensure with the support of family and friends that the next four weeks of **Determination** are as smooth as possible.”

A hush fell over the crowd as they turned their attention back to Mr Hegg.

“This first week of **Verification**, we will run some tests, some physical, some mental, some medical but all of them fun. This of course involves a tour of both the Porkergarten and the Hogsnuft, your future workplace.”

Excitement began to rise amongst the crowd, fingers being crossed and silent wishes for good **Determinations**. A few more handfuls of flower petals were thrown in the air for good measure.

“The second week,” Mr Hegg continued, “Is **Projection**. Based on your Verification results we can get an idea of your strengths, the unique gifts you can offer us. Recruits will be shown where we feel they would be best suited in the Plightpool pork product family. This week serves as an opportunity for recruits to respectfully challenge this **Projection** and show us other skills they might possess.”

Hushed murmurs ran through the crowd. Behind him Taffy could hear an old man tisk loudly with annoyance.

“What nonsense,” the old man said to no one in particular. “Everyone knows that your **Projection** doesn’t change. What they project is what you get. In all my years I’ve never seen one change.”

“**Execution**.” Mr Hegg exclaimed loudly into the microphone, as he stared at the old man.

“Sounds frightful, doesn’t it? But it refers mainly to administration, executing our plans to formally place and welcome you. Of course, it is also a chance for you to get any last-minute

activities or chores done before your new careers and lives begin. Write a letter, take a picnic on the mountain, or just go for a nice stroll.”

“And lastly the grand **Determination**.” Mr Hegg announced trying to take back the attention of a crowd that was growing restless as the smell of all the delicious food wafted over from the banquet hall.

“A wonderful tradition of **Determination** that ensures your success and ours. Thank you.”

As the crowd gave a final round of applause and the dignitaries each rose and walked off stage, Mafuta crept up behind Taffy and gently tugged at his blazer.

“Come on, let’s go over to the door, so we can go in before everyone else. I’m starving.”

“Sure, let’s go,” Taffy followed Mafuta’s path as he snaked through the mob. Being careful not to bump into anyone or accidentally get caught in any last-minute photos. Taffy felt like a professional boxer ducking and weaving through the throng. With so many people all moving toward the doors, Taffy temporarily lost sight of Mafuta. As his eyes scanned the crowd to locate his friend, Taffy was instead drawn to the painting of Irenka Plightpool. A shiver ran down Taffy’s spine. It wasn’t just the piercing eyes that could seemingly see right into his soul, but for the first time, Taffy noticed the smirk, the grin of utter contempt. As Taffy stared up at the old painting, he was struck with a particularly unpleasant feeling, it wasn’t fear, it wasn’t contempt, Taffy shuddered. It was recognition.

FETOR LEVEL

5

**MOSTLY CLEAR BUT BE AWARE
THAT SOMETHING UNPLEASANT
APPROACHES.**



“Take a seat, he won’t be long.” The receptionist glanced around furtively as she wiped sweat off her face hoping no one would notice. She dabbed her face with a handkerchief, swallowed three large mouthfuls of water from a teacup and took a large bite out of a sandwich before directing another recruit down the corridor.

“Taffy Futt? You can go through to exam room three.” The receptionist didn’t hear Taffy say thank you as she had three people asking her questions at her desk and a telephone that couldn’t be silenced. Halfway down the hall Taffy knocked on the door of the Doctors room.

“Come in, take a seat,” the doctor pointed to a chair opposite himself.

“Ah Taffy Futt, congratulations, you must be looking forward to **Determination**?” The doctor had yet to look up from the files he was reading so Taffy assumed he was saying that to everyone he would encounter that day.

“Yes,” Taffy answered, “It will be good.”

“And how is your father? He hasn’t come to see me for a while.”

Taffy looked down at the floor, his cheeks flushing slightly. “He’s still the same.”

“Yes, well, never mind, it’s you we’re here to discuss. Let’s have a listen to your chest.”

Taffy waited for the sharp coldness to press against him, but the stethoscope was warm from

over use. Taffy inhaled and exhaled, coughed on command, and poked out his tongue. A check of his eyes, nose, throat and neck before a tap on both his knees with a rubber mallet. Taffy held out his arm as blood was drawn out. He closed one eye while he read from a sign across the room, then switched for the opposite eye. The doctor placed a set of heavy black headphones on Taffy and sat him in a booth. Taffy was told to press a button every time he heard the loud tone through the headphones.

Next, the doctor passed Taffy two large dumbbells. “Hold these for as long as you can,” the doctor said as he pressed the start button on his stopwatch.

Taffy could feel sweat dripping down his face and stinging his eyes, but he held tight for as long as he could. As the dumbbells rolled across the floor, the doctor pointed to a makeshift booth beside his desk.

“Sit down in here and relax, Taffy. Have some water too if you like. This is a rather special room. Just tap three times when you’re ready to get out.”

Taffy sat in the chamber with a bottle of water while the doctor sealed the small door from the outside. A blast of cold air blew over Taffy’s head, offering some nice relief from the exertion of the strength test. Taffy took a sip of his water, it seemed colder than the first sip he drank. Taffy relaxed into his chair and exhaled deeply; his breath blew out in front of him like smoke from a chimney. Alarmed, Taffy shot a look at the doctor.

“It’s alright,” the doctor peered through the glass, “if it gets too much just knock and I’ll let you out.”

Taffy sat back in his chair, as he brought his bottle up to his lips for another sip of water, he realised there were icicles forming on the outside. Taffy sat the water bottle on the floor of the cubicle and rubbed his arms with his hands. The chattering of his teeth increased as Taffy hugged himself. As he rubbed his arms and legs all the faster, Taffy noticed the tips of his

fingertips had turned blue. A slight panic ran through his spine, he imagined his fingers freezing solid and then shattering into thousands of pieces. With three short sharp thuds on the wall Taffy was released.

“Not the most pleasant test, but you’ll soon warm up.” The doctor passed Taffy a blanket while Taffy sat with his hands cupped together blowing his warm breath into them.

“I’m just going to attach these bands to your ankles.” Taffy raised his eyebrows as the doctor secured two leather bands attached to a long metal chain to his legs.

“Tell me Taffy, have you ever wondered what it’s like to sleep like a bat?”

The mechanical pulley had Taffy in the air and swinging before he had time to let out a shriek of protest.

“Don’t concern yourself, Taffy. I’ll make sure you are brought down before you pass out.”

Taffy sat on his chair as the blood flowed back from his head to the rest of his body.

“All looking good, young man.” The doctor smiled. “Take off your shoes and we’ll get a measure of height and weight.” Taffy stood with his back against the wall as the doctor made a note in a certified **Determination Day Logbook**.

“Good, good.” the doctor seemed pleased.

“And now, if you’ll stand on those scales over in the corner, please.”

Taffy stood on the scales, mindful that he didn’t slip on the polished metal plate. The Doctor pulled his glasses from the top of his head and slid them down his nose.

“Good heavens!” the doctor exclaimed, as he quickly pencilled some calculations on his page.

“At this weight, you’re about three time the size of all your fellow recruits.”

The doctor stared at Taffy for long seconds, Taffy stared back, not sure how the doctor expected him to respond.

“That’s absolutely brilliant!” the doctor beamed. “Take a seat, we have some marvellous things to discuss.”

Taffy sat down and tied his shoelaces while the doctor finished filling in his paperwork.

“Like every year, I’ve had a procession of people come through here the last few months asking for ways to gain weight, get stronger or grow taller. Ridiculous of course, you are either born with these attributes or you’re not. You my boy must be very pleased that you are so fat, The Hogsnuuff is always after people as big as you.”

“I hope these means I get a good **Projection** next week.”

“I wouldn’t worry if I were you, lad. You’re fit, you’re fat, you’re healthy and I bet you could shove and heave anything they put in your way.”

Taffy couldn’t hide his smile.

“There are plenty who would trade places with you my lad, I wish there were more like you.”

Taffy shook the doctor’s hand and left his office feeling wonderful.



They stood in two lines of two, all dressed in sharp black suits, black ties and their hair slicked back. They had been given strict instructions to maintain a smile and to be cordial at all times. The stink in the air was still unbearable to some, but under the hawk-like gaze of Trudith B. Lumia, they dared not show their disdain or attempt to gasp for fresh air.

“You have been trained to achieve optimum results. You cannot take no for an answer, Remember your manners and if you feel you are going to be ill, go somewhere you will not be seen.” Trudith ran her hands over her head to ensure her tight red bun was still in perfect place on top of her head before she gestured for her team to leave the *Level 6 – Sleep and shower* for the town centre.

In the main street, parked in a long cortege, the doors of the shiny, clean black statesman cars all opened in unison. Each person climbed out and shut the car door, having each taken out a sealed black briefcase. At the stroke of 9 am, as all the shop owners and assistants turned the ‘closed’ signs on their shop doors to ‘open,’ the black-clad minions of Infinite Guanté each made their way inside.

“Good morning.” (*smile*) “I have something that will change your life.”

“Have you ever wanted to feel better than you have ever felt before?” (*Laugh confidently*).

“You might not have heard of it before, but it is VERY popular amongst movie stars.” (*Show the whites of your teeth*).

“No money? No problem! Take as many free samples as you like.” (*Wink, so that they feel you are doing them a special deal*).

“Really? You don’t want to look better for your husband/wife/girlfriend/boyfriend/family pet?” (*Look perplexed and disappointed*).

“I promise you will be happier once you have tried this.” (*Briefly place your hand on their upper back or shoulder to suggest friendship*).

“Not only will you feel great but initial tests suggest it actually reverses aging.” (*Smile knowingly*).

“Of course, further tests are required, but we have heard reports of people being cured of deafness, blindness, and rectal itching after just three months of using this amazing product.” (*Compassionate face*).

Voreen and her husband Nally turned the sachets of powder over in their hands.

“Never had any call for something like this before, have we, Vore?”

“What is it supposed to do again, love?” Voreen looked up with her eyebrows raised.

The man straightened his back as the light from the window caught the shine of his dark hair.

The man grinned wide, (*think of something pleasurable so they can see it in your eyes*). The well-rehearsed script skipped to the forefront of his mind.

“Magnesia Hunt, will make you the best you that you can be.” (*Maintain eye contact, smile*).

Voreen and Nally stared blankly.

“Ever felt that you are missing that spark? That certain vim and vigour?” (*Step closer to establish rapport*).

“Not really, love. What does this magnesia stuff do?”

“Magnesia Hunt. It gives you back your lost vitality. You won’t be content to stay at home and play with your cat, you’ll want to go hunt tigers.”

Nally groaned. “So, is it something to take hunting with you?”

“Yes sir, with its convenient packaging, you can take it hunting, hiking or to enjoy with friends.” (*Nod and smile to suggest you are enjoying the conversation*).

“So, what do you do if you don’t have any friends who like hunting tigers?”

(*If feeling frustrated, inhale slowly and re-establish your grin*).

“Magnesia Hunt can be used for so many other things.” (*Open your arms wide to suggest endless opportunities*). “I just know your customers will be flocking into your fine establishment to grab this delicious product.” (*Lick lips*).

“See the problem here,” Nally stepped out from behind his counter, “Is that people need to know what to *do* with a product. See these things here?” Nally pointed, “They’re called apples. And when you’re feeling a bit peckish, you eat one. Eating is what you *do* with it.”

“And over here,” Voreen chimed in, “This is *soap*. Oh, look at me, I’m ever so dirty, I might wash myself with *soap*... See, love?”

(*Do not ever show your scorn. These people seldom know better*).

“And over on this side,” Nally picked up a packet of toilet paper. “What you do is...”

“I understand!” (*Gulp. I hope Ms Lumia isn’t watching. Smile*).

“At its essence, Magnesia Hunt will reconfigure your body to a more attractive state.” (*Why are they making this so difficult?*).

Nally looked at Voreen, as she returned his gaze. Nally was still bent over and willing to demonstrate bathroom etiquette.

(*Inhale*).

“If you take Magnesia Hunt as directed, you will lose weight.” (*I need a drink*).

“Oh.”

“I see now.” Nally returned the paper to the shelf. “It’s a thinning potion?”

“In a manner of speaking.”

“No call for it here, love. Who would ever want to be thin?”

“You’d be better off trying this at a mining town. Come in handy for squirrelling in and out of small holes.” Nally sat back down behind his counter.

(*Under absolutely no circumstances may you raise your voice*).

“This product has proven to be positively life-changing. And with three great flavours, no one can resist.” (*Smile*).

“But it’s **Determination** soon. We’ve got all sorts coming in, hoping to bulk up. No one wants to be *thin!*”

(*If all else fails, offer a cash reward*).

“It takes time to appreciate such a unique product. Have you heard about our rewards program?”

As he flicked through the pamphlet, Nally almost lost balance when he saw how much the man was prepared to pay him.

“YES! Happy to stock it. Front window, ok?”

(When you have made the deal, ensure all paperwork is signed).

(Smile).

“Thank you for agreeing to stock Magnesia Hunt. We know you won’t regret it.”

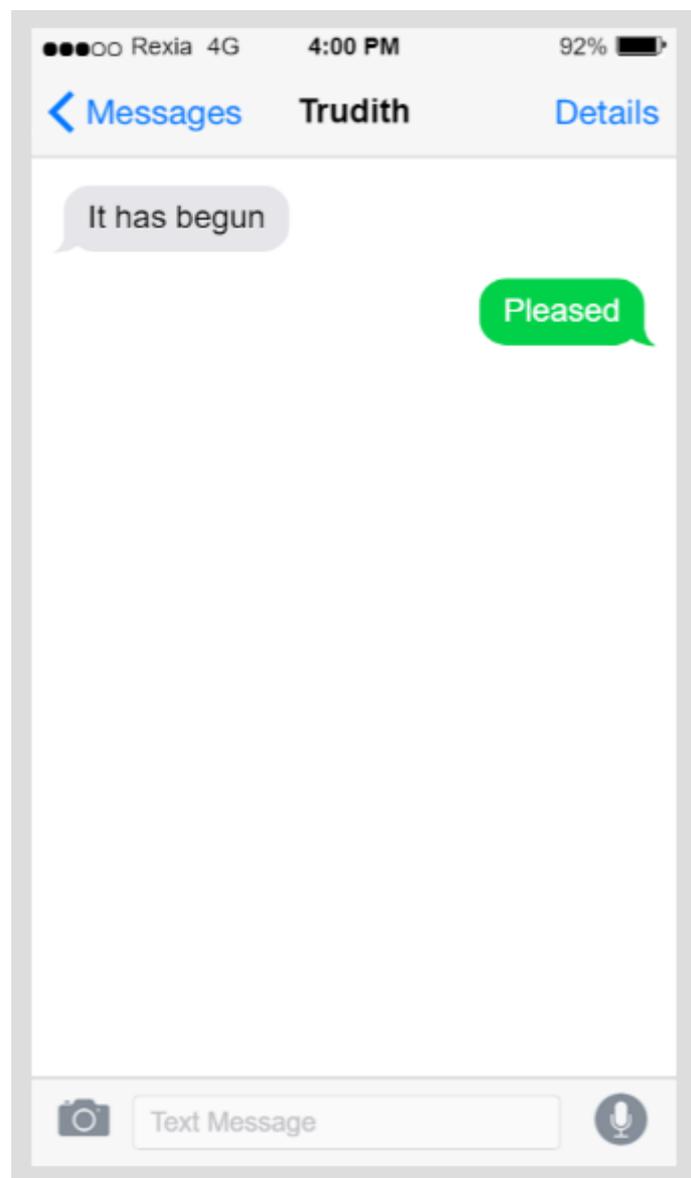
(Smile).

As the man closed the door behind him, he noticed all the others were stood by their cars.

Trudith shot him a look. Deals were not supposed to take too long. He quickly walked over and stood next to his car door.

Trudith B. Lumia climbed into her car. The others followed suit. The cortege drove away.

10



11

“No need to rush. There are enough seats for everybody.” The bus driver shouted, trying to be heard above the sound of the crowd of excited teenagers. Taffy stood at the back with Mafuta. They were happy to be the last on the bus, if it meant they were the first to get off.

“Rassie, we’ll pack your chair in the compartment under the bus and help you up in a moment.”

Rassie turned to Taffy and Mafuta.

“I’ve made a few adjustments to this chair,” Rassie explained. “I bet I could race this hunk of tin over to the Hogsnuft,” Rassie thumped the side of the bus with her fist, making a resounding clang.

“Come and sit up front with Taffy and me?” Mafuta offered. “We can help you up.”

Rassie pushed back the sleeves of her shirt and flexed her muscles. Her biceps bulged.

“Don’t reckon I need your help, lads.”

Rassie grabbed hold of the handle on the bus door and hoisted herself up over three stairs and into a spare seat in one fluid motion. Taffy and Mafuta followed and sat in the seat opposite her. While the chaperones did a final headcount, the driver closed the door and turned the key in the bus ignition.

At the back of the bus, Momona and Ora pulled on rubber gloves and methodically fastened plastic bags over their shoes, legs, arms, and the flamboyant **Verification** day hairstyles that they had each agreed they would keep for at least another week. Killen was tasked with tearing off and passing over lengths of tape to affix the bags.

"One time there was this girl," Momona began, especially loud so everyone could hear her.

"And she went on the tour of the Hogsnuuff, and she didn't take the proper precautions, and they totally found a full pig crap in her hair." Ora gasped while everyone else on the bus giggled, groaned, or rolled their eyes.

"It's true! She was a friend of my cousin, and they busted her down to *Level 1- Discharge and Dab*, which you'll all probably get because you're all too filthy to cover up."

Killen grabbed a handful of left-over bags from his friends and began to fervently tape them over his head. Before there was time for an argument to break out about the logistics of getting crud in one's hair, the bus driver announced their arrival at the Hogsnuuff. He pressed a button on the communication device, which he was just able to reach by extending his arm from his window.

"The **Determination** group, here for their tour." the driver shouted to whomever was listening at the other end of the device. With a large, rusted grumble, the heavy cast iron gates began to part, then fully opened, allowing the bus to pass into the visitor's carpark. The bus driver shoved the bus door open and quickly stepped out to fetch Rassie's wheelchair that had been stored underneath. The chaperone cleared her throat to gain the attention of everyone else.

"Like every other moment in the next few weeks, how you behave today will be assessed and used for your **Determination**. Please do ask questions, it shows you are interested, but

always remember to be polite and use your pleases and thank yous. I see some of you are wearing plastic splash protectors." Killen, Momona and Ora smiled at each other.

"Consider what statement you are making to your future employers. Can you not even stand a bit of blood? If you're lucky, you may be invited to kill a hog today. Do you think the *Level 4 - snuff & Gut* will be impressed with this get-up you're wearing?"

"Good one." Ora snarled at Momona as she tore the plastic from her head.

"You shut up." Momona retorted as she and Killen did the same.

Taffy looked at Mafuta, who, like Taffy, was trying to muffle the urge to laugh.

After each person had stepped off the bus and Rassie had finished buffing the chrome bars on her wheelchair, with the sleeve of her dress, the group were ushered into the foyer.

Inside, the walls were adorned with enormous posters and paintings of the entire range of meats and sweet treats that were produced in the factory. There were vast portraits of workers whose innovative thinking had improved the productivity of the Hogsnuff. Machine makers, sausage artists, bacon masons, the Kransky brothers, Bim and Voola who discovered the miraculous calming effect that yodelling had on pigs before they were slaughtered. People who had devoted their entire careers to the betterment of pork chops and trotters. There was a mural depicting the founding of Plightpool and the three siblings who began it. Again, Taffy could feel the sting of Irenka Plightpool's eyes staring down at him from where she sat, motionless in her portrait. Her grin unsettled Taffy, it reminded him of a person who just said something nasty about someone else, or someone who secretly took pleasure in a person tripping over or unknowingly standing in dog poo. Taffy turned to ask Mafuta if he noticed Irenka's eyes but before he had the chance to ask him, Mr Hegg *Level 9 - Authority & Administration* entered the room.

The chaperones attempted a cursory round of applause, which the students didn't join. All eyes were on Mr Hegg, a somewhat feeble man, bent at the waist as if his head was too heavy for his body. He looked kind enough but not at all like the image of strength and power that the Handbook suggested was required to be a leader at the Hogsnuuff. His hair was thin and white, and barely able to cover his head. His nose was long and pointed and his eyes darted around the room fervently like he was looking for the nearest door to run through.

"Welcome everyone, to what will soon be your second home," Mr Hegg's voice wavered.

Taffy remembered his father using the word 'dithery' to describe people like Mr Hegg. Taffy noticed the man wrung his hands a lot and kept pulling a rather stiff handkerchief from his pocket to dab at his sweaty forehead. It occurred to Taffy however, that appearances aren't everything. He may not have the body type he was expecting and he certainly didn't have the gift of public speaking, but this man had successfully run the Plightpool pork product plant for as long as Taffy could remember, so unlike Killen, who stood on the other side of the room trying to impress his classmates by impersonating Mr Hegg's ample nose with his stretched out pointer finger, Taffy thought he would be better to display some respect and not get on the wrong side of the man who would very soon be his new boss.

The door through which Mr Hegg had emerged opened again and a team of people dressed in splatter suits, goggles and face shields entered. They were each holding a clipboard, a pen, and a list of student names, which Taffy saw when was able to peek over the shoulder of one of the team members who had stood closest to him. All the recruits were listed alphabetically on the sheets of paper with assorted boxes and codes next to each name. Taffy didn't know what each box or code was for, but he knew before Mr Hegg even introduced them, that they were there to watch the recruits.

"Pay no attention to them," Mr Hegg advised. "Imagine that they are just bees buzzing around a parp-blossom. They won't bother you, and you need not bother them. They are *Level 3 - Observe and Inform* they will make notes about things they see, those little personal peculiarities you have, that will be used to **Determine** the best job for you. Don't ask them any questions, they are here solely to observe. I can help you with anything you need, if not me, then I'm sure anyone working on the floor today will be happy to help."

Taffy caught himself breathing a sigh of relief that Parry wouldn't be at work until long after the tour had ended. He dreaded to think what state his father might be in or what he might feel compelled to say if he saw the group. Worse, Taffy knew that he himself would have trouble holding his tongue, or indeed his fists if anyone made fun of Parry's metal hook.

"And now, everyone, follow me into the decontamination room for a quick spray down, and our tour shall begin." Mr Hegg motioned to the door to his right with a wave of his hand so grand that he almost lost balance. The group filed into the room one after the other making sure to close their mouths and eyes so the billowing dry chemicals that stabilised any outside dirt and filth, didn't have a chance to enter them. Taffy made one last glance around the room, the observers were each busy making notes and looking up at particular recruits. Taffy had intended to smile so that it could be noted that he was jovial and ready to enjoy the tour, instead he was drawn to the image of Irenka Plightpool.

"What surprises do you have planned for us?" Taffy wondered to himself. Irenka just smirked back, imposing and craven.

Taffy nodded to Mr Hegg as he passed by him as a show of good manners. He hoped the people with clipboards noticed. Just before the huge squirt of decontaminant hit Taffy, he heard an assistant explain to Mr Hegg that he could not run late, it was critical he was there for the meeting.

"What meeting?" Mr Hegg asked, the tone of his voice suggesting he was hearing about this meeting for the first time.

"With a Ms Trudith B. Lumia," the assistant replied.

12

"Who here has a baby brother or sister? A niece or nephew perhaps?" Mr Hegg looked about the room expectantly. A few hands were raised in the air.

"How wonderful," Mr Hegg exclaimed as he wiped down his sweaty brow, yet again.

"You may be just who we need to work here, in the first stop on our tour today, the Porkergarten!"

The observers, who had followed closely behind the recruits, pulled out their pens and began to either tick or cross boxes on their checklists. Taffy didn't have much to do with babies at all. His neighbours did have one, Taffy used to lie in bed some nights wishing it would shut up as it screamed out demanding feeding and cleaning. Taffy wondered if he should stretch the truth and mention that he spent many pleasant afternoons with the little one next door, despite it being a lie, it may increase his opportunities in the factory. Taffy soon thought better of it when the group entered the utterly enormous warehouse full of thousands upon thousands of squealing piglets, all demanding feeding and cleaning.

"It doesn't make sense, considering how many pigs we process, to expect farmers from beyond the boundaries to supply us with all the pigs we require," Mr Hegg explained.

“We couldn’t guarantee where they were coming from or if they were being treated with respect. Just because you are going to turn these fine creatures into sausage one day, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t care for them, sing to them, even love them.”

Killen and Ora both snorted an exaggerated giggle at the thought of loving a pig. They quickly closed their mouths again when two Observers noted their outburst on paper.

Overhead a bell gently rang, all the piglets, even those who were sleeping soundly, sprang to their feet and grunted while wagging their tiny, curled tails.

“Right on time,” Mr Hegg pointed to a roller door at the far end of the warehouse that was just beginning to open. Behind the doors were dozens of workers, each wearing a bright yellow apron and matching bonnet with their arms laden with oversized baby bottles full of milk.

"Feeding time!" Mr Hegg beamed like a proud father. "*The Level 3 - Bacon Matrons* come six times a day for feeding, but in just three short weeks these little darlings will be weaned off milk and put straight onto solids."

Taffy joined all the others who moved in closer to watch the matrons slide bottles into the specially made holders that the hungry piglets could suck on. All sounds of squealing and grunting had stopped and were replaced with thousands of loud, satisfied slurps.

Taffy raised his hand, much to the delight of Mr Hegg and asked, "What breed of pigs are these?"

"What an excellent question." Mr Hegg glanced over at one of the Observers to ensure this inquiry was noted in the positive. "These are called landrace pigs. They are the most popular as they are very lean and quite meaty."

"I thought people wanted fat pigs though," Mafuta interjected, "Like in that nursery rhyme?"

Buy me a piglet

The fattest you see

Butcher and bake it

As fast as you please

The fatter the piglet

The sweeter the meat

The fatter the hog

The more we can eat

The fatter the swine

The more who can dine

Buy me a piglet

Before dinner time

"Oh, good heavens no." Mr Hegg said as he lent down to wipe the chin of a piglet who had just finished his bottle. "Years ago, fat pigs were quite popular, Guinea hogs, Gloucester spots and Ossabaws were all anybody wanted. But markets and consumer demand changed and over the boundaries it seems people will only eat something if it is thin."

Mafuta rolled his eyes, "A thin pig isn't right if you ask me."

Another bell rang out and the **Bacon Matrons** collected all the empty bottles, tucked the sleepy piglets back under their blankets and retreated behind the roller door which closed down behind them.

"And now for a treat." Mr Hegg scanned the recruits and pointed at a red-haired girl who was still doting on the sleeping pigs.

"You there," Mr Hegg pointed at the girl. "What is your name?"

"Peneveive," she uttered, her cheeks blushing slightly.

"Would you like to work with my babies?"

"Yes Sir, Mr Hegg, very much so." Peneveive answered.

"Wonderful to hear. Of course, there is more to it than just bottles and cuddles."

"Yes Sir, lots of cleaning and wiping I suspect."

"Yes, there is that too." Mr Hegg wrung his hands. "Occasionally we get special orders, do you understand what that means?"

"Not really, Sir."

"Let me show you. Bring one of those sleeping lovelies over here, anyone you like."

Peneveive didn't hesitate at the chance to cradle one of the small pigs that she had grown attached to, even in such a short period of time.

"I like this one." The girl held the tiny piglet aloft. "She has the biggest eyes, and she is so cute. See the tuft of red hair on her forehead? It is the same colour as my hair, I swear she giggles when I tussle it. I've named her Jessica."

"How lovely. Please, bring Jessica up here."

Peneveive held Jessica close to her chest as she stood beside Mr Hegg.

"As I was saying, sometimes we get special orders, for a dinner party perhaps, a special occasion maybe, like a birthday." Peneveive nodded. "And what better to serve at one of these fine dinners than a suckling pig?"

Taffy and some of the other recruits had figured what was coming and each took a step backwards. The observers each took a step forward, their eyes firmly on Peneveive and Jessica the pig.

"While it is wonderful to be with the babies and tending to their needs, it will be your responsibility to also fill the special orders. Understand?"

"Yes, Sir, I think so."

"Wonderful" Mr Hegg handed the girl a knife. "You can do the honours."

All colour instantly flowed out of the girl's face. Taffy almost thought her hair had turned a shade paler too.

"Quick sticks," Mr Hegg made a sawing motion with the knife. "Do this and we can move on to the next part of our tour. As a special treat, I'll even let you keep the heart."

"But, but... Jessica."

"Oh no," Rassie whispered under her breath. "Hold it! Hold it."

Taffy's eyes were firmly fixed on Peneveive whose lips were quivering violently, and he too willed her to hold it in, but it was to no avail.

"Chop, chop," Mr Hegg urged. "Don't forget to slice down the belly to release all those slippery entrails."

With a thunderous heave, the girl vomited all over the floor, followed with a cry of sheer anguish.

Amidst the screams and the scramble to move away from the mess the Observers shook their heads. Taffy turned to see one of them scribble *LEVEL 1* in thick red letters across his sheet.

Two *Bacon Matrons* ushered Peneveive back out the way they had come, her hysterical cries becoming harder to hear as she was led away.

"What a lot of carry on." Mr Hegg looked disappointed. "Follow me, there is plenty more to see."

The recruits, each now a little queasy, were happy to leave. Taffy dared not look back, he thought he had heard a squeal but didn't want to know if Jessica had just filled her order.

13

"Much like yourselves, these pigs are nearing the final phase of their adventure. They're about to graduate... if you like."

Taffy stood close to Mafuta and Rassie, he noticed that most of the others were huddled together too. Moral support Taffy thought, or at least someone to hide behind in case they felt they were going to throw up too. There were whispers now, the red-haired girl was gone, and those who remained were nervous. Where had they taken her? Would they take pity on her? Would she really spend her life as a *Level 1*? Or would her weak stomach be taken as a sign of disloyalty and in a couple of days there will be a new type of sausage available, red in colour with no aptitude for pig slaughter.

Taffy wasn't going to allow himself to think about it anymore. The Observers were still watching, eagle eyed and at the ready with their pens and stamps. The new area, the dock as it was known, was how Taffy had imagined the inside of Hogsnuuff. Industrial and in a grid pattern, the small metal holding pens were separated by great long walkways that allowed workers fast access to all the pens. The floor was covered with hay, still comfortable enough for the pigs, but certainly not as nurturing as the Porkergarten with its soft blankets and bassinets.

"They stay here for a few weeks, to finish growing." Taffy overheard Mr Hegg explain the purpose of the cavernous space.

"Much like we observe you and see what the best use of your skills will be one day, we also observe the pigs. These ones over on the left," Taffy's eyes followed to where Mr Hegg was pointing at pigs that were taller than most of the others.

"These pigs have thick round legs; they will make the best hams in the very near future." The recruits all nodded understanding the logic of that which in turn sent the Observers into a flurry of note making and box ticking.

"And over here," Mr Hegg continued, "These pigs are a bit longer in the middle, so they will make that long, streaky bacon that everyone likes so much. Feel free to have a look around everyone. Let's see if you can figure out what some of the other pigs will become?"

Taffy, acutely aware that he, like everyone else that his actions were being noted, made a grand show of looking in several pens, pointing, nodding, and trying to look as curious as possible. As he looked around, Taffy wondered if he would be happy working in the dock. At least it wouldn't be on the Sluice floor with Parry, but would there be any prestige, or more importantly any adventure?

Taffy's chain of thought was interrupted by shouting over in the opposite corner, quite a distance from where the group was standing.

"What the hell is this?" Mafuta shouted, pointing to one of the distant pens.

Mr Hegg stopped his conversation and, somewhat alarmed at Mafuta's outburst, and quickly moved over to see what was wrong.

Nestled in the pens were six black pigs, sleeping soundly, unperturbed by the loud noises Mafuta was making. Taffy also joined the crowd; he knew by the tone of Mafuta's voice that his friend was upset.

Mafuta addressed his question directly to Mr Hegg this time, "What the hell is this?"

Mr Hegg stared blankly at Mafuta, unsure what was going on.

"Why are these black pigs in a separate cage away from all the others? All the cages have pink pigs, but the black ones are here. It's segregation! This is why my parents left our country, because of stuff like this."

Mr Hegg's mouth fell wide open in shock. All the words he wanted to say seemed to fall out at once in a rush. "No, no, good heavens no." were the only words that made sense to Taffy. Mr Hegg began to wring his hands with such fervour, Taffy was worried he might start a fire.

"Good heavens, my lad! You mustn't think that. We would never... we wouldn't ever..."

Mr Hegg was still not making much sense and only seemed to anger Mafuta more.

"They're special." Mr Hegg finally spat out "Like you."

Mafuta groaned and rolled his eyes.

"Jeju it is called." Mr Hegg held the palms of his hands up in a placating pose.

"Jeju, is a very special product that only comes from dark skinned pigs. A very special market exists for it, it isn't to everyone's taste. It is... special, just like you." Mr Hegg placed his hand on Mafuta's shoulder.

"Why do they have to be over here? Away from all the others?" Mafuta wasn't yet convinced.

"Behind you is a processing area that we use just for Jeju meat. It is less stressful for these lovely fellows to spend their last days closer to this area than to have to separate them from all the others and bring them over when their time comes."

Mafuta relaxed his shoulders and Mr Hegg smiled and exhaled.

"I'm glad we sorted that out. Heavens no, we would never..." He trailed off. "You must understand that everyone and everything has a place and a purpose. Follow me, have a look at this pen. This might especially interest you young lady," Mr Hegg looked directly at Rassie.

The group of recruits followed him over to the last pen before the exit. The gates surrounding it were quite a bit higher than all the others and Taffy could tell from Rassie's gasp that whatever was inside was not good.

"See what I mean?" Mr Hegg beamed as he pointed to the cage that held two pigs that were unable to walk, four blind pigs and a pig that had far too many limbs for its tiny body.

"These lovelies may not have turned out as we expected, but here at Plightpool pork products, we have a use for everybody." Mr Hegg gave Rassie an ostentatious wink, unaware that Rassie had pushed her sleeves up her arms and had balled her hands into fists.

"Despite your, well... your... We can no doubt find something worthwhile for you to do. These funny fellows will be thrown in the mincer this very afternoon. Mmmm... what a delicious treat they will make."

Taffy threw himself in front of Rassie. "Cool it Rassie, you don't want to get levelled down because of one mistake."

Taffy had seen Rassie reposition herself in her chair and knew what was coming. Mr Hegg however, turned away from her to invite the group into the next room in the tour, unaware that he was moments away from getting a ferocious punch on the nose.



"Oh! The smell."

Mafuta cupped his hands over his nose and mouth, Rassie stuffed her face into the crook of her arm, Momona, and Ora passed a small bottle of scent back and forth taking turns to sniff it. Taffy tried to stay still, moving around just seemed to kick up the stink.

Mr Hegg chuckled heartily making no effort to hide the pleasure it gave him to see a new group experience the unique scent of the sluice room for the very first time.

"Take a deep breath everyone," Mr Hegg exclaimed between giggles "You might as well get used to it now, most of you will end up working here."

The Observers were in their element now. Each one was paying particular attention to a recruit. Some were mumbling about weak stomachs; others were counting how long a recruit could hold their breath. In between ticking off boxes and writing notes, Taffy even heard some of the Observers exchange wagers as to who would be the first to faint. Taffy swallowed hard and resolved that it most certainly wouldn't be him. After exhaling long and low, Taffy took in a deep breath. His nostrils filled with a vile mixture of pig guts, blood and crud, the stench made his head spin, but he continued to draw in the foul air right into his brain and soon discovered that, as he expected that the first breath was the worst but his lungs quickly adapted.

"Very clever." Taffy heard one of the Observers whisper to no one in particular, impressed that Taffy had figured out the secret to being in, arguably, the stinkiest place on earth. Taffy thought about the second most pressing concern, learning to walk on a floor that was one giant metal grid.

"It allows all the crud and gore to fall straight through," Mr Hegg explained. "Then the bigger stuff can be picked up more easily."

His last statement sent a cold shiver up Taffy's spine. He knew that it was Parry's job to walk up and down the sluice grid, stabbing his hook into the chunks that were too big to pass through and placing them into a bucket. It wasn't just pig bits either. Parry was required to pick up the fingers and toes careless workers had forfeited by not paying attention to swing saws and bone slicers. There were tusks and ears and knuckles that Parry would dump into a giant skip bin that was kept outside.

The noise of the sluice room was like nothing Taffy had ever experienced. Workers would ordinarily be offered protective equipment to protect their hearing, but as a warning as to why they must never forget to wear their earmuffs in the future, the recruits had to listen to the constant blaring of sirens, the stop and starting of conveyor belts, the whirring of machinery, pulleys, levers, and thunderous thuds of processed pig bodies constantly swinging around high above them.

It was a great relief for Taffy when he saw the group being shuffled into the last room of their tour.

Quiet. Taffy could hear his own heartbeat thumping in his ears, but the manic sound of machinery had faded.

"You'll get used to it. Don't be put off. After a week or two, you won't even notice it anymore." Mr Hegg tried to assure the group, who had all noticeably lost the enthusiasm they had arrived with in the morning.

"And this is the last stop on the tour. Not as exciting as the others, but important all the same." Gesturing to his left the group turned to see three gigantic tanks. A large mechanical hose dipped into the first tank and began to vacuum up the contents.

"A much better system than they had in the old days," Mr Hegg nodded thoughtfully.

"What is it?" Rassie asked, not sure she wanted to know the answer.

"It is the Turd Slurper 1000. That giant hose sucks up the filth and sends it to the basement plant where it is separated into gas and solids. The gas powers this factory and all your homes and the solids are used to make the bricks that most of our buildings are made from. Nothing goes to waste here."

Rassie looked away, deciding that she shouldn't have asked.

"I'm sure you have plenty of questions? Such an adventure you have all had today."

Mafuta, pointing to a thin rail high up above the crud tanks which could only be accessed by a thin, rickety stairs, asked "Is that the snitch tower?"

There were whispers and giggles and talking behind hands.

Mr Hegg sighed. "I'm sure you've all heard many rumours about that seldom used area, but I assure you that they are not true."

"Do gangs come from over the boundaries and drop snitches from there?" Mafuta enquired.

"Well, yes... that may have happened once or twice, that is technically true."

"And is that where that famous actor was found that time?"

"Yes, that is true too."

"And is it true that if someone falls in that vat of crud, and by some miracle they survive, the stink can never be washed off?"

"Well alright, most of it is true, but it is not important. It is very old structure and very flimsy so only specialised personnel are allowed up there and that is just to clean the big suction hose."

Not taking the hint that he was ready to move on, Mafuta raised his hand again.

"Could that tube suck up a person? Has anyone been sucked up there for fun?"

"Oh, good heavens!" an exasperated Mr Hegg sighed. "No, I doubt very much a person would want to be sucked up through that hose. I'm not sure they would survive to tell the story if they did."

Mafuta nodded thoughtfully. He raised his hand again but was swiftly cut off.

"Anyone else?" Mr Hegg looked around expectantly.

Taffy raised his hand.

"Yes, good lad?"

"Could you please explain the rule of heritage?"

"Heritage? Yes, of course. A long time ago we realised that if your Parents were particularly gifted at a certain job, then there is a good chance that you will be good at it too."

The group all nodded.

So, if your mother is a *Level 3 - Mallet & Splat*, there we will strongly consider you for a similar role.

"So, all this is pointless!" Killen barked "You will just give us the same job as our parents and be done with it."

"That is not exactly how it works; this is your chance to show us why we should consider you for something better. Prove to us that you can excel."

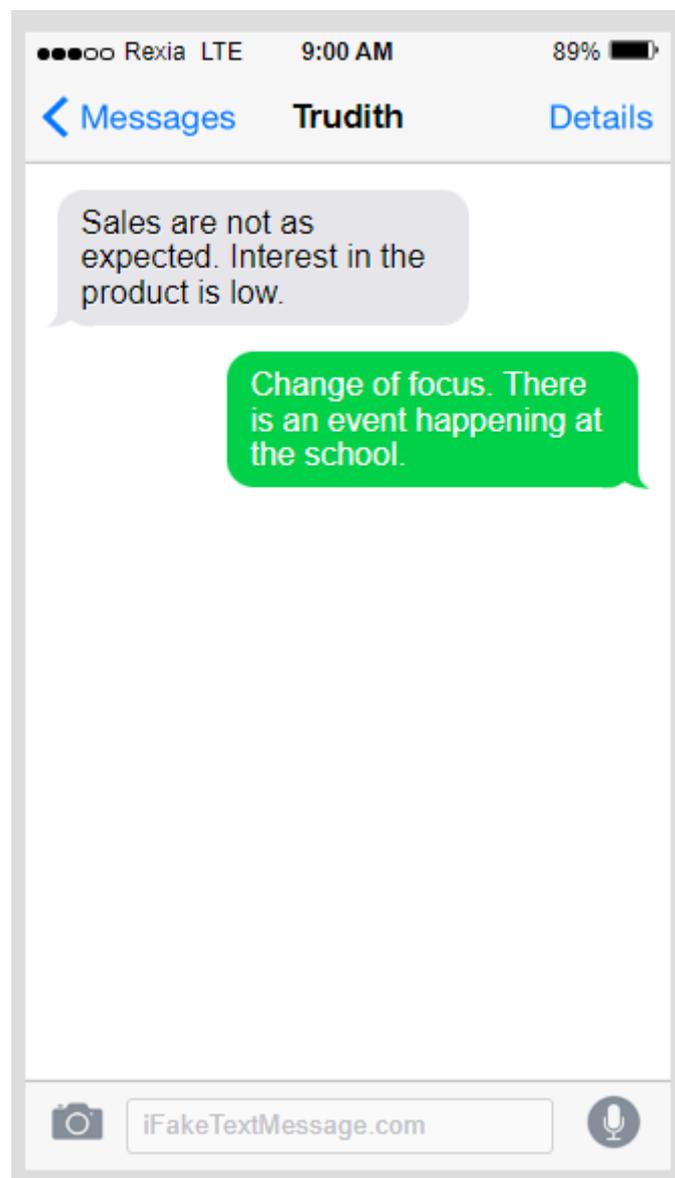
Killen rolled his eyes, earning him two large crosses on his score sheet.

Taffy's stomach sank. He wasn't ready to accept that he would be going to work each day alongside Parry, holding the bucket while his father filled it.

"Never mind about that now," Mr Hegg smiled at the group. "After everything you've seen and heard and smelled today, you must have quite an appetite!" Ignoring the choir of belly grumbles that protested the thought of food, Mr Hegg declared,

"Time for afternoon tea."

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"I'll swap you a jar of candied pig tails for your bag of chilli dried ears." Mafuta sorted through his sample bag trying to locate his least favourite treats.

"No one likes the candied pig tails." Taffy mumbled as he fervently shook the aerosol can of ham mousse.

Mafuta looked around to see if anyone else was swapping goods from the bags the Hogsnuuff gifted to all the recruits. Some were sitting on the ground, much like Mafuta and Taffy and were happy to eat as much as they could as quickly as they could. Some others were still looking decidedly green, still trying to process the sights, sounds and smells from their future workplace. Penevieve, the girl with the red hair who had been unable to hold down her breakfast, stood alone. She had stopped crying over the inevitable fate of her beloved little piglet, but others were not overly keen to approach her, lest the threat of a *level 1* job should be catching.

As the chaperones joked with the bus driver and the Observers wrote their last few notes and scores, Taffy looked over at Rassie. She stared off into the distance, lost in a thought.

Sensing that she was being watched, Rassie turned to gaze at Taffy.

"I'm used to it, you know, people underestimating me, making assumptions about what I can and can't do. They see this chair and they think they know me."

"Don't pay any attention to him Rass, you're right, he doesn't know you."

Taffy saw Rassie's cheeks flush as she straightened herself in her wheelchair.

"But that's my point. That guy is *Level 12*, Taffy, and no, he doesn't know me and neither do these fools with their pens and paper." Rassie pointed at the Observers who were comparing notes and were happy to ignore the recruits. "But he makes the decisions about what I'll do for the rest of my life, and at the moment, it looks like he thinks that all I'm good for is going into the mincer with the other lame pigs."

"I get what you're saying," Taffy offered.

"No, you don't!" Rassie snapped.

"You're fat Taffy, they instantly see someone strong, someone who can lift, shove, heave and pull. Just by looking at you they make all kinds of assumptions; they have all sorts of plans for you already. Mr Hegg actually thought he was being polite, he thought he was offering me an opportunity. I wish he had ignored me Taffy, I hate this."

"You have nothing to worry about Rassie," Killen exclaimed loud enough for everyone to hear. "You heard old Hegg, there is a rule of heritage. Your Mum is *Level 4* and your Dad is *Level 6* so relax, you'll probably get a *level 5*. My parents are both *level 5*, so hey, I will be fine too." Ora and Momona stood beside Killen, smirks plastered on their faces. "In fact, the only one around here who should be worried is Taffy over here. His Dad is *level 1* and his Mum is... well that is anyone's guess."

In a second Taffy had leapt to his feet, grabbed Killen by the shirt and had pulled his arm back ready to aim his fist at Killen's grinning mouth.

"Stop it." Mafuta hissed

"Butt out, Mafuta, this fool is about to learn what happens when people talk about my family."

Mafuta pushed his way in between Taffy and Killen and stretched his arms open to keep the warring parties separated.

"You know, I'd love to see you flatten this guy Taffy, but now isn't the time." Mafuta nodded over in the direction of the Observers who were keen to see what the kerfuffle was about.

Taffy exhaled as his arms fell back beside him.

Killen smoothed down the front of his shirt. He tried to hide the large gulp of air he had taken, a reaction to the realisation that he had almost taken an almighty thump from Taffy Futt. However, desperate not to look weak, Killen stepped towards Taffy again. Loud enough for his friends and Taffy to hear but quiet enough so the Observers couldn't, Killen looked Taffy in straight in the eyes and threw down the offer

"Want to settle this on Crud Mountain?"

A wave of gasps and gaping mouths spread over the surrounding group. Momona and Ora looked at each other and then at Killen. Killen stared at Taffy.

"Yes. Tonight. Moonlight." Taffy replied, his eyes not shifting from Killen's.

"You hear that everyone? Tonight, on Crud Mountain."

A flurry of activity and hurried whispers. Plans made, and excuses formulated, no one wanted to miss out.

As he turned away, Killen whispered in Taffy's ear.

"I'll leave it up to you to bring the essentials. It seems something a *Level 1* would have access to."

"Laugh while you can," Taffy thought. He was done arguing. There was too much to do before tonight, before the Splatting.

17

Taffy arrived early. He dumped the hessian sack with the six boar's heads in it on the ground. Although Killen was an idiot, Taffy had to agree that being *Level 1* meant Parry had access to all kinds of parts and pieces. On the frequent occasion that Parry had wasted all their credits on booze, Taffy could go to the large skip bin behind the Hogsnuff and scoop out all the parts he wanted. Boar's head soup was easy enough to make, just water and a few spices. Taffy knew the rules though, the heads with the tusks were not for eating, they were to be left behind for occasions like this. Tusked boar heads were to be used solely for the exquisite art of splatting.

The huge crud stone at the back of the clearing had scores etched into them from decades ago. Taffy wondered if Parry had ever been up there to settle a grievance. Maybe he lost his arm during splatting? A tusk had pierced his arm, perhaps? Taffy shook the thought out of his head. It was pointless. As a child he often stared at Parry's hook and wondered how it came to be. Work accident, hog bite? Pecked off by crows, stuck in a big kettle and boiled off? Nothing was guaranteed to anger Parry faster than a question about his hook. Taffy stopped trying. It soon became impossible to ask him anything, the more he drank, the more he stopped talking about anything much at all.

At the very top of the crud stone Taffy noticed a number three cut into the stone. Not a regular number three, but written in old fashioned lettering Underneath, Taffy saw hundreds

of names and little lines besides them. Decades of Splatting scores immortalised in stone for ever more. Taffy shrugged his shoulders and squatted a few times to loosen up. The walk up Crud Mountain two was steep, fortunately visibility was still clear, and no need for goggles or gas masks as the wind was too light to kick up the filthy dust. Taffy was thirsty from the walk though. He pulled out a large bottle of water that he had dumped in with the boar heads. Enough to drink and enough to wash his hands and face with. Splatting was a messy endeavour.

As the cold water ran down his neck, Taffy could hear a mechanical humming sound in the distance, mixed in with raucous laughter. As the humming drew nearer, Taffy took a tentative peak over the sharp ledge and could see flames and smoke bursting out from behind a very small, fast-moving vehicle. A repeated tooting of the horn was met with more laughter. Taffy recognised those laughs. He turned back to the path in time to Rassie steering her wheelchair into position with an excitable Mafuta on the back.

"Three minutes and forty-six seconds." Rassie fist pumped the air as she unstrapped the belts that held her and Mafuta in place. "I bet no one has ever made it up here that fast before." Mafuta attempted to stand still. The speed at which they had ascended, leaving him rather unbalanced.

"I know you said you made some adjustments, Rass, but this is absolutely incredible!" Taffy looked over the chair again hoping that he might find propellers too.

"I've been looking for a good excuse to take her for a test run up here Taffy. Seeing you sock it to that fool Killen is as good a reason as any."

"I should have thumped him one when I had the chance." Taffy gazed down at the ground.

"It is better for each party to find a way to solve their disagreements amicably, without cruel words, threats or thwacks." Taffy and Rassie turned to face Mafuta, their mouths agape.

"What? It's in the **Determination manual**. I read! I need all the help I can get. I don't want to end up changing nappies on baby pigs only to have to chop them up the next day."

"Yeah, that poor girl," Rassie nodded.

"I'll say 'hi' when I come to clean up after you." Taffy half joked.

"Don't even listen to that rule of heritage crap," Mafuta moved closer. "Seriously, if it came down to that then they wouldn't have any of this, the testing, the tours, **Projection Day**. They'd just give you a job next to whichever parent they liked the most and move on."

"But it's kind of like what Rassie said before. What if they don't see what I can really do? What if being fat isn't as special as they all say and all they see is the son of the drunk guy who spends his day picking up snouts and bums?"

As Mafuta thought of comforting words, Rassie looked up from the hessian bag she had been peeking in.

"He also scoops up some really great heads! These are perfect." Rassie held the largest boar's head aloft. "Look at those tusks!"

"They are very impressive," Mafuta agreed pleased the topic had moved on.

"Hey watch this," Rassie called out before she brought the point of one of the boar tusks to her mouth. With a deep breath, Rassie blew into the tusk emitting a deep, powerful and resounding blast.

"Sounds like one of those old-fashioned horns they'd blow when they were going to war in the old days." Taffy laughed.

"Exactly!" Rassie grinned. "Maybe I should hook one up to the chair for when people annoy me."

"Blow it again, then Rassie." Taffy pointed to the path where Killen, Ora and Momona were emerging. "I see something annoying coming."

"Surprised to see you had the guts to come, Futt," Killen sneered as he entered the clearing. Mafuta and Rassie moved in beside Taffy, happy for the chance to face off against Killen who was similarly joined by Ora and Momona.

"Don't waste your energy talking smack." Taffy picked up the bags of heads and dropped them in front of Killen. "You'll need it all to throw these babies." I'll even let you choose which heads you want first. Don't feel bad, just because they are prettier than you."

Mafuta and Rassie made a show of laughing out loud at Taffy's weak attempt at mean talk. They both found pleasure in anyone having a go at Killen.

18

"The rules are simple."

A hush fell on the group. Taffy looked around at all the people who had gathered. He suspected all the recruits and most of their siblings had come. Taffy only vaguely recognised the referee, an older brother of one of the recruits probably. Someone they could get to referee at late notice. Taffy had seen him at school a few years earlier but supposed he must have been **Determined** already.

"Fights have been solved like this for as long as anyone can remember. Better to crack a pig's head open than each other's." The referee shouted out. The gathered murmured their agreement in hushed tones.

"Rule one. Whatever, brought you up here tonight, will be settled up here tonight. Regardless of who wins or loses. Whatever quarrel, action or foul word that caused your slight, ends tonight. Are both parties agreed?"

"Agreed." Taffy assured the referee.

He turned to Killen, his lip was curled, and his arms crossed.

"Agreed?" The referee asked again.

"Agreed," Killen spat out only when he felt the stares of everyone gathered on him.

"Your names have been scratched in the stone, as will the outcome. Proof that your score has been settled. There will be three rounds, distance, drop and wall. Are there any questions?"

Killen shook his head. Taffy looked over at Mafuta, who gave him a thumbs up.

"No questions either," Taffy replied. Glad that his friends were there to cheer him on.

"Then we will begin." The referee moved over to the cliff edge, wary of not standing too close.

"The first challenge is distance. Whoever throws their swine skull the furthest wins."

Taffy stood back as Killen got into position. Killen held the pig's head by the snout in his right hand and twirled it three times in a large swishing motion before releasing it over the edge.

The crowd moved in closer to watch as the head was caught up in a gust of wind and sailed over the Freeway, past the river and landed on the edge of a field that had grown wild with parp-blossoms. The crowd broke into applause. Taffy shot Mafuta a worried look. That was an outstanding throw, lucky that it had caught the wind, but a good throw all the same.

"Next." the referee motioned to Taffy to join him.

Taffy held his head by the ear. He preferred the hop, skip, and throw approach and let the head fly with one large overarm heave. The head sailed much like the first one had. It ascended with a graceful glide, but then the ears began to flap. An unwelcome burst of turbulence and the head faltered and descended in a straight line, almost instantly to the ground. The blast of a truck horn from way below them, sounded as it swerved to avoid hitting the pig head that had fallen from the sky. There were gasps from the crowd. It was unusual to have such an unsuccessful throw. Mafuta turned his face so Taffy wouldn't see his grimace.

A line was scratched into the rock next to Killen's name.

"Round two is called drop. A head is dropped onto the ground with such force as to shatter it. Whoever makes the most pieces wins. Killen, as the winner of round one, you go first. Should you win this round, the Splat is complete, and you shall leave, victorious."

"Looks like an early night then, doesn't it?" Killen replied.

Killen held the head but the snout again and waved the head up and down, it almost looked like the boar's head was nodding yes to someone. With a solid thud, the head hit the ground. It failed to crack at all.

"Ooooo..." the crowd all groaned in unison.

"Shut up, the lot of you," Killen snarled. "None of you could do any better."

Taffy smiled as sweetly as he could, knowing it would bother Killen all the more.

Taffy held his head by the ear this time too. It was easier to get a feel for the weight of the head when it was held by the ear. Taffy closed his eyes and on the count of three dropped the head to the ground beside him with almighty force. Taffy opened his eyes. The head had split into three pieces.

The crowd cheered and applauded.

"How did you crack it into three?" an impressed Mafuta asked as he patted Taffy on the back.

"I got lots of practice when I was younger. I used to stand out by the rubbish and smash all my father's grog bottles. Some of those things were still full. If you know the right point to hit it, you can smash anything."

"And now, round three, the tiebreaker, the great decider. Much like drop, wall requires you to splat the head against the wall. Most pieces wins."

"Proxy!" Killen called out.

"What's he saying?" Mafuta turned to Taffy.

"I know the rules. I'm allowed to call a proxy if I'm injured."

"That is usually reserved for people who are bleeding or have broken a bone and can't go on."

The referee looked Killen up and down in an attempt to see his injury.

"I tripped and sprained my ankle just before. I think it might be fractured." Killen grabbed at his ankle and twisted his face to suggest he was in terrible pain.

"He is right," the referee called out to stifle the orchestra of boos. The rules do state that if one is injured then a proxy may be called on. However, the rules also state that the proxy will be chosen by the opposition."

"That's not fair," Killen protested.

Ora came over and stood beside Killen. She attempted to help him up, but he cried out in pain.

"The choice is yours; you allow Taffy to choose a proxy, or you forfeit."

"All right then," Killen conceded, "let him choose."

Ora was still standing with Killen. Her long fingernails were painted pink and green to match the scarf that tied her long flowing hair out of her face. The heeled shoes and tight trousers she was wearing meant that a run and throw would be impossible, and Taffy was pretty sure she would not be at all keen to get her hands dirty. Taffy pointed at Ora "I choose you as proxy."

The way Ora and Killen looked at each other and grinned unnerved Taffy.

“Thank you, Happy to help.” Ora moved towards the referee.

“Am I allowed to take off some of these accessories? Only they’re my **Determination** best. I’d hate to get them dirty.” Ora fluttered her eyes at the referee.

“Fine. But get on with it.” he retorted, showing he was not impressed with Ora at all.

Ora untied her scarf and folded it neatly before handing it to Momona. Ora then held up her hands, allowing access to Momona to pull off each of her fake nails that had been lightly affixed. Lastly, Ora removed her high heels and stepped into a pair of work boots that Momona had waiting for her.

“I’m ready now,” Ora smiled.

“As the rules state, the proxy will splat the head against the wall, your aim is to smash it into as many pieces as possible.”

“Thank you, ref, I’ll try my best.”

Ora picked up the pig’s head. She turned to face Taffy and winked at him. Turning back, she threw the head in the air, she took a step back, as the head began to fall, she pivoted on her

spot, extended her leg and with a sharp forceful kick, sent the head spinning into the wall. It fell to the ground, shattered into five pieces.

Taffy knew he had been played. The crowd erupted. Never had such a force display been witnessed.

“Give up now,” Killen called out. “Save yourself the humiliation.”

“That will be hard to beat.” the referee inspected the head. “But you still have your turn. The choice is yours. You can splat, or, as proxy has been called you may choose someone else.”

Taffy knew how this would play out. Killen, Ora and Momona had planned this all afternoon. Who then, he thought, would they choose as Taffy’s proxy?

“Proxy please.” Taffy smiled sweetly mirroring Ora.

Taffy saw Killen whisper to Ora; they giggled like two conspirators. “I choose Rassie as proxy.” All heads turned to face Rassie, who had thoroughly enjoyed the whole splatting spectacle up to this point and was sitting back in her chair relaxed.

The corners of Taffy’s mouth turned upwards. Killen was so easy to read.

“Do you accept, Rassie?” The referee asked before he handed her the remaining pig head.

“Yes please!” Rassie beamed. Ora and Momona laughed and scoffed as she wheeled past them.

Rassie took hold of the head; she was familiar with it. She drew one of the tusks to her mouth and blew. She turned and winked at Taffy and threw the head with such force that the head bounced off the wall, bringing a large piece of stone down with it. Silence. The referee walked over and gasped.

"Twelve."

The eruption from the audience was like nothing Taffy had heard before. Rassie was surrounded by people patting her on the back, trying to figure out what she had just done. Killen, Ora and Momona stood with their mouths open. Killen looked like he was about to cry. There was another roar from the crowd. Taffy looked over to see Rassie had rolled up her sleeves to expose her enormous biceps.

"500 push-ups a day," Rassie laughed.

The referee saw a red-faced Killen walking towards the path. His ankle having made a miraculous recovery. He walked over to the crud rock and scratched the last line next to Taffy's name. "The victor has been named. The splat is complete. Whatever quarrel you had, is now over."

Taffy threw his arms up in the air, happy to take the last round of applause.

Part II

Projection

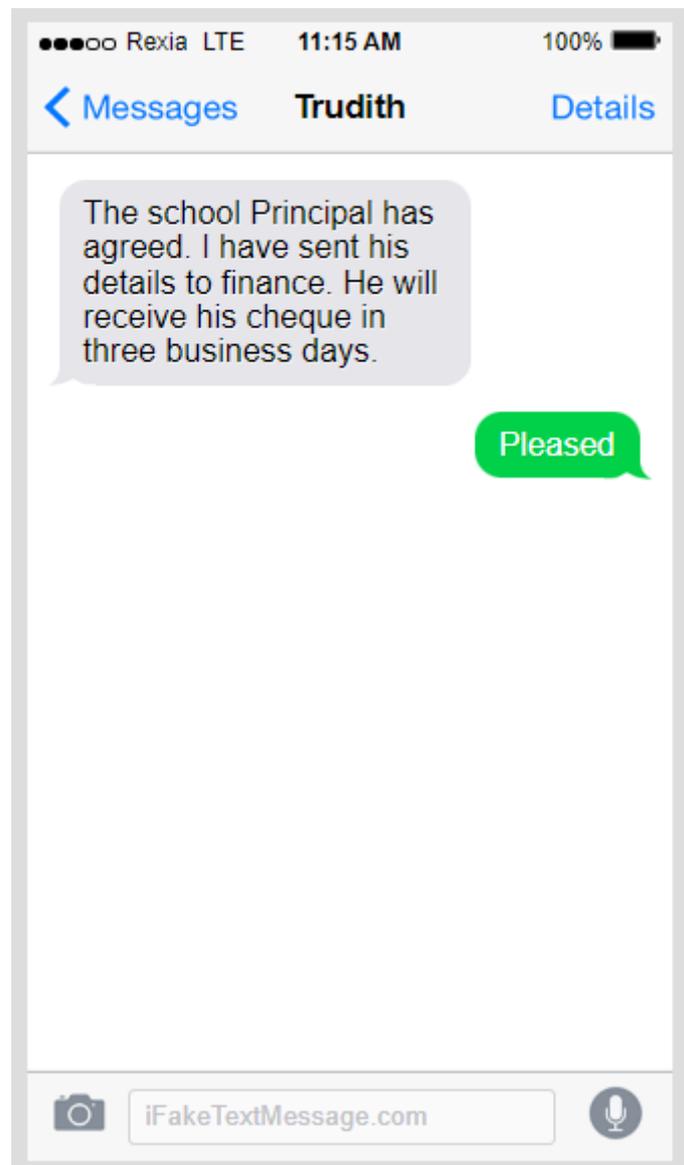
19

From the Determination Day manual, page 37

It is only fair that recruits be given details of their evaluation so that they may offer evidence of improvement. Indeed, a nervous disposition, malady or consumption of putrefied meats can lead to the false impression that a recruit is not suitable for a particular role, when in fact, it was merely an upset of their tubes that may have caused an expulsion of one's breakfast.

This process is known as **Projection**. Recruits will be given an indication of their projected **Determination**. This is not to be assumed an absolute, as stated, recruits often raise a *level* based on community service and positive involvement with others. A word of warning to those who receive an admiral **Projection**. This is not the time to rest on your laurels, others may prove that they are more deserving of a role than you.

20



FETOR LEVEL

5

Prepare for nastiness

21

It was the constant thump of music that Taffy noticed first. He felt it, deep in his chest. A band practising for **Determination Day** he supposed. As he neared the school, he could see dozens of black, shiny cars parked out the front. There were two large trucks alongside with their back doors parted wide to allow the endless parade of workers, in and out, each laden with boxes, baskets, bouquets of flowers and enormous bunches of balloons on strings bobbing along with the beat of the music.

Taffy double-checked his roster to make sure **Projection** was still happening in the school hall. All the flowers and balloons suggested a special occasion of some sort, but the St. Antony swineherd picnic was not for months yet, nor could Taffy recall hearing of anyone having a party. An event of such scale would hardly be kept secret.

Projection, on the other hand, was boring, but was usually over quickly. Some readings from the **Determination Day manual**, some advice on how to improve a low **Projection** and then all recruits lined up in single file receiving an envelope with their projected *level* written inside. Recruits were encouraged to take the envelope home to 'share the exciting news with their family'. Everyone knew that the real reason was no one at school wanted to deal with the running noses and puffy eyes from recruits who had just learnt they would be emptying huge vats full of crap for the foreseeable future.

One by one more recruits arrived to see the preparations going on before them. Taffy asked some others, but no one else had any idea what was going on and all the workers who were unloading the trucks seemed far too busy to be disturbed, so asking them was not an option. It was Mafuta who pointed out to the crowd a huge sign being unrolled and attached the side of the gym.

'Projection Day - brought to you by Magnesia Hunt'

"Who is Magnesia Hunt?" Taffy wondered out loud.

"Dunno," Mafuta replied, "but I like their tunes." Mafuta spun in a circle and clapped his hands before kicking his legs in the air. A circle formed around Mafuta, as he moved his body in time with the beat, people clapping along only encouraged him.

This was the perfect opportunity, Taffy thought as he plunged his hand into his backpack. The chocolate curd that Nally had given him a few days earlier was still in there. This was the ideal time to launch it straight at Mafuta. Slowly pulling it from his satchel and being careful not to let his twirling friend see him unwrap the hideous little log, Taffy readied himself. He planned to call out Mafuta's name, and the moment he turned to face him, he would strike.

A grab on the wrist and his plan was foiled.

"HA!" a triumphant Mafuta crowed. "Caught you! Better luck next time, chump."

Taffy grinned sheepishly, as Mafuta moved back into the circle to join Rassie who was also waving her hands skyward in time with the music.

A muffled announcement over the loudspeaker cut the music.

Everyone turned to hear the announcement better.

"As a very special treat, all students are to go immediately and quietly to the gym. Take a seat and await further instruction. All **Determinants** are to report to the rear of the gym."

Still unsure of what was happening, Taffy flung his satchel back over his shoulder and joined the others as they moved to the designated point behind the gym.

22

"Stop asking questions," Principal Lufta snapped. "They're from beyond the borders and that's all I know. You should consider yourself very lucky to have all this done for you, no other recruit has ever gotten this."

"But what exactly is all this?" Taffy asked as he raised his hand.

"I told you to stop asking questions. I have pinned a list to the door. They want you to line up according to the list. Now Line up! Stand at the back and wait for your name to be called."

As the recruits filed in, Taffy found his name at the bottom of the list. Whatever was happening, he would be the last to find out.

Inside, lights flashing blue, green, red, and yellow. The ceiling was an ocean of balloons with long ribbons dangling off them like tails. The gym was full of seated students and staff who stared around in awe, equally baffled as to why they were there and the sheer scale of the decorations, lighting and music. A DJ stood to the left of the makeshift stage, with inordinately large headphones attached to his head. Opposite him, to the right of the stage, a woman who had control of the lights. She pressed buttons with such speed that Taffy could

barely make out what buttons made which light flash. Between her and the DJ, they had changed the Plightpool school hall from a drab, sweat centred gym into a raging dance party.

A tap and a squeal of the microphone "Attention please, Attention!" The music volume lowered as the coloured lights were replaced by a spotlight focussed on Principal Lufta.

"Yes, thank you everyone. As you have noticed, something very special has been organised for the **Determinants** this year."

A sign above the principal flashed the words 'APPLAUSE.'

Those seated did as they were told and offered a reserved round of applause.

"We also have a very special guest with us today, from a big city, far across the borders, I would like to introduce Ms. Trudith B. Lumia."

‘APPLAUSE.’

A tall woman, with bright red hair that was pulled back into a tight bun crossed the floor. She didn't make eye contact with Mr Lufta as she approached, instead he quickly sat down in the front row, and bowed his head, like a dog that has been chastised by its master.

"Good morning everyone." Trudith smiled, baring her unusually white teeth. "What an experience it has been coming to your... unique... town."

"I've seen her," Taffy whispered to Mafuta as they stood at the rear of the gym. "The other day when they were driving into town." Taffy regarded Trudith. Although she was smiling, her eyes didn't match, they weren't joyful. It was almost as if she was thinking something nasty.

"News has travelled far, about this special group of people who are about to embark on a huge adventure. And we at Magnesia Hunt just knew we could help to make this special time of your life even better."

‘APPLAUSE.’

Trudith released the microphone from its stand and held it in her thin, wiry hands.

"Does anyone know what a 'Motivational lifestyle enhancing invigorator' is?" Trudith looked around the room in an exaggerated fashion pretending someone might actually know what she was talking about.

"Of course not. Let me put it another way. Do you sometimes wake up still feeling tired? You wish you had more energy? You wish you could somersault down the street instead of just walking?"

Trudith was met with a crowd of blank stares.

"Alright... let's think about this differently. You there little one" Trudith pointed to a small boy in the second row of the audience. "How did you get to school today?"

"Walked."

"Tell me, have you ever thought how much fun it would be to *fly* to school?"

Before the boy had a chance to answer Trudith pointed at a girl at the back. "You look like an ordinary teenage girl."

The girl nodded

"Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be *Extraordinary*?"

The girl grinned sheepishly, her cheeks flushing red.

Trudith smiled "At Magnesia Hunt, we believe that all of you are extraordinary people. So why be content to be yesterday when you can be today!"

Taffy turned to Mafuta "What the hell is she talking about?"

"Shhh, man, I'm trying to hear." Mafuta craned his neck to get a better look at Trudith.

The DJ turned the music back on, and the beat quietly rose, and the coloured lights began to flash again.

“Don't settle on being plain, like everyone else, the same. At Magnesia Hunt, we know what young people want, and we know how to help you become the very best version of yourself.”

‘HANDS IN THE AIR.’

The music began to pump louder as everyone in the crowd raised their hands up and began to sway to the music.

Trudith began to shout into the microphone to be heard over the music, she moved around the gym pointing at people, smiling and pumping her fist.

"Show the world how great you are. Make your outside match your inside. Let the world see that you are successful, that you are spectacular, that you are thin!" Trudith's voiced boomed.

"Thin?" Taffy placed both hands on his hips. "Who the hell wants to be thin?"

"At Magnesia Hunt, we know that it no longer takes a lifetime to achieve success, you can get it instantly AND in a variety of amazing flavours."

‘APPLAUSE, APPLAUSE, APPLAUSE.’

"As a reward for their commitment, hard work and perseverance, we have a very special offer for this year's **Determinants**.”

A ripple of excitement ran through everyone who stood waiting in the back.

“One by one, I’m going to invite these wonderful people on stage. I have all your **Projections** right here. Regardless of what they say, I know that by agreeing to sample our motivational, invigorating, taste-tingling tonic, we can make you the very best version of yourself.”

‘APPLAUSE.’

Taffy looked at the audience. Their eyes were glazed over. This was less like a school assembly, he thought, and more like the travelling preachers who sometimes came to town. People swaying, others gyrating, and more still who were desperate to be part of the spectacle.

“The first person I’d like to invite on stage has had a rough time of it.” Taffy looked up to see Peneveive, the red-haired girl from the tour of the Hogsnuuff, being led by the hand to join Trudith on stage.

Peneveive looked at the ground. No doubt tired of being known as the girl who chucked up. Trudith placed her right arm around her shoulder.

“I read your file.” Peneveive squirmed

“And I instantly knew it was nonsense.”

The girl looked up at Trudith, her eyes widening.

“You can’t be defined by one incident, a small indiscretion. Real success is about getting up each day and deciding that you are wonderful, that you are formidable, that you look great.”

‘APPLAUSE.’

“Would you like to feel confident every day?” Trudith held the microphone in front of the girl.

“Yes, yes please.” Penevieve stammered.

“And would you like to feel that you are unstoppable?”

“Yes.”

“And would you like to look great while you take on the world?”

“YES, I WOULD!”

“Then welcome to your new life!”

‘APPLAUSE.’

“With our amazing new lifestyle enhancer, Magnesia Hunt, you will be loved, needed and adored. Just sign over here on the dotted line agreeing that you are committed to being

wonderful, and you will receive your **Projection** and everything you will need to become the very best person you can be."

Penevieve leapt across the stage and over to a table that was laden with enormous gift baskets and bouquets of flowers. She snatched the pen from one of the worker's hands and signed the contract instantly. Penevieve beamed a great confident smile.

Trudith ushered her back onto the stage.

‘APPLAUSE’

Penevieve curtsied.

"Congratulations, on the start of your best life." Trudith shouted into the microphone.

"And let's meet the next person to have their life changed."

Taffy rolled his eyes as Momona, Ora and Killen lunged forward with dozens of others. All desperate to be the next invited on stage.

"This is ridiculous." Taffy shook his head.

"What's wrong, man? I love this," Mafuta shouted.

"Seriously? Did you hear her say this stuff is going to make you thin?"

“So?”

“Come on. You are always saying it’s unfair that you’re so thin. Are you really going to risk losing weight this close to **Determination**?”

"She doesn't mean it man; a drink can't make you thin. Besides, I want a gift basket, and I'll be in my Mum's good books forever if I bring her one of those huge bunches of flowers."

Taffy shook his head, "But don't you think..."

Mafuta cut him off "Why are you being a party pooper, man? Everyone is enjoying this, it's fun."

Taffy wanted to argue, but Mafuta was called to the stage. He couldn't believe Mafuta was falling for it. Taffy turned his eyes away from the stage, he couldn't believe that his best friend was actually up there dancing with that woman. That woman... Who was she? Taffy wondered. Why would someone come all the way from across the borders for a rather ordinary group of recruits just to give out free samples of some drink? Taffy looked around the gym. The lights, the music, all the decorations and the gifts, must have cost thousands to make this happen. It bothered Taffy that more had been spent on that one day than his father would earn in a year. And a contract. Why would they want recruits to sign a contract before they had been **Determined**? It annoyed Taffy; that woman annoyed Taffy. The fake smile, and those cold eyes. Then it hit him, those eyes reminded him of eyes he had seen recently, cold,

judgemental, plotting eyes that seemed to drill straight through him. These were the harsh, steely eyes of Irenka Plightpool.

A shiver ran down Taffy's spine. There was something decidedly wrong going on. His impulse was to leave, but as he turned towards the door, he heard his name being called on the microphone.

"Taffy Futt, last, but by no means least."

Taffy hesitated, but the spotlight found him. He squinted in the bright lights. On the other side of the gym, he could see Mafuta, Rassie and everyone else waiting expectedly. His instincts were telling him to leave, but he didn't want to disappoint his friends, and he didn't want to lose face in front of the whole school. Taffy placed his hand in his pockets and inhaled deeply. He felt the squelch of the chocolate curd against his right hand. He hoped it hadn't melted too much and left a suspicious mark on him.

Taffy stepped onto the stage. His eyes met Trudith's. She smiled and beckoned him beside her.

"Please, come stand beside me." Trudith held the microphone up to Taffy as he approached.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Taffy Futt."

"Welcome, Taffy. My name is Trudith. Nice to meet you, too."

"Thanks, Trude."

The music faltered and the workers who had only moments earlier been concerned with flowers, gift baskets and wrangling overexcited recruits all stopped in their spots and stared at the stage.

Trudith cleared her throat. "It's Trudith."

"Taffy, are you ready to change your life? Are you ready to show the world that you are so much more than what people see? Although your outward appearance may be unfortunate, your heart is pure. Taffy Futt, are you willing to join your friends and sign up for the most wonderful life imaginable?"

Taffy leant into the microphone.

"No thanks, Trude."

Silence.

The music stopped playing, and the lights were all switched off. Taffy looked around the gym to find that the swaying and dancing and energetic fervour had all ceased and was replaced with a room full of open mouths. Shocked and agape like stunned codfish. All eyes were on Taffy Futt.

"I... I... beg your pardon?"

"I said, no thanks, Trude."

"But... you must."

"No, I don't."

"But... but I'm offering you a new life, a better life."

"I'm happy with the life I've got; thanks all the same."

"You can't be," Trudith's voice quivered. "You're fat."

"Too right, three times bigger than any other recruit," Taffy wobbled his belly for the benefit of his classmates. A few giggles broke out amongst the audience, and from the back, someone shouted, "Go Taffy!"

Trudith spluttered into the microphone; her face flushed bright red.

"Shut up!" She screamed. "You have been given an amazing opportunity. You don't have to be like this, you don't have to be fat, you don't have to be... hideous."

The crowd gasped. Taffy's lips tightened as he placed his hands on his hips.

"I might be hideous, Trude, but at least I'm not a shithead."

Before Trudith could make sense of what Taffy had just said, he launched the object from his pocket that hit its target, right between Trudith's eyes. Before she could register the brown sticky log that was attached to her face, the entire gym, burst out laughing.

"Stop it!" she screamed, but it only made it worse as the chocolate curd rolled down her face leaving a ghastly brown trail in its wake.

Pointing, raucous laughter and chants of "Chocolate turd, Chocolate turd."

Taffy walked over to the gift table, snatched the envelope with his **Projection** inside and waved it merrily before he walked outside.

As the door closed behind him, the laughter erupted all over again.

23

"You open yours first" Mafuta waved his envelope back and forth like he was fanning himself.

"Let's open them together?" Taffy turned his over, back to front a nervous feeling growing in the pit of his stomach.

"Alright." Mafuta smiled

Taffy tore the top from his envelope. He looked over to make sure Mafuta had done the same.

His eyes scanned the document, "blah blah blah, many variables to consider, blah blah blah, all jobs are important jobs, blah blah blah, based on our current observations **Projection** of a *Level 4 - Heave and Lift* **Determination**.

Taffy jumped up and down on the spot, cheering as loud as his voice would allow. Mafuta stood up and grabbed Taffy's letter. His eyes bulged out.

"You got a four too. I can't believe it, man! We're going to be fours; we are going to be **FOURS!**"

Taffy and Mafuta clutched hands and spun in a circle like children playing a game. They giggled just as heartily too. Taffy realised the noise they were making was louder than he imagined when he noticed Parry stumble into the room.

"Can't anyone get any sleep around here?" Parry puffed, his eyes squinted as they adjusted to the light of the room."

"Sorry to wake you... so early in the afternoon." Taffy released Mafuta's hand and held out the letter for Parry to see.

"Mafuta and I both got *Level 4 Projections*."

Parry looked around the room, hoping one of the discarded bottles might have a drop left in the bottom "Yeah?" Parry slid into the nearest armchair; his legs having not sobered from the night before. "*Level 4, Level 100*, who cares? I bet they didn't tell you on your tour that no matter what *level* you get, you still just have to scoop pig crap. That's all anyone does, it's all just pig crap.

Taffy's face fell, and Mafuta stopped dancing.

"I should get going, Taff." Mafuta picked up his letter. "My parents will be so happy with this. All that money spent on the Priestess was worth it."

Taffy smiled.

"Besides, tonight we all have to try our first sample of that drink, that Magnesia Hunt stuff."

"Seriously Mafuta? You're still going to drink that crap?"

"Apparently it is really good for you. It can make you stronger and faster. Apparently, there was a deaf guy who drank it and it made him hear again... or something like that."

"Yeah, sounds legitimate," Taffy rolled his eyes.

"It's not just that, you can win prizes and cash too. Next week they're going to weigh us and give us tips on having the best life."

Taffy groaned.

"It's just a bit of fun, Taffy. Just for fun. What harm can it do?"

24

"That is amazing Taffy. I knew you would get a great **Projection**, I knew it."

Taffy sat on the bench as Borghust beamed from behind the counter. "Did they say what department?"

"Heave and lift, but not which section. I guess I'll have to wait until **Determination**."

That won't be long. And you never know, they could even raise it higher between now and then?"

"Is that what happened to you?" Taffy walked over to the counter and leaned against it.

Borghust was leafing through paperwork, happy for any distraction, but knowing he was soon going to have to fill in all the blank spaces and file it all.

"It was different when I was **Determined**. Back then they put a lot more stock into the Rule of Heritage. We all still did the tour and had the medical tests and everything, but my mother was *Level 11 - Law & Correct*, so I knew I'd probably get something like that. They gave me

LEVEL 9 - Learn & Law, so my mother trained me up. When she died, I was promoted to *level 11.*"

Taffy raised his eyebrows, his interest piqued. "Do they do that much anymore? The training I mean. Would they let a recruit train with you?"

"I suppose they might if there was a need for it. I'm not sure they need any more law here. Not much ever happens."

"I was just thinking out loud. Taffy looked downwards."

Borghust leant over and patted Taffy on the shoulder. "I would love to train you Taffy, I really would. You are smart, big, strong and you have integrity. You know I heard about what happened at **Projection** yesterday.

Taffy grinned.

"Good on you. What a lot of nonsense. Flowers and balloons. Who are they trying to impress?"

"It was strange. Everyone else seemed to enjoy it, but it didn't feel right to me."

"Rule one of keeping order, always trust your instincts. Maybe we'll make a law man out of you yet." Borghust laughed.

"Imagine," Taffy smiled. I would love that.

"You never know Taffy; strange things do happen. You learn that very quickly in this job.

Strange things do happen."

25

Momona looked at herself in her compact mirror. She pouted her lips and then licked them to make them shine. She ran her fingers through her long, dark hair trying to make it remain as straight as possible.

"Maybe I should push my hair back in a bun, like she wears hers?"

Ora rolled her eyes and clicked her tongue. "Stop being so desperate, she probably won't even notice you. I saw her smile at me during **Projection**, I'm pretty sure she just wants to catch up with someone with an iota of fashion sense." Ora brushed the front of her coat and pushed her blond bob behind her ears.

Killen placed his coffee cup down with a thud. "The invitations said all three of us were to meet her, and didn't say anything about fashion." Killen gave a quick look over his shirt just to make sure there were no stains. He rubbed his finger over his nose to remove any potential embarrassments and shook his head, hoping to dislodge any unseen detritus from his light auburn hair.

"You should have seen the look on my mother's face when she answered the door this morning," Killen chuckled. "All those black cars parked out the front and the man dressed in a black suit with the envelope on a cushion. She said she thought someone must have died at first, all those people stood by their cars looking sullen. She was so impressed when the guy handed her the envelope and then bowed. She said she went flush in the face."

"My neighbours were so jealous," Momona added. She ran a comb through her hair, having finally decided she would wear it down. "I could see them all peeking out the window. After I was given my invitation, I waved to them all. That'll give them something to talk about."

"Would you like to order anything else?" a distracted voice called out from behind the counter of the *Level 3: Hot drinks and tea cakes*.

"Not yet," Ora answered, "We've been invited here to meet someone important."

The woman behind the counter feigned a smile.

"We'll order something else when she arrives."

Killen looked at his wristwatch and then stood up and looked out the large windows that offered a great view of the main street. "It has to be something to do with **Projection**. Surely. She would have noticed that we were the only three who didn't look like we'd just been for a swim in the pig crap tank in the Hogsnuuff."

All three began to laugh so heartily that they almost missed seeing the black car pull up to the curb. It was the creak of the glass door opening that alerted them to her arrival.

Trudith B. Lumia stood in the doorway, her orange hair pulled back into a bun, as usual. Ora was glad she didn't try to copy. She slid into her chair a little. Trudith was much taller than Ora remembered, up close with the daylight illuminating her face, Ora thought Trudith was absolutely stunning and younger than she had first thought. Ora looked over at her friends who were similarly dazzled, Killen's mouth agape.

"Well how lovely. You came." Trudith held out her hand to each of the teenagers. They shook in turn, still not finding the right words to say.

Finally, Ora muttered, "I love your shirt." before turning bright red.

"Well, aren't you the sweetheart? You must be Ora?"

"Yes'm" Ora replied, barely daring to make eye contact with Trudith. "And this is my best friend, Momona and our other friend Killen."

Momona nodded a polite greeting while Killen responded with "How ya' going?"

Ora kicked him under the table, hard. He was about to protest but thought better of it when he saw the look on Momona's face.

Trudith pulled a chair out from the small round table and wiped it with a handkerchief before sitting on it. She placed her handbag on the table and a pair of sunglasses beside it. She was pleased by the look on Ora's face that she recognised how expensive the bag was.

"No doubt you're all desperate to know why I've invited you here?" Trudith made a mental note to smile periodically. She found this difficult to do, exchanging pleasantries didn't come easy to her.

"Yes." the three teenagers all uttered in unison.

"But firstly, allow me to order some refreshments."

Killen sat up straight and began making a silent list of all the things he wanted to order. He could tell by her clothes and her jewellery that Trudith had money, and he always believed that the best tasting lunch was a free lunch.

"A large jug of ice water please, and four glasses," Trudith called out.

Killen's face fell.

Trudith opened her handbag and pulled out a sachet of Pineapple flavoured Magnesia Hunt.

"A special treat for some special people."

Killen tried to smile, hoping they would have a drink before they ordered food.

Trudith poured a glass of water for herself and then tore the top off the packet of Magnesia Hunt and dumped the powdery contents into the jug. She didn't need to stir; the water turned a brilliant yellow colour as the powder dissolved. As she filled the other three glasses with the liquid she moved in closer.

"I saw something very special at our little event the other day." Trudith started. "Three beautiful young people with such incredible potential."

"Who were they?" Killen asked.

"Oh, your naiveté is so endearing." Trudith leant over the table and patted Killen on the hand.

"What does that mean?" Killen whispered under his breath.

"You three, of course." Trudith added.

Ora looked at Momona and smiled.

"You see, I need some vibrant, inspired people to make sure that everyone who has committed to taking the Magnesia Hunt challenge is actually sticking to it. You know? No sneaking assorted hog parts, or whatever you all eat around here."

"You mean spy on them?" Killen interjected.

"Oh goodness no. I mean, you three have qualities that are rarely seen in people your age and I want to offer you all an amazing opportunity. Have you ever heard of the phrase Brand ambassador?"

"What does that mean?" Killen whispered under his breath again.

"It means, that right now you and your friends are the most important people in this town."

Momona and Ora couldn't hide the look of delight on their faces.

"If you agree, you shall talk to people, check up on them, make sure they have a plentiful supply of Magnesia Hunt, that sort of thing."

Killen, looked down at the table "Yeah well, some are easier to talk to than others."

Trudith nodded. "Of course, there will be some who you get on better with, but as brand ambassadors, it will be your job to talk to everyone.

Killen slouched in his chair.

"A brand ambassador knows how to create energy; they can make people come to them. Create an environment that is fun and exuberant, like we did for **Projection**."

"Yeah," Ora added. We can invite some people around to my house and we can ..."

"That is sweet." Trudith cut Ora off. "But I'm thinking larger, fun, excitement, music."

"A party?" Momona squealed.

"Exactly!"

"Yeah", Momona leapt in. "We can get everyone up on the turd mountains and we can..."

"NO!" Trudith screwed up her nose like she had caught a whiff of something bad.

"Something with class, something sophisticated. Those on the Magnesia Hunt challenge deserve something, divine."

Trudith unfastened the clasp on her handbag and pulled out the biggest wad of cash the three had ever seen in their lives.

"You and your friends are special," Trudith moved in very close, and whispered "You and your friends are chosen."

Killen inched his hand closer and closer to the wad of cash.

"A Magnesia Hunt party. A place for all the best people to have fun and transform their bodies together, in style."

"Yeah but, not so many people want to lose any weight."

Trudith slapped Killen on the hand and snatched the money out of his reach.

"Backwards!" Trudith's tone had changed. "You're all backwards. I come here with the most amazing opportunity of your lives, and you tell me no one wants to be thin? Backwards."

"Only, you get a better **Determination** if you're fat," Momona muttered.

"Maybe so, but can you wear beautiful clothes if you're fat? Can you Lie in the sun? Can you kiss your true love at midnight in the moonlight?"

"Umm... yes?" Ora ventured

"NO" Trudith pounded the table with her fist. "I must have made a mistake. Clearly you aren't as special as I thought. Trudith slid her glasses over her nose and shouted "Cheque please."

Momona was at the point of tears when Killen stood up.

"Let us show you?"

Trudith slowly removed her glasses again. "Go on."

"Let us show you that we can make everyone drink Magnesia Hunt. We will throw the biggest party and invite everyone, and we'll tell them, we'll *make* them believe that this stuff is the best."

Momona and Ora both wiped their eyes. "I promise we can make you proud Ms. Lumia."

Trudith pushed the cash over to Killen. "I believe you can my darlings, I believe you can."

As Killen stuffed the cash into his trouser pocket he snorted. "I can't wait to see the look on everyone's faces when they see what we do with all this."

"Almost everyone," Trudith added. "There was one ghastly boy, Tally or Tabby?"

"Taffy" Momona piped in.

"That's him. He was so rude, so cynical. Don't invite him. Everyone else, his friends, his acquaintances, everyone else, but not him."

Momona, Ora and Killen had already begun discussing their plans for the party. Trudith sat back and grinned.

26

Voreen sucked on her cigarette, long and deep. She exhaled, the smoke swirling around her head.

"I knew you'd do well darl, didn't I say that Taffy would do well?"

"Yeah." Nally didn't bother looking up from the daily quiz in the paper.

"Thanks, Voreen, I'm pretty chuffed, it was a good **Projection.**" Taffy smiled.

"You never know, Taffy, you might get **Determined** for something better? That happens sometimes."

"That could be interesting," Taffy smiled, imagining himself sitting beside Borghust like in a police show from across the borders that he had seen once.

Voreen flicked her cigarette butt outside into the gutter. She picked up the mop that was resting against the wall "I thought you'd been having a lie in this morning Taffy, like everyone else, after that shindig last night?"

"What shindig?" Taffy asked as he decided which brand of mustard pig tails he wanted.

"You know. Last night, up at the centre. All the kids were there." Voreen mopped under the shelf that Taffy was standing in front of.

He looked perplexed. "I'd know if there was a party. Maybe it was a birthday or some sort of family gathering?"

"Nah", Nally started. "They didn't come here for any nibbles or eats. Apparently, they just had drinks, that stuff they gave you all at the **Projection**. Nasty tasting crap couldn't give it away. It's all over there on the discount shelf if you want it."

"No thank you, they offered me some the other day. They weren't too happy when I turned it down."

Voreen slid another cigarette into her mouth. "Who the hell would want to be thin? That makes no sense. Imagine getting a *Level 6 - Hog Haul* and you turn up to work too thin and weak to even carry a piglet."

Taffy placed his basket on the counter. He handed Nally his credit book. "A bit overdue, this month lad. Get your dad to come in soon."

Taffy's cheeks reddened. "I don't need all of this; I can put some stuff back."

Nally scooped up Taffy's shopping and placed it in a brown paper bag. "No need for that lad, you need to stay fat and strong for **Determination** I'm sure we'll work something out."

"Thank you," Taffy uttered, making sure he would tell Parry to pay the account as soon as he could.

"Oooh, look at that, Vore" Nally pointed to the street where a shiny black car had pulled up to the curb, the polished tyres driving over and extinguishing the cigarette Voreen had thrown out there earlier.

"It's the woman who came to our school. Her name is Trude. I think her face would crack if she smiled."

"She's probably here about that powdery mess her people wanted to sell here. I'll tell her to take it all back. Nasty stuff."

Taffy smiled, relieved knowing he wasn't the only one who didn't trust Trudith B. Lumia or her potion.

"Do you mind if I nip out the back door Nally? Only I'm not really in the mood to bump into her again."

Nally nodded. "No worries lad. She's about to get the short shift from here too."

Taffy picked up his bag of groceries as he walked through the door behind Nally which lead to the back room and then the laneway behind the shop. Then he stopped. He liked the idea of Trudith getting another dressing down, having someone wipe the smug, fake smile off her face. Taffy tiptoed closer to the door. He peeked around just enough so that he could see, but not enough that he risked being seen.

Trudith held out her hand for Nally to shake.

"Now don't waste your time Missy, I didn't sell one packet of that junk, you can take the lot of it back with you."

Taffy smiled. He wanted to laugh, but he didn't risk getting caught.

"That is fine. We have chosen a more efficient method of distribution."

Nally placed his pen down on the counter. "Then what is it you have come for today?"

Trudith looked around the shop. I'm glad no one else is here. I need to speak to you and your wife. Kindly lock the door."

Taffy eyes followed Trudith as she walked around the shop, surveying its contents.

"No love," Voreen inhaled. "I'm not locking the door. What if someone wants to come in?"

Trudith smirked.

From behind his vantage spot Taffy watched as Trudith unbuttoned her coat. She folded it neatly before placing it on the counter. Trudith then began to unbutton her white, silk blouse.

"What do you think you're doing, love?" Voreen demanded.

Instead of answering Trudith turned around, her back facing Nally and Voreen.

They gasped.

Taffy strained to see what had made them exclaim. On Trudith's back was a yogh, an old letter three, but it wasn't a tattoo, it was a birthmark. Nally looked at Voreen, together they held out their arms for Trudith to see the tattoos of yoghs on their arms.

Trudith grinned "It is happening Anhängers, the prophecy. Our work has begun."

Voreen snibbed the lock on the front door. "There is much to discuss."

Taffy made his way out onto the lane as fast as he could.

-

"So, if you get this message Mafuta, call me back." Taffy hung up the phone.

Taffy looked at the floor and started to count. There were eighteen bottles that he could see, but he was sure he would find some more on top of the bookshelf.

Instead of making several trips outside to the glass bin, Taffy figured it would be quicker to bring the bin inside, load it up and then take the whole lot out at once.

The smell hit Taffy as he opened the door. The winds were up, visibility was moderate, so Taffy didn't run back for his miasma mask. As he picked up the bin, he saw a group of people across the street huddled around the daily paper. Taffy looked up the street and saw more people also consumed by the paper, and beyond them, still more people shaking their heads in disbelief.

"Hello" Taffy called out to his neighbour, "what's going on?"

"Haven't you heard?" Taffy looked, as the paper was held aloft.

"It's front-page news. Mr Hegg is being investigated. They say there will be an enquiry, maybe charges laid."

Taffy moved in closer to catch a glimpse of the headlines.

"It's outrageous," Taffy heard a man across the street start. "I was **Determined** 40 years ago, and Mr Hegg took me under his wing on my first day. I don't believe a word of it, not a word."

"Fraud, embezzlement and secret bank accounts!" Taffy could just make out on the paper.

"What will happen to the Hogsnuuff? To all of us? To Plightpool?" Taffy could hear the panic rise in his neighbour's voices.

"It says here there is to be a temporary administrator, to oversee things while all this nonsense gets sorted."

"Well, who could possibly do as wonderful a job as Mr Hegg? No one was as devoted to that place as he was."

"Let me see?" Someone leant over and snatched the paper out of Taffy's hand. "It says here, the new overseer of Plightpool pork products is Ms. Trudith B. Lumia."

Taffy Futt gasped.

27

"Seriously man, if you're sick or something, let me know. I keep calling but you don't ring back."

Taffy hung up the phone.

Taffy didn't bother calling Rassie, he knew she would be down at the garage working on her chair or on whatever piece of junk her brothers were trying to revive. He figured he would have a wash and stop by there later and see if she had heard from Mafuta. If not, he would go for a walk, past the Hogsnuff perhaps.

Parry had been out of sorts since the change of management at work. There were tests, he had muttered one night. Taffy didn't bother to ask what sort of test. If Parry was this upset, then Taffy knew it must have been some kind of blood alcohol test.

There was a knock at the door. Taffy smiled, finally Mafuta was coming around to see him. He was going to give him a hard time for not returning his calls.

As he opened the door a man dressed in a black suit stood before him holding a gift basket covered in ribbons.

"A delivery for a Taffy Futt." the man announced.

"That's me." Taffy was decidedly confused.

The man handed Taffy the basket, turned and walked away. Inside Taffy couldn't wait to tear open the pale gift wrap on the basket. His face soon fell. Inside was a packet of Magnesia Hunt and a handwritten note.

"Last chance." the note read.

Taffy grabbed up the basket, the powder and all the ribbons, marched to the front door which was still open from the delivery and with all his strength, flung the gift basket outside. He slammed the door behind him.

From across the street Trudith watched from the backseat of her black car. Her lips pursed and then tightened.

"Idiot boy." she muttered before demanding the driver take her away.

28

"I'm sure he'll turn up. Is he volunteering somewhere? You know, to improve his **Determination**?" Borghust poured hot cocoa into two cups and handed one to Taffy.

"I guess he could be, but he would have said something to me." Taffy sipped from his cup, distracted. "You haven't heard anything? Nothing from his family?"

Borghust sat on a swivel chair and rested his feet on the desk. "No, haven't heard much of anything from anyone. Of course, a lot of people were upset when they heard about Mr Hegg, but not a whole lot has changed at the Hogsnuuff."

Taffy looked up from his hot drink. "So... did he do it?"

Borghust glared at Taffy "You know I can't talk about it, the case is still active."

"Yeah, I can see you're run off your feet."

Borghust took a long swig from his cup and looked past Taffy, distracted. "I must admit that this isn't the usual way in which an investigation would be handled, but I got word from some officials from across the borders that they will be handling primary investigations, collecting

data, bank statements, that kind of thing. I said I was here if they needed me. I wasn't asked to come along when they arrested Mr Hegg, they won't tell me where he is now."

Taffy placed his empty cup on the desk. "This is your town though, you're the law, and your Mum was the law before you, so surely you have more of a say about what happens to the people in it than some officials from far away."

Borghust tipped the cup up and swallowed the last drops. "And my mother's mother was the law and her Father and His Father before him. So, it might seem like I have some power around here Taffy, but power is an interesting concept. Look at Mr Hegg. One day he has all the power, he had some measure of control over every person in this town. Had he so desired, one swish of his pen and I would have been **Re-Determined Level 2 - Ear wash and trotter clip**, because he had the power to do it. Now, he has no power at all. You get what I'm saying?"

Taffy nodded thoughtfully, "Yes, and now Trude has all the power"

"Who?"

"That woman who took over **Projection Day** and gave out that cruddy drink, she is in charge of the Hogsnuuff now."

"Oh yes, This Trudith Lumia. I haven't met her yet, but I did read that her position at the Hogsnuuff was only temporary."

"I hope so. I don't trust her."

Borghust raised his left eyebrow and turned to Taffy, "Interesting. I did always tell you to trust your instincts. I might make a sleuth out of you yet." The police phone began to ring.

"So, the first thing I want you to do is go find your friend." Borghust winked.

Taffy waved goodbye and left the station allowing Borghust to answer the phone.

"Yes, how can I help you? Certainly Ms. Lumia, it would be lovely to meet you."

29

Taffy left the garage. He hoped to find Rassie there, but her brothers explained that she had been ill for the last few days, listless and bilious.

Taffy walked down the main street. There was no one at the park, or at the corn barn. He wondered if there had been a meeting called that he had forgotten. Another part of the **Determination** event that he was supposed to attend. Taffy looked up at the turd mountains to see if perhaps there was a splatting happening up there, but even though there was considerable crud dust blowing off the mountains Taffy could tell there was no one up there.

Taffy turned and began a few steps towards home when he noticed, walking into the café, across the street and down one, someone who he thought was Mafuta, going inside.

"Mafuta!" Taffy yelled out "Maf!"

Taffy began to walk towards the café. Whoever it was, they hadn't heard him yelling out to them.

There was an emptiness to the street that Taffy had only just become aware of. Not nearly as many people as usual and those that were about were older. Shopping, coming back from their shift at the Hogsnuff, but no one in a school uniform and certainly no recruits.

The café had huge glass windows that gave Taffy an open view inside. Sat at one table were Ora, Momona and Killen, to the left of them a table of four others just sat, looking glum and in the corner, was Mafuta.

Taffy pushed the door open and walked inside. Despite the rusty screech of the door that reminded Taffy of someone running their fingers down a chalkboard, no one turned around. Taffy immediately thought that something bad had happened. An accident at the Hogsnuft perhaps? No one was smiling and there was not the usual chatter or laughter that usually came with a café full of recruits.

"Hey stranger!" Taffy called across the room.

In his corner, hugging himself as if he was cold, Mafuta turned around to face Taffy.

"Hey." Mafuta responded, barely lifting his head to meet Taffy's eyes.

Pulling out a chair, Taffy sat at the table across from Mafuta. "What's going on man? I've been calling for days. Why didn't you call me back?"

Mafuta ran his thumb up and down an empty glass on the table. A spent sachet of blueberry Magnesia Hunt sat next to it. "I've been busy."

"Seriously? Too busy to make a single phone call?"

Mafuta glared at Taffy. "I can't expect you to understand. You're not committed to improving your overall health and showing the world your inner spectacularity."

Taffy raised his eyebrows "What in fresh hell are you talking about Mafuta?"

Mafuta tried to slap the table but there was no force behind it. He looked gaunt, and very tired. "You thought you were funny, didn't you? Refusing to accept the challenge at **Projection**, throwing the chocolate curd at Ms Trudith. But you know Taffy, a negative body will only ever perform negative actions."

"I can't understand a word you're saying Mafuta. Are you sick? You look awful..."

Mafuta jumped to his feet. He held the table to stop himself from stumbling.

"How dare you tell me I look awful! A Magnesia Hunt body is a beautiful body. You're just jealous of me."

Taffy stood up and stared at his friend, this had to be a joke, Taffy thought.

"Maf, man, you don't look well, you're pale, ashen. You look like you need a good feed and a long sleep. I can take you home, if you like?"

Mafuta turned to leave. "You don't get it", he muttered under his breath, "A fat body always has a fat head."

Before Taffy could respond, Mafuta left. As he stepped onto the street, the daylight made obvious the very thin frame of his best friend. Taffy gasped.

"Well look at that."

Taffy's lip curled at the sound of the voice.

"Apparently Mafuta thinks you're no longer FIT enough to be his friend."

"Shut the hell up Killen, you halfwit."

Ora taunted "You're right, looks like that friendship isn't FIT for purpose anymore."

Taffy turned around to face the three, his mouth fell open.

Killen had dark circles under his eyes, his skin had turned pale white. Ora looked like she had just been for a swim that had washed all her colour away. Her hair that she liked to spend hours brushing and styling was limp and straggly and hung around her head like dry weeds in a garden. Momona remained sat at the table. She fought to keep her eyes open, her head bobbed up and down. She held onto the table in an attempt to keep herself upright.

"Poor Taffy Futt, no friends, no fun and no future." Killen tried to grin, but his face fell flat.

"You three are even uglier than usual. What is happening here?"

Killen placed his hands on his hips. "You can't talk to us like that! We are the faces of tomorrow. A new generation, of beauty and health."

Taffy rolled his eyes. "Does everyone have swine fever? Why are you talking like this?"

Killen sat down again, his legs wobbling slightly. "You can't understand, you have ignored the opportunity that was offered to you. You are the darkness, and we are the morning sun."

"I don't know what that means, and you parps are all annoying me. I'm going home."

As he pulled the door handle towards himself, he heard Momona yell out to him "She has a message for you."

Taffy looked at Momona over his shoulder, her lips trembling. "Tudith said it is only going to get worse for you Taffy Futt. Unless you join us, change your life, change your body... it is only going to get worse."

Taffy stepped out onto the street.

"She has a message, Taffy. A message for you."

"Well," thought Taffy, "I have a message for Trude too."

30

Trudith switched off the light to her office, picked up her coat and her briefcase and walked to the lift. She checked her fingernails while she waited, she decided she would paint them a different colour that night.

She was hungry, her stomach rumbled. The security guard tipped his hat at her as the doors parted and she walked to the car park. Her car was parked closest to the door, when she rounded the corner and saw it she dropped her coat, keys and briefcase on the ground. She covered her mouth with her hands. Her eyes wide with disbelief.

In front of her, her black statesman car, buffed and shined that very morning, was now completely covered with freshly sliced pig anuses.

FETOR LEVEL

7

THINGS ARE ABOUT TO GET ROUGH

31

"Maybe you should go home, Taffy?"

"Why? I've got nothing better to do. I can sweep up if you like. Do some filing?"

Borghust stood at the front counter. He glanced over forms, not really paying attention to them.

"Surely you and your friends can find something better to do. Go out and have some fun?"

"Yeah, that sounds great, but everyone is acting really weird. I had an argument with Mafuta, and Rassie is still unwell. I've seen few other people around, but they just look glum, like they've given up."

"Yeah", Borghust mumbled, "That sounds like fun."

Taffy turned around, "You're not listening, are you?"

Borghust looked up at Taffy, "Look now isn't a good time. Come back later."

"But why? What is going on around here?"

"Taffy!" Borghust screamed, "There are things going on at the moment that I can't control. Bad things, dangerous things. Go home, I'm trying to protect you!"

"Protect me from what?" Taffy shook his head, bewildered. He couldn't remember a time when Borghust had ever raised his voice to him.

Borghust turned to walk away but Taffy reached out and grabbed him by the arm.

Borghust hissed and pulled his arm away in pain.

"What happened?" Taffy asked, pointing at Borghust's arm.

"It's nothing. Please, Taffy, just go home."

"Did you have an accident? How did you hurt it?"

"It's nothing. Go now before the fetor siren alarms again."

"Did *Level 4 – Clean & bandage* see your arm?" Taffy was nowhere near finished with this conversation.

"I didn't injure it, it's just sore."

"How? How did it get sore?"

"Go home."

Taffy jumped forward playfully and pulled back Borghust's sleeve before he had a chance to step away. Borghust had a new tattoo. It was red around the edges and had a layer of clear plastic covering it. Taffy looked Borghust in the eye.

"What is this?"

"It's nothing. Forget it, it's just a tattoo."

"What is it a tattoo of, Borghust?"

"It's called a yogh."

"What does it mean?"

"It means that you should go home, Taffy. Please!"

Taffy stood back and looked at Borghust. His friend, his surrogate father.

"What is going on, Borghust?"

Borghust stopped. He looked at Taffy and placed a hand on his shoulder. "There are things happening that I will do everything in my power to protect you from. But there are also things you will never understand. Please, you need to promise you will do what I say?"

"Just tell me what is happening. What could be so bad?"

The customer bell on the front desk sounded.

"Ah, you have caught the culprit?"

Taffy and Borghust both turned to see Trudith standing before them.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Lumia, What?"

"My car was vandalised last night. I assume you have the culprit right here? I want to press full charges."

"No sorry, Ms. Lumia, I think you're mistaken, Taffy was just leaving. Goodbye Taffy."

Taffy furrowed his brow at Trudith,

"And what evidence do you have Trude?"

"It's Trudith! I notice you're not denying it. Officer, I want him arrested please."

"Ha" Taffy laughed at Trudith. "Nice try, but you see..."

Taffy was cut off by Borghust who had pulled out a set of handcuffs.

"Taffy Futt, I am arresting you on suspicion of vandalism."

Trudith smiled.

"You can't be serious?" Taffy screamed.

Borghust led Taffy out the back towards the cells. From the corner of his eye, he could see Trudith scrolling through her mobile phone. Taffy felt the handcuffs loosen from around his wrists.

"Go home, Taffy. Run."

FETOR LEVEL

8

TRY TO STAY SAFE

32

Taffy woke up to the fetor alarm. He sniffed the air and coughed. The stink was thick. He looked over to make sure that his miasma mask was handy for when he needed it, IF he needed it.

Taffy counted how many days since he had his argument with Mafuta. He thought that his friend would have called him by now, had a bit of a sulk, but moved on. Taffy remembered little spats they had over the years. Broken toys, petty jealousies, occasional name calling, but they had never stopped talking to each other. The thought of losing his best friend was bad enough, but now Borghust was acting crazy. The man who had bought him food when he knew his father had spent all the money on booze. Who came to the school and cheered him on when he needed. The one person who he could always talk to was not there for him. It was a feeling Taffy had not felt before, isolation, a loneliness deep inside him.

After he bathed and dressed, Taffy walked into the living room. He did his usual scan of the floor. There were no bottles littered about. He opened the cupboard making sure to leave a space in case any half-drunk cans or drums rained down on him. There was nothing. Taffy pulled out a bag of dried chittlins and began to munch on them heartily. He turned around to go back to his room but was startled to find Parry upright and staring at him.

"Dad. Bit early for you, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

Taffy held his breath. He had learnt long ago that when he spoke with his father that the smell that came from his breath would be shocking.

"Are you doing night shift this week? You are usually still asleep."

Parry sighed. Taffy noted that Parry's breath wasn't nearly as bad as usual.

"They said they don't need me anymore."

"Who?" asked Taffy.

"The management at the Hogsnuff. They accused me of misappropriating meat products for nefarious purposes. I don't even know what that means? I didn't steal any meat products. I did take some scraps off the sluice floor, you know, for soup, but nothing else. I did bring you that bucket of pig anuses, but I fished them out of the waste containers. No one would miss those."

"Who told you that you were fired?"

"It doesn't matter. It's done. It'll be a tough few weeks for us until you get your

Determination, but we'll be ok. A *level 4*. We'll live like kings. You and me, like kings."

It was the new woman, wasn't it? The new manager, Trude?"

"Yes."

Taffy clenched his fists. "That nasty hag. She wants to start a fight, I'm ready."

"Parry pressed his hook against Taffy's chest. Taffy could feel the coldness of the metal.

"You will do nothing."

Taffy shook his head, angry that his father would try to stop him.

"She can't do this to you and get away it!"

"She has the power, son. Do not do anything you might regret. She can do a lot more harm."

"Like what?" Taffy snapped.

The doorbell rang. Taffy opened the door to a man dressed in a black suit holding a cushion with an envelope on top.

"A letter for Mr Taffy Futt."

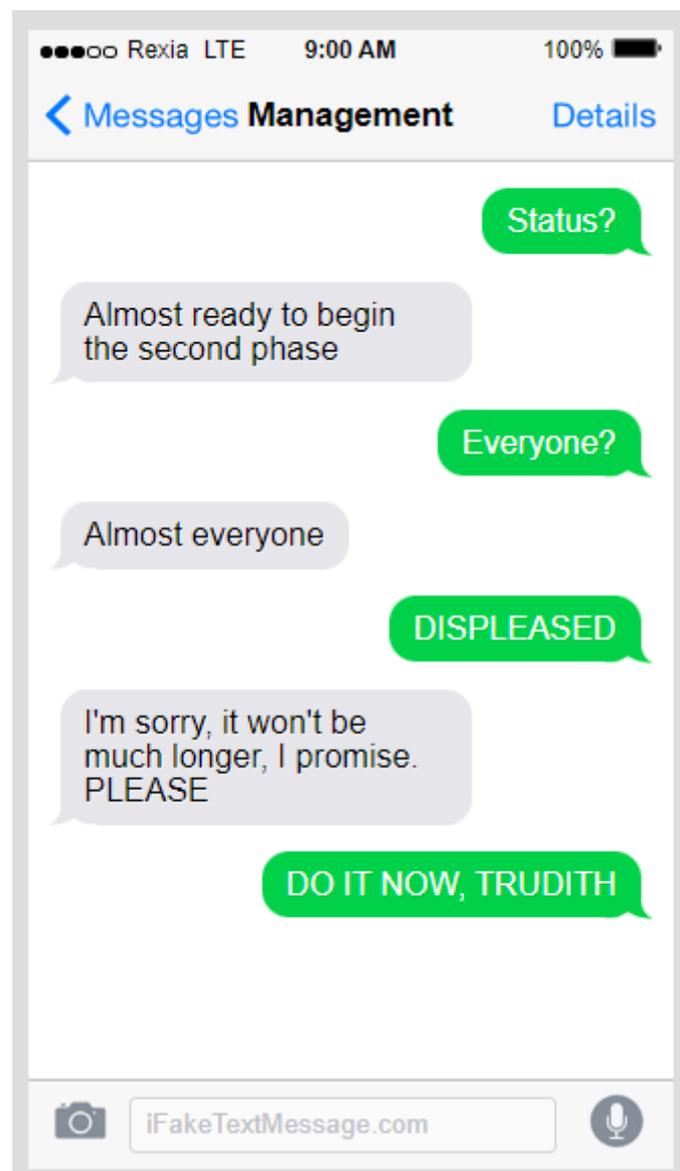
Taffy snatched the envelope and slammed the door in the man's face.

"What is it?" Parry asked, craning his neck to see what Taffy was holding.

Taffy tore the envelope open and pulled out the letter from inside.

"Dear Mr Taffy Futt,

Due to an unfortunate clerical error, you were given the incorrect **Projection**. After reassessing your skills and reconsidered the available roles in the Hogsnuuff, we now **Re-Project** you *Level 1 - Hook and Find*.



34

Empty. No one in the streets. No shoppers, no one hurrying to or from work. Even when the air was thick with brown dust, people still went about their business. People still went to work and school. Mafuta was nowhere to be seen. Rassie was still sickly as far as Taffy knew. There was no one to ask, no people chatting, or taking a leisurely stroll around town. Taffy needed to speak to Nally and Voreen and see if he could sort something out with their account. He would offer to clean after hours stack shelves perhaps. Whatever they needed if they could give him a reprieve.

The door of the Souk opened. The bell rang as usual. Taffy looked around expecting to see Nally at the counter or Voreen on the shop floor.

Taffy gasped,

The shop was empty.

The shelves still stood in place, but they had been cleared. The counter was empty, Nally's stool was gone, and the floor was polished clean.

"Hello?" Taffy called out.

"Nally? Voreen?"

Taffy heard a rustling in the back room. He stepped forward and noticed a dull glow from under the door. Taffy gently pushed the door open, there were some packed moving boxes, a table with leftover stock from the counter and a few pieces of fruit.

It was difficult to see, but Taffy looked down toward the end of the storeroom where a single candle flickered, casting enough light on the wall that Taffy could see a large yogh crudely painted on it. Taffy stared, not sure how to comprehend what he was seeing. The empty shop, Nally and Voreen gone, it made no sense.

Movement. Two figures wearing green robes stood up. The light caught their eyes and illuminated them. A shiver ran up Taffy's spine. He looked back over his shoulder to make sure his path was clear. Taffy knew he might need a quick escape.

"Taffy? Taffy, what are you doing here?"

"Voreen? What is going on? Why is the shop empty?"

"We have waited so long; we had almost given up hope. Glory to the Anhängers, we were patient and due rewards shall come."

Taffy took a step back.

"Please Voreen, not you too. Everyone is acting so strange."

Nally pushed the hood of his robe back, he grinned. Taffy shuddered. It was not a warm smile that Taffy was used to.

"Nally, is this some kind of joke? Why are you smiling like that?"

Nally opened up the cover of a large dusty book and turned some pages and began to read.

‘And she did declare that the prophet will return, and they will be the embodiment of the three. And they shall return the world to the control of the Anhänger. The great feast will begin, and all shall be right.’

"Nally? Sir, I don't think that book is recommended reading."

Voreen removed her hood "You were always a help to us Taffy. I thank you for all the sacrifices you have made in the past and for the great sacrifice you will make for us all in the future."

"If we could just talk normally, for a second, Voreen? Nally? What is happening? What sacrifice? You're scaring me a bit."

Voreen lunged towards Taffy. He gasped but she grabbed him by the hand. "A farewell gift for you. A thank you for all the great work to come." Taffy felt something press into the palm of his hand.

Voreen and Nally readjusted the cloaks back over their heads and sat in front of the candle.

Taffy backed away slowly. When he was back on the street, in the relative safety of daylight, he opened his hand to find a chocolate curd inside.

35

'Closed' on the law station door. Just like the shops on either side of it.

Taffy had knocked on the front and side doors, but Borghust could not be found.

Taffy walked along the barren street. He saw two girls talking. They leant against each other in a half hug, as if neither possessed the necessary energy to hold themselves up.

Sat on a bench in the park was a boy sitting alone. Taffy knew he was a recruit and remembered sharing some classes with him at school. The boy looked painfully thin. He rocked back and forwards as if undecided where he should fall. Taffy thought about asking if he was alright but was distracted by a low wailing sound further down the street. Taffy turned to see a girl sliding down a shop window, her legs no longer able to hold her up. She waved Taffy away. His outstretched hand rescinded. Her small dress swung around her bony shoulders.

Taffy wanted to go home. A feeling he was not accustomed to. Home was usually a mess, bottles or Parry ranting, but now it seemed a better option than gaunt faces, grey skin and weak bodies. Taffy started down the main street and passed the café. He stopped and looked inside in the vain hope that Mafuta might be inside. Instead, the only three bodies inside were those of Killen, Ora and Momona.

Taffy opened the door and stepped inside. He felt their eyes on him but was surprised that they didn't whisper and gossip at his arrival. Momona laid her head upon the table. The droplets of drool that gathered on the table suggested to Taffy that she had been asleep there for quite some time. Ora stared ahead, motionless, like blinking her eyes was too physically taxing.

Killen was slumped in his chair, like a weight was holding his shoulders firmly in place. His hair almost seemed grey; it matched his hollow skin.

"What has happened to you?" Taffy shook his head. "What has happened to everyone?"

Killen blinked, startled out of his fatigued stupor. "It's Taffy, everyone."

Ora and Momona didn't respond.

"She's angry at us and it's all your fault."

"What are you blabbering on about Killen?"

"She's angry at us, but boy, does she hate you."

"I assume you're talking about Trude?"

"It's Trudith." Momona added in her raspy, dry voice.

"She said it was easy to make you join us, but we weren't trying hard enough."

"Join you? And do what?"

Killen pointed at the jug of Mint Magnesia Hunt on the table "Join us and become the best version of yourself."

Taffy groaned "I am so tired of everyone talking in riddles."

"Happiness in a cup." Ora whispered.

"And are you happy? Any of you?" Taffy shouted.

Killen looked up at Taffy, wincing as his joints protested.

"Are you happy Taffy? She's not going to give up, you know."

"Trudith."

Killen nodded "She has taken your friends, your Projection, your dad's job. Do you really think she won't get what she wants?"

Taffy pulled out a chair and sat with the feeble three.

"But why? Why is she so adamant that I, or any of us take this crap?"

"Who knows Taffy? But is it really worth fighting her? She has the power. She can make it all stop. She can make it all go away."

Killen leant over and picked up the jug of liquid. His arm trembled as he filled the glass in front of Taffy.

"Take a sip Taffy. You can see Mafuta again, your dad can go back to work, you won't need to fight anymore. It will be just like it was."

Taffy looked at the glass. Maybe he thought. One sip? Maybe Killen was right, maybe it would be all over with one sip. Taffy held the glass in his hand. He wanted to see Mafuta again, to chat with Rassie. He wanted everything to go back the way it was.

Taffy picked up the glass and drew it near his lips.

It was the smell that hit him first, then the splatter of warmth over his shoes. He looked up to see Ora with her mouth wide open and a gush of stinking green liquid spray out of her mouth.

With a heave, like she had no control over her body Momona arched her back and like a newly tapped oil geyser she let loose another gush of green liquid.

Taffy jumped up from his seat. He looked at the glass in his hand and turned it upside down, releasing its contents onto the floor.

Killen opened his mouth to protest but no words came. A choking sound at first and then a wheeze and then a river of green liquid that shot across the table and covered Momona. The sight and smell had an instant effect on Ora who returned fire and similarly covered Killen. Momona arched again and in an uncontrollable heave sent another putrid green gush upwards. It fell with a splatter on top of Ora's head.

Taffy made for the door. The stink was overwhelming, but the three vomit covered friends had barely the energy to scream out with disgust. Instead, they dabbed at the green murk with serviettes.

Taffy ran back down the street. He hurdled over the girl who was slumped against the shop window narrowly missing the green gush shooting from her mouth.

The boy sat in the park looked like a frog, wet and green and now lying in a puddle.

The two girls who stood, trying to hold themselves were now stuck, glued together by the contents of their stomachs.

Taffy ran past them all. He diverted his route home several times to avoid the multiple young people and their green slime.

Part III

Execution

FETOR WARNING

LEVEL 15

**PREPARE YOURSELF. THE WORST IS
YET TO COME.**

36

Taffy wet some bath towels, twisted them tightly to wring out the excess water and lay them along the bottom of the front door. A Level 15 fetor meant that along with a horrendous stink, the brown dust could easily blow under doors and cracks in windows. Taffy wiped out his Miasma mask and placed it near the door. He didn't suppose he'd have much reason to go outside, he was not at all keen to encounter anymore sick friends or acquaintances. Taffy picked up a broom and swept the tiles, hoping to get up any dust that had crept through before he had a chance to block its passage. He had wiped out the bath and the sink, polished the mirror and mopped the bathroom floor. He grabbed a sack and moved to the kitchen to collect all the empty bottles. There were none on the lounge room floor or in the kitchen.

"Where are you hiding them now, old man?" Taffy wondered to himself.

Taffy checked the laundry, under the kitchen sink and behind the toilet. Nothing. Taffy knocked on Parry's bedroom door.

"Come in." Parry's response surprised Taffy.

"You're awake already?"

"Yes, couldn't sleep very well."

Taffy rolled his eyes. "Why? Didn't have enough to drink last night?"

Parry looked away and down at his hook. "I know I wasn't the best father, Taffy."

"NO!" Taffy walked out of the room. Parry followed him, looking puzzled.

"I cannot understand anything anymore. People looking like skeletons, drinking bizarre potions, Borghust and Mafuta ignoring me and Trude having something to do with all of it, but I cannot and will not have you go all philosophical. I need you, of all people to stay the same. Go have another drink and wake up in the oven or something."

"Taffy, I need you to stop. There is something happening. I've seen this before."

Taffy spun around to face his father, "all you have seen for every day of my life is the bottom of a bottle, or a glass or a 44-gallon drum. I hoped for a very long time that you would put them all down, just for a moment and ask me how I was, or what was happening in my life. But now, I don't need it. I don't need you. Just leave me alone."

Parry opened his mouth to speak again but was interrupted by a pounding at the door.

Taffy and Parry looked at each other. Taffy moved towards the front door, strapped his miasma mask on and opened the door slightly.

The figure in front of him made furtive glances left and then right. The howling blast of the wind outside made conversation impossible. Taffy was taking no chances that Trude was sending another delivery. The masked figure pulled a badge out of his pocket. Taffy opened the door wide enough to allow them inside. They removed their masks, shook off the excess dust and hung them on the back of the door.

"Hello Taffy."

"Hello Borghust, please, come inside."

Borghust sat on the worn sofa in the lounge room. Parry placed a cup of black tea in front of him and took a sip from one himself. He sat in the armchair opposite. Taffy remained standing, his arms on his hips. He stared right at Borghust.

"Are you here to tell me what's going on?"

Borghust swallowed hard. "I'll tell you as much as you need to know."

"Not good enough" Taffy returned.

"Just listen to him," Parry interjected. Taffy ignored him.

Taffy began to pace the room, a million thoughts and questions rushing around his mind.

"The last time I saw you, you tried to arrest me. You and your new friend Trude!"

"Her name is Trudith. But I let you go."

"You tried to arrest Taffy?" Parry asked trying to catch up.

"I pretended to arrest him, to keep him safe. And that's why I'm here tonight. To keep you safe. I need to send you away, across the borders."

Taffy's mouth fell wide open. He couldn't find the words or even begin to understand what Borghust was saying. Parry was not so tongue tied.

"What is going on?"

Borghust peeled back his shirt sleeve to show Parry his tattoo.

Parry leapt from his chair "Not you! No, surely not you. I thought they were all gone?"

Borghust shook his head. He looked down, unable to look Parry in the eyes.

"I tried, for years. I ignored them. I would get messages sometimes and I would never reply. Sometimes they would ask me to meet them, but I refused. I hoped that it would never come to this, but it is the rule of heritage, and the past cannot be ignored."

"I could feel it," Parry whispered. "It is like last time."

"Can someone tell me what the hell is going on?" Taffy yelled, panic rising in his voice.

"There is no time for that, I need to get you out of here. Tonight."

"No way in hell" Parry screamed. "You're one of them! You're not going anywhere with my son."

Borghust stood up. "Parry, you know me, you know I have only ever done what's best for Taffy. Do you really believe I would come here to hurt him? You know that they are watching, you know the risk it took coming here."

Parry's face softened.

"I have a small group that I will move tonight. There is a safe house beyond the borders. Taffy can stay there for now. Pack lightly, we must be quick."

Parry nodded.

Meet me at midnight. Behind the big tree in the park. Visibility will be at its poorest then, it is the best time to go.

"I'll go now and let you say your goodbyes. I have a lot to do." Borghust stood up to leave.

Taffy moved over and blocked the doorway.

"You are not going anywhere! You are going to tell me right here, right now, what is going on."

"Please Taffy, there is no time." Parry begged.

"Oh, shut up Dad" Taffy huffed. "You really think I'm going to pack up everything on a whim based on the word of an old drunk and a nutty cop?"

"Taffy," Borghust placed his hand on his shoulder. "I need you to trust me. Time is running out."

Taffy crossed his arms. "Then you better hurry up and tell me what is going on around here."

"Taffy, there is no time. Please, I am your father."

Taffy's face turned bright red, his fists clenched, and he screamed "You're nothing but a drunk. A filthy useless drunk."

Parry lunged at Taffy and pressed him against the wall. Look at me." Taffy tried to wriggle free from his father's grip, but Parry held tight, "I said LOOK AT ME!" I haven't had a drink for weeks. No bottles, no cans. Have you even noticed?"

Taffy nodded. Parry loosened his grip.

Parry's lips began to tremble. "I'm not going to let them hurt you."

"Who? Who do you think is trying to hurt me?"

Parry undid the leather strap on his arm and removed his hook. He held up the blunt stump, a reminder of where his hand once was. Taffy gasped. Parry had never allowed him to see it before.

"The people who did this to me," Parry replied.



Parry closed the door behind Borghust after he whispered "promise me you'll take care of my son."

Taffy sat in the lounge, trying to make sense of everything he had heard.

Parry sat opposite him, trying to think where to start.

"She was beautiful. I saw her and my heart skipped a beat."

"My mother?"

Parry nodded, a slight smile drawing up from the corners of his mouth.

"What was she like?"

"People made fun of her because of her eyes." Parry's eyes glazed over, lost in memory.

"Why? Was she blind?"

"Oh, no. Quite the opposite. I felt like she could see deep inside me, like no one else could."

Taffy blushed, he found it difficult to imagine Parry young but also as a romantic.

"Her eyes were gold. The most brilliant gold. I'd never seen anyone with gold eyes, but more than that she had three pupils. One in one eye, as normal and two in the other."

Taffy tried to imagine what that would look like.

"I know some of the others made fun of her and she was alone a lot of the time, but we made each other laugh. I would work here during the week, and she would come from beyond the boundaries on the weekend."

Taffy smiled.

"We talked a lot and went for walks and just liked to sit and hold each other's hands. We were in the park, it was a level 2 fetor, a beautiful day when they first approached her.

"Who?"

They call themselves the Anhänger. They saw her and said she was chosen."

"What does that mean?" Taffy sat forward in his chair.

"They love the number three."

Taffy felt a shiver run up his spine.

"Well, not the number three exactly but a..."

"A yogh." Taffy interrupted.

"Yes," Parry nodded. "They worship it. They told her that her three pupils were a sign, that she was part of some prophecy. We laughed at first. We thought it was preposterous."

"What happened?"

"It took a long time for me to really notice what was going on. She became distant. Like her mind was on other things. They gave her gifts; they told her she was going to do wonderful things. They gave her the attention she had never had before."

"But who were they?"

Parry stared into the distance, pulling up memories long buried.

"Irenka was the first."

"Who?"

"Surely they still do that boring speech about Irenka Plightpool and her brothers each year don't they?"

Taffy nodded. "Yes, they still do that."

"But I bet they don't tell you that she was insane. Blood thirsty. They were forced to leave their home country or face the hangman's noose."

"But why? What reason did she have to kill people?"

"We can only imagine. They settled here. They began a new life; they created new rules. Distance it seems did not quench Irenka's lust for blood."

"Yes, I read about that too. Pigs she killed. Her and her brothers created the Hogsnuft and became famous for Plightpool pork products. "

"A distraction, no doubt and a nice way to make a living, but Irenka had certain proclivities that she could not suppress."

Taffy suppressed a grin. "This sounds like one of the stories you might have picked up at the *Level 3 – Stout & Ale pourers.*"

"Really?" Parry snapped.

"Well does this sound familiar? Those who dared question Irenka quickly paid the price. A quarrel, an argument, a cross word and you were bound to see their head sail across the sky. It became quite the sport. Anyone could challenge an adversary; it didn't matter why. Your cock crowed too loud, or you didn't like the way someone looked at your love. You could challenge them. Both sides would face off in town, Irenka the self-appointed referee. Maybe

it would be a fist fight, a knife fight, it didn't matter. Whether you lost an arm, or an eye didn't matter either. Irenka decided the winner and the loser would lose their head with the swish of her blade.”

Taffy shook his head. "I don't believe this. This is insane."

"It is a tradition in Plightpool. I'm sure you know that. Quarrels can still be solved with the throwing of heads."

Taffy felt instantly queasy. "You mean splatting?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

"Of course, they use pig heads now, not human."

"I know." Taffy swallowed the urge to be ill.

"You mean... you?"

Taffy nodded.

"And how did you do?"

"I won."

Parry slapped his thigh "That's my boy!"

"No, Dad, this is really not the time."

"No sorry, it isn't. So, I thought maybe I had lost her. She was no longer answering my calls, she wouldn't meet me at our special places. The last time I saw her she invited me to her house. All her belongings were gone, she had packed up almost everything. She wore a robe and had a fool grin on her face. We kissed and thanked me for my sacrifice. I didn't

understand what she was talking about, but she kissed me and we... well, we made you that night."

Taffy flushed.

"We fell asleep on the floor. And I was happy." Parry looked away, not wanting Taffy to see the pain on his face.

"It was a metallic smell that awoke me. I didn't realise it was blood, my blood. I was alone. Covered in blood and my arm gone."

Taffy gasped.

"The physical pain was nothing. They fixed that at the hospital. It was the betrayal. Knowing that the first person I loved would do that to me. And I never saw her again. But she came back, she came back and left you on the doorstep. I didn't hear you. I tried to drink the betrayal away."

"But these people? Why are they back? And why now?"

"I don't know. But I do know that I will do what I must to keep you safe. You will meet Borghust tonight."

38

“You will need to wear this tonight; it is too big to pack.” Parry held up Taffy’s chemical suit, inspecting it for holes.

Taffy made a show of folding essential clothing items and shoving them into his bag, but his mind was full of questions. How could his mother do that to Parry? What did Trudith want? How long would he have to stay across the borders?

Parry looked at the clock on the wall.

“You have to meet Borghust in 20 minutes.” Parry tried to control the tremble in his voice.

Taffy looked at his father. He had never seen such concern in his face before. It angered Taffy that his father was finally sober but now he wouldn’t be around to enjoy it.

“You come too,” Taffy exclaimed, much to the surprise of his Father. “I know Borghust won’t mind, and we can make room for you, wherever it is we end up beyond the boundaries.

Parry placed his hand on his son’s shoulder.

Taffy searched Parry’s face looking for a sign that Parry might agree to come with him.

Parry shook his head. “I’m sorry, but I am staying here.”

“But it isn’t safe,” Taffy tried to control the increasing volume of his voice.

“It isn’t safe for you Taffy. For whatever reason, you pose a threat to them, I don’t. Everyone just sees me as the sad old drunk and for the first time, I am happy for them to look at me like that, to avoid me, to ignore me. When Borghust gets back, I can help him. I have some experience with these people.”

“Who are *these people* though? What do they want? And how could I possibly be a threat?”

Parry zipped up Taffy’s bag full of clothes and handed him his suit and miasma mask. He looked at the clock again, they had only minutes before they would have to meet Borghust by the tree.

“It is the number three they worship.”

“Yes, you told me,” Taffy interrupted. “The yogh.”

“Yes, but more than that.” Parry turned Taffy around so he could zip his suit up at the back.

“Have you ever noticed that, in stories, books, myths and even religions that groups of three keep appearing? Three bears, three pigs, the holy trinity?”

Taffy nodded.

“These people believe that three can change the world. Your mother had three pupils, so they thought that she would bring about a new world order.”

Taffy emitted a decidedly loud groan. “These people are crazy.”

“Maybe they are, but look around you, look at the harm they have done here in just a few weeks. Do not, for a second, underestimate the harm they can do.”

“But I still don’t get why? What is their plan? Why come to Plightpool? Why make everyone thin? I don’t get it.”

Parry zipped up his own suit and guided Taffy to the door. “I have spent the last 17 years trying to avoid thinking about what they want. All I know is that it isn’t good.”

Taffy and Parry strapped their miasma masks into place before they opened the door and entered the night.

39

The wind was thick. Like sand whipped up by a warm wind at the beach, only heavier and angrier. So many thoughts rushed through Taffy's mind, his mother, the number three, Irenka Plightpool and where they would stay when they arrived beyond the borders. Taffy adjusted his mask as the stinky wind blew into his face. He looked at Parry who walked ahead of him. Parry had to lean into the gale to avoid being blown over. Taffy used to laugh when his friend Mafuta used to fall over from gusts of wind. Taffy would reach his hand and help him up. Mafuta would sulk and mumble under his breath that he wished he was three times fatter than everyone else, just like Taffy. Thinking about Mafuta made Taffy wince. He wondered when he would get to see his best friend again. He wanted so badly to talk to Mafuta and tell him what was happening.

“Who knows,” Taffy thought to himself, “Maybe Mafuta will be there, beyond the borders and everything will be OK?”

Taffy felt his stomach lurch. Mafuta was so sickly last time he saw him. He had listened to Trudith and had lost all that weight. Taffy felt a wave of sadness wash over him. The realisation that he might never see his friends again was like a hard slap over the face.

Parry stopped walking. He held his hand up, and Taffy knew to stop too. In the distance, under the old tree, Taffy could just make out two faint yellow headlights. In the brown

howling wind, it was useless trying to talk. Instead, Parry pointed to the car. There was so much that Taffy wanted to say. Now, for the first time he had his father sober and alert, he had to go. Parry held his hand out to Taffy and squeezed it. The two regarded each other, Taffy felt the heat of tears well in his eyes. Parry embraced his son and hugged him hard. Taffy hugged him back. Parry turned and pointed at the car, this time in a more urgent manner. Parry held up his hand, a farewell salute before he pressed himself into the murky wind and walked out of Taffy's sight.

Taffy steeled himself. Visibility was almost nil. He moved slowly towards the lights, making tiny steps so as to avoid stepping into any detritus that may have blown into his path. As he approached, Taffy could make out the sound of the car engine. It wasn't Borghust's car, as Taffy was expecting, instead it was a black statesman. Taffy stopped. The familiar pang of anxiety exploded in his stomach, a feeling that all was not right. In the distance Taffy could see the lights of the car flash on and off. A signal from Borghust, Taffy assumed, telling him to hurry up perhaps?

Taffy readjusted his backpack and again moved slowly towards the car. The back, side passenger door opened slightly as an arm protruded and ushered Taffy closer. Taffy felt a little relief knowing that he would be with Borghust and escaping this madness. As the car came closer into sight, the back door fully opened. Taffy removed his backpack, ready to throw it in the back seat before climbing in behind it.

A faint sound came from the car. "Fun." Taffy thought he heard Borghust shout. Taffy grimaced, there were a thousand other things he would prefer to be doing that would be much more fun than this, he thought to himself.

"Fun." he heard again; the words lost in the gale.

As the car came into clearer focus, Taffy could once again see an arm protruding from the car. This time it didn't usher Taffy towards them, instead it seemed to desperately try to grab hold of the door, to take purchase. A face appeared out of the door only for a moment before being pulled back into the car. Again, Taffy heard sounds, but this time they were perfectly clear. Borghust was not saying "fun," he was shouting "RUN."

Taffy froze in his spot. Trying desperately to understand what was happening. The door flung open. This time there was no mistaking Borghust who screamed.

"Run, Taffy run! It's a trap."

A hand wrapped around Borghust's mouth, arms engulfed his throat and his waist and pulled him back into the car like a rag doll. Two flickering lights followed by the unmistakable sound of gunshots. Taffy's blood turned to ice.

The car tyres screeched as the car turned to face Taffy. The engine revved loudly before the car accelerated towards him. Taffy jumped out of the path and ran into the darkness that the wind and stink provided. Taffy ran and ran, his breath burning in his lungs and his legs throbbing. Taffy's head was pounding, the sound of gunshots repeated in his head over and over. Eventually even they were drowned out by the sound of screaming. As he panted and tried desperately to catch his breath, and somehow make sense of what he had just seen, Taffy realised the sound of the screams in his head were actually coming from his own mouth.

40

Taffy slumped against a wall, in a small alcove. Even though he was barely able to see, he remembered the way to get to the school. Taffy knew it was pointless going home, for sure they would expect him to go there. His first instinct was to go tell Parry what had happened, but he remembered what Parry had said, that it was better to let everyone go on thinking he was just a drunk. Taffy knew that he would put Parry in danger if he were to go back home.

The sound of Borghust yelling and the gunshots rang in Taffy's head. The sight of a pale, sickly Mafuta and Killen, Ora and Momona throwing up filled Taffy's thoughts.

"Why is this happening?" Taffy asked himself. Only a month ago his life had been so idyllic and now, he was running for his life. His friends, the Hogsnuuff, his future, everything was different.

"I wish Trude had never come here." Taffy grumbled to himself.

Fear, anxiety and hopelessness drained from Taffy's body and was replaced with a fiery rage.

"TRUDE!" Taffy shouted through his mask.

"She comes to MY town and hurts MY friends and thinks she can get away with it!"

Taffy jumped to his feet, the rage he felt invigorating him and recharging him with energy.

Two sharp beeps from the siren. The dust storm downgraded.

DUST DISPERSING.

YOU WILL START TO

SEE THINGS CLEARER

NOW

Taffy knew a sign when he saw one.

“Time to show Trude my best self.” Taffy said to himself with a grin.



Taffy looked up from the rear boundary fence. It was made from wire mesh and was useful in keeping rats and dogs away from the sluice bins that sat against the wall of the Hogsuff, but not so much angry fat boys. The bins that Taffy had accessed boar's heads and pig anuses from were empty. The gates that allowed entry to the never-ending parade of trucks that collected the guts and off-cuts were closed but not locked. Visibility had improved enough that Taffy was able to look around for security guards or workers with no trouble. He saw no one.

“Can't handle a bit of crud dust.” Taffy thought to himself.

Whilst remaining alert, Taffy passed through the gates and ran for cover behind a sluice bin. Taffy pressed his back to the wall and listened intently but was met with a stony quiet. He inched closer to the external door making sure to move with as much stealth and silence as possible, looking up and to each side frequently to ensure he wasn't being monitored. Happy that the coast was clear, Taffy reached for the handle of the door. He had supposed that it would be locked and that he might need to rip the door from the hinges. A memory flashed in Taffy's mind of his thirteenth birthday and Parry had left the house early. Taffy thought that Parry had gone to get him a card or a present or even maybe a cake but when he saw Parry return with nothing, but cider Taffy flew into a rage. Parry locked himself in the bathroom hoping to drink the lot in peace but Taffy, hurt and angry, tore the door from the jamb and

threw it aside as if it were paper. Such memories would usually stir up more anger and pain, but this time Taffy was surprised to find that instead he had hope that the relationship between he and Parry might have changed, that he would enjoy asking his father about his life and maybe even having a proper relationship.

“First,” Taffy reminded himself “Tear this door down.”

With a tightening of his fist around the door handle, Taffy pulled. The door came easily. It was unlocked and no alarm sounded.

“Too arrogant to even lock up.” Taffy thought as he gritted his teeth.

Taffy peaked his head around the wide opened chasm and surveyed the halls. Empty. Again, Taffy turned his ear to listen out for any sounds of activity but found none. Taking a deep breath for courage Taffy started off down the brightly lit corridor.

Past the staff time-card machine and the changing rooms Taffy turned right, almost on tippy toes to minimise sound, he headed towards the administration offices. Taffy had traipsed the corridors on more than one occasion, having been called in by assorted *Level 5 - Secretary and Scribes* to come and collect an inebriated Parry. At the end of the hall was Mr Hegg’s office. Taffy had seen the kindly but sweaty man at his desk on multiple occasions. As he approached Taffy could see the barely visible remains of the paint on the office door which had read Mr Hegg. It was unceremoniously replaced with TRUDITH B LUMIA.

Taffy threw open the door of Mr Hegg’s office, he refused to acknowledge that it would ever belong to Trudith, with the back of his thumb nail, he scratched back and forth through the barely dried paint, removing as much of the new name as he could. With one ear open to the corridors around him, Taffy looked around the office. A vase of fake flowers sat on a shelf to the left of the desk. Taffy thought about picking a bunch of smelly parp blossoms to put in

the vase instead. He knew he didn't have time, eventually someone would have to come past, and Taffy needed to be gone by then.

“What's in here?” Taffy wondered to himself. He wasn't sure why he had come to the office specifically, but he remembered Borghust's words, “Rule one of law and order, trust your gut.” Whatever Trude was up to, it would surely be found in here.

A filing cabinet. To the right of the desk. Taffy grabbed the handle and tried to heave it open. It was locked tight. Taffy took another moment to check that no one had entered the hall. It remained empty. As Taffy turned his attention back to the filing cabinet, flexing his forearm muscles in preparation to tear the draw from the cabinet, he noticed a file on the desk.

OPERATION INFINITE GUANTE

Without hesitation Taffy opened the file. It was thick with covert photographs taken of the Hogsnuft, the school, the Crud Mountains, the law station and even Vore and Nally's souk. Taffy flicked through faster, passing the photos of Mr Hegg, and school Principal Lufta. There were images of some of the workers that Taffy had seen following Trudith around. As he continued to flick through the file, Taffy's blood ran cold. Images of Mafuta, the first was taken at the school photo day. There was a date and a fetor level stamped in the bottom left corner. Another pang of regret cut through Taffy. This photo was taken such a short time ago, everything was so much better, his friend looking so much happier. Taffy turned the photo over, ready for the next. His gasp was so loud he covered his mouth and looked in the hall, convinced that it would alert someone of his presence. The next photo was dated two days earlier. It was Mafuta, looking more like a skeleton than the loud raucous friend Taffy remembered. His hair which, when brushed up could reach impressive heights, hung limp. There was an emptiness in his eyes, like all energy and hope had left him. His eyes bulged from his head, emphasising his emaciated cheeks and jowls. Taffy had to catch his breath at

the similar images of Killen, drawn under the eyes, almost devoid of life. As he continued to flick through the files photo after photo of everyone he had ever known, everyone he had gone to school with, had laughed with and talked to. The last photo was of a dishevelled Rassie, propped up against a metal grate. Her right eye was bruised and there was an obvious cut on her lip. Besides the date stamp which was also from two days ago there was another note scrawled on the photo of Rassie; VIOLENT.

Despite his despair, Taffy raised a smile. Rassie was a fighter and whoever had taken the photos had, no doubt, gotten a taste of Rassie's fists. Taffy scratched his head as if to loosen all the thoughts percolating in his mind. Who had taken these photos and why? Who could possibly want to make everyone so haggard, weak, and *thin*? As if anticipating his question, the next page of the file was titled 'Ten step plan'. Engrossed, Taffy picked up the file and sat in the swivel chair which had been pushed beneath the table. Taffy eyes darted over the document, 'infiltration', 'acquisition of management' and 'removal of Mr Hegg.' Taffy flicked through the file, desperate to find more information, he found lists of weight and height measurements and all the names of people who had agreed to take the Magnesia Hunt potion. An anger blew up though Taffy, he stood and slammed the file on the desk. It still didn't make sense. What was all this for? Why would anyone come to a town, take over their meat production plant and then starve all the youth. Taffy couldn't make sense of it, he needed to talk to someone, to reason it out. He needed his friend. Where was Mafuta? Where had they taken all those photos? Taffy remembered the grate that Rassie had been pressed against for her photo. It was familiar to Taffy, somewhere in the back of his mind.

"The sluice room!"

Taffy didn't cover his mouth this time. The anger inside him was ready to burst out and a few of Trudith's minions coming to apprehend him would be just the remedy. The memory of the

grate near where Rassie had balled up her fist in readiness to punch Mr Hegg during the tour of the Hogsnuuff, sprang to his mind. Why had they taken her there, Taffy asked himself as the thought came to him... they were all there. Taffy fervently tried to stuff all the papers back into the file. He hadn't been discovered yet and he didn't want to get found out over a few messy papers. As he inserted the last page all colour drained from his face as he gripped it and read it again.

'Apprehension successful. Operation infinite Guante will begin at 17:00 hours.'

Taffy gulped. They had all his friends and whatever they planned to do to them was going to happen in one hour.

42

Back on his tiptoes, Taffy walked through the back corridors of the Hogsnuuff. He knew running would create too much noise but knowing that his friends were somewhere within the walls of the vast building was motivation enough to quicken his pace considerably. Stopping at each corner Taffy stopped and stole a peak ensuring it was safe to continue, he moved from the administration building without being seen. At the door at the end of the hall with a sickly lit sign saying 'exit' above it, there was a covered area that allowed staff to move between buildings without getting covered with crud dust on heavy crud dust days. Taffy inhaled deeply, he suspected there would be at least a few of Trudith's cronies stood there, having a quick break from the smell of the sluice room or just a reprieve from being under Trudith's gaze. Taffy steeled himself ready to start fighting if he needed to. He slowly pushed the door open and took a quick peak. Emptiness. The hairs on Taffy's neck stood on end. It was too easy to move around undetected, Taffy knew there were systems in place to prevent intruders, yet he was able to walk around unencumbered.

Taffy suspected it was a trap. His instincts told him it was, and ordinarily he would consider retreating to make better plans, but his friends were in trouble and maybe Parry too. Taffy knew he had to keep moving on. A huge metal gate opposite the admin building which led to the holding pens was closed. Taffy knew that heaving the great door open was bound to be

alarmingly loud, but as he shoved it aside the sound of metal grinding against metal disturbed the silence, but as he expected there was no one to be found on the other side.

“Hello,” Taffy shouted. His echo which bounced around the ceiling was the only reply.

Taffy walked past the bales of hay that were used for lining the holding pens. There were bags of feed beside them and opposite a long row of shovels and scoops that were used to muck out the pens after each slaughter. That area was usually a hive of activity, Taffy remembered that there were workers constantly moving through there the day he toured there. Today however there was no one. Taffy walked into the enormous space that held all the pigs that waited for processing. There were no grunts, no snorts, and no wagging of curly tails. To his left Taffy heard a sound, almost imperceptible but amplified slightly in the cavernous space. Taffy moved to his left, peering into the nearest holding pen. It seemed empty at first but underneath the hay Taffy noticed a rustling. Taffy remembered hearing about sows that dropped piglets in the pens sometimes before being processed. It was unusual as most were kept at the Porkergarten, but occasionally when they were considered too old for the purpose, they were sent to slaughter. Sometimes, they were sent prematurely and gave birth. Taffy assumed there must have been some tiny hogs in the pen but jumped back with a yelp when he realised that he wasn't stroking a small pig, but Ora.

“What are you doing in there?”

Ora opened her eyes, barely able to muster the energy to keep them open.

“They brought us here, three days ago” Ora whispered, her lips cracked and dry.

“Who did?” Taffy leaned in so he could hear her better but again received a shock to see Momona lying next to her friend.

Momona didn't open her eyes. Taffy took a second to ensure her chest was still rising and falling. As bad as Ora looked, Momona was worse. She needed a hospital.

"Who was it, Ora?" Taffy asked, his voice getting louder as Ora slipped back in and out of consciousness.

"Help us." was the last thing she managed to utter before her skeletal frame fell back to sleep.

Panicked, Taffy looked around. All the pens were full of hay. He leant over and felt around in the pen beside Ora and Momona's. He was met with a groan. Taffy's blood turned to ice at the realisation that the holding pens were full of his friends.

"Mafuta!" Taffy called out, "Rassie!" He waited but there was no reply.

Taffy began to run, stopping periodically to swipe hay off his classmates.

"Mafuta," Taffy called again. In the pen beside him, Taffy noticed a pair of eyes amongst the hay. He bent over the rail of the pen and brushed the hay away. The gaunt body of the girl lying there was almost unrecognisable, but the vivid red hair was not. Taffy knew it was Peneveive, the girl who had lost her nerve and her lunch at the tour when she refused to cut the throat of a little pig. She looked at Taffy, her eyes pleading, her body wasted to almost nothing. She slid her finger through the grill that made up the border of her pen. Taffy squatted down and entwined her finger with his. Peneveive smiled. Taffy could see on her face that this was the first kindness she had experienced in a long time.

"It is starting." Peneveive mouthed

Taffy snapped back to reality. He looked at his watch. Operation Guante was beginning in thirty minutes time. Taffy still couldn't fathom what that entailed but he knew it wasn't good. Taffy needed to find Trudith. All of the trouble started with Trudith and he knew it would end with her too. Peneveive had closed her eyes and her hand had dropped beside her. Taffy stood

up and searched for the best exit, he needed to find Trudith. Over in the far corner of the space, Taffy spotted a roller door, he remembered the Bacon Matrons coming through there during the tour. He figured he could go through there and check for Trudith and move through each department until he found her. Taffy ran over to the roller door. As he bent down to grab the door handle, he heard his name.

“Taffy.”

“Mafuta? Mafuta, is that you?”

Taffy leant over the pen beside his and scooped out armfuls of hay and threw them behind him.

“Hey man,” Mafuta croaked. “I think you were right; I don’t trust that Trudith.”

The sight of his friend lying in a pen, emaciated and shivering was unbearable.

“What have they done to you?” Taffy felt a hot, angry tear roll down his cheek.

“It isn’t just me,” Mafuta gasped. “I’ve got company.”

The pen held three other boys and five girls. They were packed in like sardines with no room to move, not that any of them had the energy to.

“I’m going to get you out.”

“No rush,” Mafuta whispered. “We’ve been sharing stories of the old days, before we all came to Plightpool, we were all born in the same place, you know.”

Taffy looked in the pen, everyone was dark, like Mafuta.

Taffy felt a sharp flash of blue light, like a strike to the side of his head. His knees gave out and he fell to the ground. A revelation. The percolating fragments standing in line, each making sense, each finally, telling the truth.

“Juju.”

“What?” Mafuta coughed.

“You’re juju. They’ve got you altogether because you’re a special kind of meat.”

“Taffy, man, I’m tired, now isn’t the time to talk crud.”

Taffy dragged himself back onto his feet. “Remember what Mr Hegg said, they only want thin pigs!”

“Wake me up when you start making sense.”

“Maftua,” Taffy screamed “They’re going to eat you!”

Taffy bolted towards the opposite end of the huge room. There was a switch with **RELEASE** painted above. Taffy knew if he could release the gates, he could begin to drag people out. It was almost 17:00 hours, there was no time to spare. Taffy approached the switch, his lungs burning from running so hard, he extended his finger in readiness to release his friends from this madness, when he heard the clicking sound. Taffy turned around and was met with Trudith pointing a gun at him.

A handwritten number '43' in black ink, positioned centrally on the page. The '4' is written with a single stroke, and the '3' is also written with a single stroke, with a small loop at the top.

“Trude. Nice to see you again. I’ve been looking for you.”

“It’s Trudith. I knew you would come here tonight. I told everyone to keep out of your way. Give you all the access you need.”

Taffy folded his arms “And left your office open so I could read your files.”

“What? No... I had a guard there.”

“So you come to town, take over the Hogsnuuff, enslave everyone and you can’t even lock a door?”

“Well, I didn’t think... SHUT UP! I needed you here, and you came. You are so predictable. Taffy Futt thinks he is a hero and has come to save the day.”

“And Trude has come to eat PEOPLE!”

Trudith’s eyes grew wide, and her lips tightened.

“Yeah, I worked it out. That liquid crud you tried to peddle, Magnesia Hunt, is an anagram for EATING HUMANS!”

“You are smarter than I gave you credit for.”

“It’s just like the pigs. Mr Hegg told us that people across the border prefer lean meat, and so you’re starving everyone to make them lean! You can’t think you’re going to get away with it” Taffy snapped. “No one in their right mind would eat a human.”

“Look around you” Trudith bared her teeth. “I have gotten away with it. Production of a new product, Themmanu begins in only a few short minutes. Those gates will open and those poor wretched creatures with help me fulfil my destiny.”

“Themmanu? Human meat. Enough with the anagrams Trude.” Taffy made a show of rolling his eyes. “I feel you are destined for a padded cell and high doses of medication.”

“It’s Trudith! You can never hope to understand the forces at play here. My work is the culmination of generations of faithful having to bide their time, waiting for the prophecy to reveal itself, and now our time has come.”

“Those Anhänger? They sound as wacky as you Trude.”

Trudith lunged forward and slapped Taffy across the face, hard. “Don’t you dare utter the name of the blessed. AND MY NAME IS TRUDITH!”

In the second it took for Trudith to compose herself, Taffy also lunged forward in an attempt to press the release switch. Trudith fired the gun, the bullet hit the wall right beside the switch.

“ENOUGH!” Trudith repositioned the gun. “Into the next room. I have work to do, and I’m going to let you watch. Now walk.”

As Taffy walked away at gunpoint, he could feel every pair of eyes focussed directly on him.

“Over there, shouted Trudith, pointing to the centre of the sluice floor. Taffy inhaled deeply, the stink of the crud tank, mixed with leftover sluice stung his eyes, but he didn’t have time to waste adjusting to the stink, he had to escape Trudith and save his friends.

“I must say, you have proven to be a constant annoyance to me.” Trudith stepped towards Taffy.

“I could say the same Trudith.” Taffy stepped backwards.

“I had hoped to make an example of you.” Trudith stepped forward.

“I will never help you Trudith.” Taffy stepped back.

Taffy heard a whirling noise and looked up to see the crud hose being lowered directly above him.

Taffy stepped towards Trudith.

Seriously Trude? Why would you think you could suck a fat boy up through a hose?”

“I read it in a book one time, it seemed like a good idea.”

“Oh, Trude.” Taffy shook his head as if admonishing a naughty child.

“It matters not Taffy. Your journey ends here. I can’t say it was nice knowing you.”

Trudith aimed the gun at Taffy’s head, her lips curled into a sneer. She didn’t have time to register the object flying through the air until it hit her between the eyes with a splat.

Taffy ran, as fast as he could while Trudith peeled his last chocolate curd from her head.

Taffy made for a door beside the crud tank, but he quickly changed course as he saw Trudith’s bullets pinging from it. He searched frantically for an escape. Each roller door was closed, and as Taffy’s eyes darted around looking for safe escape, he realised that he would have to risk running past Trudith to go back into the space with all the holding pens. The only way out of the line of fire was straight up. Taffy made for the metal stairs of the snitches tower.



The stairs shook as Taffy ascended. He gripped the handrail and tried to avoid stepping on bolts that had rusted over or spots where bolts were missing altogether. The faster Taffy ran the wider the rickety staircase swayed. Taffy slowed his steps, reducing the angry rocking of the stairs. Taffy stole a quick look behind him as he continued to climb. Trudith was coming up the stairs. Taffy stopped to see if there was a door at the top of the outlook he could barge through, but there was nothing. No places to hide or to spring from, affording Taffy an opportunity to take Trudith's gun. More screeching sounds of bullets pinging off metal brought Taffy back into the present. Trudith was gaining on him, and it sounded to Taffy that she still had plenty of bullets. As he reached the top of the snitch's lookout Taffy looked down below. He hoped desperately that there might be some soft bales of hay that would safely catch him if he were to jump or even some sticky pig guts. The only way out of Trudith's path was back down and between Taffy and the floor was a gigantic vat of bubbling, stinking, putrefying pig poo.

Taffy turned to face the footsteps that approached him. The smile on Trudith's face was maniacal. Her teeth were bared like a rabid dog about to attack and she panted as her dilated pupils focussed on Taffy.

“It is a shame; I would have enjoyed the look on your face as you watched your friends die. But no matter, I will take plenty of pleasure in ending you.”

Taffy inched further away from Trudith until his back hit the brick wall that the lookout railings was bolted into.

“You are going to get caught. You will get put away forever.”

A giggle escaped Trudith’s lips. “Look around you. No one is coming. We own everyone in town, hell, we own some of the most powerful people in the world. It takes a lot of planning and a lot of money to take over an entire town, and then take control of all of the young people. But don’t fret Taffy, you will die knowing that you tried to save your friends... even though you failed, you have served a greater purpose. I might even raise a glass to you as the first bite of the flesh of your friends passes the lips of the faithful.”

“If you’re hungry Trude, I’d be happy to cook you a couple of eggs or something.”

“MY NAME IS TRUDITH!”

Taffy closed his eyes as he felt the hot metal of Trudith’s gun pushed against his forehead.

A memory.

Being sat in a wooden box of Taffies.

Trying to shake Parry awake after he passed out on the kitchen floor, his head bleeding.

The round of applause at school when Taffy was announced the fattest in his class.

Rolling on the floor laughing uncontrollably with Mafuta.

A pat on the back from Borghust.

Parry blushing as he talked about meeting his first love.

Trudith screaming

“What?” Taffy opened his eyes. It took a few seconds to adjust to the look of agony on Trudith’s face as she registered the sharp metal hook that had just been thrust through her arm. With a clank her gun fell to the metal grill. Despite her obvious agony she reached down for the gun at the same time as Taffy.

Taffy wrapped his hands around the gun, but it was heavier than he imagined, and he was unsure how to hold it properly. Trudith kicked backwards, trying to inflict the same pain on Parry that his razor-sharp hook was inflicting on her.

In the second it took for the gun to slip from Taffy’s hands, Trudith had taken control of it again and pointed it towards Taffy.

Parry yanked Trudith’s arm to the right, pulling her off balance. Taffy tried to grab the gun, but amongst the flurry of moving arms and screaming could not get purchase of it.

Taffy didn’t register at first what Parry was saying until he saw Parry throw his leg over the ledge.

“I’m sorry, Taffy.”

Trudith pointed the gun at Taffy and pulled the trigger. The bullet flew past Taffy’s head as if in slow motion. Taffy’s eyes were fixed to Parry’s as he watched his father throw himself and Trudith over the platform.

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Taffy didn't recognise the sounds that escaped his mouth. They reminded him of a wounded animal in pain. Taffy ran to the side of the rickety balcony searching frantically for any sign of his Father or Trudith, but he found nothing. A most unforgiving stench emanated from the enormous vat of crud, the foul crust on top having been broken and the circular ripple on top, the only clue that two bodies had plunged into it, lost forever.

If it hadn't been for the sounding of the alarm and the low rumble and whirring of machines being switched on, Taffy would have been content to remain on the snitch's lookout with his unfathomable grief. It wasn't enough that Trudith was gone, plans had been made that would proceed with or without her. As he descended the shaking staircase, Taffy knew he was the only one who could stop the annihilation of all his friends.

What was only moments before an empty cavernous space was now buzzing like a hive with dozens of uniformed people moving about with a furious intensity. The huge overhead lights illuminated the killing floor as the first hooks on the conveyor floated past. Taffy gasped at the knowledge that in a few moments the first of his friends would be attached to these hooks and all would be lost. Taffy crouched down behind the stair rail. Thus far he remained unseen, He could tell by the uniformity of their movements, the precision to detail and the immovable, slicked back hair that all the people who were working were Trudith's people from across the borders. Taffy took a small comfort in the knowledge that no-one from Plightpool was

complicit in the slaughter, or equally as bad, being forced against their will to kill a loved one or friend.

Taffy looked all around him. There were an array of blades and pipes that could make suitable weapons, but he was outnumbered in a fight. He thought about creeping up behind everyone and giving them an almighty kick to the back or a blow to the head, but he knew that eventually he would be surrounded. “The switch.” Taffy said aloud, bringing himself back to the moment. “The release switch must be pressed, the gates will open and everyone will have a chance to break free.” Taffy again surveyed the floor. There were no guns. A wave of hope stirred from within him. It wasn’t a fair fight when Trudith had a gun.

Trudith

Dad.

A wave of grief, more painful than a bullet to the gut.

“My Dad is dead.”

It took all the energy Taffy had not to scream, or cry or express his agony and risk being caught. In a small room, in one of the deepest parts of his brain, Taffy had to lock away his grief and his pain and his fury. He knew he would revisit it and feel the unbearable loss of his father and Borghust but he could not do it now. His friends needed him. Taffy closed the door on his grief and allowed rage to fill its place. Rage that Trudith would dare come to his town. Rage that she made people loathe their own bodies. Rage at the hideous drink that she peddled and a fiery red-hot fury that Trude would take what little he had from him.

Taffy looked across the space to where the kill switch was. There was no one guarding it but Taffy counted nine workers he would need to get past to pull the switch.

“No more time for cat and mouse,” Taffy said to himself aloud. He stepped out from the wall where he had attempted to conceal himself and walked towards the switch. Taffy was surprised that his presence wasn’t made known sooner, but he realised that these workers were a hive mind. Under Trude’s management they were probably petrified of doing or saying the wrong thing. They each had very specific tasks to do which didn’t include dealing with a fat boy walking past them like he was out for a Sunday stroll.

However, as he stepped past two workers Taffy heard a gasp.

“Who is that?” he heard one whisper to the other

“Projected *Level 4 - Heave and Lift*, ya crud-fluff.” Taffy replied.

Before they could raise an alarm, Taffy had banged their heads together with such force, they crumpled to the ground unconscious.

Taffy realised that time was surely almost up. His friends were close to being strung up on hooks. The release switch was their only hope.

Taffy broke into a jog. He scooped up a tall man and flung him to his right, like a child throwing a rag doll. The groan of the man crashing to the floor caught the attention of those nearby. Gaining momentum, Taffy held his arms out in front of him and ploughed through a group of three workers who were in his path. Taffy looked ahead of him, he knew by now that orders must have been shouted into unseen earpieces that there was a disturbance on the sluice floor and that it must be contained. Taffy reached out for a figure he saw run towards him and snatched up the wriggling package and threw it as hard as he could at a group of four who had fallen into ranks in an attempt to create a human wall. Taffy could almost hear the sound of a bowling ball smashing the pins at the end of the lane, as arms and legs entwined and collapsed in front of him. With a giant leap, Taffy cleared the pile of groaning workers and once again stood in front of the release switch.

“Can’t stop me now, Trude.”

Taffy lunged forward.

Pain

A throbbing sensation on the left side of his head

Warmth flowing over his face.

Blood.

Darkness.

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A blow to the gut woke Taffy. He had to blink hard to open his eyes, they were crusted with blood. The lights above him seemed overly bright and the throbbing where he had been punched in his stomach was matched by the pain in his head. Taffy could barely make out the muffled sounds around him, a high-pitched ringing in his ears drowning everything out.

“What?” Taffy asked, causing him to splutter and gag, spitting the metallic sensation from his mouth.

Muffled laughter and a tug on the back of his shirt.

“It’s too late.”

“What?” Taffy muttered again.

“It’s too late. Certainly, your heroic little act has put us behind schedule, but it’s too late for you to save your friends. You have failed.

Taffy wanted to stand up, but he could feel the hands of three or four men pushing him back down. As his sight and hearing throbbed back to normality, Taffy realised he was lying on the sluice grates. All the workers had stopped and had positioned themselves around the cavernous space so they could watch Taffy.

“Trudith spoke of you, but she didn’t mention quite how annoying you were.”

Laughter broke out amongst some of the workers.

“Send my regards to Trudith, you’ll be seeing her soon.” Taffy spat out.

More laughter.

“You have spirit kid. I like that. Of course, you’ll appreciate that I’m in charge now, I guess I can thank you for my promotion.”

Taffy glanced up at the tall man who hovered above him. He had the severe, slicked back hair of one of Trudith’s cronies and the same arrogant sneer.

“I won’t let you hurt my friends.”

“Look around you kid. It’s done. You lost. There is nothing you can do. You might have temporarily shut down the machinery and unlocked the holding pens, but it is a minor inconvenience.

Taffy looked around him. The hooks were no longer moving. Through the dried blood on his face, he could see some of the holding pen gates swinging ajar.

“Run.” Taffy managed to whimper.

“What was that?” The tall man laughed.

“Run!” Taffy tried to find the energy deep within him to scream to his friends.

“RUN” his voice echoed through the factory.

There was no movement.

“Enough of this” the tall man shouted back. “Reform into squads. Recalibrate starting time to 17:30 hours.”

“No” Taffy couldn’t control the tears anymore. Borghust, Parry, Mafuta, Rassie and everyone he had ever known.

“Hold him up, pull his head back.”

The people behind Taffy held his head back far enough to expose his throat. He tried to break free, but he was sore, weak and feeling defeated.

“Pass me your knife.”

Taffy saw the tall man reach out as a knife was passed to him.

“Maybe we can make a special product from you? Taff? Taffy? Is that your name? Yeah, after I have gutted you, I can make something special. Pulling Taffy perhaps?”

Taffy spat blood at the feet of the tall man before he closed his eyes and waited for the sting of metal to slide across his throat.

The blast of a horn instead.

Taffy opened his eyes. He knew the look on his own face would have matched those of his captors.

“What the hell was that?” The tall man gasped.

“It sounds like a horn, like when you blow through a conch shell,” Someone offered.

“A pig tusk.” Taffy corrected.

“What is happening?” the tall man shouted.

Everyone ignored him, instead transfixed on the sight of a painfully thin figure slouched in a wheelchair.

“How the hell did she get a chair? I ordered them to be removed!”

No reply.

Out from a pen, holding a long boar tusk, the wheelchair inched towards the tall man.

Bemused, he similarly watched as Rassie wheeled slowly across the floor.

“Is this a joke? We have work to do. We haven’t time for this unfortunate creature. Someone chuck it in the blender.”

Taffy could feel the heat from the turbo blast burning from the engine of Rassie’s self-improved chair. As she barrelled towards them at 150 kilometres Taffy broke free of the grip of the people holding him down and threw himself out of harm’s way.

Taffy looked up in time to see Rassie thrust herself from her chair, pivoting around the tall man’s shoulders before she thrust the boar’s horn deep into his chest. As the man’s lifeless body crumpled to the ground, Rassie reached out for the arm of her chair, repositioning herself on it. Rassie licked the end of the horn. The tall man’s blood, the only sustenance she had consumed for weeks. She raised the horn to her lips and again blew.

The sound was unmistakable.

It was a call to war.



Like a whisper at first. Voices began to rise amongst the holding pens. The whispers grew into chatter, then into shouting, and then as Taffy recognised all too well, into rage.

With their second leader dead, the workers seemed at a loss as to what to do next. Then, bodies, four or five at a time emerged from the pens. Despair, fatigue and malnutrition had given way to the bloodthirsty desire for revenge in a room full of disgruntled teenagers.

“They tried to kill us,” Taffy shouted.

“They starved you, captured you and treated you like hogs. They came to OUR town and did this to us. They wanted to destroy us all. You know what to do...”

“GET THEM!”

The workers tried to flee but were victims of their own design. All escape routes were firmly shut, doors locked, and emergency tunnels blocked. They knew that calling for help was pointless, they had been trained to expect cries, pleading, begging and profanities from the teenagers as they moved towards their deaths, no one who heard them screaming from the other side of the wall would expect such a reversal of predicament. There would be no outside help to aid them.

“Group together! Arm yourself” one of the workers shouted. “They are weak, we can overpower them.”

Invigorated by the desire for steely cold retribution, the teenagers collectively screamed and broke into a sprint.

Taffy looked over at Rassie, who had already forced her arms around the neck of the nearest worker and was fervently pummeling his face. Taffy looked around the carnage to see if he could see Mafuta, but he couldn't make him out in the sea of faces. Before he had a chance to yell out his friend's name, Taffy felt several hands on his back, he knew it was the same hands that were holding him down just a few minutes earlier when the tall man tried to cut his throat.

Taffy didn't waste time with witty retorts, he grabbed the man closest to him by the throat and squeezed hard, the man slapped at Taffy as he gasped for breath. Taffy released the man's throat but held onto his arm instead. Taffy began to spin in his place, the man's eyes widened just as Taffy released and sent him flying like an airborne starfish. The remaining men tried to rush Taffy in an attempt to bring him to the ground, but Taffy's fist brought down like a sledgehammer on the top of the first one's head, had him knocked out cold. The second spat blood after feeling Taffy's fist in his gut. The third gulped loudly and took a step back, which afforded Taffy the room to kick his right leg hard into the man's groin. The man fell to the ground with a squeal and tears running profusely from his eyes.

Again, Taffy turned around and looked for Mafuta. His eyes searched amongst the carnage, but he still couldn't find his friend. A twinge of panic rose up through his belly, and just for a second Taffy wondered if Mafuta had even survived. "What if he was too weak to escape his pen?" Taffy thought to himself. Taffy looked to the direction of the juju pens, but he couldn't be sure from that distance if his friend was still there.

A blood curdling scream forced Taffy to turn around. A group of five or six had circled one of the students intent on ending her. The student had managed to grab a knife from the leg

pocket of one of the workers and had drawn it across their throat before they even had time to react. As the lifeless body fell to the floor, Taffy was able to see the lightning-fast movement of the knife puncturing two more stomachs and slicing the right ear of a third. Taffy's mouth hung agape as he saw the bright red hair of the girl wielding the blade.

"Peneveive?" Taffy uttered in complete amazement as the blade came down upon an outstretched arm severing it with one clean slice. Peneveive picked up the arm and proceeded to slap its former owner about the face with his own lost appendage. Peneveive didn't stop, her penchant for blades had been sorely misjudged and she was more than happy to show them how wrong they were.

"Mafuta!" Taffy called out, as he moved through the throng. It was too loud to hear any reply. What he did hear was Killen's nose break as one of the workers fists connected with his face. The wet splatter of blood on the ground and the scream from Kilian as he pinched his bleeding nose shut. The man who punched Killen grinned, as he drew his fist back ready to give the same to Ora who stood shaking. Just before the fist had a chance to meet its target, Momona pushed her friend to the side, twisted to the left, and spun her right foot up and around, knocking all the man's teeth from his head. As he fell to the ground winded, Killen, Ora and Momona piled on top of him scratching, biting, and pinching the man with as much force as they could muster.

"Watch out!" Taffy heard behind him. He jumped to his right to avoid the six members of the rugby team who had linked arms and were charging like a makeshift bulldozer. A group of six workers had similarly linked arms, thinking they were stronger and could bring the boys to the ground. Taffy remembered when the rugby players had encountered this exact move at the grand final during the previous season. As they approached the defence they somersaulted over the opposition. On the football field they continued to run towards the goal, but there

was no running now, just an unquenchable fury. The football team each grabbed the worker in front of them, placing them into a strangle hold. At the count of three, Taffy winced as he heard the necks of the workers all snap.

Taffy jumped out of the way as a man engulfed in flames ran towards him, having tried to sneak up behind Rassie, he was given a blast from her combustible engine.

From the corner of his eye, Taffy saw a fist swinging towards him. He didn't have time to duck, and braced for more pain, but felt none. The intended punch to the side of his head was interrupted by Peneveive who had brought her knife down, freeing the limb from its body. Taffy then knocked the owner of the arms backwards with a well-placed backhand.

“Peneveive, have you seen Mafuta?”

“No” she replied, as she scored another sliced ear.

“Ready? Aim, Fire! Taffy ducked as the football team had joined forces with the basketball players and hurled round after round of pig offcuts, offal, and tusks at a group of workers who had barricaded themselves behind bales of hay. Those who attempted to run to a safer hiding spot were met by the dance students who swiftly pirouetted towards them and administered a high kick right to their chins.

In the distance Taffy finally saw Mafuta. Despite the slaughter all around him, he felt relieved that his best friend was still alive. Taffy ran towards his friend, picking up the closest worker to use as a human shield before knocking him unconscious.

“Mafuta,” Taffy called to his friend.

“Hey Taffy,” Mafuta shouted back.

Taffy stopped, unable to help but observe that his friend seemed to be jumping up and down.

As he approached, Taffy saw dozens of bodies lying on the ground.

“They had a crate of guns, Taffy, they were going to start shooting. They forgot about us in the juju cage though.”

“Why are you jumping up and down though Maf?”

“Can’t risk them waking up, eh?”

Taffy saw one of the bodies shift a little. Mafuta jumped on him with an almighty thud, ensuring they wouldn’t rouse anytime soon.

Taffy smiled at his friend. And noticed the calm that had fallen upon the Hogsnuuff.

The sewing and weaving students were using entrails to tie up any worker who was still conscious.

A blast of the hog tusk horn.

The battle had been won.

Part IV

DETERMINATION

From the **Determination Day manual**

“This is a day to celebrate, for your destiny has been **Determined**.”

You have shown the world what you are capable of.

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Mafuta coughed again. The smokey celebratory incense that his mother had waved around his body had somehow gone up his nose and down his throat. He looked up at the stage and felt a pang of excitement for his friends. Taffy was sat next to the podium where compere Deanid Smoot *Level 10 - Speech and Awards* was standing to his left and Rassie was sat to his right. Taffy caught Mafuta's eye and poked out his tongue. Mafuta smiled.

“Congratulations once again to the **Determined**. You have made us all proud under the most extraordinary circumstances.”

Another round of applause, tears of grief quickly wiped away and the sheer relief of still being alive.

“We have reclaimed what is ours, and you have taken back you purpose! Never again shall we let those from across the borders come here and do harm to us and our way of life.”

Cheering and strong applause from the crowd.

“Of course, you will have noticed that two very special people have yet to be **Determined**.”

Rassie leant over and squeezed Taffy's hand.

“We are all brutally aware that things could have gone much different if it had not been for the actions of these two people who have been invited to sit on the stage today.”

Rassie's brother attempted another round of applause, too proud of their sister to notice the solemnity of the moment.

“We take into account their bravery, intelligence and ability to draw on an inner strength which has saved the lives of so many people in Plightpool. Although we still grieve the loss of our beloved Mr Hegg, we know our future depends upon finding someone who can lead our people into a prosperous future. Although it will take time and much education, today we have **Determined** Rassie Calvernia *Level 10: Trainee – Manage & lead*.

A standing ovation and cheering that almost deafened Taffy. He patted Rassie on the back before she rolled to centre stage. Camera flashes, squeals of delight and waves of excited conversation moving through the crowd.

“And another special **Determination** for a very special boy.”

Taffy sat up especially straight, knowing all eyes were now on him.

“As more stories are told and we get a better understanding of everything that happened to our people over the last few weeks, we keep hearing one name pop up all the time. Taffy Futt, refused to believe the vicious lies of those from across the borders. He fought against injustice and for the very lives of all of you here today. Despite so much loss, he never gave up trying to keep you safe, and this we agree is what we need in *Level 11: Trainee – Law and correct*.

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“No, it has to be painted first,” Ora explained.

“And it needs a really good airing, to get the stink of all the cigarette smoke out of it.”

Momona added.

“First thing I’m going to do is burn any left-over packets of Magnesia Hunt.” Killen chimed in.

“And we’re going to have a grand Re-opening, you’ll come to that won’t you Taffy?”

“Yes, Ora, I wouldn’t miss it. I think you three will run the **Souk & Supply** really well.”

Killen nodded to Taffy. He didn’t know how to apologise for how he had behaved when Trudith came to town or how to thank Taffy for saving his life, but he figured that he could at least give up their childish spats.

Taffy stopped every few steps to receive more congratulations, hugs and pats on the back. He wondered if people would remember to be this kind in the future when he would have to come to their houses and tell them to turn down their music, quiet a rowdy hound or pay an outstanding fine. Taffy decided he would worry about that later. First he had to sit through a series of lectures of town ordinances with a group of elders. Usually new law would be trained by the old, but Borghust...

Taffy inhaled deeply. This was a day of celebration. Hearing laughter and gasps Taffy turned around to see Peneveive *Level 5 - Slice and stab* juggle three machetes high into the air.

“I could watch that all day,” Mafuta said, staring as Peneveive described how to pop out a human eye using the handle of a butter knife.

“Hey Mafuta, I was looking for you, I haven’t had a chance to say congrats on your *Level 5 - Juju Curator*.”

“Cheers man, I reckon I have a special insight into it, you know, having been both product and producer.” Taffy smiled.

“It is going to take a while to get used to everything that happened.”

Mafuta nodded, “Yeah, I’m not sure we ever really will get over being starved and almost turned into meat. It is going to be almost impossible without my best mate.”

Taffy eyes widened, “What do you mean, Mafuta?”

Well, everything has changed hasn’t it. We’re on different paths, I’ll spend my days with pigs, and you’ll spend yours making sure people like Trudith never come back.”

Taffy considered what his friend was saying, he had felt similar pangs of anxiety at the thought of so much change. “It has come to my attention that given the recent upsets going on in the Juju section of the Hogsnuuff, that it is critical that regular inspections of said section be made on a daily basis.”

Mafuta burst out laughing “Are you allowed to do that?”

“It’s my job to keep this town safe now, and everyone in it. I think keeping an eye on you is going to be essential. I know what you get up to.”

Mafuta laughed again, “Yeah, cos you’re always right beside me when I’m doing it.”

Taffy gave Mafuta a pat on the back. All the discontent between him and Mafuta was forgiven. “Hey, I’m going to get a drink, what something?”

“Nah”, Mafuta turned, “I’m going to mingle some more, I want to see what other knife tricks Peneveive can do too.”

Taffy walked towards the snack table stopping to chat briefly or to accept more congratulations.

“Can I get one snout stout and one glass of ice water, please?”

As he carried the drinks towards the gathered crowd Taffy heard an outburst of laughter.

“Three days I was hanging there, three whole days before anyone thought to look up.”

Taffy handed the glass of ice water to Parry and stepped back so others could listen to him retell his story of survival yet again.

“It is the titanium, you see. Stronger than boar’s hide. My hook got caught in the metal grates and so I hung there. Three whole days before anyone thought to look up. I shouldn’t complain though, it was better than falling into that tank full of crud.”

Another burst of raucous laughter. Taffy turned to walk away; he knew that with a captive audience Parry would be entertaining for hours. As he stepped forward, Taffy felt a hand grab his.

“I had a reason to hang on though, you see. Things are different now, aren’t they Taffy? I have a reason to hang on for dear life.”

Taffy squeezed his father’s hand back.

“Yes, you do. We all do. Everything is returning to normal, and I just know that everything is going to be OK.”

As a round of applause rose amongst the crowd, Taffy Futt ignored the pang of anxiety rising in his stomach.

Regardless of their situation, the chosen one will flourish.

Death itself cannot stop the chosen one from their destiny.

The great tome of the Anhänger

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The doors of the elevator closed. The two men and three women who were already inside the lift each winced at the smell, but they didn't dare show it. One man held his breath while another attempted to look inconspicuous as he pinched his nostrils together. Another woman made a show of rifling through her bags as if she had lost something important, when in fact she hoped that she might be able to secretly spray a few squirts from her small bottle of perfume in the hope that it might mask the unfathomable stench. As the doors opened, each person inhaled a long, deep breath of fresh air while being sure that she didn't catch them doing so. Trudith B Lumia stepped from the elevator and walked into the hallway. As the doors of the lift closed again, she maintained her composure, despite the muffled groans from the people left inside.

Trudith knocked on the door labelled 'MANAGEMENT'

"Come in."

Trudith entered the room, aware that in only moments the entire room would stink of pig-crud.

"Take a seat."

"I would rather stand, please. I don't want to ruin your furniture."

"Oh, my poor dear Trudith. What a ghastly ordeal you have been through."

Trudith looked straight ahead, maintaining her composure fighting the sting of tears that prickled at her eyes.

“I have failed, and no matter how hard I scrub, I cannot get the stink of that vile place out of my skin.”

Trudith ran her fingers through her limp uncooperative hair that refused to remain pushed back as it once had. She had thought of shaving her head in the hopes that new growth would return without any smell and would not attract nearly as many flies.

“Dear Trudith, hush now, don’t say you failed. You have uncovered information I only ever dreamed possible. You have put in motion possibilities that we had thought had been lost to the past.”

“I would have completed my mission if it hadn’t been for that fat boy.”

“Oh yes, Taffy Futt, the boy who is three times larger than anyone else in Plightpool.”

“Horrible, rude, insolent and he kept calling me Trude. I want you to approve an extermination order.”

“Request denied.”

“That fat beast humiliated me! He is the reason I stink of filth.”

“Trudith, I appreciate that you are angry, but as I just told you, while it may seem a failure, this whole process has uncovered new destinies. The prophecy is closer now than we could have ever hoped.”

Trudith stepped forward, her top lip curled, “You seem to forget that I am the chosen one, I bear the mark, I want that fat boy dead and I asked you for permission only as a courtesy. I am organising a team and it will be done by tomorrow night.”

Trudith was not expecting to be met with laughter, a deep, guttural guffaw from her manager.

“What the hell are you laughing at?” Trudith demanded.

Her manager removed her glasses and placed them carefully on the table. Trudith was momentarily fascinated by her pupils; all three of them and each the most brilliant gold colour.

“Oh dear, Trudith. I too once believed you were chosen, that mark on your back is quite convincing, but it is nothing more than a stain, a mosquito bite probably. You have been through a lot. Take some time off, relax and recalibrate. I don’t want to hear any more about you harming that boy.”

“Who the hell do you think you are talking too?” Trudith beat the manager’s desk with her fist. I have been chosen to fulfil the prophecy by the High Anhänger and I will not be barked at by some administrator. That fat boy will be dead in the imminent future and there is nothing you can do about it.”

Trudith turned and marched back towards the door she had entered. It was the faintest sound of the barrel clicking that made her turn her head ever so slightly and see the handgun being pointed at her.

“I’m sorry it has to end like this, Trude.”

Before she had time to open her mouth to gasp, the bullet passed through Trudith’s skull and her lifeless body fell to the floor.

“I need a cleaning team in my office, and I need the jet fuelled and ready in one hour. Cancel all my appointments for the next ten days.” the manager demanded through her intercommunication device.

She stood up, collected her glasses and bag.

“I shall be attending to some very important business in the coming days. I will also take the time to attend a family reunion.”

As she stepped over Trudith’s lifeless body, she added,

“I am going to meet my son.”

-The end-

Chapter 3

Challenging the tropes: A fat counter-narrative.

In this chapter, I will discuss my motivations and influences, both personal and theoretical, for creating my young adult novel, *The Determination of Taffy Futt*. Intended to challenge dominant depictions of the fat boy character, I am drawing upon my findings in chapters 1 & 2 to create a fictional character that shuns societal expectations of the ideal body and is written in a way that deliberately subverts the typical language used when describing the fat boy. I will discuss how my novel serves as a counter-narrative to dominant narratives about fat boys and the ways in which literature serves as a resistance to power. I will discuss my choice of genre and how Speculative fiction has a successful history of use by subjugated writers. I will also discuss the theory of animalistic dehumanisation and how it influences the creation of fat characters, before I show the ways in which I have reimagined my fat boy character, Taffy Futt. I will finish off this chapter discussing the role of the mother in my novel and dieting as a metaphor for ‘cult’ like behaviour, my use of ‘other bodies and the way I have chosen to challenge the ‘fat quest’.

As discussed in chapter 1, there are measurable prejudices that people with fat bodies face in society. There are also fat activist and body positivity movements that aim to negate the attitudes that perpetuate these prejudices. However, as Nicole Ann Amato (2019) notes,

It is not enough to teach... self-love and acceptance if educators are also not teaching society at large to dismantle prejudices about fatness. I am not sure that work can happen if exposure to fatness in literature is reinforcing negative tropes and misinformation about what it means to be fat (pp. 18-19).

It is my contention that one of the ways in which prejudice can be dismantled is through the use of counter-narratives.

Understanding counter-narratives

In *Power/Knowledge* Foucault (1980) states that “‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces, and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth” (p. 133). As I have argued, the discourses that are placed around obesity and fat bodies, position a ‘truth’ that allows for the ongoing negative depiction of fat characters, justified by the idea that it is to promote good health, or social inclusion or longevity. A counter-narrative, Foucault argued was “the insurrection of knowledges that are opposed primarily [...] to the effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the institution and functioning of an organized scientific discourse within a society such as ours” (p. 84). The dominant idea of ‘truth’ therefore, is dependent on who wields the most power. To counter this version of the truth, without possessing the same level of power of those in control, can be achieved through the production of narratives which challenge “the tyranny of globalizing discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges of a theoretical avant-garde” (Foucault, p. 83).

According to Lundholt et al. (2018),

Counter-narrative refers to a narrative that takes on meaning through its relationship with one or more other narratives. While this relation is not necessarily oppositional, it involves a stance toward another narrative(s). This aspect of stance, or position, distinguishes counter-narrative from other forms of intertextuality (p. 1).

Scholars have used counter-narratives as a method of reimagining and challenging the stories and beliefs about those whose experiences are underrepresented, including, but not limited to, Black, Asian, minority, and ethnic people, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and members of the LGBTQ community. As academic and civil rights campaigner Jehan Roberson (2019) states, counter-narratives are “the stories of those whose lives disrupt the fictions of master narratives—thus emerge as necessary and potentially lifesaving works” (*A Black Counternarrative*, 2019).

Similarly, Bamberg and Andrews (2004) stated, “counter-narratives only make sense in relation to something else, that which they are countering. The very name identifies it as a positional category, in tension with another category” (p. X). While Lundholt et al. (2018) argue that a counter-narrative is not necessarily oppositional, my novel is, in that my work is a concerted challenge to stereotypical depictions of the fat boy. As this thesis focuses on challenging traditional tropes of fat boys in YA novels, I didn’t want to position my work within the dominant discourse surrounding fat bodies but rather to add to the dissenting voices as they are articulated within the field of Fat Studies. I would contend that to argue that a dominant ideology is unfair and incorrect to a particular group within society is inherently oppositional. However, as Bamberg & Andrews (2004) assert, my work only makes sense within the context of those novels and tropes that negatively portray the fat boy, in response to the novels that were discussed in chapter 2, asking the reader to rethink their perception of the fat boy.

As Acevedo et al. (2010) stated, the term counter-narrative is used “to denote an all-encompassing and authoritative account of some aspect of social reality that is widely accepted and endorsed by the larger society” (p. 125). As discussed in chapter 1, medicalised obesity discourse now serves as a mode of discipline on fatness and fat bodies, which the majority in society accept and endorse. While it is not the intent of this thesis to argue the

myriad issues that impact people with fat bodies as a result of medical obesity discourses, I contend that, in part, an anti-fat sentiment can be both created and perpetuated in YA novels. Conversely, I contend that a counter-narrative can also generate and perpetuate different ways of understanding and reading characters with fat bodies. This, in turn, has the potential to challenge prejudice and anti-fat sentiment in society.

Counter-narratives have been shown to be a particularly powerful tool for changing the minds and beliefs of those who adhere to unhelpful or dangerous dominant narratives. For example, one of the most successful ways to counter ideologies of violent extremism in young men is through counter-narratives (Bélanger et al., 2020), thus suggesting a substantial efficacy in overcoming harmful beliefs. Within the field of literature, however, Delgado & Stefancic (1995) state that counter-narratives offer a perspective that both “helps us understand what life is like for others and invites the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (p. 48). Richard Delgado (1989) adding that counter-narratives in literature have the ability to evoke the “imagination in ways in which discourse that is more conventional cannot” (p. 2415). Counter-narratives are important to highlight information that is inaccurate or false and to expose exclusionary stereotypes and depictions.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer, identified what she called the danger of a single (or dominant) story in her 2009 TedTalk. As a young black girl, Adichie was very familiar with British and American children's writers and the exclusive inclusion of "white and blue eyed" characters in their books. Although fond of these stories, Adichie explains, "the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature." It is important to acknowledge that the lack of Black, Asian, Minority, and Ethnic characters persists in most books for young readers (Ramdarshan Bold, 2018). However, Adichie's single story concept, which argues the need for diversity in storytelling and not the displacement of one single or dominant story for another, can be extrapolated to understand

the impacts upon young readers, especially young fat readers, the negative depictions of fat boys. When there is no dissenting voice to challenge an idea or offer an alternate point of view, then it adds validity or an acceptance to that idea. In the context of this thesis, to only ever read about fat boys who are greedy, stupid, victims or bullies reinforces the belief that that is how fat boys are in reality. As Adichie explained, "show people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (Adichie, 2009). So ingrained are the negative portrayals of fat boys that they, arguably, now evoke an instant prejudice from the reader. The fat body has been linked with bad behaviour for so long that readers are now conditioned to expect the fat body to represent negative qualities, "what we learn about bodies from YA novels is that thin is beautiful, and "normal" and fat is pathological and bad (Averill, 2016 p. 15). It is this labelling and assigning of an entire group and body type that pushes the issue from one of poor representation into an issue of human rights violation; as Adichie stated, the single story "robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasises how we are different rather than how we are similar" (2009).

Therefore, this thesis argues that the single story of the fat boy that has been reproduced in YA novels for over 100 years is causing actual harm to our culture. Again, it isn't just the fat boys who read these poor depictions who are harmed; to bind a particular race, culture, or body type in an unfair narrative is to exclude them and deprive others of their potential. It is critical that young readers are given the opportunity to see their own lives depicted fairly and to experience fair depictions of others.

My fat boy character, Taffy Futt was created to be as fat as Billy Bunter but without the ridicule, "Too right, three times bigger than any other recruit" Taffy wobbled his belly for the benefit of his classmates. A few giggles broke out amongst the audience, and from the back someone shouted, "Go Taffy" (p. 163). I did this to counter the idea that a fat body was

always viewed with shame and show that Taffy had the support of the people in his town.

What I found in my close readings in Chapter 2 was that when describing the fat boy, writers always denigrate the fat boy as soon as he is introduced. The word ‘fat’ is used in connection with ‘slow’, ‘ugly’, ‘loud’ or ‘greedy’. I did not describe Taffy like that as I wanted to show the reader early on that I would not be inviting the reader to ridicule my fat boy.

Resistance literature.

As discussed in chapter 1, according to Foucault, wherever there are systems of power, there is also resistance to that power. This thesis has focused on the ways in which literature can be used as a creative resistance to societal systems that enforce oppression. Barbara Harlow, in her seminal text *Resistance Literature* (1987) originally defined Resistance literature as texts from third-world liberation movements that sought to both challenge and alter the literary and political categorisations of the West. Harlow suggests that engagement with literary narrative that depicts resistance can contribute to civil, political, and governmental change. The YA novel, I contend, can therefore serve as a particularly powerful tool as a form of resistance to the dominant anti-fat rhetoric in society by offering an alternate perspective of the fat body and appealing to the reader to consider the fat body differently.

Historically, Resistance literature was critical in changing attitudes to and ultimately banning slavery in the United States. Books such as *The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano : or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (Equiano & Wilson, 1789); *12 years a slave* (Northup, 1853) and *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (Brown, 1848) are all examples of novels that showed the lived experience of prejudice, and the social change that can be achieved when the stories are read, showing literature can resist and overcome societal

systems of power. One of the most effective ways in which to resist a dominant narrative is to offer a counter-narrative.

Defining and using speculative fiction.

Speculative fiction is generally understood to be a genre that encompasses works in which the setting is somewhere other than the real world (*Definition of Speculative Fiction / Dictionary.com*, n.d.).

Marek Oziewicz (2017) suggests

Speculative fiction includes fantasy, science fiction, and horror, but also their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres like the gothic, dystopia, weird fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, superhero tales, alternate history, steampunk, slipstream, magic realism, fractured fairy tales, and more (p. 1).

My decision to position my novel within a speculative world, however, was in keeping with the tradition of choosing a genre that has embraced representations of oppressed and minority groups. As Gill (2013) suggests, although there is no standard definition of speculative fiction, it is “marked by diversity; there is no limit to possible micro-subjects” (p. 72).

Speculative fiction “emerged as a tool to dismantle the traditional Western cultural bias in favour of literature imitating reality (Oziewicz, p. 1).

According to Ricardo Guthrie (2019) speculative fiction has been used to challenge the racism and the impact of a colonised past by imagining “another world beyond racial exclusion” (p. 17) and to “invite viewers to reimagine or rearrange existing stories about Blackness, embodied knowledge, and our shared historical, political and cultural heritages in

new, transformative ways (p. 24). Similarly, for Queer writers, speculative fiction has been utilised to challenge and question “queer representation; histories in which queer representation has been suppressed; queer dismantling of all types of normativity; queer theorizing about intimacy, kinship, reproduction, and family; questions of posthumanism and the queering of embodiment” (Pearson, 2022, p. 2). In the interest of brevity, I have used Black writing and Queer writing only as examples of the way in which minority writers have used speculative fiction to confront and subvert traditional literary tropes. However, I acknowledge that speculative fiction has been used successfully by Trans writers, Indigenous writers, disabled writers, and many other writers who identify as belonging to a minority group. It is within this vein that I have chosen to adopt speculative fiction, as it has been shown to be crucial in altering long-standing perceptions of readers, both in and out of the minority group.

When writing *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, I had to consider the best genre in which to impart the themes and meanings of my story. With the cannibalistic elements, this novel could have fitted into the horror genre well, but I was conscious of equating the fat body, even tacitly, with something horrific. I did consider literary realism as that is often the way in which authors deal with complex social issues such as drug addiction, teen pregnancy, sexuality issues, and of course, people with fat bodies. Although there are elements of literary realism, I was wary of creating a potentially exclusionary narrative for the very readers I wanted to target by writing an overly realistic problem novel. In order to challenge ideas of body acceptance, I would argue that it is important to write a novel with as wide-reaching a narrative as possible. Similarly, I wanted a genre that was not going to be overly limiting in its conventions. I didn't want to write a love story, for example, as the conventions of the romance genre would arguably require more emphasis on the dynamics of Taffy trying to find a romantic partner as a type of coming-of-age story. Again, I contend that genre would

limit potential readers. I ultimately decided that my book would best be suited to the speculative fiction genre.

The benefit to writing in the speculative genre is that as writers, we do not have to adhere to specific rules or conventions of that genre. This is critical, I contend when it comes to challenging traditional tropes of fat boys within YA novels. As Oziewicz (2017) stated, speculative fiction fulfilled the need for “new conceptual categories to accommodate diverse and hybridic types of storytelling that oppose a stifling vision of reality imposed by exploitative global capitalism” (p. 1). This fits perfectly with challenging storylines, which I argue are informed by and enforced through popularist obesity discourse. Although not the focus of this thesis, the weight loss and ‘health’ industries make billions of dollars each year, so I would argue that it is beneficial to those industries to introduce ideas of body dissatisfaction and shame to young readers as it can eventually lead to them contributing to those industries.

Reimagining the fat boy

As discussed in chapter 2, writers have frequently relied upon depicting fat boy characters to impress upon readers the idea that this character is of low moral or social value. It is now so commonplace that one of the biggest challenges I found in writing *The Determination of Taffy Futt* was how to invite the reader to consider my fat boy character, Taffy from a positive perspective, and not automatically assume that the fat boy was to be used as a stereotype, to not read my work with a preconceived assumption that Taffy would be lazy, vulgar, greedy, stupid, or deserved to be punished.

I introduce my fat boy character: “Taffy stood naked in front of his mirror. He rubbed his hands over his large belly and down his thighs. He turned from left to right. Taffy thought his neck was definitely thicker and maybe his backside too” (p. 77). It was critical not to add any adjectives at this point that might lead the reader to think that Taffy should be perceived negatively. To show the reader that fat was not automatically a negative body type, I added a quote from the fictional ‘Determination Day Manual,’ which stated, “The very tall, the very fat, and the very strong hold a natural advantage over other recruits. This should not be seen as discouraging. Even bodies lacking natural exquisiteness serve a purpose” (p. 77). This was in direct contradiction to the ways in which the authors discussed in chapter 1 described their fat boys. This passage was intended to show that, as a writer, I would not be depicting Taffy negatively but also that this novel was going to position fat as favourable, indeed desirable. This was reinforced when Taffy was talking to the shop owners Nolly and Voreen, who reassured him with “Yes, good luck, lad, a big fella like you will do very well” (p. 82). This was to show the reader that it wasn’t just Taffy who was happy within his own body, but the people in the town thought so too. Unlike Billy Bunter, who liked himself but was portrayed as misguided and derided by everyone else, Taffy Futt is respected precisely because he is a fat boy.

Unlike Augustus Gloop from *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, Jimmy Winterpock from *The fat boy chronicles*, and Butter from *Butter*, Taffy is also liked, respected, and included by his peer group. Although the characters Momona, Killen, and Ora are initially cruel to Taffy, they don’t ridicule him for his weight until they are influenced by Trudith. Like the other recruits in Plightpool, the three bullies were also portrayed as being initially supportive of fat bodies, accepting the societal value placed upon fat bodies, again asserting to the reader that this novel would not adhere to traditional fat boy tropes. Importantly, Taffy’s best friend Mafuta was not the ‘supportive’ friend who advocated weight loss as depicted in *The fat boy*

chronicles or *Butter*; instead, I wanted him to be jealous of Taffy's body to show the reader that fat bodies weren't being tolerated or pitied, as is a common trope within the literature, that the fat boy is supported before his thinning metamorphosis. Instead, I wanted to position fat bodies as more than just acceptable; they are enviable. Mafuta said to Taffy, "I eat all day but never get fat. It isn't fair" (p. 78). It is important to note that it was not my intention to be unnecessarily oppositional or to be as simplistic as to depict fat as good and thin as bad. Instead, I wanted the reader to consider fat beyond the usual binaries that readers are exposed to. In my novel, fat bodies served a purpose in the Hogsnuuff; to be able to lift, shove and heave ensured secure employment, which was why Mafuta was envious of Taffy. This also placed importance and usefulness on Taffy and to fat bodies in contrast to anti-fat rhetoric that prescribes the fat body as either useless or of lesser use until weight loss has been achieved.

Fat characters and animalistic dehumanisation.

Pigs play a significant role in my novel, pigs also serve as a plot device; for the evil plan to harvest human meat to work, it was necessary for there to be somewhere for this to happen. The Hogsnuuff or abattoir is an essential setting for this to happen. I chose pigs rather than cattle or sheep as pigs share a closer DNA match to humans (Carruthers, 2017)

I also included pigs in my story as a metaphor for fat people. In a conversation with Fat Activist and Fat Studies scholar Jennifer Lee, she stated that "every fat person gets called a pig at some point" (personal communication, May 17, 2017). Lee described the time she was approached by a man at a train station who began oinking in her face. She screamed at him, to which passers-by noted their displeasure at her screaming rather than his oinking at her.

Lee retold this story on the ABC television program, *You can't ask that* (Docker & Smith, 2016). Although her story was edited out before being aired, other guests on the show did concur that it was their experience, too, with fat activist Kath Reid stating, “pig noises, cow noises, they get very generous with the barnyard.”

By including pigs in my story, I was attempting a linguistic reappropriation. Robin Brontsema (2004) describes linguistic reappropriation as “the appropriation of a pejorative epithet by its target(s)” (p. 1). According to Kleinman et al. (2009), linguistic reappropriation is often attributed to the work of African American activists who fought to change the negative associations of the word ‘negro’ and ‘black’ by actively using those words within positive contexts, “Black is beautiful” (p. 49). Moreover, Kleinman et al. (2009), in their work on the use of the word “bitch” and the cultural meanings that are applied to those of whom the word is applied to, contend that words shape and reflect social reality (p. 48). Words, therefore, are powerful. Rather than rejecting or denying the use of the word ‘pig’ as a common way of describing fat people, I wanted to embrace the term and change its impact. A slur loses its power when it can no longer inflict harm. To depict the thin teenagers of Plightpool as the replacements for pork products is intended to subvert the association between fat people and pigs. Arguably in cannibalistic tropes in stories such as ‘Hansel and Gretel’ (Grimm & Grimm, 1812), the victim is fattened up before being eaten. I wanted to challenge that trope by having the thin people in line to be consumed rather than Taffy, the fat boy. While the old adage ‘sticks and stones’ would suggest that words don’t hold substantial enough power to cause real harm, I would disagree. One of the processes through which an oppressor gains an advantage over the oppressed is through the persistent narratives of the oppressed group being more akin to animals than humans. This is referred to as animalistic dehumanisation.

The concept of animalistic dehumanisation describes “The denial of full humanness to others, and the cruelty and suffering that accompany it” (Haslam, 2006, p.252). Historically, animalistic dehumanisation was viewed within the context of racial or ethnic conflict (see Kelman, 1976; Staub, 1992; Opatow, 1990). However, Haslam suggests that “dehumanisation is an important phenomenon in interpersonal as well as intergroup contexts, occurs outside the domains of violence and conflict, and has social-cognitive dimensions in addition to the motivational determinants that are usually emphasised” (p. 252). Occurring when a person or group of persons are perceived as lacking qualities that are considered to be characteristically human. In turn, those who are “perceived as lacking what distinguishes humans from animals, they should be seen implicitly or explicitly as animal-like” (Haslam, 2006, p. 258).

The depiction of the fat boy character as animalistic is not a new phenomenon and is exemplified by the character of ‘Piggy’ in *Lord of the flies* (1954) by William Golding. For the character Piggy, whose real name is never disclosed, there is no ambiguity that he is nicknamed Piggy because of his fat body. Golding introduced Piggy to the reader, describing him as “the fat boy” (pg. 8) and “he was shorter than the fair boy and very fat” (p. 7). Despite his intelligence and gentle nature, Piggy was killed by the boys who had rejected law and order. It could be argued that naming the character Piggy was just a foreshadowing device; the boys kill a pig on the island and later they kill Piggy. However, I contend that the author was making a very pointed statement about fat boy bodies by naming his fat character Piggy, that fat bodies were not socially acceptable, and that fat should be considered animal-like, specifically, like a pig.

Comparing the fat boy character to a pig is a common trope, even in more recent publications. The fat boy character, Dudley Dursley from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s stone* (Rowling, 1997) was introduced with the phrase “Harry said that Dudley looked like a

pig in a wig (p. 21) and was followed by Hagrid attempting to use magic on Dudley explaining “Meant ter turn him into a pig, but I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there wasn’t much left ter do” (p.48). Although the character of Dudley was unpleasant, as one of only a few fat characters, Dudley’s selfishness and greed were linked inextricably to his fatness. Even as recently as 2021, the naive Rowley Jefferson, who was introduced as the best friend and sidekick of the protagonist Greg Heffley in *Diary of a wimpy kid* (Kinney, 2007) had a spin-off book series, *Rowley Jefferson’s Awesome Friendly Adventure* (Kinney, 2021). Portrayed as overly innocent, trusting, and childlike, the name ‘Rowley’ evokes the term ‘roly’ similarly equating his fat body with his immaturity and naivete. This highlights the need for more varied representations of the fat boy in YA novels.

Depiction of ‘Other’ bodies.

In addition to fat bodies, in my novel, I include characters that are otherwise underrepresented in YA novels, specifically disabled and black as I wanted to include characters who are frequently misrepresented in literature, much like fat bodies are. This implicitly creates a celebration of a community that was previously maligned. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold (2018) contends that “literature that teaches empathy and understanding is crucial, especially in our formative years” (p. 386). An idea that served as motivation for this thesis, as I contend that if read with compassion and empathy, anti-fat prejudice will also diminish.

I am aware that it could be problematic to write about cultures and bodies that do not reflect my own experiences. A lot has been written about the portrayal of the ‘other’ or marginalised characters from the perspective of writers who do not belong to that community (see Rose

2011; McDonald & Pryor 1999/2000; Savage 2016; Padmore 2006). The main concern is that depictions will fall into racist and stereotypical representations (Leane, 2016). In contrast however, writer Lionel Shriver (2016) controversially argued that the expectation that writers only write characters who approximate their own cultures or experiences amounts to censorship and that “the kind of fiction we are ‘allowed’ to write is in danger of becoming so hedged, so circumscribed, so tippy-toe, that we’d indeed be better off not writing the anodyne drivel, to begin with” (n.p.).

Many responded negatively to Shriver (see Yassmin Abdel-Magied, 2016; Convery 2016; Araluen 2017; Tolentino 2016), arguing the privilege that has been afforded to Shriver, who is white, has been denied to many other writers, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. Arguably, there may not be as much of an issue with white writers depicting people from other races if there was a parity of marginalised writers getting published or similar inclusion of depictions of marginalised characters.

However, an ethical argument exists regarding the invisibility and erasure of marginalised groups. While it may be preferable to allow members of a given minority or marginalised group to write their stories, I would argue that it is dangerous to allow any one group to remain ignored or invisible. After considering the arguments, I decided to include the characters Mafuta, a dark-skinned boy who was the protagonist’s best friend, Taffy, and Rassie, a highly intelligent girl who uses a wheelchair. I included Mafuta as a literary device for Taffy to solve the mystery as to why the young people were being kidnapped and starved. Jeju is a real product and the meat of a black pig; Taffy realised the nefarious plan when he found Mafuta segregated. I wanted to include Rassie, a female character who was helpful and kind to Taffy, as the three main female characters, Momona, Ora, Trudith, and his mother, were all initially negative characters. I didn’t want to portray all the female characters negatively, so Rassie was included to counteract that. Moreover, to emphasise that Plightpool

is a genuinely welcoming place, it was important to depict marginalised characters, not just a cursory mention of them within the narrative.

I wanted to ensure that my depictions of Mafuta and Rassie were not comments on what black and disabled people do, how they behave, or how they exist. I wanted to depict body dissatisfaction in young male bodies and also not rely on stereotypical tropes of the fat boy being unhappy with his body. Instead, I subverted that by depicting Mafuta as being envious of Taffy for being fat while Mafuta was thin. Similarly, I wanted to subvert expectations of disabled bodies. Rassie declared war on Trudith's men by blowing through a hog's tusk. This was a reference to Piggy in *Lord of the flies* and the conch shell, only this time the sounding of the horn represented an impending victory for the fat boy rather than his death. Rassie had been placed in a pen alone, with Trudith's workers underestimating her abilities. Like Piggy, Rassie's intelligence was underestimated. I wanted to subvert the disability narrative by making Rassie both intelligent and physically strong. She fought valiantly in the great battle.

In subverting the reader's expectations of fat, black and disabled bodies, I wanted to expand upon the Abject, which in critical theory is the concept of repudiating and separating from the rules and morality of society (Childers & Hentzi, 1995). It is important to note that the Abject is different from the uncanny. Although often erroneously conflated with abjection, the uncanny instead refers to being un-like-home or not yet familiar (Childers & Hentzi, 1995). There are elements of the uncanny in *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, but ultimately my narrative pushes beyond the bounds of believability. According to Julia Kristeva in her seminal work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) the abject refers to a subjective horror or feeling when a person is confronted with 'the real' intruding upon the symbolic order. The symbolic order, in this context is the positioning of fat as undesirable and weight loss a necessity. The real however, is the lived experience of fat people who don't share this opinion, and who may even reject diet culture. Similarly, I wanted to explore

ways to challenge the symbolic expectations of the disabled body and the black body. This was a conscious choice to add to the body of work that seeks to challenge fat, disabled and black bodies from being consigned to the role of ‘the other’ in young adult novels.

The ‘mother’ and the cult of dieting.

I always find it satisfying when the books I read contain a twist, an unexpected change of direction in the plot (Singleton & Conrad, 2000; Kay & Gelshenen, 2001). I chose to include a twist by having the protagonist, Taffy’s mother, revealed as ‘Management’ and therefore the instigator of the plan to produce humans for food. This twist was created to comment on what can be perceived as the cult-like nature of the dieting industry. Tessa Ashlin Nunn (2021) describes the “Cult of slimness” (p. 1), as the social glorification of thin and slim bodies as healthy while rejecting fat bodies as morally bad and lower class. Similarly, Ignacio Jáuregui-Lobera, (2017) stated that diet cults “are designed for individuals and/or companies trying to convince followers that their diet is the one true way to eat in order to reach the best health status. These diets usually promise fast weight loss and great physical health” (p. 91). Even in circumstances where there is insufficient evidence to support the efficacy of a particular weight loss product or system, the cult-like nature of the industry can create interest and generate substantial sales. As reported by Christianna Silva (2022) on the internet news and entertainment website *Mashable*, Kim Kardashian was thought to have lost weight after allegedly using the drug Ozempic, which is prescribed to suppress the appetite of people with type 2 diabetes. Although Kardashian never confirmed or denied her use of the drug, based on the rumour that she may have used it, demand became so great that there was a worldwide shortage, making it inaccessible for those it was intended for. Considering the

response to a rumour alone and the willingness to swallow medication, I contend that if a celebrity or popular social media influencer claimed that eating the flesh of humans made them lose weight, then the results would be similar. My novel, which seems far-fetched, could potentially become a reality, with people willingly eating humans in order to become thin.

While the character of Taffy's mother, 'Management', may seem inherently negative, indeed someone who wants to eat people should be read negatively; I wanted to subvert the role of motherhood by positioning her within the context of a cult. Stereotypical tropes of mothers are commonplace in YA novels, with mothers frequently portrayed as dead, unimportant, or ineffective (Thaden 2013; Dever 1998; Shuttleworth 1992). Rather than being the victim of the diet industry, Taffy's mother is the instigator. In contrast to depictions of women feeling forced to lose weight or being preyed upon by weight loss ideology, I wanted to consider stereotypical gender and weight loss roles in YA novels and the ways in which the roles of women enact broader cultural imperatives that serve to oppress them. YA novels frequently depict girls who are required to lose weight, for instance, *45 pounds more or less* (2013) by K.A. Barson, *Life in the fat lane* (1998) by Cherie Bennett, *Skinny* (2012) by Donna Cooner, *Teenage waistland* (2010) by Biederman & Pazer, and *Fat chance* (1993) by Margaret Clark are examples of YA novels that situate young women as needing to lose weight to be accepted by their peer group and frequently by a boy. In my novel, however, 'Management' is adhering to what she believes is a higher calling; she is motivated by a prophecy of a 'chosen one'. The character of Trudith, served in part as a red herring. The reader is initially led to believe that she is the chosen one when really it is Taffy who 'Management' believes will bring about the new world order. Whilst it is fair to consider the way in which Taffy was treated at the behest of his mother cruel, again, it is a metaphor for the lengths some might go to, to attain a thin body.

Challenging the ‘Fat Quest’.

Within YA novels with fat boy protagonists, it is a common trope for the fat boy to undertake what has been described as a ‘fat quest.’ Sarah A. Shelton (2016) describes the fat quest as “a culturally constructed set of steps a fat protagonist must take before he can be considered human, thin, and worthy enough of narratives thin teen protagonists enjoy by default” (p. 172). If the fat character has not been dismissed as one of the stereotypical tropes, I discussed in chapter 2, then the fat character is depicted as able to redeem themselves through weight loss. As seen in the novels *The fat boy chronicles* (Lang & Buchanan, 2009) and *Butter* (Lange, 2012), the fat boys were depicted as either saved or hopeful or somehow morally better as they had either lost weight or, in the case of *Butter*, was being sent away to a hospital for a year.

Rachel Beineke (1998) similarly critiques the fat quest, stating, “by the end of each book, each child either loses the weight or starts to lose the weight. The child then gains popularity and friends and has loving families that are pleased that their child is finally becoming ‘normal’ and fitting into their standards as a result of the weight loss” (p. 44).

Within dominant obesity discourse, losing weight is seen as a desirable goal and often depicted in YA novels favourably, especially with female protagonists. However, I contend that these depictions of intentional and desirable weight loss can be damaging. As discussed in chapter 1, the sense of being watched and of adhering to weight loss is a dangerous message to send to young, impressionable teenagers. Giovanelli & Ostertag (2009) agree, stating that the fat quest structure melds with the cosmetic panopticon, which in turn creates a prison of our own making and the fat boy his own jailer. Julia Jester (2009) goes further and

suggests that consistent depictions of thinness and weight loss being depicted as desirable, it positions fat people in most forms of media, including literature, movies, television, and theatre, as “the old, the ugly or the comical” (p. 249).

I considered it essential to challenge persistently negative tropes of fat boys in YA novels to ensure that my protagonist did not adhere to the fat quest and lose weight. I wanted to create a character who was not ashamed of his body and who was actively opposed to changing it. This was made apparent in the scene in chapter 22 of *The Determination of Taffy Futt*. The antagonist, Trudith, had usurped the projection day process as a way of enticing the young people into using her weight loss drinks. Bribed with gift baskets and attention, one by one, Trudith made each young person who was receiving their projected job prospects agree to drink her weight loss mixture. All agreed to do it except for Taffy.

"Taffy, are you ready to change your life? Are you ready to show the world that you are so much more than what people see? Although your outward appearance may be unfortunate, your heart is pure. Taffy Futt are you willing to join your friends and sign up to the most wonderful life imaginable” (p. 162).

To which Taffy replied, “No thanks, Trude” (p. 162).

I didn't want to portray a character who, through a journey of self-discovery, decided that weight loss wasn't for him, as I think this still perpetuates the idea that weight loss is acceptable and expected of all fat characters. Instead, I wanted Taffy to reject the notion of weight loss outright; I wanted to show that in an accurate counter-narrative, despite societal pressures, weight loss is not essential in order to be a valid human being.

Ultimately Taffy is able to defeat his enemies with the help of the other young people. This also is an important aspect of challenging fat boy's tropes. The fat boy is frequently positioned as the ‘other’ or the outsider. Taffy had friends; he has community ties despite a

difficult home life with his alcoholic father, Parry. Unlike Billy Bunter, who was depicted in opposition to the other characters in their novels, I wanted to show that Taffy was heroic and supported by his friends, family, and the other young people by the end of the novel.

In this chapter, I used my creative piece, *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, to argue that traditional tropes of fat boys in YA novels can be challenged. I discussed the ways in which writers create a language that is important in describing fat and fat bodies and encouraging the reader to accept fat characters in different ways. I explained the reasons why, for example, I depicted pigs in the novel as a form of reappropriation of words and images that are frequently used to insult fat people. I discussed the reason why I chose to include marginalised bodies in my novel, specifically black and disabled bodies, and discussed the arguments surrounding writing about experiences and bodies that do not belong to the author. I discussed the role of mothers in my novel and the reasons why I chose to depict mothers and maternal figures the way I did. Finally, I argued that speculative fiction is a vital genre to allow for the challenge of stereotypes of fat bodies.

Conclusion

This research considers ways in which to challenge traditional tropes of fat boys in YA novels. This thesis argues that the ways in which the fat boy character is represented in YA novels are overwhelmingly negative. In order to understand ways in which to challenge these traditionally negative narratives, for the creative element of this thesis I wrote a young adult novel, *The Determination of Taffy Futt*. This novel challenges the stereotypical tropes of fat boys by portraying a fat boy who is not greedy, lazy, stupid, a bully or identifies as a victim. In my novel, fat bodies are lauded and considered essential in the town in which the story is set.

To challenge these negative tropes, I first needed to understand the societal structures of power that reinforce the marginalisation of fat bodies in our culture and perpetuate negative stereotypes in cultural artefacts, specifically YA novels. To counter the ways in which the fat boy character is depicted in my own novel, I examined the ways in which key fat boy characters have been depicted in YA novels spanning from the 20th century to the 21st. I wanted to understand the words and phrases that writers have used to describe fat bodies in the past and how the writer used fat as a form of social commentary, i.e., that fat represented an anti-war sentiment or that it was sinful, and then how society changed to perceive the fat boy as inherently unhealthy and assumed a moral failure, with atonement achievable only through weight loss. Lastly, to offer examples of ways in which to challenge tropes of fat boys in YA novels, I discussed the elements which I concluded were important to achieve that. These elements included the acknowledgement of the importance of literature as a form of resistance to power and the difference narratives that counter dominant tropes can make in society. I also acknowledged the use of animalistic dehumanisation when depicting fat boy

characters and how choosing to use Speculative fiction, including characters that are similarly marginalised, creates a setting in which those with bodies that are frequently depicted negatively can be reimagined in a more positive light. I also responded to the literary choices I made when writing my novel such as the representation of the mother figure, the cult-like nature of the dieting industry and the fat quest.

This work is motivated by the belief that it is essential to challenge the depictions of fat boys, which I argue are overwhelmingly negative. I contend that the negative depictions of the fat boy character in YA novels both mirror and inform society of the ways in which fat people are treated. However, I argue that by offering counter-narratives to the dominant, negative tropes of the fat boy, it is possible to change the ways fat people are perceived in our culture. An argument supported by Academic and civil rights campaigner Jehan Roberson who describes counter-narratives as “the stories of those whose lives disrupt the fictions of master narratives—thus emerge as necessary and potentially lifesaving works” (2019, n.p.). Moreover, the efficacy of counter-narratives has shown to be effective in challenging something as perilous as the ideologies of violent extremism in young men (Bélanger et al., 2020). Without challenging the dominant tropes of fat boys, they can continue to perpetuate harm within the greater society. The “single-story” or unchallenged narrative is what the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) describes as a “deficit-oriented” stance on marginalised teens. When adverse representations continue unchallenged, it adds validity to the story and the negative qualities that are espoused about the marginalised characters within.

In order to effectively challenge traditional tropes of fat boys, this thesis asked three questions:

1. What societal and cultural systems of power perpetuate stereotypical tropes of fat boys in young adult novels and what systems and discourses can be used to challenge them?
2. How have fat boys been depicted in young adult novels?
3. In what ways might a young adult novel such as *The Determination of Taffy Futt* challenge the traditional tropes of fat boys in young adult novels?

My research is based upon the assertion that there have not been any substantive changes to the ways in which fat boys have been depicted in YA novels. I argued that our culture is based upon systems of power that perpetuate and enforce anti-fat sentiment. To better understand how these power systems worked, I used French Philosopher Michel Foucault's theories of Biopower (1976) and Panopticism (1975) to explain how the human body has been regulated as a site of control. Fat bodies are positioned as unhealthy and an anathema. The theory of Biopower explains the ways in which societies can produce and enforce bodily controls through the willing performances of self-control enacted by the individual. Pertinent to my research is the ways in which people with fat bodies are expected to adhere to diet and weight loss regimes. Foucault's theory of panopticism posits that we live in a culture that perpetuates the idea that at any given time individuals are being watched and will willingly conform to society's rules for fear of punishment. It is my argument that one of the ways in which bodily control is enforced in society is through negative depictions in literature. Negative depictions of people with fat bodies serve as a warning of what may happen if the individual does not willingly regulate their body; they may be considered ugly, sinful, or immoral. The novel can also be used as a tacit threat of punishment. For fat people who cannot or will not comply with the demand to alter their bodies, there is the potential of more negative depictions of their bodies.

The second question considered the ways in which fat boys have been depicted in YA novels. I chose to focus on four YA novels with fat boy characters, Billy Bunter from *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School*, (1947), Augustus Gloop from *Charlie and the chocolate factory* (1964), Jimmy Winterpock from *The fat boy chronicles* (2009) and Butter/Marshall from *Butter* (2012). I chose to focus on these four characters as they succinctly represent the dominant stereotypes and tropes of the fat boy character in YA novels, and by surveying the language and stereotypical depictions of the fat boy character, I could subvert them and create a fat character that challenges traditional tropes. Through surveying these novels, I found the word fat was always used negatively and often to depict a failure of character, the dominant failures being laziness, greed/gluttony, and ignorance. In the case of Billy Bunter and Augustus Gloop, their fat bodies relegated them to permanent marginalisation. For Jimmy Winterpock and Butter/Marshall, social acceptance was afforded to them only after they agreed to lose weight. The promise of a thinner body was depicted as proof that they were ‘better’ people than when they were fat. Examining these common ways of depicting the fat boy character was critical in knowing how to challenge them when writing my novel, *The Determination of Taffy Futt*.

The third question asked: In what ways might a young adult novel such as *The Determination of Taffy Futt* challenge the traditional tropes of fat boys in young adult novels? In this chapter I discussed the processes I used to challenge negative depictions of fat boys in YA novels. I began by reasserting that my novel is a counter-narrative to the dominant tropes of fat boys and serves as a resistance to power. Michel Foucault (1978) argued that “Where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95). My novel is intended to challenge the dominant tropes of fat boys. In order to re-imagine the fat boy, I describe my use of Speculative fiction, which in recent history has been successfully utilised by minority and marginalised groups to make readers reconsider the way in which they perceive the experiences and possibilities of that

group. I acknowledged that writers frequently degrade fat characters by equating them with animalistic attributes. As a form of linguistic appropriation, I depicted thin people as the pig substitute, as a way to subvert the usual association between fat people and pigs. I also addressed the cult-like nature of dieting in my novel and the importance of including ‘other’ bodies in my work.

My novel, *The Determination of Taffy Futt* focuses on the fat protagonist Taffy Futt and the speculative world in which his hometown, Plightpool exists. This novel considers the way fat bodies could be situated if the dominant perception was focused on what people with fat bodies *can* do rather than what they cannot. For Taffy, being fat means that he can push, shove and heave, which will be immensely useful when he is employed, like everyone else in his town, at the local abattoir. Unbeknownst to Taffy, a malevolent corporation comes to town, intent on making everyone thin. This comment on the social manipulation of young people to adhere to specific body types also alluded to what I consider a fanatical advocacy of bodily control and marginalisation of those whose bodies do not adhere to social norms. Ultimately, Taffy resists the pressure to become thin and discovers the nefarious plot to consume his friends. In a challenge to what Sarah A. Shelton (2016) calls a “fat quest...a culturally constructed set of steps a fat protagonist must take before he or she can be considered human, thin, and worthy enough of narratives thin teen protagonists enjoy by default.” (p. 172), Taffy becomes the hero and saves his friends. The reader learns that Taffy’s fat body is also considered a sign, but a cult, that he is the chosen one, again depicting fat bodies as something other than a health issue.

This thesis represents a small part of what I discovered to be a gap in the enquiry of both Fat Studies, Literary Studies and of Creative Writing. There remains significant scope for further research into depictions of fat boys in all forms of literature. Going forward, I consider it imperative that there be more depictions of the fat boy character in YA novels that are

positive. By positive, I specifically mean the inclusion of fat boys where their fat body is not the source of ridicule; there is depth to his character and not just the perceived limitations of a fat body. As I have shown in *The Determination of Taffy Futt*, the fat boy can easily be described without relying on the brutal clichés that began with 20th-century writers.

To further challenge common tropes of the fat boy, I deem it critical to experiment with genre. My research has shown that Speculative fiction is ideal for allowing alternate versions of marginalised characters. However, to truly challenge anti-fat sentiment it is critical to show positive depictions of fat characters in a range of different genres. The fat romantic lead, the fat hero, the fat leader, the fat villain and indeed the fat lead in a horror, providing the fat body is not attributed as being the element that causes the horror or that the lead is not villainous due to his body alone. To go further, my novel depicted a world where fat is desired. I contend that there are more narratives required that show relationships and interactions outside of westernised ideals of the perfect body. These narratives could include cultures where fat bodies are seen as superior for marriage, the dynamics of chubby/chaser relationships, or simply people who do not willingly adhere to the social pressure to either personally adhere or demand their friends/family/lovers adhere to those social pressures either. When it becomes more commonplace for writers to be more conscious of how they chose to depict fat bodies, then we really can challenge depictions of fat boys in YA novels.

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