

Book Week Short Story Competition 2021

3rd Place- James F (10S)

The Climb

Jason could feel his fingertips slipping off the slick rock. Every muscle tense in his arms, he desperately tried to pull himself up. But he had no strength left after the two-hour climb. 'Hold on! I'm coming!' cried Layla, scrambling across the cliff face. Jason saw the panic in her eyes. They both knew she was never going to reach him in time. His left hand lost its purchase on the rock and he dangled like a leaf in the wind. Glancing down at blackness beneath him, Jason wondered if all the sacrifice had been worth it. Henry dead. Jayde missing. Arthur killed. And now it was his turn...

His flailing body jerked and a small pouch fell from beneath his coat, white chalk trickling from a tear in the leather, its strap caught precariously on the spur of his boot. With a flick of his heel, the pouch flew up into the grasp of Jason's outstretched hand. The white dust coated his palm and fingers with an oddly silky yet rough feel. How stupid they had been to not have utilised it yet! Once he was done, he tossed it to Layla who greedily grabbed some for herself, clouds of white billowing like smoke in the frigid wind. After a moment's rest, they continued the climb.

From the valley below, Patrick Strongjaw gazed silently through the sights of his rifle as the two spider-like figures, their metal equipment shimmering like stars in the dying light of the setting sun, traversed towards the top of the cliff. His fellow hunters had tracked Jason's gang here, and the corpse of Arthur lay bloodstained at his feet. But the hunters had not been so successful, for their limp bodies hung grotesquely across the branches where they had been picked-off by the survivors of Jason's gang. The hunters thought they were formidable, but their complacency made them such an easy target. He alone had survived and now all that was left for him was to take the two shots - and end the glorious hunt.

The burning pyre of Henry's grave was now but a speck of orange on the ground, and the frigid air made Jason feel as if he should just dive down into the pools of invigorating water below. A nod to Layla, and they continued their vertical journey. But the peace and calm were short lived. Sharp cracks echoed throughout the valley, and dust flew from frighteningly close indents in the rock. He knew of only one sound that could bring so much terror. Not much longer, they were so close! He cried out to Layla – but Layla cried back with a bloodcurdling scream as her almost lifeless body flew down and past his head. But a metre left, Why now! An excruciatingly piercing shot through his foot, yet he was over the ledge and onto the surface. He lay there, cradling his foot and scrabbling for some sticks to help him stand, when the crunching of footsteps and the battle cry of the traitor Jayde launched him back over the edge and to the fatal floor. The Great Hunt Society had won.