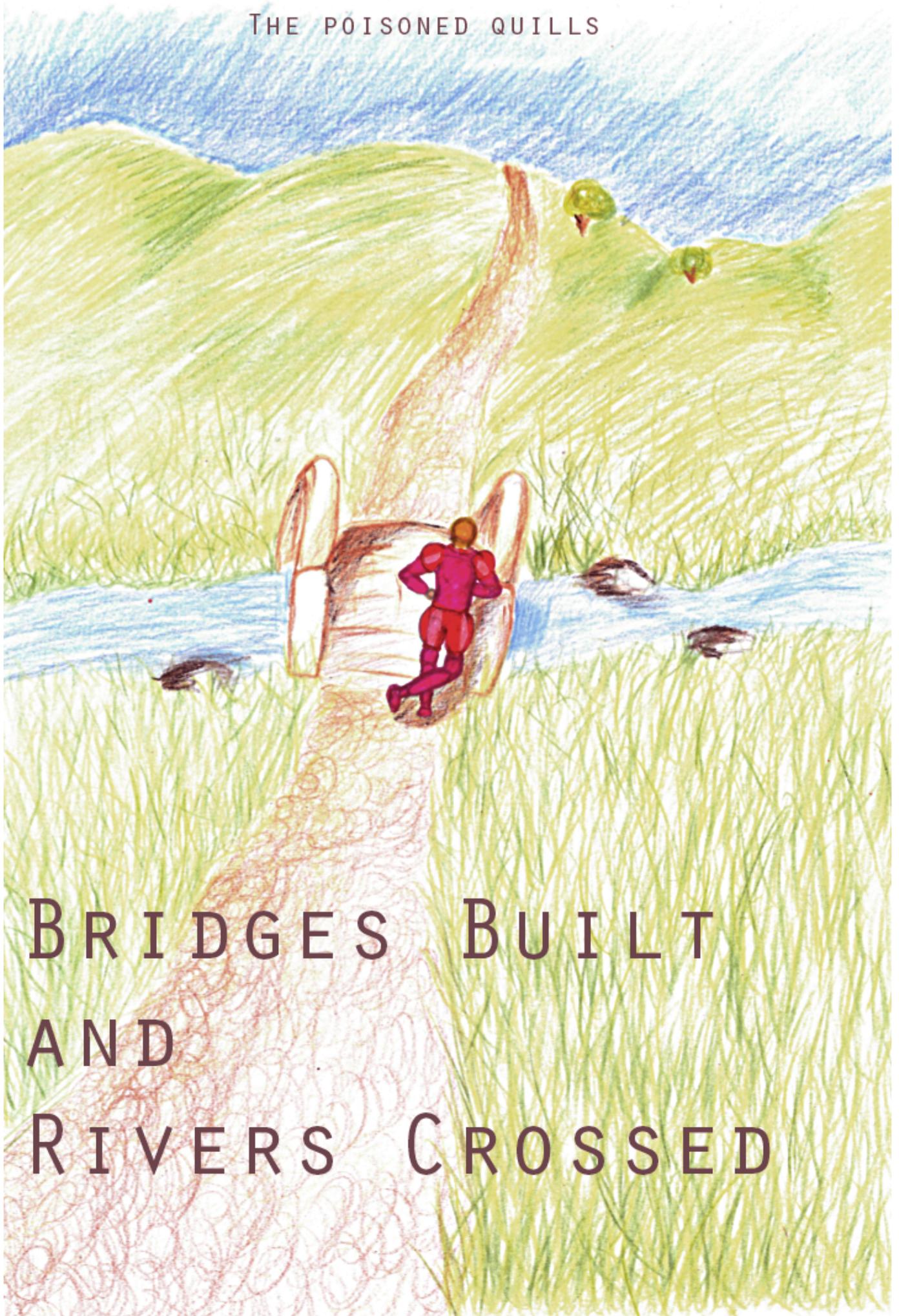
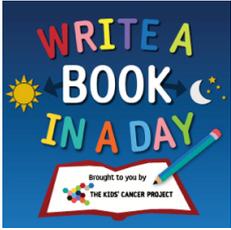


THE POISONED QUILLS



BRIDGES BUILT
AND
RIVERS CROSSED



Write a Book in a Day 2016 Book Summary



The Team Supervisor must confirm the details on this page. When the book is complete, please tick off the checklist items and sign where indicated. This page must be included as the first page in the final book.

TEAM DETAILS

Writing Division: Upper School (VIC)

Writing Date: 30-08-2016

Group or School: St Helena Secondary College

Team Name: The Poisoned Quills

Team Members:

<u>Ellorie Mercer</u>	<u>Charlotte Clough</u>
<u>Tara Papaioannou</u>	<u>Georgia Kirkpatrick</u>
<u>Elina Ahokas</u>	<u>Sophie Wallace</u>
<u>Katy Gale</u>	_____
<u>Madihah Lambrias</u>	_____

PARAMETERS

Primary Character 1: Computer technician

Primary Character 2: Poet

Non-Human Character: Cow

Setting: Bridge

Issue: Strange journey

RANDOM WORDS

Delicious

Nonsense

Hums

Cracked

Danger

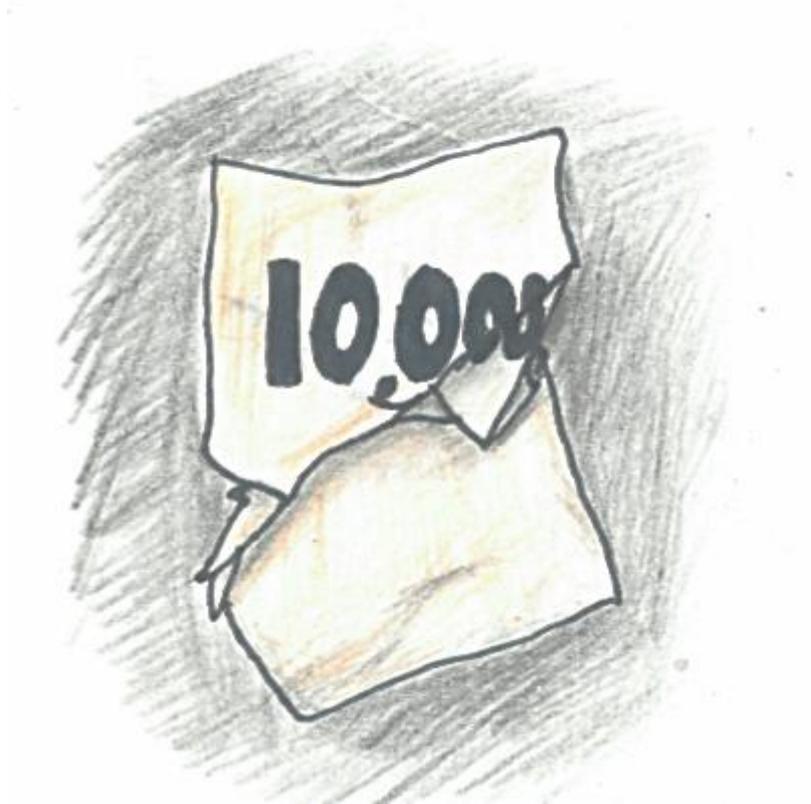
AFFIDAVIT

I, (Team Supervisor), certify that the above team:

- completed all work on their book in accordance with the competition rules
- completed all work between 8:00am and 8:00pm on the day of writing
- included all five random words
- Word Count: words

Date: Signed:

Part I



*I am the trickster known as Poet
My verbal sparring cannot be beat
Soon you shall know it
This domain is mine, my sweet*

*Try and pass me
If you dare
But do not cheat me
Or else beware*

Evan wasn't having a great day.

She'd woken up at midday, for one, thanks to her ruined sleep schedule. Graveyard shifts paid okay - at least at Telstra - but the payoff sucked. One of her roommates had left cold, stagnant coffee in the pot *again*, and she'd wasted a half hour brewing another batch, eyes still blurred with sleep and hair thrown messily over her head, yesterday's makeup still smeared across her face and a half-glare staining her features.

Then, because nothing ever went right on a Wednesday morning, Evan had spilt said coffee all over her shirt and ripped jeans, cursing as the burning liquid seeped onto her skin.

Running into her uni class an hour late might've been a frequent occurrence, but that didn't make it any more enjoyable. The professor glared at her, mouth set into a thin line before falling back into his lecture as she fumbled her way into a seat.

That Evan had forgotten her laptop was the icing on the cake and- god, what was she wearing?

The sudden rush of blood to her face wasn't subtle as she sighed in frustration at the mix-matched clothes she had thrown on; a dark pair of jeans paired with the bright yellow tee she'd had since she was twelve.

So yeah. Evan wasn't having a great day.

The lecture finished after what felt like decades and she stumbled out of her class, hand clutching the blank piece of paper on which she'd meant to take notes.

As she stepped outside into the rain (because *of course* it had started to rain), she felt a distinct squish under her foot and prayed that she hadn't just smeared snail all over the heel of her favourite boots. Biting her lip, she lifted her foot to inspect the damage and breathed a

sigh of relief when she found only a claggy sheet of paper advertising some kind of competition. Peeling it off, she was ready to flick it away when the title caught her eye.

Strange Journey- Heroes Quest.

Evan had heard of the up-and-coming video game; as a computer technician at Telstra, her job encompassed everything computers and it would've been hard not to, even if she hadn't been a dedicated gamer. What was more intriguing, though, was the prize printed in bold, black text below it.

The first person to finish their playthrough of Strange Journey: Heroes Quest will receive a cash prize of \$10 000 and a position in gaming development at Sofitech. Good luck, gamers!

Embossed underneath it was a colourful rendition of a medieval scene; grassy fields with an imposing castle complete with a slight, blonde Princess and a snarling green dragon and more curiously, a grazing cow of soft gold and white. She supposed it was pretty, in a cliché sort of way.

Evan was ready to read further, but she was standing in the pouring rain holding a soggy bit of paper and beginning to receive strange looks. Clutching her precious books to her chest, she retreated into the shelter of her car.

Later, in her shared, cramped apartment, as her roommates, Sam and Charlie, left for dinner, she would bask in the blue glow of her laptop and order a copy of the game from Sofitech's website. Leaving for work that at eight that evening her face was set in determination.

Evan Jones, trainwreck of a woman, was going to beat Strange Journey, and she was going to be the first to do it.

The title page of the game flickered into life on the screen, swallowing the dull lists of numbers and spreadsheets and introducing Evan to a world of dragons and thatched rooves (which, she thought detachedly, probably wouldn't end well for the poor villagers). A small jester-like figure jaunted around the screen, twirling pieces of ribbon and flipping himself head-over-heels, entertaining the farmers who walked to and from their paddocks. Fantasy creatures frolicked, weaving about maidens who stood gossiping, **nonsense** conversations scrolling in speech bubbles above their heads. Quaint villages were scattered in small clumps around a large stone castle and the entirety of the kingdom was surrounded by a river. Beyond the river, green fields faded into the corners of the monitor and if Evan squinted she could make out a small bridge that crossed to the other side. The whole atmosphere was a stark contrast to the harried businessmen and drab concrete of Melbourne and she was suddenly reminded of why she loved video games so much; the chance to get away from the world, to become someone else, someone adventurous with a goal and a plan.

Chewing on her bottom lip, she pressed on the start button with a sense of purpose that she hadn't felt since she was in high school, when she had ambitions and ideas and the belief that she could be exceptional (turns out that those things are all well and good, but you need money to do them and usually a plan, both of which Evan didn't have).

The page stilled, stuttered and suddenly flashed to the beginning of the game, revealing a young man in peasant's attire, standing shell-shocked as a princess kissed his cheek on the ramparts of the castle. The pixelated image shakily moved and the Princess took both of his hands, locking eyes with him in what Evan assumed would be a moment of tender gratefulness had the graphics been better.

Slowly, dialogue between the characters began to sweep across the bottom of the picture and Evan felt a few small bubbles of excitement blossom in her chest as she prepared to be swept away with the story.

“Thank you, kind sir, for agreeing to rescue my cow for me.”

The gestures of the Princess were stilted and Evan wondered vaguely if all her movements were that mechanical; whether if when she spooned soup her hand jerked violently enough that she spilled it down her crimson dress in the same undignified manner that Evan was so familiar with.

“It’s my pleasure, Your Highness.”

Evan lost her patience, desperate to play, to defeat the game, to do something worthwhile for once. She skipped through the dialogue, skimmed the instructions and immersed herself in the world of Strange Journey: Hero’s Quest.

Evan played the game throughout her entire shift, ignoring everything happening around her; the **delicious** aroma of her cubicle mate’s dinner, the car alarm going off outside the building, the sun setting and reappearing (which usually signalled the countdown to the end of her shift). She couldn’t tell whether it was her imagination or not, but the peasant she was playing as was exhausted and drawn, more so than he had been at the beginning of their quest. The game wove through the medieval kingdom, asking her to complete task after task, each more invigorating than the last. She thrilled in exercising her wit like this, something that she hadn’t done in so long, and she found herself anticipating the final battle more and more.

So it was understandable that when she arrived at the end of the game she was more than a little disappointed to be faced with only a bridge, reaching itself over the river that she reasoned must be the edge of the kingdom, and the same jester-like figure she had seen on the title screen. He was leaning against a post, all casual rumples and care-free hair that flopped across his unusually wide forehead. He flitted across the screen, his image often wavering. His emerald eyes were glimmering with trouble and his grin was wicked. Text scrolled across the bottom of the screen.

“I am the Poet, pass me to cross

Answer my riddle or else you’ll be lost:

Four little letters,

A paradox to some.

The worse that it is,

The better it becomes.”

“A riddle!” she thought, with triumph.

She had always been good at riddles, enjoyed the way you could manipulate language and confuse people with it. She had enjoyed the fact that she was good at them, that she could always answer questions that had other people stumped.

Refocusing on the riddle she contemplated the answer. Four letters. A paradox. Getting better when it’s worse. A moment of contemplation and she had it. Really, she was a little disappointed; it was so easy and what’s the point if there’s no challenge?

Clicking on the text box, she typed the answer. Love. Four letters, always confusing, and the further you fall the better it is. It made sense.

Almost immediately, the poet's already mocking smile turned devilish and he issued a little wave as the screen faded to black. After a long minute the screen brightened again and two words flashed up.

WRONG ANSWER.

Poet smirked evilly, wiggled his fingers in a cruel imitation of a wave. Then she found herself back at the beginning of the game, staring again at the green fields and the simply dressed farmers.

What.

In an instant she was out of her chair and pacing, needing to release the sudden burst of anger and energy that surged through her.

She glared at the computer, showing the innocent, cutesy village, her frustration molten hot.

Evan Jones didn't lose, and she made a promise that this video game wasn't going to be the exception.

"I am the Poet, pass me to cross,

Answer my riddle or else you'll be lost;

You heard me before,

Now you hear me again

I die,

Until you call me again."

“Pain?” She said aloud, her voice unsure even to her own ears. She typed the word, somehow unsurprised when she received the same smile and wave as the night before.

*“I am the Poet, pass me to cross,
Answer my riddle or else you’ll be lost;
Silvery points that downward thrust,
Sparkling spears that never rust.”*

“I don’t know, a magical sword?”

A wave and an eerie smile, and Evan sighed, resting her cheek in her hand.

She tried again, and again, until she knew each generic response by heart and wondered at times why she was so invested in this stupid video game with its stupid Poet. She couldn’t find an answer.

Fifth attempt. Evan’s eyes were beginning to ache from the dull glare of her computer and she’d dismissed more than a few red-flagged emails over the course of the night.

The sheer tediousness of it was starting to drive her insane; she was ready throw the disk into the paper shredder. The thatched huts and slow trickle of content villagers that had at first seemed quaint to her now grated on her nerves; she was sure that with each impossible quest and cutscene her blood pressure rose.

She got to Poet in record time, so used to each click that they flowed from her fingertips like water. The familiar bridge with its familiar grassy field and the familiar gold and white cow made her want to scream; she couldn't, however, hold back a muffled growl.

"Hey, sugar," Poet sang, leaning jauntily against the railing of that awful wooden bridge. He held a lute loosely in his left hand, occasionally bringing up his right to strum a tune. "Fifth attempt, huh? Are you sure you're trying?"

Evan gritted her teeth, knuckles turning white on her mouse.

"I'm just warming up. I'll have the riddle now." She typed in response.

"Don't you want to talk first, Evangeline?" Poet replied.

Evan's immediate response was to type back, "It's Evan, not Evangeline." It was only after she'd pressed Enter that she realised that she hadn't imputed her name into the game, not once.

A peculiar sense of unease crept over her, cold and cloying. That was odd, to say the very least, and she almost closed the window, mouse hovering over the 'x' button - almost, but her eyes slipped back to Poet's face and her resolve caved.

Poet smiled, and his face seemed clearer, more defined; she could make out the golden hue of his eyes and the points of his teeth.

Here's your riddle, hero;

A danger to those alongside it,

*It **hums**, purrs, beast-like*

Travelling leagues each hour."

Needless to say, Evan sat in her cubicle for hours. Three, in fact, right up until twenty minutes before five, when her shift ended. Finally, frustrated and eyes pathetically prickling, she typed “A cheetah?”

Poet’s smile, frozen on the screen, grew, and Evan knew ever before he lifted a hand that she was, once again, wrong.

“Until we meet again, *Evangeline*.”

A week passed sluggishly, days and lectures and faces oozing past Evan, whose mind remained stagnant, fixated on the stone castle and pixelated smiles of Strange Journey.

Each night she came alive, seemed to spiral out of control, her thoughts filling each crevasse and darkened corner of her cubicle until it was just her, Poet and whatever riddle he decided to throw at her.

Evan hated it- hated *him* -but she hated the way she looked forward to it even more.

On her eleventh attempt, she started to crack.

“For such a clever girl,” Poet typed, a small smile gracing his lips, sharp and poisonous, “You’re really struggling with this, *Evangeline*.”

Evan breathed in deeply through her nose, bit her lip. “The riddle,” she typed, wondering if it was possible to communicate the level of her frustration via text.

“So you can fail again?” His lips curled up into something both amused and cruel, “I suppose you’ve become accustomed to failure throughout your life, haven’t you?”

Evan began to type a response, paused, and deleted what she'd written. Again, her gaze strayed towards the 'x' on the upper right before returning to Poet, whose smile hadn't changed.

"A hard pill to swallow, I'm sure. Such promise, wasted," he sighed theatrically. "A pity, yet not a surprise."

"The riddle."

*"A dagger thrust at my own heart
Dictates the way I'm swayed
Left I stand and right I yield
To the twisting of the blade."*

A beat. Evan thought of dark smiles and arrogance.

"I don't know." She typed, and closed the window, though not before she saw Poet's grin spilt into a sharp, high laugh.

"Nice to see you again, sugar. Ready for round..." Poet trailed off, miming checking a phantom watch. "Twenty two?" He smiled. "You're lucky you make somewhat acceptable company, grumpy though you are. You're funny, love, with how hard you try."

Evan had never been more done in her entire life.

As was her custom, today (a Wednesday, of course) had gone horribly; she'd upset Sam after she'd offered Evan a cup of coffee only to be greeted with a muttered rejection and a glare and had been late to uni (again) after spending an hour spewing awkward apologies dotted with the occasional back-pat. After her lecture had finished, again with a blank set of notes, she had returned to her car to find it decorated liberally with scratches and dents, with

a hastily scribbled 'sorry' note forced between the windscreen wipers. And then, to top it all off, her boss had come in during the beginning of her shift and asked why the bulk of the emails sent to her cubicle remained unread.

She was *done*.

“You try, Evangeline, so futilely, and you know it. Sometimes, it’s better to just... give up.”

That was *it*.

Anger surged in her, a slow wave, tightening her throat and clenching her hands into tight fists. She was fairly sure she snarled aloud.

There was one solution to this, one that’d been bouncing around her head for the past few days, lurking in the shadows of half-formed thoughts and daydreams.

Four clicks and Evan was scrolling through the code, eyes scanning, scanning, scanning- *there!*

Colour: #ff002

Text: as riddle 4

Parent.width = parent.root

Parent.height = parent.root

Highlight and delete.

What could she say. Hacking came up in her job sometimes, and it wasn’t cheating if the game was *bloody impossible*.

Evan held her breath, closing the window and-

Her character stood behind Poet's turned back (and the world looked different, from this angle; Poet looked smaller, more vulnerable from behind) and as she began to slowly rotate herself, that goddamn cow (and to think, that's what she'd been fighting for all this time) grazed behind her, looking up with large, soulful eyes.

Poet looked wrong, from this angle, mouth turned downwards and a frown marring his brow. Smaller, decidedly less impressive.

"I-" He paused, tilted his head to the side, obviously unsure. Off kilter, and that was perhaps the oddest part.

"What did you do?"

Evan smiled, typed, "I win."

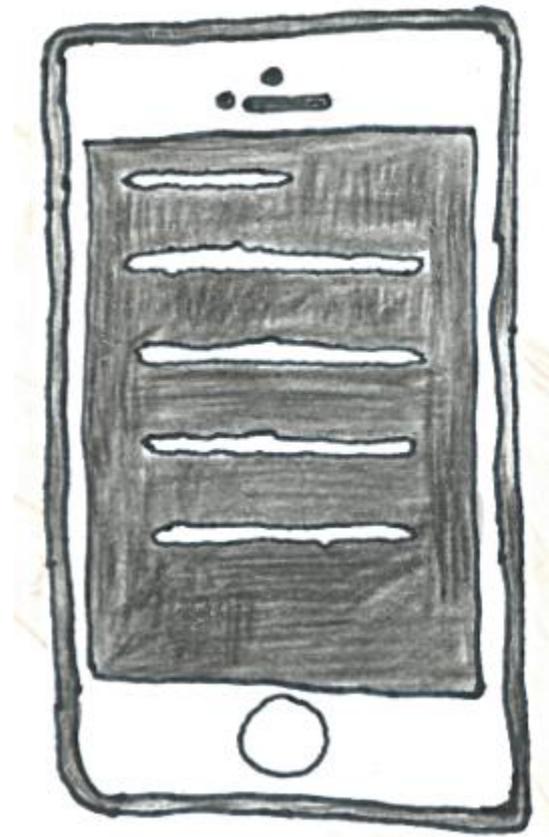
"No." He shook his head, resolute. "No, you cheated." He seemed childlike, in his anger. Real, somehow, and Evan remembered with a jolt that this was a *goddamn video game*.

Evan laughed, giddy. "I win." She whispered under her breath.

She clicked the cow, hands steady, and was immediately rewarded with the ending screen.

She clicked the window closed and leaned back in her chair, feeling as though a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. At rest, she thought, pleased, a content smile stretching her lips.

Part II



*The girl with whom I joust is **cracked***

Her logic all but gone

The insanity with which she is wracked

Leaves her vulnerable and forlorn

*My anger leaves the world in **danger***

The villages in flames

Her frustration and mine are not strangers

They know each other's names

For the second time in as many weeks, Evan slept through her alarm. She threw back the covers and climbed out of bed, already feeling the anger that simmered beneath her skin. She stomped downstairs and turned the T.V on, hitting the volume button until it was loud enough to hear from the kitchen. Evan was halfway through making herself a cup of coffee when she heard the booming voice of a newsreader delivering the morning headlines.

“And Telstra users will be left red-faced today, after the company suffered a major technical glitch overnight. All products that used Telstra services have been rendered completely useless. The plot thickens as reports have emerged of strange messages showing up on the otherwise incapacitated screens of computers, phones and tablets that were supported by the Telstra network.”

Evan ran into the lounge room just in time to see lines of text flash up on the screen. She sat on the couch, completely motionless as the news reporters pondered what the message meant. She pulled out her own phone and found the same five line stanza filling the screen. As she read each line of writing she felt the anxiety begin to bubble inside her, filling her chest and constricting her throat. The words continued to circle in her mind, creating a labyrinth of confusion and fear.

My dearest, Evangeline

Know your victory's bittersweet

For you're a liar, a vile cheat

Your schemes are through, your plots now end

Onto you, my revenge descends

How many Evangeline's could there be working at Telstra? Not to mention Evangeline's that had just hacked their way through a game? It must be some kind of sick

joke. Someone's just pulling a prank. A very real seeming, bizarrely accurate and ridiculously complicated prank...

It just didn't hold up. Not with the way Poet had been acting in the game... Not with the way Poet had exploded with rage. Something wasn't right and that something was all her fault.

Evan raced into the next room, shaking Sam awake,

"Sam," she whispered, "Sam! I need your phone",

Mumbling incoherently, Sam swatted at Evan's hands before rolling over and going back to sleep. Starting to lose her calm, Evan gave up whispering shouting, "SAM. I NEED YOUR PHONE."

Thoroughly confused but finally awake, Sam handed over her phone, keying in the passcode dazedly,

"Here. Now for God's sake, shut up."

After a quick Google search, Evan called up Sofitech, waiting with baited breath as the ringtone chimed on.

"Hello, Sofitech call centre, this is Rachel speaking. What can I do for you today?"

"Rachel, please you have to help. The video game, Strange Journey, is messing with the whole phone company!" There was a pause where Evan could imagine the confused expression of Rachel as she pondered how to respond to the lunatic on the other end of the phone.

"I'm sorry. I can't help you. Have a nice day." And then the line went dead.

Finally descending into panic, Evan sunk to the ground, discarding the phone next to her and clutching her arms around her legs. How had things gone so wrong? How is something like this even possible? Of course this would happen to her. If anyone's going to plunge the world into chaos by playing a video game, it's going to be good old Evan Jones. It was at this point that she felt sobs ricochet through her chest and tears dribble down her cheeks.

Leaning against the mottled brown couch in her living room, sobbing to herself, Evan knew she had hit rock bottom.

As she sat there, contemplating her failures with an inordinate amount of self-pity, Sam and Charlie stumbled sleepily into the room. Upon seeing their enigmatic roommate staring blankly at the wall, rivulets of tears tracking unnoticed down her cheeks, they shared a thoroughly confused look and then sank onto the floor next to her.

Sam put a comforting hand on Evan's shoulder and felt, with a small amount of relief, as the other girl leaned into it. The gentle touch being all she needed to anchor her back into the world, Evan turned to face both her roommates, the devastation clear on her face.

"I don't know what to do. I messed up, and I don't know what to do."

Charlie and Sam shared another confused look, before turning their attention back to their distraught roommate.

"I'm sure whatever it is can be fixed," Charlie said reassuringly. "You can't have messed up anything monumental, surely. How much can someone screw up overnight?"

A phone is thrust into Charlie's face, the screen frozen on the mocking rhyme left for her by Poet.

"This is why Telstra is going haywire. Because I hacked a game and it went rogue."

“Oh,” said Charlie blankly. “I didn’t know your full name was Evangeline.”

Sam glared at him.

She scooted closer to Evan, wrapping an arm across her shoulders and pulling her close. It was the closest the two roommates had ever been and despite the dire situation they were in, Sam couldn’t help but hope that this would solidify their friendship.

“Will you help me, please?”

She sounded so resigned, so uncomfortable asking for help, that Sam wanted to fix the whole mess for her (if Sam actually knew what the whole mess was, because, if we were being honest, she was still a little bit confused).

“Of course we’ll help you,” she said, nudging Charlie. “Won’t we?”

“What? Oh yeah, we’ll help. What exactly do we need to do?”

Armed with a plan, the three friends march into the office with an aura of feigned competence about them. The glares aimed at Evan were met with equally venomous ones from Sam and Charlie, but it didn’t stop the overwhelming sense of dread she felt as she approached her desk. A sea of her co-workers split apart to let her through to the only working computer in the building. The taunting face of Poet filled the screen, laughing at her as she sank into her seat, lacking the anticipation she used to feel at facing the game.

“Please,” she said to Sam and Charlie. “Please, don’t let me give up.”

Stood behind her, armed with flasks of coffee and determined expressions, Evan was, for the first time, grateful for her roommates.

Countless tedious hours later, any joy that was once felt at beating the game and reaching Poet was well and truly gone. She was tired, Sam had visited Gloria Jeans twice and Charlie was now well acquainted with the servers at Bakers Delight after being placed in charge of getting snacks.

She had arrived though. Her hands hurt and her back ached and her head throbbed with each strobing light on the game (which she swore Poet was doing on purpose) but she was there. Staring her (hopefully) last ever riddle right in the eye.

I am green and pink and yellow

A multitude of hues

Yet I'm lost so easily

Often leaving no clues

Evan took a deep breathe, the pressure of the decision she was about to make resting weightily on her shoulders.

"I can't!" she exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air and walking away from the computer in disgust.

"Sam, what do I do? I don't know it!"

"I don't know Evan, I was never good at this kind of stuff."

"Hey guys, I got it!" called Charlie.

The girls turned around in time to see him hit the ENTER button.

"Charlie," said Sam, slowly, the way you would when reprimanding a small child.

"What did you put in that computer?"

"Socks." He replied cheerfully.

Everyone in the office looked at him in utter disbelief, and a general whisper of annoyance crawled its way around the crowd. Evan sunk to the ground, complete despair overtaking her at the idea that she would have to endure this hell again.

She felt a soft hand on her shoulder.

“Evan,” Sam said, in a voice brimming over with joy. “He did it.”

“What?”

“He did it. He beat the game!”

Her head turned towards the sound and in a way she didn't know was possible, her eyes zoomed in on the screen. The screen that was now filled with the picture of an overly excited Princess, her arms wrapped around the neck of a golden cow.

Slowly, the three roommates tumbled into an embrace, grasping each other, overwhelmed and laughing.

“He beat the game. With socks.”

A beat, and Evan began to relax, a ghost of a smile still on her lips. The anger and loneliness (and now, surrounded by people she had let in, she recognised it for what it was) that had curled around her heart like an icy cage had lessened (not dissipated, not yet, but time heals all wounds). She was happy, she realised. It was a strange feeling.

The buzz off the office had somewhat quieted in the minutes that followed and Evan was just tuning herself back into the discussion when the room hushed again.

“Evangeline Jones?” A woman's voice, melodic yet firm, came from behind her. Evan turned and gaped, now hyperaware of her knotted hair and oily skin.

“Ms Jones?” The woman asked again, a flicker of amusement colouring her tone. The woman, of course, was Adelyn Vice, CEO of Sofitech gaming. All heels, determination and a glare that could – and had, according to some rumours- make men wet themselves.

Obviously, she was one of Evan’s heroes. What she was doing here, talking to *Evan*, she wasn’t sure, but Evan wasn’t about to complain.

“Ye-“ Evan’s voice cracked. “Yes, that’s me. Evan, I mean. Hello,” She had to force back a cringe at her stumbled words.

Amusement rose in Vice’s face. “Hello, Ms Jones. I understand you’re the young woman who’s caused all this trouble over the past day.”

“I suppose-“

“I also understand that you’re the first person to complete *Strange Journey: Heroes Quest*.”

Evan choked on her own spit. After her prompt (and very embarrassing) coughing fit, she forced out a croaky, “Pardon?”

Vice continued as if Evan hadn’t spoken. “Obviously, this means that you’re entitled to both the monetary prize and the position in Sofitech gaming.”

“Thank you so-“

“However,” Vice interrupted shrewdly, “The damage you caused with your actions has more than exceeded the \$10 000 on offer, so Sofitech has made the corporate decision to directly place that money into Telstra’s hands to cover the expenses. Sofitech, of course, have no legal obligation, as detailed in Clause 23 in the paperwork delivered with your copy of the game.”

“Oh, that’s-“

“Fine, I’m sure.” Vice finished, levelling Evan with that famous stare. Evan had to fight back an uncomfortable squirm.

“You’re still, of course, entitled to the position offered, which is yours to consider. I understand you’re currently employed as a night-time computer technician?” The contempt in her voice left no room for argument; her tone filled in for the unspoken words. Evan was to accept the job or else there’d be hell to pay.

“I accept, of course-“

Vice smiled thinly. “Excellent. My secretary will contact you at my earliest convenience.”

And then she was gone in a whirl of Chanel perfume and power, leaving Evan reeling.

“Well,” Evan said faintly. “That just happened.” She collapsed into her cubicle with a groan, closing her eyes.

Peace, finally. Nothing could get her out of this chair, nothing-

“Hey, Evan. Want to come out to dinner with us?” Sam asked, warmth colouring her voice. Evan peeled open her eyes and stared at the two, something hot and comforting burrowing its way into her chest.

“Yeah... yeah, I do.” She smiled back. “That sounds great.”

Trainwreck of a woman she may be, but maybe, just maybe, things were looking up.

To those reading our story,

We hope that though our story is short, it will bring lots of joy and possibly some laughter. We loved working on this and being able to hopefully make someone's day brighter. We all hope, as *The Poisoned Quills*, and individually, that everyone who reads this will be able to take something away from this novel, whether it be the relatable feelings you get from Evangeline and her klutziness, or Poet and his eloquent ways.

The riddles used have mostly been made up or have been adapted from famous ones. Please don't feel sad if you cannot get the answers to the riddles, we did over simplify them to show the true simplicity of life, and appreciating the simple things.

*Sour little letters,
A paradox to some,
The worse that it is,
The better it becomes*

A: Puns

*A dagger thrust at my own heart,
Dictates the way I'm swayed,
Left I stand and right I yield,
To the twisting of the blade*

A: A lock

*Silvery points that downwards thrust,
Sparkling spears that never rust.*

A: Icicles

*A danger to those along side it,
It hums, purrs, beast-like,
Travelling leagues each hour*

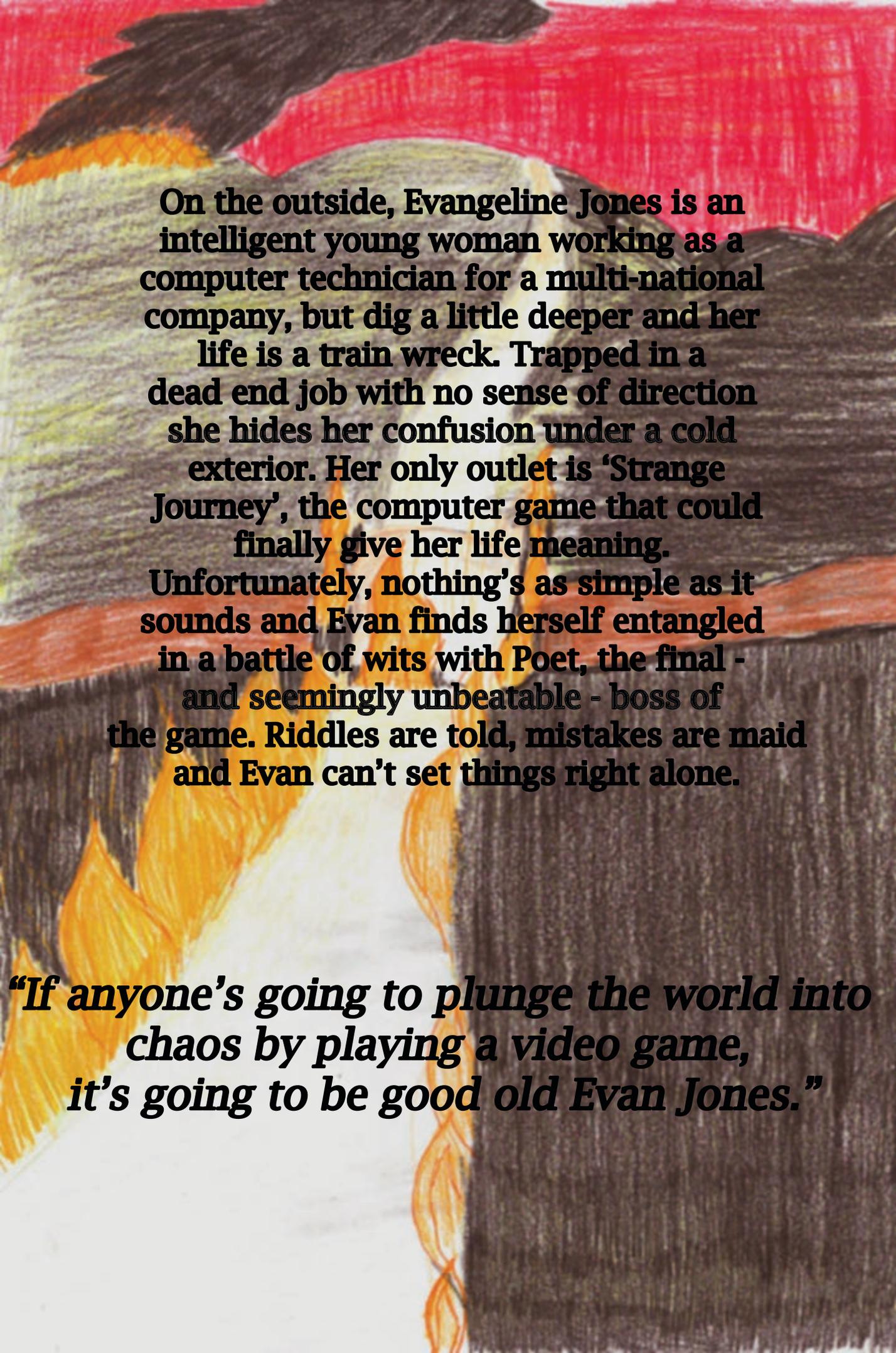
A: Car

*You heard me before,
Now you hear me again,
I die,
Until you call me again*

A: Echo

*I am green, and pink, and yellow,
A multitude of hues,
Yet I am lost so easily,
Often leaving no clues.*

A: Socks



On the outside, Evangeline Jones is an intelligent young woman working as a computer technician for a multi-national company, but dig a little deeper and her life is a train wreck. Trapped in a dead end job with no sense of direction she hides her confusion under a cold exterior. Her only outlet is 'Strange Journey', the computer game that could finally give her life meaning. Unfortunately, nothing's as simple as it sounds and Evan finds herself entangled in a battle of wits with Poet, the final - and seemingly unbeatable - boss of the game. Riddles are told, mistakes are made and Evan can't set things right alone.

"If anyone's going to plunge the world into chaos by playing a video game, it's going to be good old Evan Jones."