

## Honorable Mention

### Reverse Perspective

By Ryan J. McBriar

It's an early Monday morning in October when the sunshine wakes Finn Carpenter because he neglected to close his curtains after a late-night Street Fighter 2 session. *Great.* He's late for school.

*Why didn't my alarm go off?* He rolls out of bed and stumbles to the dresser. The red digital display glows 11:15, the alarm already reset for the next morning. *Weird.* Finn's eyes narrow. He shakes his head and fumbles on the dresser for his comb and hair gel. No time to shower. The gel is open, and the quarter-sized dollop cools his palm. Prayer hands, up and down to spread the gel, eyes up to the mirror to perfect the spiky tips ...

Finn can't immediately identify what is wrong with the image in the mirror, like when you enter a room with which you are intimately familiar after someone has rearranged an inconsequential piece of furniture. The body senses something is wrong before the mind can pinpoint exactly what's amiss. He stares, looking into the reversed replica of his bedroom presented by the glass. He grinds his knuckles into his eyes, looks again. Finn's reflection is gone. He runs to the window, fully opens the curtains, basks in the sunshine. *Not a vampire.*

He dresses, his mind a fog, and makes his way downstairs, still groggy and confused. He passes the oval hallway mirror, similarly lacking in a reverse Finn. *What the hell?* Mom and Dad Carpenter are gone, off to work. *Why didn't one of them wake me up?*

He reaches the kitchen and finds the answer.

The Carpenters traditionally eat meals as a trio, and apparently this morning was no different. Three plates sit stacked in the sink, along with two coffee mugs and Finn's favorite Shazam! tumbler. His lunch is missing from the fridge; his JanSport backpack is not hanging on the hook by the door. Finn's only mode of independent transportation, a beloved and badly beaten-up BMX bike, is gone from the garage, along with his helmet. Impaled on a nail usually reserved for it is a note in Finn's writing: "Off to finish what you couldn't."

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Fifteen minutes later, Finn is almost at school, gulping in lungs full of air as he tries to not pass out.

Finn normally rides the same path to school as his Sunday morning newspaper route. Today, on foot, he encountered the first demolished mailbox at his second regular stop. The customer was Mr. Gulch, a retired refinery worker who liked to make fun of Finn's long hair, usually tied back in a ponytail, whenever he was up early enough to see Finn ride by on delivery. Finn stopped in front of Gulch's house, almost tripping over the toppled mailbox, which looked to have been kicked until the post nearly snapped in half. The blue newspaper delivery tube box had been pulled out of the ground; it took Finn a few seconds to locate it. It looked to have been launched like a javelin toward Mr. Gulch's front window. The glass was a spiderweb of cracks.

More broken mailboxes, shattered windows, and torn-up lawns dotted the path from Finn's home to school.

About to round the last corner before the high school, he hears it: a quavering voice from just behind him. "S-stay away from me."

Finn freezes and scans the area, quickly realizing where he's stopped. Dubbed the "fight pit" by almost all the kids in ninth grade, the intersection of Bryant Avenue and Jancey Street possesses a certain reputation. On the corner stands a large apartment building. This edge of the structure has a unique feature: a set of cement steps that descend below street level, leading to a locked door Finn presumes allows the landlord maintenance access.

This enclosure, hidden from prying adult eyes, replaced the bike racks as a prime fighting location for those challenged by anger management issues. The voice is coming from the pit.

Breath finally caught just in time to lose it again, Finn approaches the opening of the pit, stepping over patches of blood and what looks like a tooth at the top of the steps.

"Stay away. Please."

At the bottom of the steps, curled in a fetal position, is Devin Peters, a football star at Sunnyside High School. Peters is almost unrecognizable. His face is a mask of blood and bruises, his left leg twisted in an unnatural angle. Finn recognizes the letterman jacket, the one that makes him cringe every morning before the inevitable water dumping, name calling, or homework stealing.

But right now, Devin needs help. Finn starts down the steps.

"Don't come near me again, psycho!" Devin screeches, so loud the force of his words seem to push Finn back up the steps. "Help, somebody, help me!"

"Devin, I—"

"Help!"

Finn runs away from the fight pit toward the school. He passes his bike in the rack and enters the empty open playground that serves as a recess area for the connected elementary school. The side of the high school facing the playground is all glass, a series of large windows meeting in the middle with a set of double doors, all looking in on the cafeteria.

Approaching the glass slowly, Finn hears the muted din of teens and preteens socializing. He sees himself, not reflected in the glass but in the lunchroom, sitting with people he doesn't know. The lonely spot he normally haunts in the back of the cafeteria is abandoned. Shaking, Finn runs home.

Finn is still sleeping on the floor in his room when his parents get home from work. He hasn't bothered to look in the mirror since the morning. He stands, anticipating the call to come and "say hello, tell us about your day." Wincing, he glances at the bureau.

Finn's reflection is back in place, smiling, even though Finn is not. There's another note, again in Finn's messy scrawl.

"Same time tomorrow?"

*Ryan J. McBriar is a writer from Warren, PA. A graduate of La Roche University, McBriar is currently a high school English and newspaper teacher in Corry, PA. McBriar enjoys spending*

*time with his family, as well as movies, books, music, writing, and gaming. He also thinks horror stories are the best kind.*