

ORGANISER'S NOTE: 'VOYAGE THROUGH THE DARKNESS' WAS
WRITTEN BY MICHAEL ECONOMOU AND WON THE 11-14 PROSE
CATEGORY OF THE WRITING COMPETITION.

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Voyage through the darkness

Roy shuddered. The chill of the mines was not only physically cold but it was mentally paralysing, haunting you down to the bone. His lungs were now choked from the dust of thousands of days work in the mines, and his skin and clothes were tinged black, matching the expression of murky anger which permanently stained his face. *Life can't get much worse than this* he thought *I work in horrible conditions, doing painful physical labour, and get paid next to nothing. I might as well be in hell.* Suddenly a rumble echoed through the tunnels, it seemed as if the mines were the intestines of a colossus, fixed up to a gigantic rumbling stomach. Screams from above were enough for Roy to run, in his panic he was blind, bashing aside people and equipment alike in his haste to escape. It seemed he was failing, as the waves of terrified shouts were closing in. He charged as fast as he could, turning through the eternal labyrinth. His ears were roaring, heat and fear combining to form a dark fever over his head. After what seemed hours he realised there was silence. No shouts. No crashing. Nothing. At that moment he collapsed to the floor in a dazed sleep.

He awoke with a start. He had no idea what time it was or how long he had been asleep. Time did not exist in these deepest parts of the mine, only blackness and cold. Even a miner's eyes were not accustomed to this kind of dark, for at least there were lanterns to light your way when you were mining. Roy got up and walked forward, only to have his head dashed by rocks. He sniffed the air- it was rank with blood, sweat and coal. His clothes were torn to

ragged. He noticed aches in other parts of his body- he felt numerous gashes across his side, his arms were burning from scrapes against the tunnel walls and his legs were bleeding. He didn't realise at the time, but these had all been acquired during his mad flight away from the rumbling. In his pain

Voyage through the darkness

Roy could only lay and think. Where was he? Had he stumbled into the abandoned parts of the mine? Would he have to travel through the mines until either he died or escaped? Then his friends came to mind- surely some of them had escaped like him? Cold black tears flowed down his face- so many dead, and who would find their bodies? They would never be buried, and thus would go into the afterlife unblessed. With these delirious thoughts he fell asleep.

Roy's eyes cautiously opened, and shut again. He opened his eyes again more slowly, but still the same effect. It made no difference if his eyes were open or shut he realised, it was all the same black. He tried to get up by levering himself on the nearby cave walls. He found to his surprise that he could get up and walk. He gingerly crept through, his hands against the mine walls, feeling a way around the tunnels. He was starving, and his throat burnt. He felt around his pockets. A piece of bread and a half empty flask of water. He drank greedily, stopping himself just after he had drunk most of it anyway. He took about a third of the bread and wolfed it down. He kept moving, farther and farther across the tunnels, turning at random directions. Was he going up or down? His eyes gradually became accustomed so he could see a reasonable amount, enough to walk through the mines without fear of crashing.

After a few hours travelling he saw a dead end up ahead. This would not be unusual, if the dead end wasn't made of wood. A sign of something man

made. He moved as fast as could towards it, almost running. As soon as he reached it his heart sank. Painted in large white letters on the wood was:

Voyage through the darkness

ALERT! DO NOT ENTER! DANGER OF CAVE IN!

This meant he'd been going down.

Panic gripped him.

"I need to get out," he whispered, "LET ME OUT!" he screamed. His faced dissolved into tears. He shook hard, sweating with rage and terror. With energy running low, crying was a luxury he could ill afford. He collapsed to his knees, and fell to the dusty floor. He lay trying not to think or care about his torment. His nightmare. His misery.

Suddenly he heard a voice. His father's voice shouting in his ear- did I ever teach you to give up Roy? When he got up he was given new courage. He now knew which way was down. He turned in opposite directions to before. He had all reason to believe he was making progress. He **would** make his escape. He knew it. He sipped a little more water and ate a little more bread. He felt like an explorer- heroic, daring and fearless. When he got out everyone would be so proud of his achievement. He would be a local hero. He would have something to tell his children, and maybe even grandchildren.

He wandered for hours. After nearly a day he was limping and panting. Then, in the distance he saw a light. A whitish shimmer in the distance mixed with multiple hues of brown. Could it be? He summoned his last ounce of strength and ran towards it. *This was it* he thought *I'm free*. Crash! He bounced off the brown and white in the distance. No, no please god no. The brown was actually wood; the white light was actually paint which spelled out in large

letters:

Voyage through the darkness

ALERT! DO NOT ENTER! DANGER OF CAVE IN!

Then a smile crossed his face. He barely ever smiled even in happy times. *It's okay. It's alright. It doesn't matter anymore.* He cried tears of relief. *Whatever happens I don't care. Hell or heaven are both the same. I've already experienced both.*