

The Hope Folios #9



THE BETWEEN

Episode 22½: Uncivil departure



Plus...

Discovering Dunster

Time with Tyn

And... collect all of Hope Folios #9!



Well, well, well

This is a very civil arrival. A reader, are you? It's our business to ask. Uncivil business, you might say. Crime scene, you see. The whole episode is cordoned off.

You almost snuck past me. But you'll have to be quieter than that and not smell so human to get past a rat's ears and hooter.

Now, as far as I can tell, Butterworth's the chief culprit. So keep an eye out as you pass through the pages ahead. I'd be mightily impressed if you manage to spot her. Snitch on her. Why, I dare say it'd be awfully uncivil of you.

I think you'd best depart, the story's about to begin. In you go!

Deirdre, Officer of the Guard
The Very Uncivil Service



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THE BETWEEN

Episode 22½: Uncivil departure

For this moment, all was quiet. Just Thoreau and Hazel together on the sofa. Silent as... stone.

"I've looked everywhere." Byron had staggered back into the bright lounge of the apartment. "That vole has gone. Vanished into thin air." He was gasping for breath. "Mr Gladstone, sir, is it possible she jumped through the window into Forget?"

There had been no answer. Gladstone was lost in a personal between, gazing out at the hubbub of Dunster Show. Ada was pacing back and forth, deep in thought.

And, as for Hazel, she was seated in exactly the same position as when they'd found her. **Staring, unblinking, out of the window towards the blue sky, toward the sea.** A tear drop was cemented to her cheek. She did not move, did not breathe. She was neither colour nor monochrome. Sweet Hazel, that bright, kind soul, the Keeper of Seeds, had set solid. Solid as stone.

A long, slow, tick-tock of time passed in silence before the small group began to disperse.



The eventual conclusion of Ada's pacing had been that Marsha's abduction was too tricky to explain. Especially after the unceremonious downing of two Uncivil rats. Even if it was in self-defence. The Agent Royal had gathered Byron up out of a slump of grief, and left...

"Where will you go?"

Thoreau had frowned. She wasn't sure.

Somewhere with time to think. Time alone. She was always very elusive.

Separate. But, there was something so wonderfully reassuring about her. He wished she hadn't gone, so he didn't feel so...

Alone. Thoreau rested a front paw on the cold dormouse beside him. "A vole! Assassin! Who would want to hurt poor, loving Hazel?"

"There are dark forces at work, old boy." Gladstone





had said. "When mice start interfering with one of the Great Books, what can we expect?"

But something didn't sit right in Thoreau's old head. And to where had she fled, this vole? He hadn't seen her, but Byron had... Ada had... At least, so they said. But something... something... wasn't right.

Gladstone had made several calls. Some difficult, some very hush-hush, some plainly irritating. There was Montgomery: the Cabinet Secretary must always be informed first, that was protocol. Then someone

called the Duke. The Uncivil Service. Attempts to get hold of Clarke and Merriweather had failed. And of course, Emmit, the Keeper of Houses had to be informed. It was law.

"I am sorry, dear Hazel!" Thoreau had turned to the grey dormouse. "I wonder if you can hear me, see what's going on around you... feel my touch? Are you alive, but cannot respond? Or, as they say, stone dead? How awful it will be for you, when all these mice and rats show. They'll be prodding you, interrogating me. It breaks my little, ancient heart!"

As for Gladstone, he'd gone downstairs to greet the advance-party of Civil Service investigators, and bring them up to the rooms. Sure enough, in the long tick-tock of time that followed, they'd poked Hazel's hard surface, asked Thoreau



bewildering questions. They'd dusted for prints, bagged up a plate of biscuits. Gingernuts. Such a waste. More questions for Thoreau. Just a couple for Gladstone.

To top it all, there'd also been a long, disrespectful debate about what to do with the solid dormouse. The conclusion was that, until those truant engineers reappeared to build a winch, or some Uncivil Service heavies could be summoned, Hazel would have to stay exactly where she was. Then, at last, one by one, the bureaucrats and the investigators left. And Gladstone was hot on

their heels. Thoreau was glad. He needed peace and quiet. Needed the time, the space, to think.

The old Keeper gazed out of the open window.

A hubbub of human crowd drifted up from the Show. A rainbow-hued hot air balloon bobbed, distantly, in the evening air. **An excited boyish squawk flew in on the cusp of the setting sun.**

"Geronimo!!" Thoreau watched impassively as a large wood pigeon boinged up-and-down to a dangle below the balloon. There were more shouts: "I've got it! I've got it!" from somewhere



in the sky, and a furious "Idiot!" from somewhere down below.

Thoreau sighed and hauled himself to his feet. The shock of Hazel's transformation had aged him further, if that was possible. He lent on his stick. But, decrepit or not, he couldn't afford to sit still any longer. He tapped his way, slowly, through the apartment. If anyone could unlock this mystery, surely it was he, Keeper of Keys?

Through the lounge, the long hall, the bereft mouse shuffled. The place was full of books and

maps, paint and scrolls, and pots of... ink!

Thoreau's heart sank. Was nowhere sacred? He worried about the younger murines, about the Between. Could it survive? And, if not, what would that mean for Nostalgia and Forget? Without mice to keep them apart, would the two worlds flow into each other? Two precious habitats mixing would surely prove poisonous? Two would briefly become one, briefly, then slowly wither to... none.

At the end of the hall the Keeper found Clarke's study and, beyond, Merriweather's Map Room. He marvelled for a moment, lost in frame upon frame of... "Creation! Oh, my! Merriweather, these are not maps. They are alive. If you only look a little closer. This is beautiful, but criminal."





Empty bottles of hooch littered the edges of the room. Feeling a sudden urge to tidy, Thoreau slowly, achingly, picked them up. And, in doing so, almost tripped over the answer to his dilemma. A crumpled rug in the corner of the room and, underneath...

"A trap door!" Thoreau shook his astonished head and tapped an echo on the wooden planks. Could this be...? Had the vole...? There was a distant rattle as the apartment door opened. Voices entered. An annoyance of noise.

Disturbance. Panic gripped him. He needed to escape.

The Keeper of Keys lifted the trap and squeezed through. As he swung the door shut, he poked the hook of his stick up through the hole and pulled the rug back into place. **A small smile of satisfaction, and then his feet found a staircase, spiralling down, down, down...**

Old, blinded by the dark, Thoreau felt like Dante, descending to hell. But when, at the bottom of the steps, his fumbling front foot found a light



switch, he discovered instead a sort of heaven before him. He sunk down upon the bottom step, and marvelled at the biggest map he'd ever seen.

A flow of rivers ran through Merriweather's masterpiece, tiny vees of geese flew over it. He briefly averted his eyes, as if even looking were a crime. But he couldn't resist the temptation, the hidden pleasure, the life, the creation. A brush of clouds formed over sea, floated inland, emptying their thoughts on painted contours of green. Light fell from some unknown elsewhere, slanting as the day aged, bringing shadow, sending the world moving from the vivid colour of noon towards the silver monochrome of night.

Thoreau eased to his feet and hobbled across the room to take a closer look. Yes! **There it was!**

Through every rise and fall of land, the snake of the holloway hushed, rushed and hissed.

Alive, wild, and free. And what was this within its curling path? Tiny footsteps? Moving, slowly. Names attached...

'Merriweather'. So, that was where the young scallywag was hiding! 'Butterworth?' The old mouse leant his falling eyes towards the map. Wasn't that what Gladstone had called the...? Ha! From the recent crossing of the two sets of footprints, Merriweather must have recently found out.





Thoreau stared, imagining some revelation, some discovery, at the point the feet had met. But the rest of the map drew him away. Gently, softly, inevitably. He turned from the holloway towards a flit of butterfly and an unfurl of leaf.

The more he gazed at the endless beauty, the lighter he felt. He heard his stick clatter to the floor, as if in some far-off dream. **Birdsong floated up and caught him before he fell. Starlings came, like stars, out of an oily night to carry him through a painted breeze.** Ink flowed over his skin. Watercolour

leaves. A tangle of branches. Fresh air washed around him, swirled like water into a brush of his hair. A pastel of night, and...

"Soft soil between my toes," he laughed.

"Where am I?"

Moonlight trickled through leafy branches.

"The holloway of course!" Snuck a voice out of the darkness.

"What...? Who...? Who said...?" The befuddled Keeper looked left, right, up and, finally, down. Where he found...

"What on earth? A talking worm!"

"Says a talking mouse!" The worm polished his monocle, screwed it back into its socket, and returned Thoreau's rude stare.

"The curtains are a bit drab! And the colour scheme..." Emmitt tutted a



wander around the furniture of Clarke and Merriweather's living room.

"Oh, it's just too dreadful." Drinkwater ran a toe along the dusty mantelpiece.

They were slightly missing the point, thought Montgomery Flax, relieved when Emmitt vanished down the hall with her sidekick.

Unfortunately, her voice didn't join her. It rushed back down the corridor to the rat, and was far too awake for his liking.

**"More maps!
I hate maps!"**

Other people's homes brought out the worst in the Keeper of Houses. And the Keeper of Gardens merely amplified the displeasure. Maybe Emmitt would benefit from a new position? Montgomery glanced at the stone figure seated on the couch, and sighed. There was a vacancy for Keeper of Seeds. No. He shuddered. Too soon! Far too soon!

"It was horrible," wheezed Gladstone,



breathless from his pursuit of Flax back upstairs to the scene of the... "Just horrible. So painful to watch." Tears welled up in his eyes. "The vole gave her tea..."

The Cabinet Secretary's eyes narrowed. **He pulled his pipe from his pocket, and blew it free of fluff.**

The room suddenly darkened. Several large rats squeezed in through the unlatched front door. And, behind them, the biggest of the lot: Brewster, Head of the Uncivil Service.

"Looks like you mice have sunk to a new low! I've never seen such a criminal mess!"

"Steady on, Brewster. Don't jump the gun." Montgomery lit his pipe. "You're here to support the Civil Service investigation."

Brewster scowled and shrugged off the



Secretary's reproof.

"Stolen Theorem. Murdered Keeper. Crime scene in another Keeper's hole!" He looked around. "Is Clarke here?"

"No." Gladstone piped up. "Merriweather is AWOL too. Thoreau was here before I stepped out briefly. But I'm not sure where he's got to..."

"Are there many of your Keepers left?" Brewster frowned. "They seem to be vanishing like the proverbial in the wind!"

There was a grunt, a bump, and a thud. Ratty front feet slipping on a



grasp of stone. "Easy!"
Huffed Montgomery.

"She's surprisingly heavy,"
complained one of
Brewster's crew, "for
a mouse!"

It took four rats to
carry Hazel from
the apartment.

"Careful with her! I'll be
making enquiries..." The
Secretary called after the
group as they shuffled
out, taking some of the
gloom with them.

"Now, tell us about this
vole, Gladly."

"Yes, Mr Gladstone, do
tell!" Brewster slumped

on the vacated couch,
picking his teeth with a
dirty claw.

"I'd returned from
visiting Brewster's
establishment..."

"So I heard! You've made
quite an impression back
in London." Montgomery
perched on a narrow
discomfort of dining chair.

"You really put your
reputation on the line to
free Thoreau. Though I
did think his arrest a
touch harsh, a touch
eager. I shall be speaking
to young Marsha..."

"...when you find her!"
Brewster quipped,
pulling a chunk of meat
from his teeth. "And don't
forget, Thoreau's release
is temporary."

"Temporary?" Gladstone
gulped.

"Why, yes! That hefty fee
you paid was bail," the
rat smirked, "and it's
forfeit now your old
friend has disappeared."



Gladstone gulped again.

Brewster fished in a grimy pocket, pulled out the Keeper of Polite Conversation's confiscated badge, and held it up in a dangle of fading sunlight. "One thing's for sure, I'm keeping hold of this until we find that Theorem!"

Gladstone took a breath. "I had nothing to do with the theft! And I have no doubts about Thoreau. But... that vole, she came to my office, looking for a position. And I needed an assistant. With my

reputation on the line," he nodded at his badge in Brewster's front foot, "I decided to complete my own investigation."

"Had you advertised the position?" Montgomery fixed Gladstone with a hard stare.

The Keeper of Polite Conversations blinked, but held his nerve. **"She'd travelled from Oxfordshire to London in search of work.** Fancied a life in the Service. And who better for a shy vole to approach than the Keeper of Polite





Conversations?" The nervous mouse smiled, but when the smile wasn't returned, he continued. "I hadn't even considered taking on someone, until she showed up out of the blue! That's how good she was..."

"But who would wish to assassinate poor Hazel?" Montgomery bowed his head.

"Bream," suggested Brewster, swirling dregs of tea around Hazel's abandoned cup.

"Bream?" Blustered Montgomery.

"You'll need to get your lab mice on it, of course," The Uncivil rat handed over the cup. "But there's a solution of Ink here. I'd recognise it anywhere."

"Ink?" Gladstone felt a little lightheaded. "Mythic Ink?"

The two rats looked at the giddy mouse.

"Oh, no!" Brewster grinned. "This is much more crude, not refined at all. More likely to drain the life from story than create it."

Montgomery sniffed the cup, with a creeping, oily suspicion that Brewster might be on to something. "You really think Bream is behind this?"

"I'm not suggesting anything! I deal in fact, not fiction." Brewster loomed to his feet and wandered over to the window. The day was slowly blinking into a yawn of dusk. "When



Bream began trying to match Hope's powers of creation, he first concocted this. **Medusa Ink, we call it. It was a disappointment, briefly giving life to plot and story, before petrifying it.** Too little and things fall apart. Too much, and... well... as you all now know! But it has its purpose."

Gladstone clamped his shaking front feet together, his throat tightening at the memory of a squeeze of snake. "You seem to, umm, know a lot about Bream, Mr Brewster?"

The black rat grinned a sharp, white sneer of satisfaction. "The Uncivil Service harbours many stories, myths, legends, tales, tittle tattle. I have a nose for sifting fact from fiction. And there is a lot of fiction in this room right now." He sniffed Gladstone's collar. "You in

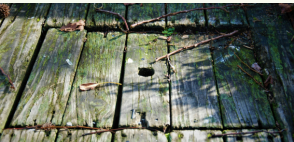
particular, reek of it. I'll be watching you... closely."

Brewster paused briefly, watching his words land heavy on Gladstone's shoulders.

"Now, gentlemen. I have other business. I'll leave you with your peculiar Keepers of Houses and Gardens."

Sure enough, as Brewster ducked out through the front door, Emmitt and Drinkwater could be heard wittering and twittering along the hallway. And, as the Uncivil rat strode off into





the falling night, they burst into the lounge.

"There's a trap door!" Emmit squealed.

"In the map room!" Drinkwater nodded.

"Behind the library!"

"Come," Emmit beckoned, "it's too dark for us down there."

"Yes, too dark." Drinkwater nodded again.

"We can't explore on our own..."

"...what with assassins about..."

"... and poor Thoreau probably lying dead at the bottom!"

"Ladies, ladies."

Montgomery puffed to his feet. "Please calm down. A trap door, you say? This is highly unorthodox. You must show me the way."

Emmit wafted her front foot and coughed away the Secretary's pipe smoke. "Forgive me, Cabinet Secretary, but it's too small for a... rat."

"Yes, sir, far too small." Drinkwater's head was a wobble of nod.

"We were thinking Mr Gladstone might..."

"Yes, yes," Montgomery blustered, breathing in his large embarrassment of



stomach. "Of course. Quite. Gladly, looks like this one's on you."

"Me? But Sir, I'm sorry, I have to go!" The Keeper of Polite Conversations lurched to his feet.

"Urgent business in London. But, oh look, Clarke! Just in time to be your gallant knight..."

"What, what?" Clarke tutted, hanging up his coat and bag. "What's all this hullabaloo? Cabinet Secretary?! Emmet and Drinkwater, my dear ladies! Gladstone! Where's Merriweather? Is he alright? What has happened?"

To be continued...

++From the++

Hope Codex

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Thoreau: Greater Keeper of Keys, uncomfortable secrets and, usually, a large stash of ginger biscuits.

+++++

Gladstone: Devilishly ambitious, upwardly mobile Keeper of Polite Conversations, plotter of remarkable deeds.

+++++

Montgomery Flax: AKA The Cabinet Secretary of the Very Civil Service. Strives to keep the peace among his Keepers. He may be a rat but his heart is that of a mouse

+++++

Brewster: The Head of the Uncivil Service loves nothing more than enforcing corrective measures on rogue mice.

+++++



Discovering Dunster

Go on, dip your toes. Feel the tide tug at your feet. Yes, it takes a little imagination, but the Celtic sea really did once touch this village. My village. Dunster.

I may be biased, but I think this is the most beautiful spot in Somerset. From the pink-tinted castle to the thatched cottages.

From the pastel-painted West Street to the rippling, babbling Avill beneath Gallox Bridge.

But so much of what makes Dunster, well, Dunster, isn't obvious on the surface.

Somewhere beneath the marshes is a harbour that helped make the town rich. Before the





sea receded, half a mile to the north.

Breezing through the empty octagon of the Yarn Market are the echoes of Jacobean barter and gossip. Threads of story as long and tightly wound as the skeins of wool traded beneath its roof.

Turn the castle back through time, and you'd see it start to shrink in the 1800s. Lose its earliest stone in the 1200s, revealing its timber bones. Today's refined family home is unrecognisable as the

fortress William de Moyon built just a few short years after the Norman Conquest.

But de Moyon was, himself, building on the backs of even older ghosts. There have been people living here since the iron Age. Breathing, dying, loving, dreaming. And I'm pretty sure there were mice in residence back then too.

You see, Dunster is a magnet for those who're at home in the middle. Caught between the Bristol Channel and Exmoor. Half hill,



half valley. A place with two very different views. What better place for the Civil Service to guard twin windows on to Nostalgia and Forget?

So, when the castle was remodelled in the 1860s, a band of murine engineers were at work too. They inked a small change to the blueprints whilst Anthony Salvin was dozing one afternoon. Enough to squeeze in a small staircase to a mouse-sized apartment beside the human rooms.

And, now, Clarke and I live in this cosy *Between*, keeping watch on the technicolour of Hope's domain from one window, and on the monochrome of Bream's from the other. And, here, I draw my maps. Maps that aren't always strictly Civil. But let's keep that secret to ourselves.

My latest project?

Well, it'll draw you deep into the history of





Dunster. Under the surface. It brings back boats, to be laden with cloth in the harbour. It draws Iron Age hill forts up from beneath the ground.

Its lanes are full of footprints from the past. And, if you let yourself, you can step right in too.

Go on, dip your toes. Feel the tide tug at your feet. Yes, it takes a little imagination, but the Celtic sea awaits. In my map of this village. My village. Dunster.

**Merriweather,
Master of Maps,
The Very Civil Service**



Writing community focus: [@TynShenton](#)

Time with Tyn

We turn our attention to a beautiful weaver of words, a twister of reality, a master of tiny tales.

*There was no
#sombre funeral
for the giant. He
lay in the crater
where he fell,
slowly turning to
stone. Eventually
the dust settled
and the rains
washed him
smooth, then the
moss took him,
turning his belly to
a hilltop of green.
He lies still with his
range of brothers.*

#vss365

1 September 2023

Your poignant, fossilised giant reminds us of the dormouse whose stony silence lies at the heart of Episode 22½ of *The Between*. Can you tell us more about your vss, which beautifully weaves myth and landscape together?

I think there is something deeply humbling in realising that the meaningless rocks around us existed long before everything we ever have known and will continue to exist long after everything we have known has gone. A human lifespan on the timescale of a mountain is nothing. We are here for a blink. So when I write about giants, I think that's one of the ideas that often comes



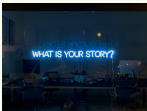
through. Not the only one, but definitely one that's there. With this story, if an entire community of living mountains could be lost and forgotten - reduced to a grassy hillock - what does that mean for us? I don't have the answer, but it does remind me that there is no point in wasting my blink on being an arse towards other people racing through their own blink. I may as well just enjoy the grass for as long as I can.

I should add - that sounds far more actively philosophical than my writing style actually is! I also like just like to play with word flow and imagery. A lot of my stories are just finding a sentence that seems to have a nice rhythm to it and then spending my ten minute ride to work scrubbing it into a story. I think, with this one, the first bit that came to me was the "belly a hilltop of green." That phrase just falls nicely off the tongue. The rest grew from there.

Your many brilliant vss seem to draw magical threads from your everyday experiences. Are your daily writes close to your truth, or are you taking your readers on journeys where fiction is disguised as life?

First, thanks for the compliment! Writing can be a lonely hobby and it's always nice to hear someone has enjoyed the words you have come up with.

I think stories are a wonderful paradox, as are people. You can only know your own experience, because that is the only thing you have lived. But when you tell a story you can only do it if you think another person (with a head you have





never been in) will see those squiggles on the page and recognise them to mean what you think they mean. Any interaction with another person is a clash between us being trapped inside our own heads and trying to put ourselves into someone else's. So I'm not sure I can really say if my stories are MY truth, because as soon as they're on the page I can't control what someone else will make of them. And I can't say they're a fiction, because they have to have come from me. There are two creators in every story, the mind that writes the words down and the mind that reads them. I'm only in charge of one of

those two things. I enjoy throwing down the music, but I enjoy being surprised by how people dance to it more.

The #vss365 suffix and prefix prompts set by [@the6thJM](#) inspired you to write some delightfully creative very short stories. Has participating in the #prompt word games on social media changed the way you write, and if so, how?

The prefix / root / suffix ones were so enjoyable for me. I'm not a medic, but I have to understand medical terminology for my day job. It is fascinating how all of these complicated sounding medical words are just broken down into chunks that can be cut up and mixed up to make new ones. Arthro? Oh, it's to do with joints. Itis? That's an inflammation. Arthritis? This person has inflammation of the joints. I really enjoyed applying the same logic to



those VSS prompts by [@the6thJM](#).

In general, I've been doing VSS for 6 years now, on and off. I've done every prompt but one for the last three years. It's become part of my daily writing practice. Forcing yourself to play with ideas or styles or whatever that you may not have tried before is the best way to improve as a writer.

Also, I find it a great valve release. I find it so hard to sit down and start writing. If I take part in VSS each day and let myself have the room and freedom to accept most of it will be a bit rubbish, then I can get on with the actual writing part. If you stop worrying about writing something good it's easier to write. If you write often enough, some of it will be good.

Getting back to Episode 22%, Thoreau discovers a hidden trap door to a secret room where he subsequently vanishes. What's the best hiding place you've discovered? And do you have a favourite story, real or fictional, about vanishing?

I have some friends who like to hide from each other at random. I don't know why, but it makes us laugh. If one person is walking too far ahead down the street, everyone else will find a wall to duck behind. I once walked back into a room from a bathroom break to find one friend under a table, another behind the sofa and one stood in the middle of the room with a tea towel on his head. We're all in our forties.

I can't actually think of any vanishing based stories I've read off the top of my head though. When I was at school a teacher once asked us to write stories based on



the idea we woke up one day to find we were the only person left in the world. It was one of the moments that made me 'become' a writer. Maybe I should revisit it.

Someone walking down the street with their friends when, pop, he suddenly can't find them anywhere...

We spotted, while perusing your feed on X, that you have a number of pet fish in an aquarium. Can you tell us about your love of fish, how many you have, and if any of them have names? If you could swim indefinitely underwater, which fish or other sea creature would he most like to swim with?

I wish I could say my fish were a love story, but it's more often a horror. I write a lot about the reality of nature. How things come and go. My fishtank at times has been that battle in a microcosm, with numbers going up and down

depending what mood the big boss fish is in...

They do have names though. Tony, Gordon, Ed and Jeremy. The snail is called Boris.

The deep is a terrifying place to me! Miles under the gloom all alone with prehistoric monsters waiting to come make a meal of you. It would be incredible to see a giant squid and to see what else might be down in the depths that we don't know about, but I think I'd like to do it all from the safety of the shore with a remote camera!



Your #tynsphotoaday looked like the beginning of an inspiring series... three great pics and then it came to a halt. What happened? Is there any chance of a revival?

Unfortunately it all comes down to time. Coming up with a quick VSS can sometimes be difficult enough. Trying to think of new photos each day proved to be a self imposed demand that made the process less fun, so it didn't last. I did go back to the idea briefly when I was on holiday a month ago, but I firmly believe a hobby should never feel like a chore so I let myself only do it when

I feel like it. That said, I would definitely recommend anyone gives it a try, especially if you enjoy photography. Bringing an image to life with words is a great writing exercise when you have the time to do it.

Please tell us about a vss you love, and why you like it.

Shameful admission time: I rarely get chance to read many. My VSS time is usually on the ride to work or in my ten minute morning break, so I only get to see a couple a day.

My friend Nathan Whiteoak wrote a wonderful one a few years ago playing with the idea of a knight rescuing a maiden from a dragon. Except the maiden didn't want to be rescued and it didn't end well for the self appointed hero. That one has always stuck with me. I like the ones that try to engage with the word, rather than just use it. And I like the ones that feel like a full story, rather than just a snippet





comment. Any that make me laugh are always a bonus too!

We were thrilled to read you were on Countdown, but sorry that you didn't win. If you could be on any other gameshow (real, or of your imagining), which would it be and why?

Haha, oh wow, that was quite the day. I wrote my letters down wrong in round one and fell apart after that. Oh well, at least I can say I had my makeup done sat with Rachel Riley.

I think my ideal gameshow would be the Great British Bakeoff, but for writers. The Great British Write-Off. I can see

it now, I have a fairly strong Yorkshire accent so the press would call me 'a character.' My limerick technical round would be pretty strong, but I'm not sure I would last beyond poetry week. Hopefully I would be there long enough to turn things grim with a body horror showstopper.

We loved discovering three copies of the same novel, *The Last*, on your bookshelf... it gave us a warm smile. Was the third, truly *The Last*? Did you read the book three times?... And which of the books currently on your shelf would you most like to read again?

I am spectacularly good at buying books, I am spectacularly bad at reading them. My to-read pile is huge and I will admit, *The Last* is still on there. Though those were definitely the last copies of *The Last* I bought! My favourite all time novel is *The Time Traveller's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger and if I were to go back



and re-read any book I would start with that one. A few years ago I was best man at my best friend's wedding and as a thank you he bought me a rare copy of the novel. I have read the story many times, but never that physical book so reading that would both tick one off of the unread pile and the re-read pile.

Episode 22% of *The Between* is set against the backdrop of the Dunster Show, an annual fête held beneath the walls of the castle. What annual events or traditions do you most enjoy? And, as with a traditional English summer fête, can the weather make-or-break the fun?"

Nothing says British summertime more than drinking an expensive cider from a cardboard cup in the rain, ankle deep in mud at a music festival. I've had some great times at many over the years. Watching the



Stones at Glastonbury, Pulp at Leeds and Iron Maiden at Download are some highlights. With all three I arrived home more mud than man and it was beautiful.

And, finally, if you could run a stall at the Dunster Show, what would it be, and would you wear fancy dress?"

I think I would bring the one thing all country-themed shows need: a music stage. With a full line up of cover songs. Moo-ving on up. Herd it on the Grapevine. Who Let the Sheepdogs Out? Hay-Yah. We Swill Rock You... I'll stop now.



The Between continues...

Episode 23: Fortunes good, bad and told

On 16 August 2024

Dr Warwick is fleeing for his life through a crowded Dunster, the Nun, her cronies, and the Nelsons in pursuit. Will a touch of good fortune come to the rescue?

This episode also sees the good Doctor chased down by a couple of eager interviewers. Let's see what reception they get!

Plus the grouchy Nun gathers us round for a tale of her own.

Find out more at:
writteninhope.ink

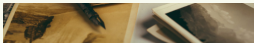


Have your say...

The **Underground Mice Writers Society** want to know your thoughts, your thinks, your views about *The Between*.

Which is your favourite episode so far, and why? Which character do you like the most (or least)? Is there an itch about the plot that you need scratching?

Email MiceWriters@gmail.com or tweet at [@TheMiceWriters](https://twitter.com/TheMiceWriters) to let us know. We'll be delighted to respond to a human.





Thank you humans!

Many in the Very Civil Service have lost faith in humanity, but we at the Underground Mice Writers Society still believe your species has plenty to offer.

A special thanks goes to a quartet of tall readers who helped to shape the early chapters of this epic:

[@IreneDreams](#), [@phantomsspleen](#) (formerly known as [@hungryghostpoet](#)), [@mordoc1](#), and [@writer_suzy](#).

Go read their work on Twitter/X, it's so good you'd think it was written by a mouse!

Below ground

The seed of *The Between* was planted way back in June 2020, but much of its story was taken from cuttings previously struck on Twitter.

So, this adventure simply wouldn't exist without the regular watering of the amazing online writing community, and the dedicated hosts and ambassadors of the Twitter word prompt games, such as [#vss365](#), that have inspired our world.

Thank you, to you all, from the bottom of our inkwells to the tips of our quills.

Oh, and we mustn't forget the collaboration between [@patchiesteve](#) and [@teabeesea](#), to which we owe our very existence!

The Editorial Team

The Underground Mice Writers Society

The Hope Folios #9

Collect the set

We hope you enjoyed episode 22% of *The Between*. There are 52 further episodes, and you can receive the whole set - in serialised form - for just £9.99 (£7.99 to Written in Hope email subscribers).

Visit writteninhope.ink/the-between to find out more.

5%: Before the Begin

1: The Begin

15%: The Renegade Engineers

2: The storm gathers

25%: A whiff of conspiracy

3: Nelson Epsilon

25%: Merryweather and Clarke

4: Doctor Warwick gets it wrong

45%: The Very Civil Service

5: Nelson Gamma

55%: The Queen of Mice

6: The turn of the worm

65%: The summons of Dream

7: From Forget to Nostalgia

75%: Thoreau the keyhole

8: The Nun goes to prison

85%: Mythic Ink

9: The biblioklept

95%: The Map of Life

10: Nelson Delta

105%: Humboldt goes on the prowl

11: The Penguin Café

115%: Ada takes her Kew

12: The Nun meets her Fairy Godmother

125%: The Very Uncivil Service

13: HMS Warwick is sunk

135%: The Underground Mice Writers Society

14: A pounce of lion

145%: A think of ink

15: Doctor Warwick gets suspicious

155%: Thoreau's return

16: The Heist

165%: (Mostly) Polite conversations

17: The unlikely escape

175%: A worm of plot holes

18: Taxi

185%: Flight

19: Enna and Fielding

195%: Redemption

20: Nuts, buns and cinnamon

205%: Stone cold

21: Where all roads meet

215%: A Parliament of Owls

22: Gerontius!

22%: Uncivil departure

23: Fortunes good, bad and told

235%: Merryweather's return

24: Dis-comb-obliterated

245%: One last heist

25: At a loose end

255%: Lost and found

26: The End

Picture this

Thank you to the people below whose pictures have helped bring the words in this magazine alive.

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