

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 76

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 October

1814 – Eight people die in the London Beer Flood.

1907 – Marconi begins the first commercial transatlantic wireless service.

1931 – Al Capone is convicted of income tax evasion.

1933 – Albert Einstein flees Nazi Germany and moves to the United States.

1979 – Mother Teresa is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Loyalty Day (Argentina)

National Police Day (Thailand)

Births

1918 – Rita Hayworth

1935 – Michael Eavis

1938 – Evel Knievel

1972 – Eminem

1983 – Felicity Jones

Deaths

1849 – Frédéric Chopin

1991 – Tennessee Ernie Ford

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1970 – Freda Payne – Band Of Gold

Number 1 album in 2006 – The Killers – Sam's Town

Number 1 compilation album in 2015 – Various – Rapper's Delight

#vss365

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

I wasn't really listening, the only word from the sentence I'd taken in was fillum. I was more confused than usual. Fill what I asked, only to be told again, a fillum.

Realising it was my dad speaking my brain figured out the right word. Did you mean #movie?

Yes, fillum.

#vss365

Joke

I was in the pub the other night and my friend Denzel comes rushing in he says, "I need a favour". I said "what?" He said, "I got a young woman in the back of my van that I met in here, well she wants me to shag her, but my wife just called, and she's got me tea ready I have to go home" "What you want me to do about it?" I replied. "Well, you get in the van pretend to be me and give her a portion" he said. Well, I got into the van and bloody hell it was dark I could barely see the woman. But she was very friendly. Anyway, we get under way and just as I'm giving her a stuffing a

policeman shines his light through the window. "What are you doing in there?" he said, "I'm shagging my wife" I replied. "Oh, sorry I didn't realise she was your wife." said the officer. "Well neither did I till you shone your torch."

Drabble

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

Too Clever

Isaac thought he was being clever, and very secure, when he removed the main processing circuit board from his robot personal assistant. He was going to store it in his safe whilst he went away on holiday. That way, no one would be able to use the PA while he was away.

Only to find he couldn't open the safe upon his return from his holiday. The robot personal assistant was the only one who knew what the combination to the safe was. Which it couldn't give until the safe was opened and the circuit board was replaced in it.

Random Items

Facts

The average life of a taste bud is 10 days.

The human eye has more than two million working parts and blinks some 4.2 million times per year.

The human nose can differentiate between 10,000 smells and odours.

Thoughts

You're not really drunk if you are laying on the floor without holding on.

Can you cry under water?

How important does a person have to be before they are considered assassinated instead of just murdered?

Random Top Ten

The ten largest towns in Warwickshire based on the 2021 census population.

Pos	Town	2021 Population
1	Nuneaton	94,634
2	Rugby	78,125
3	Royal Leamington Spa	57,512
4	Warwick	37,267
5	Bedworth	31,332
6	Stratford-upon-Avon	30,055
7	Kenilworth	22,538
8	Atherstone	11,259
9	Polesworth	9,913
10	Whitnash	8,193

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.

Leaving For Las Vegas

Daphne hadn't been out of the state in nearly forty years. She had been in so many adventures in her late teens and early twenties it was ridiculous. But the gang had drifted apart.

She hadn't ended up marrying Fred as everyone thought would happen. He had been strangled by his own cravat getting caught in a machine when he was poking his nose in where it didn't belong. Again.

Daphne hadn't spoken to any of the others in decades. She had grown tired of Velma insinuating that she wasn't very bright and was only there because of how she looked. There had been a big argument, some hair pulling and some stamping on Velma's precious glasses. There was no going back from that. As for the pot head and his ridiculously large food hoover of a Great Dane, she had heard they moved into a hippy commune and never come back out.

Her own life had been very sedate since those days. She had got married to the first local boy in Dover County to ask her. It had been a mistake. Edmund had seemed nice enough when they started dating, but he turned into a controlling freakazoid once the marriage vows were complete, and Daphne had the ring on her finger.

A ring that was an indication of what a cheapskate Edmund would turn out to be. The gold plating wore off within a year and the ring was a dirty grey colour. It suited their relationship perfectly.

She found herself trapped, and strangely allowed herself to be. She wasn't allowed to go to work, not really allowed to have friends unless Edmund was there. It was just her and Edmund most of the time, and his increasingly paranoid behaviour.

That got worse the longer they were unable to have children. His patience ran out, and he was blaming her for it. Accused her of using contraceptives behind his back. Of being barren. Of not being able to give him an heir. As it turned out, Darwinism had taken control, decided that Edmund shouldn't be allowed to procreate and so it came to pass that he was firing more blanks than the army reserves.

She had been watching CNN when she saw a clip about the UK wanting to leave the rest of Europe. Take back control was the slogan being branded about. Those words stuck in her mind, bouncing around and picking away at her.

And so, she did. She divorced Edmund, got a job, found some friends and now she was going to be leaving Delaware and heading to Las Vegas.

The flight was in the morning. She had packed all of her most glamorous outfits. Over the last few months, she had taught herself how to play poker, blackjack, craps, and learnt all about probability. She found she had a great memory, especially for cards. In her handbag was seven thousand, three hundred, and thirty-one dollars. She was going to come back from this trip either totally broke, or having broken the bank.

And if it were the latter then maybe she would come back with a man in tow. It didn't matter to her is he was only there for the money. At least she would be in control now.

Leicestershire

The Guildhall

This fascinating building is probably one of the best-preserved timber framed halls in England. The great hall was built in 1390 by the Guild of Corpus Christi (hence its name), who were a small and powerful group of local businessmen that were founded in 1343. It was built as a meeting place for the guild, and remained as such until the guild was disbanded following the reformation in 1548.

Within a few years the corporation of Leicester had begun to meet in the great hall, and from 1494 the hall officially became the Town Hall, which it remained until 1876. In 1450 the great hall was extended by adding a further two bays (making five in total), making it up to its present size of 62ft long, by 20ft wide, by 27ft high. In 1490 the east and west wings were added to the original structure. When the Guild of Corpus Christi was dissolved the Leicester Corporation bought the hall from them for the sum of £25, 15s & 4d.

In 1563, the west wing was converted to make it into three floors, of which the ground floor became the mayor's parlour from 1637, and the first floor became a Jury room for the courts that were held in the hall. The east wing was redeveloped in 1632 in order that it could become the Town Library, which was transferred from the belfry of the neighbouring St. Martins. The library still remains today, and is the third oldest public library in the country. The books held in the library can still be viewed by prior arrangement. The hall had started to be used as a court, as well as meeting rooms, and theatre. It was also used to hold banquets, and civic events.

During the English Civil War, the Mayor and corporation received a demand from Prince Rupert for £2,000. The decision was made at the Guildhall to offer a loan of £500 and made an appeal to King Charles I. In May 1645, the King in attempt to divert attention away from Oxford positioned an army of 6,000 men outside the city walls on 29 May 1645. Again, important decisions regarding the fate of the city were to be decided in the Guildhall. On 30 May 1645, the Royalist Army made demand after demand to the city, who played for time. In the end Prince Rupert attacked at 3:00 pm. The

City walls were breached, and the last stand made by the defenders outside the Guildhall and St Martins. The Royalists then entered the Guildhall looting the town's archives, and mace and seal. The Royalist victory was reversed a couple of weeks later with the defeat at Naseby.

In 1836, the old kitchens were demolished to make way for a house for the newly appointed chief constable, of the first Leicester borough police force, and the Guildhall became the first police station. The east wing's ground floor was converted into cells, for prisoners.

However, with the growth of the town, especially during the 19th century it became obvious that the Guildhall was too small for the town functions, and it was agreed to build a New Town Hall, which was opened in 1876, and the corporation business moved across town. For the next 50 years the building was used for a variety of uses, including a school, but it fell into disrepair, and became an eyesore. Despite calls for it to be demolished, the then City council restored the building, which included the demolishing of modern annexes, and additions, and the stripping of all plastering and rendering. The timber was renovated, and new bookcases and fireplaces were installed. It was then reopened in 1926 as a museum, which it remains to the present day.

It has been reoriented for visitors in the last few years, with the entrance moving from the old doors on Guildhall Lane to a new entrance, shop and display suite, with an entrance in from opposite the West door of the Cathedral. In addition, it is now available to hire for events.

With five reported ghosts, the Guildhall is reputedly Leicester's most haunted building. Because of its reported hauntings, it has appeared on various TV programmes, including being investigated on the television show Most Haunted.

Harston

Harston is an English village on a crossroads in Leicestershire, England, near the border with Lincolnshire. The nearest town is Grantham, about six miles (10 km) to the north-east. It forms part of the civil parish of Belvoir, which belongs to the district of Melton. It once contained several quarries for iron ore.

The church, dedicated to St Michael and All Angels, is a Grade II* listed building. The oldest part appears to be the tower, which is probably from the first half of the 14th century. The chancel dates from 1871 and the nave from 1888.

Harston was the last place in Leicestershire where iron ore was quarried. This took place extensively to the north, east and south of the village from 1889 to 1972. Stanton Ironworks Company had started quarrying in 1883 at Woolsthorpe-by-Belvoir, just over the border in Lincolnshire to the north of Harston. The company opened its first quarry in Harston in 1888, south of Denton Road to the east of the village.

The ore was taken by a short narrow-gauge tramway to the terminus of a standard-gauge mineral branch of the Great Northern Railway (GNR). The GNR then took it to the Stanton Company's ironworks in Derbyshire. The GNR was later part of the London and North Eastern Railway and then nationalised in 1948. The Stanton Company opened another quarry to the north of the road in 1889, also served by the same tramway.

From 1901 the company quarried to the north of the village on either side of the Woolsthorpe Road. At first the ore from there was taken by another tramway leading to the GNR branch further down the line near the Grantham Canal. This tramway, the last part of which was a rope-worked incline, passed the original Woolsthorpe quarries. Later, when quarrying west of Woolsthorpe Road ended, the quarries east of the road used an extension of the tramway leading to the standard-gauge terminus.

The Harston quarries north of Denton Road were exhausted by 1923, but they had already been extended into the parish of Denton. South of Denton Road, the active quarries between 1918 and 1930 were all in Denton, just to the east of Sewstern Lane.

New quarries were opened to the south of the village in that year and later extended into Knipton. So was the tramway to serve them, which in 1947–1948 was converted to standard gauge. Quarrying ceased at Harston in 1972, but the tramway was still used for trains to and from the quarries at Denton for another two years. Until 1948, the ore was tipped from the narrow-gauge trucks into standard-gauge ones at the terminus of the standard-gauge branch, where they were left for a main line railway locomotive to take away.

After 1948 the wagons were loaded at the quarry face and taken to the British Railways terminus where they were later picked up by a British railways' locomotive. Between 1951 and 1955 there was a quarry to the north-west of the village, not served by the tramway. Ore from it was loaded into lorries, which took it to a tipping dock at the head of the British Railways branch. A small part of the quarry to the south of the village was also worked in that way in the early 1960s. The last two steam engines on the tramway gave way to diesel in 1967.

Quarrying was initially done by hand with the aid of explosives. Steam quarrying machines were introduced from 1917 and replaced by diesel power from 1936. There were also some electric machines used from 1940.

The quarries were owned by Stewarts & Lloyds Minerals Ltd from 1950 and British Steel from 1970. In later years, the ore was taken to Scunthorpe for smelting. Traces of the railway and tramways remain. Some fields previously quarried are now at a lower level than the roads, but few other signs of the quarrying remain. There are some company-built cottages near the Denton Road. The engine shed has been removed and re-erected at Rutland Railway Museum, Cottesmore, Rutland. The last two steam locomotives are used on preserved railways.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

The Joy Of Pets

Today I have realised why, for the first 46 years of my life I was more than content in living in a pet free environment. One of the cats woke up from a nap to let out the strangest high-pitched whining sound, louder than I have ever heard from either of the cats. The noise was something akin to the sound of a Tie-Fighter, screeching its way to a battle at the Death Star.

The cat then avoided capture and backed itself under the coffee table where it proceeded to puke its little guts up. I finally managed to retrieve said cat, pick it up and get it to the front door, where it took one look outside and ran in the opposite direction through to the kitchen.

Meanwhile, as I was at the front door, the damn dog took the opportunity to rush in and eat the cat's regurgitated remains. He was still happily licking the floor when I dragged his disappointed looking self away.

I make my way into the kitchen to get a cloth and some Dettol to wipe the space under the coffee table, now only damp from the dog's tongue. I find the recently puking cat on the side eating the contents of his bowl as if his little moggie life depended on it. This being the same cat who is normally too lazy to jump up onto the side.

Back in the living room I had to remove the dog from under the coffee table again where he was licking the fumes of the fumes of the cat's former dinner, so that I could get to clean the floor.

I have now cleaned the spot of the foul, and have managed to exit the cat from the premises. I have reclaimed my spot on the sofa; however, the dog is now sat on my feet licking his lips in a doggy satisfied manner whilst I try to remember what the hell I was writing before being interrupted by pet madness.

Poetry Corner

Keyboard Warriors

These bitter people tapping away all day.
Always negative, never positive words they say.
They spew bile, always vile, aiming to defile.

Self-entitled, the arbiters of right and wrong
Disparaging words are all that fill their sour tasting song.
With distain, they complain, aiming to cause pain.

Facts are optional or twisted inside out.
They must be correct, in their minds there's no doubt.
They dig dirt, aim to hurt, with every sentence they blurt.

Anonymous warriors hide behind screen names.
With no consequences, to them it's all fun and games.
No recognition, no admission, a much too common condition

The only view that is valid is their own.
Everything they write has such a vicious tone.
They fill with dread, mess with your head, and wish you dead.

But when the tables are turned, they all cry.
With the heat on them they become small fry
They start to deflect, never reflect, at their own lack of respect.

But the best way to deal with them is to ignore.
As the start up just slam that door
They get blocked, get accounts locked, their evil defrocked.

Never drag yourselves down to their level
There is no use n trying to argue with a devil.
They cannot hear, they don't fear, so get them out of here.

Did I Really Blog That?

A Leicester History Through Pubs

It was another night out in Leicester. There have been a lot of them over the years. Between the late eighties and 2001 there was a hell of a lot of them. In all the time since 2001 this was only the fourth. It was a hastily put together last-minute arrangement to try and meet up with a couple of old friends. However due to the last-minute manner of it and other commitments it ended up being a solo night out. There had been a fair few of them over the years as well.

When I arrived in Leicester there was no actual plan in place. I was in the Highcross. It wasn't a place I used to go to when I lived in Leicester, and for a lot of the years I used to go out it used to be shops. I was sat there nursing a pint waiting for the confirmation of my hotel booking at the Holiday Inn.

As soon as it popped through, I finished my drink and headed over to the hotel to change. The view out of the room's window was out over the Jewry Wall, and St. Nicholas's Church. Two of the older parts of Leicester's history, being Roman and Saxon, respectively. When they had been building the foundations for the Holiday Inn, they had found some more Roman remains of the reasonably sized town they had taken over on the banks of the River Soar. They let people down into the basement to look at them from time to time as well. My stay wasn't one of those times.

The historic view gave me an idea for how to start out my trip through the pubs of Leicester. Pub one of my journey was going to be the Castle Inn. A place where I had never drank at before. I hadn't even stepped foot into the buildings it occupied. It is set in two small cottages that made up part of the Castle's estate, and looks out to St. Mary de Castro church, now sadly without its spire.

There had been an inn on this site up to the first half of the twentieth century, and one of my friend's – Tony – predecessors had run the inn at one point. However, it had always been private cottages when I lived in Leicester, and it had only opened as a bar in June. It was made up of two small rooms with low ceilings and a tiny bar in the corner of one. I was the only person in there (apart from staff) when I arrived, and they were struggling with no draught beers. A couple more people came in before I left. It is tucked away off the beaten track, but it is a great historic building and location, so I hope that it catches on and does well.

Pub two of the evening was another historic location. (Roger) Wygston's House. I had been in this building countless times as a child, but never for a drink. The medieval timber framed building with its sloping uneven upstairs floors had used to house the Costume Museum. It had only opened as a bar and restaurant this year.

I sat outside in the cool autumn night, admiring the ancient building from its courtyard, whilst trying not to be distracted by the large, big wheel in the Jubilee Square opposite the pub. I've been on the London Eye, and a big wheel in Manchester, so one in my hometown was tempting, yet alcohol was calling. It would have to be saved for another time. Moving on to pub three, well, more a bar really, and from this point the evening took a longer detour into history, personal history on the whole.

Bruxelles bar is a stunning Victorian reproduction of Georgian architecture. Inside they have very much gone with the Belgian theme; Tintin and Mannequin Pis have statues there. And then you look up at the domed ceiling. Vividly painted with scenes from around the world. Then the place names are painted around the bottom of the dome, attesting to all the twinned cities Leicester is linked to.

The domed roof gives a hint to an older name for the building. Back in the late eighties, this used to be the Leicester Dome, and for the best part of a year it was my, and a number of good friends of mine's spiritual nightclub home. Granted we were probably the majority of the clientele on any particular Friday or Saturday night, and we probably treated it as our own personal fiefdom.

It wasn't in the slightest bit salubrious back then, but we had some amazing nights in there, and it was a shame when it closed, though not a massive surprise. Not when the old-school style bouncers Marco and Franco were playing games such as 'the most ridiculous reason not to let someone in,' that included the immortal "sorry mate, no white shirts" line. They should have been stopping people in the street and throwing them into the club, not thinking up bonkers reasons to prevent people not getting in.

It is a lot more upmarket and salubrious nowadays. This evening's clientele is a much higher class than we used to be, or at least they look that way. There is a surfeit of ball-gowns and tuxedos as it seems to be a meeting point before a number of Christmas parties that are happening around town tonight.

Pub four is The Globe. Of all the venues visited on the night's tour, this is the one that has changed the least. The look, the people, the beers, the music. It could all have been from any one of a few hundred nights out in the nineties. It was rare back then to have a night out that didn't involve at least one drink here. I can see people, and hear conversations that could have been myself and friends twenty-five years ago. It is a wrench to leave, but more history calls.

Pub five had personal and physical history. It is an O'Neill's, the ubiquitous Irish chain pub. Growing up and being of Irish descent and having sat in the corner of many an authentic, run by the Irish for the Irish pubs in Leicester, I hate O'Neill's as a chain with a passion.

The one here in Leicester is now massive. Mainly because it acted like the Borg and assimilated another pub and a couple of shops during the late nineties to become the sprawling monstrosity it is today.

The pub it assimilated used to be the Fourpence & Firkin. Back when Firkin pubs ruled the world in the mid-nineties (or at least that how it seemed.) The Fourpence part of the title was a nod to the peppercorn rent bestowed to the building by one of the fifteenth century Henrys. (I can't remember if it was IV, V or VI anymore). An Inn had been on this site ever since, and before it became a Firkin pub in the early nineties it was called the Crown & Thistle, and was still a great place to go.

On a personal level I remember many nights in there drinking Caffey's or Addlestons. And I remember my dad being so drunk on a session after we'd been for wedding suit fittings that he kept sliding off his seat. In the original part of O'Neill's, a couple of months later came the point where everyone on my stag do thought they had finally got me to hit the wall. The pint of Caffey's didn't want to go down at all, and I thought I was done for the night as well. But it all kicked back into place, and I ended up being the last man standing in the Fan Club (which we'll come back to later).

Pub six was the Knight & Garter. Well, it had been for about a year. When I left Leicester, it was called Molly O'Grady's, playing up to the Irishness of its landlords and clientele to compete with the faux Irishness of places like O'Neill's. Prior to the renaming it had been the Saracen's Head, and a proper old-school Irish pub. My parents had always gone in over the years, and my grandma had worked there at some point in the past.

Being on the edge of the formidable Leicester market, it used to have a hatch out to the little jetty that ran along the back of the pub. This was used to serve out of hours drinks to the market traders as they came to set up their stalls at stupid O'clock in the morning. There were a few times I took advantage of a stiff drink before heading into my Saturday job at Superdrug after a heavy night out.

This was the venue that had changed most from my memories. The layout was vastly different, and there is polished wood and shiny copper piping everywhere. There is no sign of the spit and sawdust that accompanied my childhood visits.

Pub seven does still have some of that feel to it. Duffy's is another place that has changed its name to play up to the Irish market. It used to be called the Town Arms, and was another place that had always been an Irish run pub. There was the year we were in there when St Patrick's Day fell on a Sunday, and I met my parents in there with two of my friends – Chris and Tony. My dad wouldn't let us finish one drink before another miraculously appeared in front of us. It didn't shut at three as it should have done back in those days, so there was no respite in what became a very messy afternoon.

It is located opposite the block that Leicester's registry office is located. There was always a steady stream of pre and post wedding drinkers in there. I particularly remember Barry and Dawn getting married on a Friday and the extended lunch break pre-wedding drinks caused. We had also been in there the week before on Barry's stag do. He had been dressed as a Boer War British soldier, resplendent in his red tunic, pith helmet and not-necessarily replica rifle and bayonet. His mate Ian only had an afro wig, y-fronts with a bamboo grass skirt over it and flip flops on. He was however covered head to toe in smeared coffee residue and carrying a six-foot-long spear. And hardly anyone batted an eyelid as the rest of us walked through town with the pair of them. There would be lynch mobs nowadays.

There is a band playing in one of the back rooms in the pub tonight. A few people crowd round the makeshift stage, whilst others just wander in and out as the mood takes them. The name may have changed, but the spirits remain the same.

Pub eight is now called Brood. (Yes, the extra O is supposed to be there.) Back in the day it used to be called Vin Quatre, a play on the fact that it was primarily a wine bar and was situated at number twenty-four King Street. It was the Friday night haunt of the old DSS building that sat on the corner of Norton Street. It was also the home of the gallon challenge – drink eight pints without having to break the seal and pee. Unsurprisingly it was rarely completed, and to be honest, nowadays I can't imagine trying to complete it; such bladder control is a younger person's game.

The layout inside is very similar to what it had used to be. I think some of the older furniture looks the same as it was a quarter of a century ago. A folk band is coming to the end of its set as it reaches the old traditional chucking out time of 11pm. They pack up, but the bar carries on serving. I sit on an old, overstuffed leather sofa towards the back, where the windows look out over the New Walk, and the signage still shows the sign of being called Vin Quatre.

I had made it through the plan of pubs in my head. There were some other places I had thought of whilst I was wandering around, but The Pump and Tap, Princess Charlotte, George's, Jacey's, and Cheers are all now sadly departed. What a night it would have been with them still being in the mix. But it's now time to hit the club.

And what a club. The Fan Club. A behemoth now, but it hadn't always been that way. When I get there, the entrance is one building across from where it used to be, and you pay on the ground floor. It had been the case that you dragged yourself up the narrow stairs to pay at the booth at the top, and then make your way into the single room, either left to the bar, or right to the dance floor.

At the same time in the eighties there was another club on the same block, on the corner. That was Sector 5, again a single room, paying at the top of the stairs. There were three units in between the two clubs then, now it is all one club stretching across the whole of the first floor of the block.

Sector 5 had expanded to two rooms when they rebranded as Alcatraz, and introduced paying downstairs. The Fan Club has expanded to two rooms, but with as little partitioning as possible. The unit that now sat between the two clubs was used as the fire escape for both, down into the car park / loading bays that sat behind ground floor shops. Bouncers would be on the fire escape doors either side of this and you could see one club from the other when the doors were left open to let some fresh air into the boiling atmospheres.

In the nineties, these were my clubs of choice, and of a hell of a lot of other people I knew at the time as well. It was common for me to be in one or the other of them four or five times a week. The Fan Club staple drinks were Grolsch, out of the big pint bottles with the flip top lids, which ended up being used as adornments to the front of shoes or trainers, and oversized earrings. Or for light relief Orange Hooch. There is a picture somewhere of Chris and I sat at the solitary table in the Fan Club with the table being full of empty Orange Hooch bottles.

Over in Alcatraz the main drink was a cocktail called The Sacred Mountain of The Pekinese Cloud Gods, a green mixture that included Martini, Southern Comfort, Blue Bols, and Orange Juice. All for only two quid a pop. This was taken alongside Prairie Fire, a shooter that was Sambuca and Tequila with a floating line of Tabasco sauce in the middle. For a quid. There were a lot of messy nights.

None of those drinks survive the new super club version of The Fan Club. The initial room from the first incarnation is back doing their eighties night stuff as of old. It is this room where I witnessed one of the most spectacular un-choreographed pieces of dance floor action ever. Being ejected from my house the night after my stag do, so the hen do could happen, I went alone to the Fan Club and was leaning against the wall overlooking the dance floor. The Beastie Boys' Intergalactic was playing, and when it got to the line "let the beat drop" and it went silent, the whole dance floor's crown dropped as one, and from a mass of dancing people I could now see straight across to the DJ booth. Everything stood still in silence for a second before normal service was resumed.

This is now soundproofed off from the middle three rooms, full of dry ice and flashing lights and a more mainstream dance mix, before you make your way into what had been Sector 5. The Tank Girl adorned walls are now painted over, in what they call the indie lounge. It's much more chilled in here, the music isn't as loud, and there are lots of overstuffed leather sofas.

Which at after one in the morning, after reaching double figures of mainly wheat-based lagers, is deadly. It is when the bouncer taps me on the shoulder for the second time that night as I've dozed off that I decide it is time to go.

Automatic pilot takes me outside, around the corner and into the kebab shop. I didn't know there would be a kebab shop open there. I was making the assumption that seventeen years since I'd last popped out of the Fan Club, nothing had changed around there. If there hadn't been a kebab shop there, I don't know what I'd have done. Food and a taxi back to the hotel. So blinkered on getting home I didn't even notice if the bus station was still there across the road from the kebab shop.

I didn't remember the taxi back either. A joke really as we used to walk back to my house from the clubs. A route that would have taken us around the Holiday Inn, less than halfway along the journey.

It's not just the pubs, bars and clubs that change over time, it's the people who used to go to them as well, they are older and more tired and lazier than they used to be. But it was still a great night out walking through mine and the city's history.

Story Time

The Future Is Clear

Eloise stared at the crystal ball in the middle of the table in front of her. It was clear now, and to her it had been for years. All she could see in it now were the distorted views of the table beneath it and the oak panelled walls beyond the table, along with a weak reflection of the window behind her.

It hadn't always been this way. She had been thirteen when the first vision in the ball had been shown to her. It had shocked her. The old spectral face, the twisted features, the pained look in the eyes in there. It was nothing like the visions she had heard her mother and grandmother describe for those who had come for readings in their caravan as their travelling show had crossed and re-crossed the country.

Eloise had cried out in fright and that had brought her mother running into the room with a dark look upon her face.

"What have you done child?" she had screamed at Eloise.

Nothing was not an answer that her mother had accepted, and over the next half an hour Eloise had described what had happened. And as she did her mother had softened. Her mother asked Eloise if she had bled yet. She had but hadn't mentioned it to anyone, scared of what it might mean, and that her family would be cross at her about it. But they weren't.

Eloise's mother, Cassandra, had been one of the most, if not the most renowned psychics of her age. Eloise had taken over the readings when her mother died. She had a modicum of talent when younger, nowhere near what her mother had had, but enough to keep it as a going concern.

It had been just over ten years since she had seen anything at all in the ball. Ten years since she had sat there with an ever-growing sense of panic as nothing appeared in the ball. She was so shocked at not seeing anything there her brain couldn't catch up, and she was unable to make anything up on the spot. Stumbling over words. Babbling away like a lunatic, making no sense to her client (or herself). She had given the woman a refund and then cancelled readings that were booked.

But her husband, Marvin, had persuaded her to become a fake. He would thoroughly research all of her clients, and between the two of them they would script out what they thought the client would want to hear.

But Eloise was tired of it all. Tired of the research. Tired of the deception. Tired of staring into the crystal ball and seeing nothing. Every time she did it now it dredged up memories of her mother; disrupting the readings, making her forget the script and make predictions that had nothing to do with the client in front of her. There had been more than a few confused looking people leaving the house recently, and it was only going to be a matter of time before the clients stopped coming.

It wasn't as if she needed the money. Eloise often wondered what she was doing still working well into her seventies. She didn't have anything to prove. No one really cared anymore. No one would miss her 'services'. There was so much choice out there on the internet. All kinds of weird and wonderful alternatives. She wasn't adding any value at all.

She should have taken the hint when she stopped seeing. She had just started to get her pension. But Marvin had kept pushing her to carry on. Starting up the whole research charade. It kept them both busy, and they hardly saw each other, much as it had been for most of their married life. If anything, Marvin seemed to prefer it this way. Not that she cared. She might say she didn't love him anymore, but it wouldn't be strictly the truth. If she was honest with herself, she knew she had never loved him. Yes, she was fond of him, and enjoyed his company when he was around. He was always charming. Years of perfected patter running the ring toss, or coconut shy, or some other fixed game in the show had never worn off. But it was all an act. And now that was all Eloise's life was as well. An act of scripted tales of falseness, useful for one thing. Extracting cash from gullible fools.

She leaned forward and drew herself as close to the crystal ball as she could. So close in fact, her nose was brushing its cool, smooth surface. Leaving a small smudge on its perfectly polished surface. At least it would be something to focus on during the reading.

In a few minutes, a new client would be sat opposite her on the other side of the table with the crystal ball between them. Eloise would spout the scripted rubbish her and Marvin had gone over in minute detail in the last couple of days. And in just over an hour, it would all be over. She, this room, and that sphere of taunting glass would all be retired. No more clients, no more research, no more scripts, and most importantly, no more guilt. For the first time in a decade Eloise was looking forward to a reading.

There was a knock at the door, and it was opened by Marvin who led the very last client in, bringing the tray for tea with him. After pouring out two cups of tea adding the milk and sugar for her, he left tray on the side table, and left the room.

Eloise glanced up at her client. Fatima was the woman's name, and during the research she hadn't seen a photograph. But she knew that Marvin would have done. She sat speechless as she looked at Fatima and wondered why Marvin hadn't mentioned how much the client looked like Eloise did twenty years ago. The long black hair, the high cheekbones, the piercing green eyes, the pale skin, the red lipstick. If Eloise could find a picture of herself twenty years ago it would act as a mirror to the woman in front of her.

The woman watched Eloise appraising her. The touch of a smirk moving her lips to one side. It took a couple of minutes for Eloise to get herself together enough that she could speak. She took a deep breath and started.

"Good evening Fatima, before we start, is there anything in particular you are looking for in your reading?"

The smirk turned into a wide smile.

"Only the truth Madame Eloise. That's all anyone can really ask for, isn't it?"

There was something quite unsettling to Eloise about Fatima's demeanour. A challenge perhaps, or maybe a mocking tone. But it didn't matter. If the reading went badly there were no future clients to be put off by bad reviews. Word of mouth no longer mattered to her. All Eloise had to do was to get through the next fifty minutes, and this would all be behind her.

So, she looked into the crystal ball. To stare into the nothingness that faced her all the time now.

And cried out in shock. Just as she had that first time, she saw a vision in this ball. The old spectral face, the twisted features, the pained look in the eyes in there. They were all back. Only now she recognised them. As sure as if she were looking into a mirror, the images in the ball were her. In pain with something desperately wrong with her.

The images kept flowing, and as they did, she felt the blood drain from her face. She felt herself pale. Felt the tears well up in her eyes and start their slow trickle, descending down her nose and cheeks, catching on the corner of her lips before carrying on down to her chin.

Those images telling her what a fool she had been for these last ten years, showing her everything that had been going on without her even having an inkling. And chillingly, showing what was planned for her today.

She picked up her teacup and as she did, she let out a big sob, and in doing so the teacup fell from her grasp, dropping to the table, spilling its contents on the deep purple velvet covering before it rolled off the table onto the floor where it hit the treated oak boards and smashed.

As the sound of breaking china reverberated around the room, another sound joined it. a slow hand clap from across the table. Fatima was smirking once more and giving mocking applause, only stopping to speak.

"Madame Eloise, what a performance. You are very good. Very convincing. The acting is worthy of any Shakespearean play. Such a reaction from looking at the crystal ball."

So, a sceptic Eloise thought, another who knows nothing of the arcane.

"It is no act."

The woman had the audacity to laugh.

"Of course it is. I know full well that you haven't seen a thing in your crystal ball in ten years. I know everything about your act here, and how it comes to an end today."

"You know nothing."

"I know it all, everything your husband has told me all these years."

"That's as the case may be, but you know nothing of the arcane and how it really works. Marvin doesn't really understand it either, and until just now I didn't fully understand it either."

"And how's that then you fake."

"I did see a vision. One of me. It started the same way as my first one when I was just a teenager. But this time I knew who it was being shown to me. Sixty years ago, I wouldn't have recognised my seventy-four-year-old face in pain and agony, but now I see it on a regular basis."

Fatima sniggered.

“So, you saw your haggard reflection, big deal.”

“That was only the preface. I learnt so much in a few moments. Things I should have known and remembered. I never realised that my first vision came on the day I first kissed Marvin in a silly game. And that connection made became the basis for my visions. It was ten years before we were married and I didn’t do a lot of readings then when my mother was alive, but he was always around and always cared for me, and unbeknown to me, it was that caring which gave me the strength to see what was within the crystal ball.”

“Yeah, yeah, old woman, of course it was.”

“It was.”

“And it just stopped, even with him being with you these last ten years.”

“But he hasn’t really been here with me, has he? Not since he met you and you took him into your bed. A younger model of me, and that connection was gone. It is all your fault.”

“Ten out of ten, one mark for each year it has taken you to realise.”

“I have never seen you before today, Marvin has kept you well away before today, hasn’t he? He knew if I saw you, an image of me twenty years before, that something might fall into place. But he couldn’t keep you away on the day you aim to kill me. Poison me with my own tea as I give my last ever reading.”

The smirk was gone from Fatima’s face, replaced by a much harder look.

“You dropping your cup was an act then. You really did have a vision.”

“Of the reaction to the poison. That was what my first ever vision was. Me dying from its effects.”

“There is still time for you to be poisoned, this will be your last day.”

It was Eloise’s time to laugh.

“I know that was your plan, the one Marvin was all too willing to go through with, but things have changed.”

“Keep deluding yourself old woman. You will be gone today, and Marvin and I will be together with no need to sneak around and hide our love.”

Eloise grinned and leant forward, moving one hand under the table.

“What do you know about this table?”

“Only that you do your reading up here and always have.”

“Did Marvin tell you nothing about it?”

“Marvin doesn’t care about your stupid table, or about you anymore either.”

“More fool him.”

“Really?”

“This table belonged to my mother, a far greater psychic than I ever was.”

“Not hard nowadays.”

“You may mock, but what people heard from her sometimes didn’t sit very well with them. Threats were made, there was violence, and so she modified the table. A modification I kept all these years without ever needing it until today. And it would appear to be a modification that Marvin never bothered to find out about.”

Eloise pulled the trigger. The noise was far louder than she was expecting. It was nothing compared to the shock Fatima got, and her cry of pain. Eloise carried on talking.

“A gunshot to the stomach won’t kill you immediately, but it will kill you very soon without any medical attention, and it will hurt like hell. Which is appropriately where you will be going.”

The door burst open, and Marvin rushed in. He did a double take, surprised to see Eloise sat upright smiling and Fatima slumped over the table in pain. And then he saw the blood.

“What have you done Eloise?”

“Did you not hear the gunshot? Is the loud bang not why you rushed in, expecting it to be me having fallen over?”

“I don’t understand.”

“I shot her Marvin. I’m surprised you never knew about the hidden gun under the table. I had a vision, after all these years. I saw what the pair of you had planned for me, and so, I shot her.”

“But she’ll die.”

“Almost definitely. An ambulance might be able to save her, but I’m not calling one. And neither are you.”

And with a flourish, Eloise detached the fun from its mount under the table and held it over the table, pointing it at Marvin.”

“Are you mad woman?”

“Yes, I’m furious. And I’ve got a gun. So, sit yourself down. Have yourself a cup of tea if you must, and we can wait for Fatima to depart this world.”

Marvin went to Fatima, lifting her head from the table. Her eyes were closed. Her skin pale. Blood slowly bubbled from her lips. He didn’t know what to do and absent mindedly picked up the untouched tea from in front of Fatima. He took a sip, and looked at it and frowned. He went around to the side table and put milk and sugar in it, and then drank the lot in a single go.

Eloise laughed.

Marvin didn’t.

“You should have drunk yours. Instead, you’ve killed Fatima, and now you’ll have to watch me die from my own poison.”
Eloise laughed again.

“No, I won’t.”

And she shot him.

Chapter and Verse

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

The Repsuli Deception – Chapter 3

No sooner had the new client left when Vipond decided to show his metallic face. He looked at the glass splinters on the floor.

“Have an accident, did you?”

I ignored the jibe.

“Where the nebulas have you been?”

“We both agree it works best if I am not here when potential clients arrive.”

“Did you let her in?”

“No, I had been out to try and get our remaining fees owing from the Tranter case. When I returned, I heard you talking and stayed outside until they left.”

“How much did you hear?”

“Not a great deal, the universal translator was interfering with my own. You really should look at getting it fixed or replaced.”

“I did fix it when it played up this morning, a quick bang with my fist worked wonders.”

“I’m surprised it works at all if that’s how you treat it.”

“Anyway, now that you are back, you can be of some use. Our new Repsuli client left this data chip here. It has all the details regarding her missing husband that we have been hired to find. Whilst that loads, can you work my data centre and put in a search for the name Tarrega Opsulate.”

Vipond rolled his eyes, it was one of his favourite tricks and it annoyed the hell out of me. They actually did roll around in the sockets, just like the reels on one of those old fruit machines I’ve read so much about. There were some clicks, which the translator ignored; they were a sign that my robot partner wasn’t happy in his work. He didn’t have to be happy, but he was good. The details on my new client flashed up all around me.

She was the eldest daughter of the Queen of Repsuli, and therefore next in line to the throne. If her husband was pregnant, and if the child was a female, then that unborn Repsuli child was the future ruler of a planet.

I wasn’t going to have any difficulties getting paid for this case, far from it, the Repsuli royal family were beyond rich. But I sure as nebulas would be encountering a whole host of other problems.

“I hope you charged her double your normal rate. Royalty can afford it you know.” Vipond remarked.

It hadn’t even crossed my mind. I didn’t know she was royalty when I had agreed to take the case. I didn’t even know for sure that she was until she had left the building. Beside the rates were in foot high letters on the back wall of the office. That and the fact I couldn’t have lied about that anyway.

“No, the usual price.”

“Let me guess, you couldn’t lie to her?”

“No, well, yes, but, well, I didn’t know she was royalty. I didn’t even suspect until she had made the initial payment.”

“Some detective you are.”

If I could have rolled my eyes I would have done. It came to something when your robot partner was more adept at lying than you were. I changed the subject.

“What’s on the chip then?”

“A lot and yet almost nothing at all.”

“I hate it when you talk in riddles.”

“The chip has every detail about every trip her husband has been on, most of them with our client. There is some biographical information and numerous photographs. Some of a quite personal nature. But that is all there is. Nothing that describes personality, there is nothing that he has said. For all the photographs there isn’t a single piece of video, or recording of his voice. His biographical information has his name and his birth date, and measurements, but there is no mention of his family at all. If anything, it seems like the kind of dummy biography that security services put together for their operatives for a mission.”

“Does it say on the chip who put the file together?”

“That is another thing; there is no meta data in the file at all. Not in any of the documents, or on any of the photographs. It is all blank. That is something I have never seen, I didn’t think it was possible, I don’t think I could have done what the creator of this file has.”

Great, that’s all I need, a file that seemed like a ghost, put together by a ghost.

“Nothing at all?”

“No, nothing.”

“So, what’s his name then?”

“Franeth Opsulate.”

“What was his name before he got married to our client?”

“Franeth.”

“Very funny tin head, what was his surname before he was married?”

“Franeth.”

“So, you’re telling me his name was Franeth Franeth?”

“According to the file, yes.”

“Aren’t there laws against child cruelty on Repsuli?”

“I am not sure; I could look it up for you.”

“Never mind, I was being facetious anyway. What can you find on him in the data centre?”

I could have typed in his name myself, but it might have taken me a while, my hangover was back with a vengeance. Vipond touched the data centre, and more details flew up around me replacing the ones on my client. I tried to focus on the data floating in front of me.

“Is this right?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“It says that our missing Repsuli used to be the owner of Frantech. Surely that can’t be right. Frantech is one of the largest corporations in the cosmos, even I’ve heard of them. How in the nebulae is it possible that I didn’t know it was a Repsuli corporation?”

“There are a lot of things that come as no surprise to me when you say you don’t know it. What you do know is a much smaller, much more manageable subset.”

Vipond touched the data centre again and another set of data appeared. This time on the ceiling above me. I leaned back to look up and wished I hadn’t, my head spun, and I struggled to focus more than before.

“Would you like me to read it to you Brodie? You seem more hungover than usual today.”

I closed my eyes and nodded, and then just listened.

Frantech is over eight hundred standard years old. It was started on Repsuli by another Franeth Franeth, the only son of an aristocratic family on the planet. As soon as the corporation got to the point of being able to trade outside of Repsuli it set up a corporate front. It moved its headquarters to the nearby planet of Khakgle where it set up a board of local Khakgles to be the face of the corporation. A strategy used to get over some of the prejudices held towards the Repsuli. From there it grew across the know cosmos, and today is one of the five biggest corporations in the cosmos. The majority of its clients still don’t know it is owned by the Repsulis. And since the marriage of Franeth Franeth to Tarrega Opsulate, it is now owned by the Repsuli royal family, after all property was transferred to the wife as per Repsuli law.

I didn’t open my eyes. I lounged in my chair and wished that I had not opened my eyes at all yet this morning. I wished I had never set eyes on my new client.

“So, for clarity’s sake, let me try and summarise. Our new client is the heir to the throne of Repsuli, something she failed to mention until it was too late. We have been hired to find her missing husband, who appears to have vanished into thin air whilst on Earth. A man, who before he was married was one of the richest men in the cosmos, and who now, is not, as all of his wealth has gone to his wife. And to top it off, she was pointed in my direction by the space corps. The same space corps who couldn’t get rid of me fast enough because I told the truth, and of whom there would be any number of them who would quite happily see me interred in whichever penal mining colony they could get me on to. Is it too late to give the client their money back and find a new profession?”

I do believe Vipond was chuckling, or at least the robot equivalent of it.

“I didn’t know she had been sent to you by the space corps. Does that mean they didn’t like her, or that they are trying to get their own back on you?”

"Knowing them, probably both."

"I would normally be inclined to agree that this case may be more trouble than it is worth and to repay the client."

"Good Vipond, that's exactly what I want to hear."

"But..."

"NO, no no no no no! No buts, I don't want to hear any buts."

"If you want to create a diplomatic incident on a cosmic scale, and never work again on this or any planet, then by all means give the money back. I would suggest however, now that we are hired, we stay hired. We can do a half ass search; say we can't find the missing husband, and no one will know the difference."

I had to laugh; it would appear that my partner was a lazy unscrupulous pile of metal and wires.

"Did I mention our client insisted on coming with us?"

"No, that seems to have escaped a mention."

"Well, she is, she is going to be back here this evening, expecting me to be ready to leave."

"Has she seen your space shit; sorry I mean ship?"

"Very droll Vipond and no I very much doubt it."

"It's probably not the kind of first-class facility that she is used to."

"That's not my problem. If she wants to come with us, then she needs to slum it in fourth class like us. Though hopefully it might put her off the idea."

"It would certainly put me off."

"You don't get a choice."

"So you keep telling me."

"Get the ship ready to ready to fly. We need supplies to get us to Earth. There is actually money in the business account, so we can get fuel through the proper route for a change. Don't tidy the ship up at all, apart from to move any junk from the seat behind me. The princess can sit there."

"You don't want to see her then."

"Not really, I can do without being able to see someone lick their eyeballs for two days if at all possible. And make sure we get all the data onto the ship's computer."

"But I have it all now; it would only be a duplicate."

"But you could go missing."

"Don't be stupid Brodie, how could I go missing."

"If a Repsuli can go missing on Earth, anything is possible. Just load the damn data, I'm going out."

"Typical, leave me all the hard work as usual."

"I need food, and non-alcoholic liquids. I need to sort myself out before flying us anywhere. Plus, I want to speak to Wynne. I need to bounce some ideas off someone I trust."

"Am I not enough?"

"Sometimes Vipond, no, sometimes I need to get answers that aren't logical."

"And sometimes it would be nicer to be lied to."

That's all I need to top this day off, a sulky partner, a sulky robot partner. I got up and headed out.

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'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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