

In Deep Water

Water surged around me, causing bubbles to burst up the sides of the thick, metal walls. I pushed a button on the control panel, and the submarine began to sink into the gloomy depths of the ocean. The light dimmed as we motored downwards; not even the sunlight dared to venture this far into uncharted territory. A school of small fish swam by in a huddle, before breaking apart and darting away as they spotted the powerful machine. Down here, it almost seemed like you were in another world, and nothing else seemed to exist but the endless, inky darkness.

It had been three days since we had arrived here and set up camp on the shoreline. Three days since the trench had been discovered, deep down on the ocean floor. It was my job to scout it out alone and make sure that it was safe for the deep-sea divers and the more qualified scientists to proceed with their mission. They hadn't told me exactly what their 'mission' was, but I knew better than to question them, especially if I was getting paid for this. I glanced at the depth gauge on the wall of the submarine. 30,000 feet. We were getting close.

The automatic headlights activated, and a flurry of sand was illuminated as the submarine came to rest on the ocean floor. I pushed the throttle forward, and the vessel crept forward at a steady pace, the low thrum of the engine a soothing reminder of the task at hand. As I neared the trench, the signs became more noticeable: the fish scurried away into the cracks and fissures of the ocean floor, and the very water around me seemed to darken, as if it were warning me of the evil that lay ahead.

The radar began to beep as our target came into proximity of the scanners. Before long, we were almost on top of the signal and the sub slowed down to prepare for the steep descent. I stared out into the darkness, trying to imagine what waited for me down there. There was a great wound in the ocean; a gash festering with evil that had driven the deep-sea creatures away. I took a deep breath to steel myself, before taking hold of the controls and steering the sub down into the abyss.

I looked out through the window as the last glimpse of open ocean disappeared above me, swallowed by the cavernous mouth of the trench. The headlights seemed to dim slightly, then flickered, as if unknown forces were draining the life from them. Just then, something appeared on the radar, a great blinking dot getting closer and closer. Confused, I moved the craft forward to get a better look; the deep-sea scans hadn't revealed any signs of life previously.

A dark shape flashed by the reinforced window, startling me. I stumbled backwards. The submarine rocked as the creature - whatever it was - rammed into its side. I froze. I slammed the throttle down, jolting the vessel forward and almost shaking me free of the controls. The craft shot upwards, and I breathed a sigh of relief; I didn't know what that *thing* was and I didn't want to know. I was almost clear of the mouth of the trench when the machine shuddered to a stop. A spine-chilling screech rang out behind me, and to my horror I saw the creature tearing at the side of the submarine; a writhing mass of dagger-like teeth and rippling muscles. Then, with one final tug, the propellor was ripped off by the clamp-like jaws and tossed like a broken toy into the darkness.

Immediately alarms blared all around me: thousands of red-hot knives being hammered into my skull. Panicked, I rushed to the emergency booster controls and slammed my hand against the glass, before yanking down the handle. In an instant, long, thin cylinders folded out from underneath the hull. I held my breath. I exploded forward, rapidly losing the creature behind me as I powered through the water, searching for a glimpse of daylight that would lead me to safety.

Three hours later my submarine broke the surface of the Bering Sea, just off the coast of Siberian shores. The door popped off, and I gasped a breath of fresh air, feeling the warm sun on my face. I inflated an emergency lifeboat and paddled back to shore. I lay there on the beach for a few moments; breathless, exhausted. Safe.

Abigail T, Heathfield Knoll - Year 8
The Time Traveller
797 Words

“The end.” Martha slammed the book shut and stared, eyes half shut, at the glass roof of her cosy conservatory. It had been a horrible week. Rain had lashed down on the roof whilst thunder had clapped threateningly day after day. It was showing no sign of stopping. Throughout her whole life, Martha had never known a week go so long. She had long exhausted her book collection and had now read all of her parents as well! Bored out of her mind, she reached down to grab her rucksack and get started on some of the homework she had been putting off but it wasn't there. Heaving herself off the chair she had lounged in for the past few hours she grudgingly began searching for the bane of her life - her schoolbag. The rain, still relentlessly hammering down, did nothing to improve her mood as she stepped out of the warm and comfortable conservatory into the cold and unwelcoming kitchen.

“Mom! I've lost my schoolbag!” she yelled. Martha trudged into the lounge where her younger brother was sitting on the windowsill staring out into the rain, his eyes unfocused.

“She's gone,” her brother (Arthur) murmured tonelessly without even turning around to look at her.

“What do you mean she's gone?” Martha shot back, her heart thumping loudly against her chest.

Slowly, he turned around to face her, “I *mean* that when I went upstairs I saw Mom and Dad both go into your room but when I poked my head round, nobody was in there. Now don't ask me any more questions; I'm tired. “

Barely ten seconds later, Martha stood outside the closed door of her small bedroom. Curious as to what she might find, she marched into the room only to find...nothing. Absolutely nothing. Everything in her room looked completely normal: her bed pushed up against the far wall, bright posters of everything from flowers to her times tables and an odd assortment of clothes strewn all over the floor. The only thing that looked out of place was an old, mouldy pocket watch lying in the middle of her bed. Instinctively, Martha strode across the room and went to take a closer look at it. A faint purple glow was coming from the watch.

“Well, here goes nothing!” she told herself. Slowly extending her arm out, she took hold of the watch. At first, nothing happened and Martha relaxed slightly. No sooner had she done so, she heard a faint pop and suddenly, she was hurtling, head first, into nothingness. Darkness was closing in around her as she fell down and down...

Slam! She had fallen on what felt like a soft and very fluffy mattress. Giving herself a few seconds to recover, Martha slowly opened her eyes and stared around. All she could see for miles and miles was an endless sea of light blue sky. She looked up and saw that the sun seemed much closer than usual. It seemed to be smiling at her. Quite quickly, it became apparent that she was lying on – a huge but brilliantly white cloud!

“Woah,” she breathed, softly.

Without warning, the cloud sank slowly lower and lower towards the ground.

After five minutes, the cloud landed in the middle of a forest clearing. Without hesitating, she hopped off and was just about to make her way out of the clearing to find out where on earth she was when a man glided out from behind one of the trees. He was tall and had white blonde hair which was slicked back with bright blue eyes and a sneer that seemed like it was permanently stuck on his long, pale face.

“Well, well, well, I thought I might be seeing you today,” the man said in a mocking tone, “ Come to save your parents, have you? Well I’m afraid that won’t be possible. You see, I have them trapped inside 1940 London with no idea how to get back and that is where I am planning to put you.”

He grabbed Martha by the scruff of her neck and marched her past the grimacing trees shoving her right in the ground. When she looked up, she saw that she was now in a war- battered London street. Jumping to her feet, she spotted her parents huddled against a bombed house and hurried over to them.

“Martha! Listen,” they said,” We should have told you and your brother this ages ago and now it’s too late! We’re time travellers. Our job is to go back in time to stop the bad guys that want to change our world for the worse. This one, Blackwell, has trapped us and we need your help in getting out. Will you help us?”

“Of course," she replied.

Suddenly, everything went black.

In Deep Water

The Lost City of Parakáto

Archer S J, Meoncross School

My eyes flickered to life. Coral was dancing all around, waving as if to welcome me. Ruined buildings and monoliths towered like great giants, gazing into my soul. Jellyfish swayed in a current which swept my feet off the ground. 'Where am I?' I thought to myself, 'What is this place and how did I get here?'

I was sailing across the Pacific Ocean, right over the Mariana Trench as the ocean swirled with rage, sending chaos in every direction. My boat could barely remain afloat as the confused seas plundered into her. A massive whirlpool suddenly materialised in front of us and sucked us down into its gaping mouth. I could hardly see a thing as clusters of bubbles blurred my vision. A pearl appeared in front of my eyes and then, unexpectedly, it swam into my mouth. Everything was pitch black...

"So, I am in the Mariana Trench? How is this possible? I can breathe! How?" I was still dazed but was able to tread around the sea floor, although it felt like walking on the moon because of the weightlessness, to move I had to somehow swim and walk at the same time. The monuments were astonishing, even being in ruins. Statues and pillars stood tall and proud everywhere.

I slowly swam into a small building and as I entered; was stunned. All furniture was still intact even at the bottom of the Marianna Trench, the deepest part of the ocean! I wondered how old this place could be. I came out and stared at an obelisk. It read 'Parakáto'. *I reached back into the far recesses of my mind to my Greek mythology and knew Parakáto meant below.* "Could that be the name of this astounding city?" I asked myself, my voice resonating before completely fading into the flow of the sea.

As I started to explore, I pondered the idea of how I could see down here as it should be as black as a void. It looked as if this city spanned across the entire world and would never end and seemed like it was hours before I found something interesting.

A chest, sitting by itself in front of a statue of a giant armed guard, its spear as sharp as a knife. As I glared at this peculiar crate, I couldn't get the thought of Indiana Jones out of my head, the bravest adventurer that has ever existed. As I slowly trudged towards it, I could feel something was wrong. I glanced at the stone guard again. "Were the eyes following me?" I speculated. "Surely not. What an absurd idea!" As I seized the chest, I heard a click. Then cogs started to turn. Where was this sound coming from?

My eyes weren't playing tricks on me then! The guard was following me! It gradually arose from its podium and its eyes turned fiery red with what seemed like anger and harmful intent. I swiftly spun around, still cradling the chest in my arms, and dashed through buildings, narrowly avoiding stone pillars. The Guard pursued me, rattling the ground with every thundering footstep.

I ran and swam faster than I ever knew I could. I darted behind a wall and finally thought I had lost the behemoth. I was wrong. The stone stomper rammed into the wall next to

me and apprehended me in its grasp. I dropped the chest. It hit the floor with a thud. Jewels, gold and pearls spilled over the seabed. That's when it hit me. 'The riches I could've attained!' I thought. The grip tightened on my body. I could feel cracking and popping everywhere. Abruptly, the stone mammoth's grip unlatched, and it crumbled to the ground in piles of rock and dust, dispersing across the silky sand. I plummeted to the ground, striking it with such an immense force I was paralyzed for a moment with shock. A mysterious figure emerged from the shadows, holding a staff that was twice their height. "Are you hurt?"

Before me stood a being wearing a cloak woven from sea kelp adorned with bioluminescent runes. Their face was shadowed, but I was overcome with an overwhelming feeling of calm. Somehow, I knew instinctively this peculiar aquaterrestrial wanted to protect me, not harm me.

"Don't be alarmed friend. Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Neróphos which in your language means water-light. I am a sea nymph with the ability to see the future. Beneath my cloak, I grow pearl visions which contain many possible destinies." Neróphos then held out a gleaming pearl and said, "This one, Elias Marinos, is your destiny. Come. We have much work to do and very little time."

Curiously, I followed, unknowingly stepping into an epic adventure...

Word Count = 800

One Starry Night by Zara M, Huddersfield Grammar School

Curator Leonard Williams sprinted through the long ascetic halls of The New York Museum of Modern Art. The ivory moon seeping in at the windows was a stark contrast to the ebony sky creating a serene, mystical aerosphere of a starry night. But all of that was meaningless to Leonard now. A man of 74 years, he was a tough, cold-blooded creature whose impassive nature and foreboding reputation earned him the nickname "Frostbite."

"Give up old man." The accent of the dark hood figure chasing him was hard to place. Arabic? Turkish?

Leonard stumbled down the sweeping staircase and sprinted down a narrow, one-way, corridor.

The hooded figure slipped a sharp knife from his thick velvet cloak.

"It is coming to an end Mr Williams." His sharp voice punctured the still air.

How does he know who I am? He cannot know about...

"Tell me where it is hidden and your life shall be spared." The voice was sharp as a gunshot.

Leonard intuitively knew who the figure was.

"Illuminatus, he muttered under his breath. The deadly vendetta between the Illuminati and the Catholics was a millennia old battle between science and religion, logic and spiritualism, knowledge and the unknown.

Leonard lied, a well curated lie, one that he had rehearsed thousands of times, praying he would never have to use it, praying that he would have the chance to pass the secret on before it was too late. After his recital, the figure applauded acrimoniously with an underlying attitude of the Machiavellian.

"That is what they all said," the dark silhouette whispered. Leonard knew that the other holy members bequeathed with the sacred knowledge had all suddenly disappeared. He had come for them.

The dark figure took off his hood and calmly walked past the elderly man. He was only 16. Young. Too young to be brainwashed into the satanic cult of the atheist who abhorred theism of any kind. His skin was soft. Unbroken. He unhooked a golden framed painting with practiced ease. Starry Night, a Van Gogh classic and a renowned piece with a hidden secret, one Leonard hoped would never get into the wrong hands.

"It is true what they say about this painting, no?" The figure came closer; Leonard could see his piercing crimson eyes staring into his soul. "That it is encoded with the-"

“Stop!” The curator shouted with a sharpness that surprised even himself. “You ought to be ashamed of your actions, your denial to see truth in the meaning of life, your desire to be seen as worthless and have the world be seen as nothingness, shrouded by unimportant people with meaningless lives. You cannot look at your beautiful science and tell me you do not see God.”

The dark figure looked unphased. He made towards Leonard with a purposeful gait. The figure came closer as Leonard started to fear for his life. He plunged the knife into Leonard, creating a cardinal tarn. The Figure revealed a small card encrypted with the words “Ludus Incipit.” The game is afoot. With ease, the figure slipped out and called NYPD, saying that there had been unusual activity at The Museum of Modern Art. He then boarded a late-night MTA train northeast bound across New York City, smirking as the police enter the museum.

Stumbling into a well-furnished room in The Meridien hotel, the figure lay on the beige ottoman and picked up his mobile, dialling a number he had memorised off by heart.

“Speak,” the ominous voice on the other end demanded.

“It is I master, your devoted servant; I have retrieved the artifact. And taken care of some ... interferences.”

“Very well, Janus, you will be rewarded for your service. Rest now, you will soon have important business to attend to. Be at NLI airport tomorrow; a flight is booked for Rome at 7:00 AM”

The line went dead. Janus felt fulfilled. His service had been done. Now, all he had to do was watch the world burn. He had succeeded in an impossible task. For encoded within the mesmerising stars and the soft strokes of impasto was a hidden secret that meant everything. Van Gogh had commissioned a piece of extraordinary artwork where the confidence was to be kept until the end of time. The secret, in question, was one that was inevitable, it was coming, and it was coming very soon.

The end of the world.

Word count: 744

One Starry Night

Lena N J, Kingsley School

Drip. Drip. I sigh. Gran was right, it is going to rain after all. I said I didn't believe her, that it looked perfectly pleasant outside. She said to trust her, her knees didn't lie. I guess I shouldn't have doubted her knees. Not when they're right, like now. Perhaps I should've listened and taken a better coat. Too late now. The rain starts to pick up pace and cascades down from the darkening sky. The trail in front of me is already muddy, stones now slick and shimmering with wet. Icy fingers brush my neck. I shiver.

The murky sky casts long, hungry shadows upon my surroundings, and before I know it, it's suddenly descended into darkness. So much for my hope of catching the sunset. It's got dark earlier than I thought it would, but I suppose I'll have to stop for the night somewhere, so why not around here? Behind me, as I was walking, I think I remember spying a hikers' hut in the woods. I glance behind me at the trees, only able to pick them out by their silhouette, darker than the sky behind them, but only just. They sway hypnotically in the breeze, beckoning me towards them.

Well, even if I don't find the hut, the canopy will offer some shelter from the unrelenting downpour. Hitching my bag higher up on my shoulders, I put my head down and walk rapidly into the woods. As I thought, the canopy of leaves does relieve me from the worst of the rain, but barely. I guess I can't really get any wetter now, though, my hair is plastered to my face and droplets run in rivulets down my cheeks, like cold tears. Joy.

I reach a clearing, and I think I recognise one of the trees, how it's drooping so low and swaying so precariously it feels like it might fall over any second now. The hut must be close. I scour the clearing. There it is. A shade lighter than the trees around it. It's pretty small, but definitely big enough for one night. Empty, too; a great bonus. I quickly cross over to it and inspect my sleeping quarters for the night.

The first thing I notice is the portraits. There's about six of them in total. Their painted eyes stare straight off the canvas. One of them – the one closest to where I dropped my dripping bag – depicts a man. Eyes wild, mouth agape. Face marred and bloated by bruises that stain his face an inky purple. The stuff of nightmares. Goosebumps prickle on my arms. I stare at the painting; the painting stares back. My eyes water – it's never a good idea to have a staring contest with an inanimate object.

I look away hurriedly. I roll out my sleeping bag. I didn't bring a pillow – I decided to prioritise snacks instead – but that's okay. Besides, those Maltesers were worth it. I drift off to the aggressive, but soothing sounds of the rainfall still chucking it down outside.

As I wake up to nothingness. It takes me a moment to realise that it's because I've forgotten to open my eyes yet. My mouth feels dry and crusty. Groggily I prise my eyelids

open and wince as weak sunlight falls directly into them. Good, hopefully that means it won't be as wet today. I'm just deliberating what to have for breakfast when I realise.

Sunlight. There were no windows last night, though. Were there? No, I'm sure there wasn't. There was only – portraits. I stiffen and sit up. There are six windows dotted around the room. I was never alone.