

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 69

Introduction

The first rule of Flanagan's Running Club is everyone should be telling everyone they know about Flanagan's Running Club! After all, sharing is caring. Details of how to sign up is in the epilogue.

There is no need to panic, there is no actual running involved, it is not a running club in that sense. The title is made up from extending the title of my favourite book – Flanagan's Run by Tom McNab.

So, sit back, grab a cup of coffee (or beer or wine or whatever), and enjoy the read.

On This Day – 17th March

It's Evacuation Day (Suffolk County, Massachusetts)
Saint Patrick's Day

1337 – Edward, the Black Prince is made Duke of Cornwall, the first Duchy in England.
1861 – The Kingdom of Italy is proclaimed.
1969 – Golda Meir becomes the first female Prime Minister of Israel.
1992 – A referendum to end apartheid in South Africa is passed 68.7% to 31.2%.

Births

1919 – Nat King Cole
1944 – Pattie Boyd
1951 – Kurt Russell
1962 – Clare Grogan
1964 – Rob Lowe
1986 – Miles Kane

Deaths

180 – Marcus Aurelius
1997 – Jermaine Stewart

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1984 – Nena – 99 Red Balloons
Number 1 album in 2007 – Kaiser Chiefs – Yours Truly, Angry Mob
Number 1 compilation album in 1998 – OST – The Full Monty

#vss365

A short story in 280 characters or less, based on a prompt word on Twitter

He believed what they told him. That he was a #robot, and that was why he had no memories before two years ago. He felt no pain and they joked about him being unemotional.

Then came the dream. He could see the crash. Had they been lying to him, or had they rebuilt him?

#vss365

Joke

70-year-old George went for his annual physical. He told the doctor that he felt fine, but often had to go to the bathroom during the night. Then he said, "But you know Doc, I'm blessed. God knows my eyesight is going, so he puts on the light when I pee, and turns it off when I'm done!" A little later in the day, Dr. Smith called George's wife and said, "Your husband's test results were fine, but he said something strange that has been bugging me. He claims that God turns the light on and off for him when uses the bathroom at night." Thelma exclaimed, "That old fool! He's been peeing in the refrigerator again!"

Drabble

A drabble is a complete story that is exactly one hundred words long.

I Don't Like Basil In My Soup

I looked suspiciously at the contents of my bowl. I was dubious about what appeared to be floating around in the soup. And it had the strangest taste to it, one I couldn't place. Eventually I had to ask the question.

"Hannibal old chap, what did you say this soup was again?"

"It's my unique new recipe tomato and chopped Basil."

"Are you sure? I can't taste any basil in it, and it appears to have some meaty bits in there."

"Yes, that's right, the meaty bits would be Basil. Basil Spence. Surely you remember him from the rotary club."

Random Items

Facts

There are more per capita visits to a public library in Colombia than in any other country.

Colombia has more emeralds, frogs, birds, carnations, and orchids than any other country

Colombia is the world's leading exporter of human bones.

Thoughts

The hardest thing to do is to disguise your feelings when sending a large crowd of visiting relatives' home.

Some men are discovered, others are found out

No really great man ever thought himself so.

Random Top Ten

The ten NHL teams with the most playoff appearances.

Rank	Team	Playoff Appearances
1	Montreal Canadiens	88
2	Boston Bruins	75
3	Toronto Maple Leafs	71
4	Detroit Red Wings	64
5	Chicago Blackhawks	63
6	New York Rangers	61
7	St. Louis Blues	45
8	Philadelphia Flyers	40
9	Pittsburgh Penguins	37
10	Dallas Stars	34

Flash Fiction

Something between the 100-word shortness of a Drabble, and the short story, these are works of fiction somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred words.

Fisnik

"Fisnik is history." The pale guy who had sat down opposite me said as he positioned himself in the chair.

There were two things about that statement which gave me pause. The first being the obvious, who, or what the hell is Fisnik? I was going to assume it was a person unless told differently. The second, and possibly more worrying thing was the tone of the delivery, and the demeanour of the pale guy. There was a clear indication that if Fisnik was a person, then I could expect to find that they were dead. Lying in an unmarked hole in the woods awaiting the wildlife to move in and devour them.

The pale guy showed no emotion in the delivery. He couldn't have been more matter of fact about it. As if someone or something being history was beneath him and he was reading out a shopping list. But I was interested.

"Why do I need to know about Fisnik and their history?"

"Because you are here to see him."

Well, it confirmed my assumption that Fisnik was a person, but it confused me as I wasn't here to see anyone. But it would be good to know why the pale guy thought I was.

"Am I?"

"You are."

"I don't think so. I'm not here to see this Fisnik. I'm not aware of any person called Fisnik, and I hadn't heard of him until you sat there opposite me, despite every other seat in the bar being empty, and told me they were history."

"If you are sat in that chair, you are here to see Fisnik. Everyone who sits in that chair is here to see Fisnik. It is pretty much the only reason this bar exists. So that people who need to see Fisnik can come and sit in that seat to wait to speak to him. I made my way in here specially to tell you, and anyone else that Fisnik is history so that you can leave before you have waited too long and wasted your time. I know you may be disappointed. Anyone who doesn't meet Fisnik usually is. But there is going to be a lot of disappointment going forward."

"So, what happened to this Fisnik then. He sounds as if he would have been interesting to meet."

"It is best you do not know what happened to Fisnik. The details aren't pretty. I do not want to know. I am only here to pass on a message. Fisnik is history. Be content with that. Do not try to take in more on the subject. It is not something anyone should have to know."

"I'm sorry to hear Fisnik is history. But this was not why I am here. I am here for a drink. And the quiet."

The pale man looked at me with the kind of look to say he did not believe me.

"If you say so. But it is worth remembering. If someone should ask, or someone is interested. Fisnik is history."

The pale man got up, clambering out of what must have been Fisnik's seat and towered over me, leaving as quietly as he had arrived.

I stared at my drink. Part of me wanted to drain it in one and run from this strange, eerily quiet bar as fast as my overweight body and uncooperative legs would allow. The rest of me wanted to stay and drink the schnapps slowly; sipping it as it was meant to be drunk. And then buy another. And drink that one even slower. To stay seated here to see who else would turn up. To see if anyone else would come to this grotty seat in the shadows at the back of the bar, and hover uncomfortably as they waited for me to leave. To give them the chance to sit in this very spot so they could take the opportunity to make their acquaintance with the mysterious Fisnik character.

I looked at the glass as it called to me. I downed it in one and called for the barman to bring me another. I wasn't going to be spooked out of this seat by a strange pale guy in an ill-fitting suit. I was better than that. I did wonder whether the bar would soon have a sign on the door saying Fisnik is history. And the stream of poor unfortunates would stop coming to this seat. And if the bar would indeed close when that happened.

The second drink arrived, and I drank it in the same fashion as I had the first. I didn't give it time for the ripples to settle on the surface from the barman setting it down on the table. I felt the burn in my throat, I stood pulled out a note and put it on the table under the schnapps glass and left the bar.

The pale guy was sat in a car, engine running, outside the bar. We looked at each other. Did he know for certain? Then I walked on, and I heard the car drive off.

He couldn't have known for sure. I had sat opposite my usual chair. I'd had a shave and a haircut, and I'd bought new clothes. Had these changes saved my life. The pale guy looked as if he might have been able to snap me in half, and perhaps the ill-fitting suit hid a multitude of firearms.

I found I didn't mind if he were there to kill me. But that bar was no use to me now. I would have to find another one to be able to carry on my business. Fisnik may indeed be history here. But Fisnik could always change his name. And I could always set up in another bar.

Leicestershire

Willie Thorne

William Joseph "Willie" Thorne (born 4 March 1954, died 17 June 2020) was a former English professional snooker player who is now a sports commentator. He was most famous for winning the 1985 Classic.

Thorne became national under-sixteen champion at snooker in 1970, and was the runner up in the 1975 English Amateur Championship. He never really converted this early promise into professional success, only ever winning one ranking snooker tournament (Classic in 1985). The same year, he reached the UK Championship final against the then dominant Steve Davis, and seemed to have built himself an unassailable 13–8 lead. But a miss on a straightforward blue off its spot during the first frame of the final session allowed Davis to take the frame and eventually win the title. Thorne later said that he had hardly looked at the blue, considering it a certainty. He was also runner up in the following year's British Open. He reached the quarter-finals of the World Snooker Championship in 1982 and 1986.

He won six non-ranking events, with wins in the 1984 Pontins Professional, the 1986 Hong Kong Masters and Matchroom Professional Championship, the 1987 Kent Cup, the 1989 New Zealand Masters, and the 2000 World Seniors Masters. He also won the 1980 Pontins Spring Open pro-am title. He was also runner up in another eleven non-ranking events.

He peaked at no. 7 in the rankings in the mid-1980s, while also battling a serious gambling problem. In one incident, Thorne bet £38,000 on a match involving John Parrott, betting that Parrott would lose as Parrott had lost his personal cue and had to use one supplied by the venue. Much to Thorne's dismay (not least because he was actually commentating on the match), Parrott recovered from a slow start to win, only worsening Thorne's debts. Also, in an interview with The Guardian newspaper in 2004, Thorne admitted to placing bets worth up to £20,000 on a horse.

Thorne's bald head makes him instantly recognisable, and he is often referred to as the "Homer Simpson of Snooker". He has become a popular senior character in the game, commentating on snooker for television on the BBC and Sky Sports as well as BBC Wales for the Welsh Open. Alongside other Matchroom professionals, Thorne featured in the popular song "Snooker Loopy", written and performed by Chas & Dave. In the verse which begins "but old Willie Thorne, his hair's all gorn", Thorne's cameo line was "Perhaps I ought to chalk it", in reference to his gleaming head putting off his opponents. Thorne also appeared in the "Romford Rap" video with the rest of the "Matchroom Mob".

Thorne has been described as a skilled break-builder and possibly the "missing link" between old-school percentage play and the current aggressive potting game. He took nineteen seasons to record one hundred competitive century breaks. He was only the third player to achieve this accomplishment, ahead of many of the world champions of his era, leading many to believe he was an underachiever in the game. He also got the nickname of Mr. Maximum due to the number of maximum breaks he got during practice.

Thorne also won the World Seniors Masters in 2000, beating Cliff Thorburn in the final.

Thorne was married to former Miss Great Britain winner Jill Saxby and lived in Broughton Astley.

He ran a club in what is now the City Hall building in Leicester for many years, where Mark Selby used often to compete in junior tournaments as a youngster.

Thorne competed in Series 5 of Strictly Come Dancing with professional dance partner Erin Boag, before being voted out on 20 October 2007 in 12th place (out of 14).

In June 2015, Thorne was diagnosed with prostate cancer after a psychiatrist ordered routine blood tests and told doctors about the diagnosis and Thorne began treatment.

Thorne tweeted on 18 March 2020 that he had been diagnosed with leukaemia. On 16 June 2020, he was placed in an induced coma after suffering respiratory failure in hospital in Spain. On 17 June 2020, his carer reported that Thorne had gone into septic shock, was not responding to treatment, and died after his life support was withdrawn, aged sixty-six.

Ashby Folville

Ashby Folville is a village in the Melton district of Leicestershire, southwest of Melton Mowbray. The civil parish of Ashby Folville was abolished in 1936 and its 1,796 acres (727 ha) were merged with Gaddesby.

The village of 'Ashby' was recorded in the Domesday Book as consisting of twenty-four villagers, three smallholders, two slaves, one priest and being owned by the Countess Judith.

By the time of the Leicestershire Survey of 1124-29 the manor had passed from Judith to her daughter Maud, Countess of Huntingdon, and her husband King David I of Scotland.

The Folville element of the place name comes from a family that had its seat here since at least 1137 when its lordship was held of the Honour of Huntingdon by Fulk de Folville. The family name, ultimately derived from Folleville in the French region of Picardy, was attached to several other sites in Leicestershire, including the deserted village of Newbolt Folville.

They seem to have gained most their estate at the beginning of the 12th century. Several of their possessions, such as Ashby and the manor at Teigh in Rutland, were in the hands of other parties at the time of the Domesday survey, but had passed to the Folvilles by the reign of Stephen (1135-1154). The family were certainly well-established in Leicestershire by the mid-13th century. In 1240 a member of the family donated a large sum to the church at Cranoe. The Folvilles were rebels during both Barons Wars; Sir William Folville (died about 1240) had his lands seized for his part in the First Barons' War in 1216 and Sir Eustace Folville (murdered in 1274) was one of the knights appointed to enforce the Provisions of Oxford in 1258 and stoutly defended Kenilworth Castle after the Battle of Evesham in 1265. The family gained renown during the reign of Edward II, when they ambushed and killed the Baron of the Exchequer, Roger de Beler. Hugh le Despenser, 1st Earl of Winchester had been stealing people's lands in Leicestershire, using Roger de Beler as an enforcer, and in 1325 de Beler had threatened the Folville family with violence.

By the beginning of 1326 much of the country had turned against Edward and the Despensers and preparations for a rebellion led by Edward's wife, Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer had started. The Folville family, headed by Eustace Folville, and encouraged by Sir Roger la Zouch, Lord of Lubbethorpe murdered de Beler before fleeing to Paris. Following Isabella and Mortimer's successful invasion of England, Edward III was crowned, and rebels were pardoned including the Folville family who were celebrated locally with the Folville Cross, said to be located at the site of de Beler's murder.

The Folville Gang flitted in and out of outlawry for many years, but, apart from Richard Folville, vicar of Teigh, who was beheaded in his own churchyard, they ended with their freedom intact. The manor of Ashby eventually passed via marriage from the Folvilles to the Woodfords and then Smiths.

After World War II, a resettlement camp for displaced people from Poland was established in a former US Army base in the grounds of Ashby Folville Manor.

The parish church of St Mary is a Grade I listed building. The Ashby Folville estate was bought in 1890 by Herbert Smith-Carington, then mayor of Worcester (died 1917), who built cottages and a village institute and restored the church. The old wooden roofs of the nave and the new oak panels of the chancel and screen of the Woodford chapel are among the features of interest. In the chancel are memorials to Ralph Woodford (a descendant of the Folvilles) and Elizabeth Woodford. Monuments in the Woodford chapel include a stone knight known as "Old Folville" and the fine monument of Sir Francis Smith and his wife. Stained glass windows by Veronica Whall and Edward Woore were erected in memory of members of the Smith-Carington family.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

Childhood Holidays

Childhood holidays all followed a remarkably similar pattern. Suitcases would be loaded; we would walk with them to the end of our street and catch the bus. The bus would go through the town centre and up to a stop outside the train station. We would get on a train, get off, change platform, or perhaps if really lucky change station with a tube ride in the middle, and then get on another train. There might be multiple changes, but they would all be done with military precision under the very watchful eyes of my mum. Then we would arrive at a seaside resort somewhere in the UK and walk with our luggage to whatever apartment or boarding house we were staying in. I don't think we ever stayed anywhere that did bed and breakfast. It was cheaper to do it ourselves.

A lot of those journeys involved changing trains at what I can only describe as the gateway to hell – Birmingham New Street station. It was dark, dingy, damp, dank, it smelt disgusting and felt dangerous. When the demons do break through to our plain, it will be there, probably on platform eleven.

When we got to our resort it would be afternoon and time for orientation. I never understood why. My mum, brother and I never got lost. As for my dad, he could get lost going to the bottom of the garden. No amount of orientation would ever fix that. He would get lost every holiday. At least once. And when he did reappear, he would claim he was never lost, just exploring. There was the time he said he was nipping to the bookies – Joe Coral's – but it wasn't the sign for the

bookies, he'd seen the letters JC and assumed it was, but it was a Job Centre, yet instead of coming straight back and admitting his mistake, he kept walking and came back an hour later.

There would be days at the beach; dips in the sea, sand in the sandwiches, trips onto the pier, playing the 2p machines in the arcades. There would be days visiting nearby places on local buses; castles, churches, abbeys, stately homes, anywhere with a bit of history, and that was either free or cheap to get into. I still do that today.

Each year would see the obligatory dog bite. A random and usually big dog would appear and bite me. An Alsatian jumping over a wall, crossing a road, biting me, and going back to its owner. The Doberman appearing from between two parked cars, biting me and disappearing back between the cars again. And the guide dog, puncturing my football, biting me, and then ambling back to his blind owner, ignoring the other dozen or so kids playing football with me on the beach. So many childhood memories are dog bites, and I'm still scared of them now.

And there would be some kind of incident. The little thing that makes the holiday memorable. Like the ladybird invasion at Weston Super Mare. Running to catch the steam train at Blaenau Ffestiniog and being sick on the train. Or when my brother turned on the serve yourself ice cream machine and couldn't turn it off, so my dad went to help and snapped the handle off. And still the ice cream flowed. We could envision it slowly cascading down from castle hill and engulfing the rest of Hastings.

And just when the holiday home seemed normal to us it would be time to go home. The holiday would be over. The journey would be made in reverse, we would get through the devil's lair unscathed and arrive back at Leicester railway station. If we had any money left, then the bus home would be upgraded, and we would get a taxi back instead.

Once outside the house then the search for the house keys would begin, and there would be fifty more weeks until we did it all over again.

Poetry Corner

The Typewriter

The typewriter sits on the table silent
A virgin sheet of crisp white paper inserted
But the keys do not move
My fingers hover
My mind is as blank as the paper
The first seventeen pages had flown
So fast the paper was scorched from the speed
Now page eighteen awaits me
And waits
How long has it been?
Bright white becomes aged yellow
And the paper crumbles to nothing
Still the typewriter sits silently on the table
It mocks me
It mocks my lack of ideas
It mocks my lack of talent
Now you can't tell the keys apart
Dust coats them all in grey
The ink ribbon is completely dry
Rust is all that holds it together
But it will outlast me
My life's story is at an end
Which is more than can be said for the story I tried to write
The typewriter now sits silent
On a cabinet in the museum

Did I Really Blog That?

A Bit Of A Mad Squeeze

Usually, if you are going to a gig, you will be excited about it. And going to see Madness with Squeeze as support at the O2 should be a reason to be cheerful.

However, the O2 had been sucking any joy out of the build-up (obviously helped by the other shit storm of the Government and their lackadaisical handling of all things Covid). First there was the e-mail ten days before the concert

saying you had to have a Covid passport on the NHS app to get in. By now my utter disdain for being forced to download apps should be well known. But having paid for tickets it was a necessary evil I suppose.

But it turns out it wasn't as evil as what O2 were going to pull next. Four days before the gig there is another e-mail, this time saying tickets were available. But only on the O2 Arena app. No printed tickets, no pdf to download. App only. I was spitting feathers by this point. With much swearing I downloaded their app, only to then have to register, a process completed by clicking on a link by e-mail. Twelve times I clicked on the link before finding their e-mails were going straight to junk mail. Once registered I then had to link to my tickets, which was another registration process.

When I bought the tickets, many months ago, there was no mention of any of this rubbish. If there had have been I wouldn't have bought the damn tickets, and it is a guarantee I will never buy tickets for the O2 ever again, and nor will I buy tickets for any other fucking venue that will force me into downloading an app to be able to get into the gig. They can all go fuck themselves.

We had booked a hotel in Stratford (a third of the price of nearer ones) bearing in mind it was three stops on the tube. Only to get another e-mail from the O2, this one informing us of a tube strike on the day of the gig.

Fast forwarding to the day of the gig, we got to Stratford, and Helen had tried booking a few places for food without much success, so we got the bus to the O2 (as it turns out, a bit slower, but more convenient being almost door to door, than the tube would have been), and winged it. Ending up at Café Rouge, where there was no wait for a table outside under umbrellas and heaters.

Getting into the gig wasn't anywhere near as bad as I thought it might be, even with all my ranting above. The queues were massive at entrances A & B but being up in the clouds meant we were at the furthest point away at entrance H, where there was no queue, and both the NHS and O2 app worked, and we were on our way up in less than a minute. It has been a while since I'd been to the O2, and I'd forgotten just how small the seats were in the gods. I've lost a fair bit of weight since the last time there, but they are still too narrow for my fat ass, and the legroom would only work if I were a foot shorter. Even Helen was finding the seat narrow. But whatever the confines of the seat were, there would be no way I would be standing up. Fuck it is steep up there. My head is spinning if I look down whilst stood up, and only just calms down when seated.

Looking around, there were a lot of people wearing fez's, Madness ones. Which was good, as it showed exactly where the obnoxious moron sections were in the crowd.

If I thought my seat was tight, I wasn't having half the issues a woman two rows in front of us was. She really couldn't get into her seat at all, trying half a dozen ways. Her other half (wearing tatty shorts) tried bending the arms of the seat out of the way – to no avail. She took herself off, not sure where she was going, or hoping to sort out, but her other half didn't go anywhere. (She came back four songs into the Squeeze set, sat on the steps for a couple of songs, before cramming herself into an unused seat on the end of a row – whilst shorts bloke was fast asleep before the end of the Madness set.)

And then it was show time, Squeeze ambled out onto the stage and launched into an incredibly good set. The tickets for the show weren't cheap, and I might not have gone for it if it was just Madness, but the chance to see Squeeze tipped the balance for me, and they didn't disappoint. They rattled through twelve songs, with all the favourites there, and only the one I didn't recognise in the middle – F-Hole, which sounded like it could have come off Nirvana's Nevermind.

The full set list was, "Take Me I'm Yours", "Up The Junction", "Hourglass", "Slap and Tickle", "Cradle To The Grave", "F-Hole", "Labelled With Love", "Muscles From A Shell", "Annie Get Your Gun", "Tempted", "Cool For Cats", and "Coffee In Bed", during which they went around and spotlighted the different band members and they all did solos.

To our amusement, the couple sat behind us weren't Squeeze fans. They were seated before we got there and had given us filthy looks when we sat down as they had to stop dangling their legs over onto our seats. Getting there that early, you would have thought they were up for seeing Squeeze, but at no point did they applaud, sing, or move during the Squeeze set, just sitting there with faces slapped by a wet fish, and arms folded. They were strictly Madness mutherfuckers.

After an interval full of eighties and nineties singalong anthems, it was time for Madness. A phone rang in the red call box on stage and Suggs appeared there and answered it before appearing from the call box onto the stage to let the audience shout the intro to One Step Beyond before curtains dropped to reveal the rest of the band. As the roadies tried desperately to pull the curtains off stage, they were hindered by Suggs blithely wandering around on top of them.

Nearly forty years on from playing "Complete Madness" to death, they played most of that and much more beyond, although no longer with Chas Smith. It was a storming set, featuring two songs I didn't recognise – "Baby Burglar" and "If I Go Mad" – both good, and there was a good reason I didn't recognise them, as they haven't been released yet and they are being introduced on this tour. There were some good visuals on the screens behind the band during the set,

the highlights being them playing Gene Kelly doing the well-known "Singing In The Rain" clip from the film whilst the band did "The Sun And The Rain," and various clips from "The Ladykillers" as would be expected with the tour being called that.

Towards the end of the set, they played four songs that I would have thought prime candidates for any encore, so when they said they were finishing with "It Must Be Love," I wasn't expecting an encore. Nor was I expecting the woman sat on the row in front of me to get up and be swaying and waving her arms from side to side. For crying out loud you silly bint, this is Madness, not fucking Paul McCartney doing "Hey Jude." When it was finished, they piled off stage, and quite a lot of people left. Only for a bagpiper to come on playing "When The Saints Goes Marching In," before going into "Scotland The Brave," during which all the band came back onto the stage from the telephone box and did a two-song encore.

It was amazing, but then it was over, and they left the stage for real this time, and it was time for us to head back out into the night. Two great bands in a single night, and a top way to start an extended holiday break.

The full Madness set was "One Step Beyond", "Embarrassment", "The Prince", "NW5", "My Girl", "Take It Or Leave It", "The Sun And The Rain", "Baby Burglar", "Wings Of A Dove", "One Better Day", "Lovestruck", "If I Go Mad", "Shut Up", "Calm Down Mr Apples", "Bed And Breakfast Man / Woolly Bully (medley)", "House of Fun", "Baggy Trousers", "Our House", "It Must Be Love", and then for the encore "Madness" and "Night Boat To Cairo".

Story Time

Spring Forward

The little hands on the face of the watch kept moving. Never stopping. Indicating what they called time. Driven by springs and cogs. A mechanism so small it would need a microscope to see all its workings. And yet it was put together by a man who could not see. Could not hear. And could not speak. And yet who could make machinery that told the time created by this race of animals out of seemingly thin air.

These watches were the most sought after in the world. The most accurate ever made. Never missing a second. Never stopping. Never needing to be wound. No battery. No solar panel to power them. No one knew how they worked apart from the old man, and it wasn't as if he could tell anyone how he did it.

They suggested taking one apart, but who had the kind of money to waste on doing such a thing in this day and age.

The watches kept moving on, with the twelve men and five women who owned them happy to have such fine timepieces. The ultimate status symbol in this time of time.

Yet none of them knew what the watches were meant for. Only the old man did. He knew he was going to die soon. His head filled with more knowledge of how the cosmos worked than all those who had gone before him. But before he died, he needed to finish the final watch.

Number eighteen.

The one that would complete the cycle and allow him to depart this world, if not this time.

Number eighteen would be for his granddaughter. It was going to be for her eighteenth birthday. A special gift for a special birthday. But the old man knew that birthdays were all a myth made up by a frightened species to help them make sense of their ever-changing physiology and their surroundings.

And once number eighteen was out there in the world, then everything would change. It was to be the order of things.

Some would embrace the coming change. Others would run from it. But none would escape it. All that would come to be would be triggered by the watches.

Many years before, deep inside the caves in the hills of Buda, hidden behind doors long since forgotten by most; a secret chamber had been constructed.

Over many generations, those who were aware of the insanity of time had worked silently. No one could hear them working on the chamber. They were all blind deaf mutes, but they had felt their way and carved out the staggering eighteen-sided chamber with a stone chair for each person when the end of time came to be.

And on the old man's granddaughter's birthday, the change was set in motion. The watch was put upon her wrist, and all the other watches felt it.

The old man felt it too and surprised all those who had gathered for the birthday by speaking the first words of his life.

“It is done.”

Before drawing his last breath and dying.

And no one questioned what it meant. They carried on with the birthday celebrations, treating the old man's death as a mere inconvenience. Not knowing of what was to come.

The other owners of the watches felt it too, but were unaware of what it was they were feeling. As the days passed, they felt a need to walk in the hills. It seemed natural to them. Why hadn't they done it before?

And over the course of a single overcast but muggy afternoon they came. From all over Buda and Pest they found their way into the hills. Each coming via a different route. Each picking their way through the trees and undergrowth. Following paths long since overgrown and forgotten. Making their way to what was their own door in the hills. Again, each hidden for centuries, and all now able to open, guided by the watch each walker was wearing.

They all passed the threshold and walked into the dark passages within the hills. Unafraid. Unburdened. Happy. Purposefully. Along the passages and their twists and turns without a single trip or bump. Until they were in the chamber. Each of them took their seat there as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do.

When the last of them had taken their seat, the room began to hum, a low bass rumble of sound from within the chamber beneath them. Then, as if it were a giant fairground ride, the floor of the chamber began to move, very slowly at first as it gathered momentum, and very deliberately in a counter clockwise direct, the floor and the seats upon it started to spin. Not one of the eighteen owners of the watches showed any surprise in the movement. Not one of them called out or showed any fear. If anything, they would have shown excitement. A happiness to be here. The old man's granddaughter was the only one who knew who all the others were. She had known all of the owners of the other watches, the lucky people who had been destined to wear her grandfather's masterpieces. She had known the watches were special, and that her grandfather had been a man of purpose, but sat here, in the chamber as the speed of the spinning began to increase, she knew that it was all because of his watches.

She found that if she focused on another seat, she could see its occupant clearly, that the blur of motion behind them could be tuned out, and as the spinning increased in speed, she moved her eyes to focus on each of the others in turn. And she saw them changing. All in different ways; older, younger, fatter, thinner, taller, shorter, different hairstyles, different clothing styles. And she wondered about herself. She must be changing too. But changing to what and why.

When the chamber eventually came to a halt, the world had changed. Time had come to an end. The eighteen wrists the watches had been on were now all bare. Now that they had brought about the end of time, they were anachronistic pieces and so they had ceased to exist.

The eighteen of them stood, and as each one did their seat disappeared, and when the final one of them stood the south side of the chamber opened up and a road appeared for them to all leave the chamber and return to the city. None of them spoke. They glanced at each other, recognising the changes on those around them, but unable to see their own change.

The road took a sharp turn and came to an end, spilling them out onto the banks of the Danube. What lay before them was difficult to comprehend. Everything was both amazing and grotesque. The buildings were not as they were, parts remained the same, but old, modern, and futuristic were all blended into one, and in the same space. Bridges were meshed together at various levels and vehicles ran on, above and under every surface.

All time was together now. What the eighteen found when they could see themselves was that they were at the age that they were at their best, and that is the age they would stay. What was before them now was what would stay forever. There was no change now. Nothing aged. Nothing new would come about.

This was not what was expected when the words 'the end of time' had been bandied about.

Chapter and Verse

A chapter from one of my completed books, works in progress, or novella length short stories.

The Magicusians – Chapter 2

“Have you moved in for good then Hodson?”

“I've offered to leave several times over the last six weeks. Yet you seem more than happy to keep me here Aristor.”

“We were hoping you might actually do something useful and help us with the research.”

"You know my feelings on that. In fact, you know my feelings on this whole mess."

"It's not that bad, is it?"

"I know you spend a lot of time down here in this subterranean world of books and papers, but have you not been outside. Have you not seen it out there in the city?"

"I have, it is not as bad as we expected it to be."

"The agencies have taken control, and the infighting has started. The militia is even more out of control than before. Inadequate men who have had their power taken away."

"Most of them have been rounded up and pit in gaol."

"Where most of them should have been instead of in the militia to begin with."

"The army is in control of the issue now. It was a surprise move for Kamsort to take over the militia agency and put it under control of the army agency. It was a smart move on his part as well. He's found gainful employment for all those under him going forward, and removed power from those inadequate men as you called them. The other Chiefs were surprised, but they are all for getting rid of the militia and have been for years, but the Emperor had always protected them. Kamsort is now looking at converting large numbers of the legions he has under his control to become a proper law keeping force. Without the Emperor here to keep attacking, or trying to attack our neighbours, the army isn't going to need the numbers it had. Apparently Kamsort is to convert ninety percent of the army to become law keepers by the end of the year."

"And the remaining ten percent?"

"To remain as an army fighting force. With the Emperor gone, the chiefs have been sending emissaries for peace, but there is still a danger of some retaliation attacks."

"Or for our neighbours to get their rightful lands back?"

"Yes, Kopinger may well want to reclaim South Kopinger. The Chiefs would rather not fight for them though; they would rather discuss a peaceful solution."

"I'm sure they would. There again I'm sure my ancestors would have preferred that as well."

"Unfortunately, we cannot change that now. But we can help to shape the future. I had come to ask you if you were going to grace us with your presence today, or are you just going to mope around in this room that you have commandeered?"

"I've done no such thing. You offered it to me until such time as something could be found to help decipher the rest of the prophecy."

"Something you could be helping with."

"It's getting to the point where I may. I need to get out of the city. I can't go up to the surface without somebody pointing and whispering. It's like everyone knows who I am and what I did."

"I'm not surprised Hodson. You did them a great favour, disposing of the Emperor and his family."

"You make it sound like I killed them."

"You did set the events in motion."

"No! I didn't, one of your godforsaken priests put this damn talisman around my neck. I was then manipulated into coming here, where I was told I had to take this action. A simple action put a piece of metal on to a stone statue. Only for it to turn out that none of you knew what would actually happen."

"You were not harmed."

"I would have been if the Greyhorns had caught up with me."

"There is no such thing as the Greyhorns anymore. Kamsort had disbanded them; the majority have joined the militia in gaol."

“That doesn’t mean I feel safe here or anywhere in the city. I must leave here soon.”

“Then help us with the texts. The sooner we find the information related to the other three Symbols of Power, the sooner you can continue with fulfilling the prophecy.”

“Stop presuming Aristor. Even if all it says I have to do is cross a field and pick a flower, I may still decide not to continue with this madness.”

“Of course, but seriously Hodson, have some breakfast and come to my room, there are a lot of papers to go through.”

“We’ll see.”

Aristor left the room and Hodson shook his head. He needed to get out. Aristor didn’t know about the increasingly frequent dream he was having. He could still hear the voices of the Magicusians from the dream inside his head. The roars and screeches from the assembled gargoyles were eating into his subconscious. He had seen them fading away, disappearing from the world as the never-ending winter in Jaquisk finally started to take its toll.

COME TO US, WE HAVE THE ITEM YOU NEED TO HELP US

Hodson wasn’t sure he wanted to help them. Something about them and the images he was dreaming of didn’t feel right. But he knew the dreams would keep on, driving him insane if he did nothing.

He got up and went in search of some breakfast. Perhaps today was the day he would begin to help with the prophecy papers.

Medium

A lot of my blog posts were also get published on my Medium account, especially ones that are picture heavy, as there are no hosting costs to store all the photos there, the link is <https://medium.com/@onetruekev>. A lot has gone onto this site over the last year, and it would be good if you are on there looking at my work if you could register and become a standard member – it’s free for the basic member level, but it allows you to follow me on that site and allows for claps and comments to be made on pieces. Anything to help with profile raising is much appreciated.

As a user with over one hundred followers, more recent posts are on what they call the metered site, so full members of Medium who read or like my posts generate me money, which is good. It also means I become part of their referral scheme. So, if you are not a member, and are considering [subscribing to Medium](#) if you do so through that link then you will be supporting my writing and you may also discover lots of other great writers, posts, and articles, including those I have already published [here](#).

Epilogue – Where To Find More Of My Writing

To get people to sign up, point them in the direction of my website’s homepage of <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/> scroll down past the menu and then enter their e-mail address and select whether they want Flanagan’s Running Club or blog post updates or both and then hit submit.

If you want to catch up on old issues, go to the website at <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/frc.php> where all the issues are available.

For blog posts go to <https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/> which will have the most current post and the ability to scroll back in time.

There are various short story competition entries on my Reedsy prompts page at <https://blog.reedsy.com/creative-writing-prompts/author/kev-neylon/>

For all previous works including the old Surerandomality pieces go to <https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/else/> where pretty much everything I’ve written before is linked through to.

Then there are my books. Nothing published yet, but I have one full book available online, it’s called “Where The Lights Shine Brightest.” Can I ask you all a favour, please can you review my book on Inkitt, and the link is below? Even if you don’t take time to read it properly, please flick through a few chapters, give it ratings and a review, and vote for it please. It may help me get it published.

<https://www.inkitt.com/stories/thriller/201530>

I have had a number (seventy-three) of Drabbles published on the BookHippo web site, and they can all be found at <https://bookhippo.uk/profiles/kevin.neylon/drabbles>

I've recently been submitting to Paragraph Planet and have had some pieces published there, they will be in the archive somewhere, one piece a month from me since June. <https://www.paragraphplanet.com/index.php>

You can also follow me on Twitter, where I will occasionally put up some micro fiction or micro poems, my Twitter handle is @Onetruekev – <https://twitter.com/onetruekev>

You can also follow all my writing on the Facebook page Onetruekev which is at <https://www.facebook.com/Onetruekev-102649357993650/>

And also, now on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/onetruekev/>

E-mail any ideas or suggestions to kev@onetruekev.co.uk

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