

The shocking conclusion to the trilogy

*Arcadia Greentree confronts her past—
and her future.*

The pieces of Arcadia's life are slowly falling into place when Moira returns to scatter them once more. Arcadia must now choose whether to trust her nemesis as they uncover the dark secret of their birth.

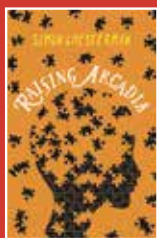
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Read it, solve it, love it.”

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“Part Oxford tutorial, part Sherlock Holmes, this intelligent novel for thoughtful teens touches on everything from ethics to anatomy, physics to puzzles, and the nature of genius.”

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For Review Only

SIMON CHESTERMAN

BEING ARCADIA

Marshall Cavendish
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THE FINAL BOOK IN THE RAISING ARCADIA TRILOGY

SIMON CHESTERMAN

BEING ARCADIA



Praise for the first two books in the trilogy:

“In...Chesterman’s gripping young adult trilogy, 16-year-old genius Arcadia Greentree must follow a string of clues and puzzles to Oxford University to find the person responsible for the tragedy that tore her family apart ... Peppered with codes, puzzles and shocking twists.”

The Straits Times

“A 16-year-old girl detective stars in a mystery paying tribute to Sherlock Holmes... This series opener is pleurably packed with clever, solvable, well-explained puzzles; hits the spot for a mystery lover.”

Kirkus Reviews

“First-time novelist Chesterman creates an engrossing story that keeps readers chasing the truth. ... Fans of quirky protagonists, puzzling mysteries, and spy craft will enjoy this.”

School Library Journal

“It was intoxicating to have such a strong character use intellect rather than supernatural abilities or weaponry to solve the minor puzzles ... and the more sinister mystery twists that ultimately shake Arcadia’s trust in family and identity.”

Glee Books

“In prose so still and measured, Chesterman methodically uncovers Arcadia’s world. Beneath this astonishing portrait of a family is an invisible intellectual machinery at work that will intrigue readers at every turn. I am already impatient for the next book.”

Leeya Mehta, author of *The Towers of Silence*

“She’s Harry Potter without a wand; Katniss Everdeen without a quiver. It’s the world against Arcadia, armed only with her fabulous, prodigious, logical mind. A super impressive debut.”

Tony Wilson, author of *Stuff Happens: Jack*

“Chesterman’s compelling creation of Arcadia, a preternaturally precocious sleuth with an unsettlingly clear-sighted and plain-spoken manner, is matched by the twists and turns of a devious plot, making for a true page-turner.”

Philip Jeyaretnam, S.C., lawyer and author of *Abraham’s Promise*

“Packed with intellectual puzzles, the taut chain of events invites the reader’s participation every step of the way. This subtle, intriguing novel raises the bar for young adult contemporary fiction. When we enter the world of our brilliant teenage protagonist with all its attendant mysteries—who is Arcadia? Who is our killer?—we are reminded that the present, viewed keenly, holds all the keys to the past. This book is impossible to put down.”

Michelle Martin, radio personality and host of *Talking Books*

“*Raising Arcadia* is a pacy mystery novel that has, at its centre, the irrepressible (and perhaps sociopathic) heroine Arcadia, a sixteen-year-old searching for her place in the adult world. Stuffed with intrigue and mystery, it will be adored by young adults and by adults who prize curiosity and challenge. Read it—and then read it again, to see if you noticed all the clues.”

Adrian Tan, lawyer and author of *The Teenage Textbook*

For Review Only

THE FINAL BOOK IN THE RAISING ARCADIA TRILOGY

SIMON CHESTERMAN

BEING ARCADIA



Marshall Cavendish
Editions

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1

ESCAPE

“We don’t have much time,” says Henry—wasting some.

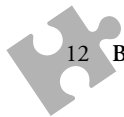
On the screen, numbers count down. One minute, thirteen seconds. Twelve seconds.

No wires to cut, no cheery ringtones today. The cylinder resembles a torpedo but lacks a propeller. Welded to the outside is a simple laptop, the liquid crystal display of which shows the task and the time remaining.

Not exactly what she has prepared for. But perhaps that is the point?

The screen also shows an icon in the shape of a trefoil—a stylised three-leaf clover. Similar to the one painted on the brushed steel of the cylinder, it is trimmed so that, instead of leaves, three equally-spaced wedges extend from a central circle. Black on yellow, it is the international symbol for a radiation hazard.

Hazard only means risk. Similar signs appear on x-ray machines around the world. Used properly, they are film-



safe and person-safe. This device, however, if used properly would destroy most of Oxford.

She looks again at the puzzle on the screen.

16, 06, 68, 88, __, 98

A number sequence problem, but not necessarily an arithmetic one. Minus ten, plus sixty-two, plus twenty, then what?

Based on 1940s technology, nuclear weapons are physics at its highest and its lowest. A chain reaction is the break-up of matter itself, heavier atoms like uranium decaying into lighter elements. As the bonds that once held the uranium together are broken, Einstein's famous equation comes to life as some of that mass becomes energy.

Why "06"? If it is read as "zero-six" it has three syllables, as do all the others except sixteen. Six-and-ten? Not specific enough; there are dozens of two-digit numbers with three syllables. Sixty-six, to be precise.

$E=mc^2$. Though the amount of mass lost is tiny, when multiplied by the square of the speed of light it tends to add up. Just one gram of mass is equivalent to around ninety thousand billion joules of energy—what twenty-five thousand homes might use in a year. The release of energy here would be in fractions of a second, however. A better measure is the destruction caused by the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima at the end of the Second World War. That blast was the result of a mass-energy

conversion of seven-tenths of one gram, about the weight of a raisin.

Could it have something to do with spelling? Each number uses the vowels “i” and “e”.

“Should we just split the difference and put 93?”

Henry is trying to be helpful but she wrinkles her nose. Guessing offends her. “You’re right that any answer is better than nothing,” she says, “but this isn’t meant to be chance. There is a correct answer if we can find it.”

Thirty-seven seconds.

If a chain reaction represents the highest form of physics, getting it started is the lowest: critical mass is a fancy term for squashing the uranium into a ball dense enough that the splitting of one atom causes the breakup of another and so on. This can be done by positioning explosives around it, or simply ramming one piece of nuclear material into another. Compress the atoms enough and the chain reaction begins.

She looks more closely at the laptop. The keys have barely been used. Some fingerprints on the screen, but no hints there. The locked closet within which the bomb was hidden opened with a key they had retrieved from a drain using a flexible magnet. The magnet had in turn been found in a safe opened with a password generated by the page number of a Bible passage. And so on. Is this the last test? No, for the door of the hotel room remains locked.

“Come on, Arcadia,” Henry is speaking again, “we have to try something.”



She refuses to admit defeat. Try something, try anything. Sixteen, zero-six...

“I thought you could do this sort of thing standing on your head.”

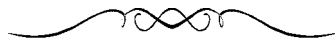
She tries to shut out his voice as the seconds tick down, clearing her mind for one last attempt to view the problem from every angle, when she sees her mistake.

“Once again, Henry”—she smiles for the first time—“you have saved our lives.”

On the laptop keyboard she taps an “L” and then an “8”. The timer stops at six seconds.

Henry looks at the screen, then her, in confusion. “What does that even mean?”

Above them she hears footsteps, leather-soled shoes on metal. “Nicely done, Miss Arcadia.” Dr. Joseph Bell steps forward on the elevated walkway that runs the length of the fake hotel room. “You’ve made it further than anyone else today. Let’s see if you can get past the final test.”



It is the first time she has been back to Oxford in a year. Her previous visit also featured a bomb—in that case a real one that threatened the John Radcliffe Hospital, which serves as the university’s medical school.

That was when she first met Dr. Bell, while searching for information about her birth. Her medical records show that she was born at the John Radcliffe, second child

of Euphemia and John Hebron. A month later, the couple died in a car crash. She was adopted by the same family that had taken in their first child, her brother Magnus, seven years earlier.

Yet the Hebrons' own paper records make clear that they died childless. Dr. Bell himself signed the death certificates. When she discovered this, a phone call brought her to Dr. Bell's office; there she found him strapped to a bomb large enough to kill them both and destroy the hospital—removing any evidence of the deception and the only two people who knew about it.

And yet. That bomb was also a test, a means of evaluating her for—for what?

On this occasion, the “bomb” is the coda to a day of more subtle evaluation. Admission to Oxford University is notoriously opaque. Past and anticipated grades are considered, a personal statement is thrown in, but central to the alchemy is an interview with fellows of the college to which one applies. She once dined with some of those fellows and has yet to conclude whether that is an advantage or not. Having observed their alcohol-infused discussions at close range makes it difficult to maintain the proper reverence when being asked why she should be admitted into the hallowed halls.

Two days ago, her mathematics teacher, Mr. Aveling, was tasked with speaking to the Priory School's upper sixth students who had been selected for Oxford interviews. After some notes on practicalities and personal hygiene,



his advice boiled down to two things: be brilliant—and don't let the school down.

And so on Tuesday she, Henry, and five other upper sixth students arrived at Oxford with overnight bags. Only she and Henry had applied to Magdalen College and were dropped off first when the school minibus pulled into the High Street. From the Porter's Lodge they were directed to small bedrooms on separate floors. A quick inspection revealed hers to have been abandoned hastily by an undergraduate student sent home at the end of term. He or she—from the state of the basin, definitely *he*—could do with some tips on personal hygiene.

Henry continues to think that he has a chance of being admitted into Oxford only because of his parents' money, an underestimation of his intellect that she finds endearing. Of more concern is that he might be applying to Magdalen only because that is where she applied. She avoids social media, but this is an occasion where the simple status update "it's complicated" might be apt. Set that thought aside for later consideration.

For her part, she has decided on Oxford because it is not Cambridge, where her brother spent so many years. Magnus has at last graduated and assumed a government position about which he takes undue pleasure in being mysterious. But the impression he left on Cambridge—metaphorical and literal—is significant; she has no desire to be seen in his plus-size shadow.

If she is honest with herself, the choice of Oxford was

also partly due to Dr. Bell's advice. Having nearly been blown up together forged a bond of a kind; he also tried to help her find out the truth about her parents. They have not seen each other since then, but six months ago he wrote her a letter in precise longhand, inquiring after her studies and suggesting that she consider Oxford in general and his college, Magdalen, in particular.

Why his advice resonated with her is unclear. It was more than the shared experience of the bomb, more than his help. Set that thought aside also for the time being.

After settling into their rooms they were given a tour of the college and then invited to dinner at Hall. On her previous visit she dined at High Table as a guest of Dr. Bell. Last night's fare was simpler: a mix of proteins, starches, and vegetables all apparently chosen for their different shades of yellow. She sat with Henry as other students milled about, sizing each other up and making half-hearted attempts at conversation that tended to focus on the public school one attended, with occasional gasps at encountering someone from a comprehensive.

The next morning two interviews were scheduled with tutors at the college. An ageless woman in a shapeless sweater asked her about organic chemistry. Then Lucian Smythe, one of the younger fellows whom she met on her previous visit, gave her a simple problem to solve concerning seven pirates who were to divide up gold according to some unlikely "pirate rules".

Each discussion was moderately interesting, yet she had



begun to reconsider whether the intellectual stimulation of an Oxford education was quite worth the hassle of its peculiar institutions and individuals. It was towards the end of lunch—the colour palette now extending to include orange—that Dr. Bell approached and asked if she and her friend might be willing to take part in an optional component of admissions that the college was trying out.

Refusal seemed churlish, so she and Henry accompanied him through the cloisters and onto a lawn on which a marquee had been erected.

“We are preparing for a Gaudy next week—a kind of party for former students of the college,” Dr. Bell explained. “There is a feast and dancing in Hall, but there are also games, magic shows and so on and so forth.”

He led them into the marquee, within which a stage had been built. But it was a stage without space for an audience, four walls enclosing a box in the middle of the oversized tent. A cheery sign on the only door read: “Welcome to the Hotel California”. They stepped inside. It had indeed been decorated as a hotel room, approximately four metres square, complete with bed, closet, and washbasin. There was no ceiling, presumably the better to observe participants from the elevated walkway that ran along the top of one wall, reached via steps from outside the room.

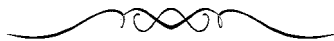
“It’s called an ‘Escape Room’,” Dr. Bell said at the time. “Apparently they’re quite the thing in America these days. One has a certain amount of time and must solve puzzles and so on to escape, as it were. Some of our graduate

students requested it for the Gaudy and then one bright spark asked if we could use it for admissions.”

Dr. Bell sniffed. “I confess that I doubted whether it would be particularly useful as an admissions exercise, but we’ve had a handful of candidates try it out. Most fared rather poorly, I fear—I suspect the lateral thinking demanded throws off many of our narrower candidates.”

The basin was not connected to a water supply, she observed. A picture hung on the wall too upright, probably hinged and possibly with a safe behind it. Symbols had been drawn on the plasterboard above the bed; the bed itself was covered with a quilt whose patchwork followed a complex sequence. Pi, as she later confirmed. There was an odd, sweet smell in the room.

“And then I recalled”—Dr. Bell was still speaking—“that you were rather good at puzzles. So would you be willing to give it a shot?”



“How is ‘L-8’ even an answer?” Henry protests.

She is already onto the next problem, but the fact that they are in this together suggests that teamwork is part of the “test”. So she pauses to explain.

“Actually you gave me the answer yourself,” she says. “Stand on your head and look at the problem.”

Frowning, Henry crouches down and is about to put his head on the carpet.

“Not *literally*,” she tuts. “Just imagine you were looking at the sequence upside down. ‘16, 06, 68, 88, __, 98’ becomes ‘86, __, 88, 89, 90, 91’. So the answer is ‘87’, which you can write upside down as ‘L8’.”

Henry’s mouth forms a silent “O”. She should be more generous: it was he who first worked out that the flexible magnet could reach down the drain of the washbasin and retrieve the key.

Now there is just one puzzle left. The storyline that Dr. Bell explained to them, setting up the game, was that they were secret agents seeking to disarm a nuclear bomb and then escape from the hotel room before enemy agents arrived. A somewhat implausible scenario, but justifying a series of challenges without requiring additional real estate.

Having dealt with the bomb, they must now work out how to leave the room. The symbols above the bed are the key:



The same symbols appear on five buttons next to the door, which is held shut by an electromagnetic lock. Adjacent to the buttons, an emergency release offers a simpler exit from the room—but concedes defeat in the game. Above the buttons are three lights.

Henry presses one button at random, earning a beep. He then presses a second, and a third. On the fifth button a buzzer sounds and the first light glows red. So, five buttons to press but in a precise order. The first of the three lights stays illuminated.

“I think that’s enough guessing, Henry,” she says. “We get three tries at this and that was the first.”

On the walkway above them, she knows, Dr. Bell is smiling. He knows the solution and is seeing how long it takes her to work it out.

Five buttons. More than three thousand possible combinations, fewer—one hundred and twenty—if each button is to be pressed only once. But they only have two more attempts.

“I’ve got it!” cries Henry. “It’s the number of straight lines. It goes from zero to one, then two, then four, then five.” Triumphant, and before she can stop him, he presses the buttons in sequence:



A buzzer sounds twice; a second red light illuminates.

“Two strikes, Miss Arcadia,” Dr. Bell intones above them. “You would do well to choose carefully next time.”

She has also considered the straight lines briefly, and the number of angles, enclosed areas, and other geometric

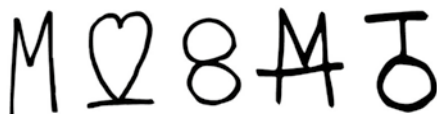
features. But the theme has been lateral thinking. What does it mean to think laterally? Adopting an indirect or creative approach, as opposed to solving a problem logically; looking at it from a different perspective? Edward de Bono made a small industry out of telling people to think using six coloured hats, each representing a different aspect from which a problem might be approached.

Yet “lateral” simply means from the side. So what would it mean to look at this question sideways?

Again she smiles, approaching the keypad.

“Arcadia,” Henry says quietly, hesitating before stepping aside. “Are you sure you’ve got it? I mean, of course you’re sure—but are you actually right?”

“You worry too much, Henry,” she replies. She presses the buttons in the correct order:



Instead of a buzzer, the lock emits a single beep and the three lights turn green.

“Well done again, Miss Arcadia,” Dr. Bell says. Seeing Henry’s evident confusion, he adds: “Might you explain the solution to your friend? I thought it was a rather clever use of lateral thinking.”

Henry is frowning at the symbols and holds up a hand. “Give me a second.” Then he uses the same hand to slap

himself in the forehead. “Of course—lateral thinking, sideways. Each of these figures is symmetrical, a mirror image of itself. Take the right half of each and you get 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.”

She resists the urge to congratulate him as it will sound patronising. “Exactly,” is all she says.

Gentleman that he is, Henry reaches forward to open the door for her and then his frown returns. It opened easily when they came in, but the magnetic lock has not disengaged. He leans against the door but it is solid wood and does not move.

“Is there a problem?” Dr. Bell enquires from his perch.

“The door release appears to be jammed,” she replies, trying the handle herself. The lights above the button are shining a steady green but the door remains locked.

“Now that’s odd,” Dr. Bell says. He turns to pull a lever on the side of the walkway. There is the sound of a latch being released and the scrape of metal on metal as a narrow set of retractable stairs is lowered from the elevated platform. Gasping, he climbs down the steps, catches his breath, and then joins them at the door.

He pushes the buttons in the correct sequence once again. Again the lights glow green, there is a single beep, but the door remains locked.

“How strange,” Dr. Bell murmurs to himself. “It has worked impeccably all day. Perhaps there is a bug in the system. Ah well.” Sighing, he presses the emergency release and gestures for Henry to try the door.

The two-second alarm that rings covers the sound of footsteps on the metal walkway, but it fades before the clanking of the stairs being raised has subsided. Henry is still trying in vain to open the door when she taps him on the shoulder to turn around.

“What?” Henry says, looking at her and Dr. Bell before following their gaze up to the walkway. Colour drains from his face as he registers the person standing there. “Oh God, not again.”

“Hello to you too, sweetie-pie. Did you miss me?” The voice is hers and yet not hers; accelerated slightly, like the movements of the figure, clad entirely in black, that now paces above them. The figure is also hers and not hers; the same shape but moving in jerks, twitches of nervous energy being released. The other her blows a kiss towards Henry, who shifts as if to dodge its impact.

“Hello, Moira,” Arcadia says at last. “Long time no see.”

She has met Moira only once before. On that occasion, her twin sister shot her with a tranquiliser dart, tied her to a chair, threatened to suffocate her with a plastic bag, and then pointed a loaded gun at her head. Apart from that, the encounter went well.

The other her grins. “Indeed! So, welcome to my Hotel California, Arky. If you had paid more attention to the song, you would have known that you can check out any time you like—but you can never leave.”

It was Moira who strapped the bomb to Dr. Bell that almost blew up the John Radcliffe Hospital. Having

escaped from the laboratory in which she was part of a genetic experiment, her plan had initially been to assume Arcadia's identity and remove any evidence of her own existence. On each occasion, however, she had given Arcadia a chance to cheat death, or to prove her worthiness. But worthiness for what?

"Not drinking today?" Arcadia asks. Keeping Moira in conversation seemed to rein in some of her more homicidal tendencies. At their previous meeting, the other her carried a bottle of fluids that she needed to drink regularly—electrolytes, beta-blockers, and something called DHA—or else her brain would begin to shut down. Eventually, she would die.

Moira taps her arm. "My variation on the nicotine patch. A slow release of all the goodies I need to start my day right. That and an apple a day keep the doctor away. But you have to throw the apple fairly hard." The other her laughs to herself. "It's always apples, isn't it, Dr. Bell?"

Dr. Bell is looking at her curiously. "Am I to understand," he says to Arcadia, "that this is the girl who nearly killed us a year ago? Your twin?"

"I didn't know she was my twin at the time," Arcadia replies.

"Oh, so we're playing it like that, are we?" Moira interrupts. "You know, Arky, they say the Devil's greatest trick is persuading you that he doesn't exist. The problem is that people are so gullible. Just think how dim the average person is—and half of them are even dumber than that!"

Why is Moira here, why now? After the aborted—or abandoned—attempts to kill Arcadia a year ago, the other her disappeared. On the same day, one of the scientists who ran the laboratory in which Moira had been imprisoned died when his car exploded. Though there was clearly foul play, the police have no leads as to who killed Lysander Starr or why. It is possible that Moira had planted the bomb—she certainly had a motive—but a simple detonation lacked... flair.

“So,” continues Moira, “you must be wondering why I’m here. I can hear the wheels in your brain spinning even at this distance.”

As she moves on the walkway, a backpack slung over one shoulder swings beside her. Like her dress and the beret under which her hair is gathered, it is black. Add a lazily held Gauloise and she might pass for an aspiring French intellectual. Moira’s words reflect her talent for mimicry; perhaps that now extends to fashion also.

Keep her talking. “Indeed,” Arcadia says, “because it looks like you were enjoying your time in Paris.”

Moira grins again. The stage lights make her face shine—is she sweating? But she is also pleased. “Oh *très bien*, Arky, *vachement bien*! You carry on demonstrating that you are more than just a bag of hammers. And when I heard that you were applying to Oxford, I thought to myself: Arky needs a memorable admissions test. Not the tedious interviews and written papers, but something that really does *test* you. Like the German philosopher with the

whip says: that which does not kill us, makes us stronger. So I'd like to give you a test that really will make you stronger—because if you fail it, you die.”

Something that is nearly fatal seems more likely to leave you weakened rather than strengthened—but it does not seem prudent to point that out to Moira right now.

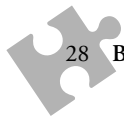
“I can illustrate,” the other her says, “with a story. Once upon a time, there was a teenage girl stranded on an island covered by forest. No Gilligan, no professor and Mary Ann, just the girl and her forest. On a day that a strong east wind is blowing, lightning strikes the easternmost point of the island and starts a fire. The flames devour everything in their path, fanned by the breeze and moving from east to west. The girl's island is two kilometres across; in two hours, the entire island will be consumed and the girl with it. The only beach is on the eastern tip and impossible to reach. The rest of the coast is cliffs or jagged rocks, so she cannot jump into the water, either.”

Moira pauses for dramatic effect. “But the girl has read her Nietzsche and her will to live is strong. So how does she survive?”

“This is ridiculous,” Henry says, pulling out his phone. “I'm calling the cops.”

Arcadia puts her hand on his arm. “Wait a minute, Henry,” she whispers. “I don't see any harm playing along with this game.” With the door locked, there is also no escape other than past Moira.

Beside her, Dr. Bell shifts uneasily. Yet at the same time



he, too, seems intrigued by the problem. “I assume, young lady”—he clears his throat—“that our protagonist cannot call for help, and that there is no convenient stream to divert and thus extinguish the fire?”

Moira resumes pacing, one arm checking something in the backpack. “You assume correctly.”

“What about a chainsaw?” Henry pipes up. “With a chainsaw she could cut a firebreak.”

“There is no chainsaw,” Moira replies. “Nor is there a fire hydrant, flame-resistant clothing, hydrogel, or a convenient hatch into a mysterious fireproof tunnel. Nothing. Just her wits.”

Henry sniffs. “How has she been surviving on this island if she doesn’t even have food and water?”

“Once again, Henry demonstrates all the intellectual sharpness of a mashed potato,” says Moira, rolling her eyes. “Fine. She has all of that and a partridge in a pear tree—on the *eastern* side of the island. Now, can we get back to her imminent incineration?”

“She should start her own fire,” Arcadia says quietly. “Use matches if she has them, or else take a branch to the edge of the current blaze and light it. Then run with it to the western side of the island. The wind will keep the new fire moving west, so if she can burn the trees on that side, once that fire is out she can shelter there when the original fire approaches.”

“Oh bravo, Arky!” Moira seems genuinely pleased. “I am so glad I didn’t kill you the last time we met. Normally,

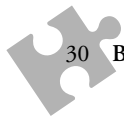
when I miss someone—which is rare—I take another shot and hit them the second time. But life without you would be like a broken pencil: pointless.”

“This is all very interesting,” says Henry, “but I suppose we should be getting on our way now. Nice seeing you, Moira, I guess. Thanks for not shooting me today.”

“Please don’t rush off, sweetie-pie,” Moira calls. The forlorn tone in her voice hardens quickly: “Oh, that’s right. You can’t, because I’ve locked the door and have the only key. But you’re right that this scene is dragging a little and so it’s time to move on to our final game.”

Moira points to the keypad next to the door. “You’re familiar now with the good Dr. Bell’s house of mirrors numerical system. Entertaining but a little—elementary, don’t you think? I’ve edited the system that controls the lock so that you have one more task to complete.” Again, the other her adjusts the backpack on her shoulder and then takes out a bottle.

“For this game,” Moira continues, “we need three volunteers. Let’s call them... Dr. Bell, Arky, and Henry. They are standing in a line and Dr. Bell is looking at Arky, but Arky is making cow eyes at Henry. As for Henry, he’s staring blankly into space. Now, a key part of the game is that in this universe everyone is either guilty or innocent. Let’s say—just for the purposes of argument—that Dr. Bell is guilty, but Henry is innocent. And your question is a simple one: is someone who is guilty looking at someone who is not?”



This is about more than just making admission to Oxford memorable. In her own peculiar way, Moira is trying to communicate something to her. But what? The bottle in her twin's hand is unlike the one she drank from when they last met. And it appears to have something sticking out of the top.

"Can I really not call the cops?" Henry whispers, a little too loudly. "She's obviously mad."

"A madness most discreet," Moira replies. "A choking gall, and a preserving sweet." Seeing his puzzled expression, the other her explains: "That was Shakespeare, Henry. *Romeo and Juliet*? You should read it one day. I was quoting Romeo and intimating that my outward appearance of mental disorganisation might be due to a romantic sentiment."

Henry's frown contradicts his nodding. "Oh, I see," he says, not seeing.

"Lighten up, Henry!" Moira replies, cheerily. "As they say: laughter is the best medicine." Then she frowns. "Actually, that's not entirely true. Not if you've got syphilis, for example. If you've got syphilis you're much better off with penicillin than with laughter." The other her pauses, train of thought apparently derailed. One hand holds the bottle with the cloth sticking out of the top, the other reaches into the bag and produces a cigarette lighter.

And then the flow of words resumes: "Anyhow, as I was saying, is a guilty person looking at an innocent person? You have one chance to answer and three choices: yes, no,

or it's impossible to know. I suppose you do have a fourth option, which is not to tell me. But I'll just take that as the wrong answer and, well, you know how that goes."

The walls of the fake hotel room are wood and plasterboard. Difficult to smash through, but she and Henry might be able to use the furniture to climb out. Harder for Dr. Bell.

Moira has paused again, not due to confusion but in the manner of the host of a reality television programme. "So if your answer is 'yes', you press 1 on the keypad by the door. If it's 'no', you press 2. And if you decide it is impossible to know, you press 3. Correct answer opens the door. Anything else locks it and throws away the key." The other her regards the cigarette lighter. "Filthy habit, but the lighters are irresistible for those pyromaniacs among us." A practised flick of her thumb and a spark ignites the butane gas. An inch of flame now rises from her hand.

"I thought about giving you a time limit, but that's so been-there, done-that. Instead, I thought we could each estimate how long it will take for this pretend hotel room to burn to the ground. I'm afraid I don't think the fire marshals would be very impressed with this place, especially since the carpet has been doused with naphtha."

Moira now brings the lighter to the cloth sticking out of the bottle. It ignites immediately, probably soaked in alcohol or kerosene to serve as a wick. And when the bottle smashes, whatever is inside—petrol?—will spread the fire.



The other her lifts the bottle above her head, raising an eyebrow also. “Ready?”

“Oh no you don’t.” Beside her, Henry is preparing to do something rash. He still holds the phone with which he had planned to call the police, now being considered for one final missive.

“Henry,” she begins, but his arm has already wound back and it is too late to stop him.

Thrown with force, the phone appears to travel a straight line towards Moira. Its true path would be a parabola with some adjustment for air resistance, but evolution and Henry’s years of playing cricket mean that his aim is accurate even without using differential calculus. It hits the other her in the shoulder—was he aiming at her head?—knocking her sideways and causing her to drop the Molotov cocktail.

Henry’s pleasure at hitting his target is evident, a small “Yes!” issuing from his lips. But the bottle falling from Moira’s upstretched hand lands on the metal walkway and smashes. The liquid inside spreads across and through the platform, igniting a curtain of flame.

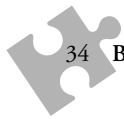
Standing in the middle of it, the other her stumbles as if confused. As she turns, her dress weaves in and out of the orange tongues. Fire needs oxygen, fuel, and heat. In seconds, the temperature of the cotton rises to the point that it, too, ignites. Tendrils of flame now rise up Moira’s back as she raises her hands to cover her face. Surrounded by an aura of incandescence, she moves sideways but that only increases the oxygen supply, fanning the flames.

It is only seconds since the smash of the bottle, but the fire has made no sound. When the scream escapes Moira's lips it is more animal than human. More than pain, it is a cry of rage and frustration. This, surely, is not how Moira's final act was to play out: destroyed by her own weapon, dropped at her own feet. The other her cannot outrun the flames that trail her, yet now she races to the end of the elevated walkway. Stairs lead down to the ground beyond the mock hotel room but she cannot see. She stumbles. Hands still covering her face, she falls, disappearing behind the wall to land with a thud on the grass outside, wisps of smoke curling towards the marquee above.

"My God..." Henry begins, perhaps shocked at what he has done. But there will be time enough to deal with Moira's return and departure. For now, the fire from the walkway has engulfed the wall of the hotel room farthest from the door. And, true to her word, the carpet that would normally be fire-resistant has also ignited and a sheet of flame moves towards the three of them.

Smoke fills the room; even without a ceiling, soon there will not be enough oxygen to remain conscious. If it were possible to remove oxygen from the room completely, that would extinguish the fire—but also the lives of anyone inside. Nor is there any means of taking away the fuel or reducing the temperature. Flee, then.

Beside her, Dr. Bell is coughing but knows enough to back away from the flame and move towards the door.



Henry is motionless. It is a waste of oxygen, but she needs him to listen: “Henry,” she calls. “Time to go.”

He shakes his head as if to clear it and moves to the door also. On the walkway above them, his phone smoulders.

The door is locked and Moira said they only had one chance to open it. To do so, she has left them what is now her final problem. Dr. Bell is guilty and looking at Arky; Arky is looking at Henry, who is innocent.

“Oh crap,” Henry says after a futile attempt to push the door open. “Moira and her bleeding puzzles. What did she want us to work out? Is a guilty person looking at an innocent one? You can’t tell—we don’t know whether this ‘Arky’ is guilty or innocent. So it’s got to be number three.”

He reaches for the button but this time she grabs his wrist. “Wait,” she says firmly. There is more to this problem. “We don’t know if she is guilty or innocent. But we do know that she is *either* guilty *or* innocent.”

The heat is becoming as oppressive as the smoke and they now crouch near the door, Dr. Bell continuing to cough uncontrollably. Explanation can wait until later. But if the Arky in the problem must be either guilty or innocent, then even though it is impossible to know which she is, either she is innocent and being looked at by Dr. Bell, or she is guilty and she is looking at Henry.

Reaching up, she presses the mirrored symbol for “1” and there is a click as the magnetic lock releases. The door opens and they stumble outside, flames beginning to climb

from the walls of the stage to the marquee above. Dr. Bell is struggling to stand, so she and Henry take one arm each and pull him out onto the lawn. Fresh air fills their lungs and they collapse onto the grass, noticing for the first time the cries of a gathering crowd and the peal of a fire alarm.

She turns to watch as the marquee burns, an acrid smell filling the air. The plastic of the tent must have been treated also, accelerating the conflagration. Then the aluminium frame begins to buckle and the marquee collapses in on itself like a marshmallow left to roast too long, a funeral pyre for the twin sister she never got to know.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photograph by Isabelle Delcourt



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