

Law of Effect

A Delta Green scenario by Fergal O'Brien

“Desires and passions pervert human judgement, and thus people make errors to which more logical life-forms are not prone”

-Gilbert, Attribution and Interpersonal Perception

A few words about this scenario

Very often Call of Cthulhu scenarios come with pages upon pages of back history which explain why the players are in the situation they are in right now, encompassing the life histories of several key characters. That's not going to happen here. Delta Green is supposed to be a conspiracy branch of the Call of Cthulhu game. In my opinion, it makes a mockery of the whole idea of secret conspiracies if the players can understand what is going on. Why do players always assume that they will be able to unravel the plans which a major world power has spent years coming up with? What's worse, what gives them the gall to say 'that's stupid, that would never happen' instead of 'OK, now I'm confused (not that I'm referring to specific incidents...honest)? Now that I've finished ranting, I'll get to the point. Nowhere in this scenario will you find justifications for the overall plan. There may be explanations of specific events. I may even let little parts of the plot go (**yes, there is MiGo involvement**). On the whole though there are going to be several things happening and various characters/creatures appearing for which there is absolutely no explanation. Consider this my attempt to try to get the feel of alien logic and overarching conspiracies across.

This is your sanctuary.

This whole scenario takes place in UCD Arts Block and the adjoining library building. There are three different maps, but here is a quick verbal description of salient points. Firstly the Arts Block is divided into a number of sections each designated by a letter (ABCDEFGHIJK, there is no section I and H is ground floor only). All of these sections are interconnected, but not all of them have the same amount of stories. What this means is that while players might be able to travel from section G to section A on the first floor by going through E, they won't be able to do this on the second floor because E no longer exists at this level. There is a main concourse on the ground floor containing a large glassed-in courtyard, 7 lecture theatres, a coffee shop and several social areas. There is also a ground floor containing two computer rooms, the drama rooms, a pool room and lots and lots of lockers. The ground floor (which is actually significantly above the pavement outside) connects to the library building through a long glassed-over tunnel. Directly across from the tunnel are the doors to the library complete with security guard and anti-theft sensors. Downstairs in the shop and the donut place. A lot to keep track of huh? This is good, because that is the point. Little plot bit number 2. **This all takes place inside the characters' heads (kind of)**. Considering that all of them except one have less than a year's experience in UCD, they won't know the ways around off by heart (trust me on this). This gives you license to change the architecture about a bit, putting in dead ends where there wouldn't otherwise be dead ends and so forth. Especially when they go into the labyrinth that is the locker area ☺.

Apologia

This is going to be a bit strange. Yeah, I know every scenario writer prefaces their game with that, but this one really is a little bit strange. Firstly, the beginning is totally out of your hands. It's totally up to the players for the first couple of minutes and you only start interfering when they look like they are getting bored. Secondly, there is no specific way in which this game is supposed to run. This is largely because there is no actual back story or reasoning for it. Also there is no ending. It ends whenever you feel like it, for no apparent reason (or for an apparent reason if you so wish). This is kind of handy as far as stressed out organisers are concerned, but makes things a bit random ☺.

So here is the format of the game as it stands. There is a start. There are several things which can happen at any stage it seems appropriate. There are also events that are tied to specific areas. There is an epilogue. Are we sitting comfortably?

Waiting for the Scenario

The scenario starts in a tutorial. Specifically, it is an English tutorial and the topic for discussion on this particular day is that fine (sic) piece of English Drama, *Waiting for Godot*. Thankfully, as a GM you are required to know absolutely nothing about the play. That's left for the players. Make sure that each of the players has the Godot background associated with their character. Some of them know a lot, some of them barely know that it's a play. It is up to the player who has the character Shawn to decide what the format of the tutorial will be. Let them at it for as long as you feel they are getting enjoyment out of it (within limits - tutorials last at the most 50 minutes. Let's not have critical theory the rpg). Eventually it is time for you to play your first card (well first scheduled one anyway. Feel free to throw in distractions earlier on if needs be). It's fairly simple, the phone rings. On the other end of the phone is Shawn's PhD supervisor, Dr. Tully. He has very little to say, but will say it in as long winded a manner as possible. His basic topic of conversation is an invitation to Shawn to a Departmental wine reception (fun, fun, fun). At some point in the conversation, he should cut off in mid sentence. This isn't a case of the connection being cut and the engaged tone ringing, it just cuts off. Absolutely no sound can be heard from the other end.

So what?

Gee, what a very strange occurrence. Not really. To be honest, for anybody except Cthulhu players, that shouldn't be enough to cause more than casual comment. Technology malfunctions all the time, especially in UCD. If your players are being sensible, you can use whatever mechanic you want to let them know that everything is eerily quiet. Once they go outside to check (or hell, once the tutorial ends) the main body of the scenario starts.

It's oh so quiet.

There is nobody left anywhere in the Art's Block. The entire place is deserted. For the first while, that's all there is to it. The whole place is deserted and they are left to wander around. Incidentally, the tutorial was in section C of the Art's Block on the 2nd floor. The main body of the English Department is in J which is just around the corner. Should they go there, they can easily find Tully's office which is also empty. Sitting on the desk will be a book (*Post-Feminist Critiques on Ancient Myths*) and an invitation to the aforementioned wine reception. There will be little squiggly doodle symbols in the margins of the book. These are concentrated around a passage referring to legends of

angels and how the use of the female form is just an attempt to put the inexplicable into a less threatening form. Included in this passage is the Rilke quote "Every angel is terrifying".

Before we go any further...

There are two main things which will happen in this scenario at times of your choosing. Both these events change things significantly, so choose the timing of these well. The first is that at some point they will bump into an entranced academic. He is a well dressed man of approximately 35 years of age, wearing a suit. He stands blankly on the spot doing nothing, no matter what they try to do to get him to move. If they move away, he will follow when they aren't looking. Thus, everytime they turn around he will be right behind them again, staring blankly at nothing (do they recognise him? Up to you). Eventually though, he will walk past them and around a corner. Should they follow him they will see him be lifted up into the air by something big, horrible and nasty. Well, we're going to assume that it is horrible and nasty. The problem is that it is completely **invisible**. Anyway, said invisible presence will tear the academic to shreds and fling him against the wall. If the PCs are watching, the academic will remain totally silent throughout the entire thing. If they aren't watching, they will hear a tortured pleading scream and then the academics body will impact on a wall within their line of site (or variation e.g. they run around the corner and see suspended body being mangled). Whichever way this happens they will feel a vast terrifying and malevolent presence moving towards them. (Feel free to do whatever San rolls you feel appropriate). You now have your main antagonist. **This creature will stalk them throughout the building for the rest of the game whenever you feel it is appropriate.** I'm not going to give it stats; mediate any encounters on the basis of how the players handle it. The creature moves at a reasonable pace. For reasonable pace read '**fast enough to make the players break into a panicked run**'. While it is at all times invisible, it can very much be sensed; almost like an approaching pressure.

The second really important thing is that at some stage everybody is going to reappear. I'd advocate timing this so that it occurs just after something which could be misinterpreted as being relevant and possibly climactic. For example, they might be reading something out of a book, or they may be talking to one of the NPCs. Whenever it occurs, allow the return to normalcy to last for a short while. Preferably they should be somewhere busy (in the concourse or the library are good places). Out of the corner of their eye, have one or two of them notice a person engaged in a strange activity. **He is counting something.** What it is depends on where they are. It could be bricks in a wall, books on a shelf, or any other fruitless act of numeracy. After this, everything stops again. This time all the people will still be around. They will all be frozen on the spot instead.

A few places of note

There are a number of places where the players may wander. Here is a list of a few of them and any relevant details.

The Doors - Kind of obvious huh? Oh no, we're trapped in a building with an invisible killer. Gee, do you think we should try the doors. They ain't getting out of it that easily though. The doors are all locked. The glass in the doors are strangely resistant to being

broken. They can't see anyone outside. No, emergency exits don't open either.

The Psychology Department - this is the highest point in the building, in D5. It is one of the few places in the building where a noise can be heard from. There is a photocopier constantly going outside the secretary's office. If they are there when there are people around, there will be a fortyish bespectacled male standing in front of it with his hand on the cover. The machine has amassed a large pile of copies from a history of psychology text. The page details the Salem Witch Trials and contains details of how traces of ergot were found in the grain supply, and the delusional effect this had. It is worth noting that the Psychology Dept. is a dead end. There are no corridors leading to anywhere else. Only the stairs/lift offer a way out.

The Lower Ground Floor (LG) - There are a number of areas of note down here. Opposite the AD stairwell are LG3 and LG4, computer rooms which are full of PCs and Macs respectively. Underneath the stairs down from the Services desk are LG1 and 2 which are owned by Dramsoc (detailed below). Along the corridor which connects the two main areas is the Trap; the Student Union pool hall. Here's an important bit - all of the LG area contains lockers. Most of them are concentrated in the area around the BC stairwell, which is a maze of lockers. It's actually feasible to get temporarily lost amongst all the lockers there. If they are wandering through said area, the nasty beastie should definitely stalk them. When he manifests here, the locker doors open and slam as he moves past them - just for effect. Should anyone hide from the beast down here, they will actually be able to get a look at his shadow - 'tis quite hideous (San). Incidentally, you can throw in as many alcoves as you want in the LGs. There actually are offices that are hidden by lockers. It's a strange place.

Dramsoc - no matter at what stage of the scenario they go in here it will be the same. There is a large wooden counter which encircles both doors. The right hand door leads into LG2, which is a back stage area separated from the stage by rotating flaps. Lots of junk all over the place. The left door leads to LG1 which is where the stage is. There are portable tiers of seats which contain no-one at all. In the near upper left corner is a lighting booth suspended on metal legs. The stage area contains an impressive looking prop tree and a big ramp covered in materials intended to represent a woodland floor. There are two people on stage (even if this is the first part of the scenario), both frozen in place. One of these is dressed as a clergyman and is genuflecting with eyes downcast. The other wears dark robes (unclear just what colour they are) with big shoulder pads and wears white Kabuki makeup. He is lit by a purple drop spot (i.e. light from directly above). The rest of the stage is very dimly lit in green. At some random point the standing figure will start to speak, although nothing except his lips moves. The voice is loud and hollow sounding. He recites the following -

"Yet it is now too late to heal
The incapable and cumbrous shame
Which makes me when with men I deal
More powerless than the blind or lame

"O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small

durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! Creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep"

Shawn should have little problem recognising this as Hopkins (roll if you like). He would know that Hopkins was a Jesuit priest, converted from Protestantism. While much of his earlier poetry was exultant and showed a great love for life and nature, it soon became tortured and depressive. Many scholars believe that Hopkins suffered a massive crisis of faith.

Lecture Theatres - There are seven lecture theatres in Arts, the biggest of which is the gargantuan theatre L which holds approx. 600. Should they try to go into any of these wedge shaped rooms (incidentally, you enter from the ground floor into the top and then go down along the tiers), they may find lecture overheads from lectures in progress still shining on the wall. Sample overheads include:

- An analysis of one of the stories from Plato's *Republic*
 - Macroeconomics
 - The history of American involvement in Middle Eastern affairs
- My, don't overheads cast shadows? That's a perfect place for a big misshapen shadow to appear. Also, one of the overheads will be from a Greek & Roman Civilisation lecture and will have lots of arcane squiggles and a flat drawing of several men holding scrolls standing around in a circle.

The Library Tunnel - The Arts Building and the Library Building are connected by a long tunnel. At both ends are two sets of glass double doors. Technically, there is also a door to the SU leading off the tunnel but they are never going to have a chance to go in there. Here's why. As they step into the tunnel they will here some strange breathy whispering in their ears. If they move in further, they will lose sight of the tunnel and each other. Here they will experience their visions. Each of these visions is part truth and part exaggeration, and is derived from part of their life that they would rather forget about. You may want to do each vision in two parts (presumably they will be coming back through the tunnel at some stage) or you can do them all at once. Here they are -

Shawn - Shawn is a young boy again (approx. 10). He is watching his parents go out the door and is filled with dread. His brother has a large grin on his face and is assuring the Mum and Dad that everything will be fine...

Basic rational - Shawn was unmercifully bullied as a child. Not just the usual sibling fisticuffs either. His brother used to terrorise him mercilessly. Whenever his parents went out, Shawn was in for hell. He would spend most of his time hiding with tears streaking down his face as his brother stalked him throughout the apartment. His brother threatened to kill him if he ever told what happened. One day something terrible happened. As he struggled with his brother, his brother tripped and fell out of an open window, falling to his death. Overcome with guilt, Shawn could never tell anyone what happened. These are the events he is going to relive.

Rachel – Rachel is dying and there is nothing she can do about it. Her skin is drawn across her face revealing the lines of the skull below. Her limbs have withered and

atrophied. Everyone around her wears a look of undisguisable pity on their faces. If she tries to talk to anyone, she won't get any satisfactory conversation. A lot of yes dears and no dears. Relations whom she hasn't seen for years have come to crowd around and see her one last time – some of them to unload a burden of their guilt before it is too late. At some stage she will notice a dark man whom she doesn't recognise standing in the corner. He will eventually walk over to her. All the relations are oblivious to his presence. As he reaches out to touch her, watch for the players' reaction. It should be clear that this is death. If the player screams and struggles then he keeps reaching out until the end of the vision. If the player accepts it (a valid interpretation of the character) then have Death give a little smile, draw his hand back and walk away.

Marianne – there are a number of ways you can handle Marianne's vision. If you look at her character sheet, you will see that it suggests all the elements of child abuse from her father. This is not the case. What actually used to happen is that her mother used to beat her father. Her father felt hideously ashamed of this, quite unmanned by the whole experience, but couldn't bring himself to hit back. He used come upstairs sobbing after the experience and come into Marianne's room, tell her how much he loved her and sit there with her for hours. Marianne doesn't remember very clearly, as she was very young at the time. Therefore there are a number of routes for this vision. You can do the bed scene, or you can have her in bed listening to the beating. Or you could have her walking downstairs to investigate, seeing everything from the skewed perspective of a young child. Your choice.

Christina – by far the most Cthulhu-esque vision here. Christina parents were deviant to say the least. She was taken from them when she was two, and believes them to have been wonderful people. Not so. They were in fact cultists. Of course, this never came to light properly. Instead they were busted for running a child pornography ring. Let's just say that certain Unspeakable Entities like those sort of unspeakable acts. Christina's vision should be from a two-year-olds perspective. Thus, nothing should be very clear. There are two people who she recognises as Mommy and Daddy, and several other adults around. The room is very smoky and there are candles lit everywhere. Several children are crying loudly. One naked child (far older than she) is tied down. Others are in cages. Suddenly one of the men moves towards her. Her parents are shocked to see her there but Daddy moves in front of her and seems to be arguing with the man. The man hits Daddy and Daddy falls to the ground. Mommy is screaming. Suddenly the door bursts in and armed Gardai flood into the room. There is a lot of shouting and scuffling. The last thing she sees is a Garda bending down to pick her up and carry her away, as her mother struggles to reach her.

Ruari – Ruari must face that which has terrified him for years – his 'brother'. He is very young again, and is in the schoolyard surrounded by children. There is a fight about to start and he is going to be part of it. His opponent is the school bully. After being smacked around for a while, he should hear a voice telling him to step aside. That voice is inside his head. It's up to you how much you want to play through his 'brother' taking control, but once he does the school bully is going to get severely trounced. As a further vision he can be confronted by his brother, who will only appear in shadow. His brother will talk very aggressively and is obviously quite bitter that it is Ruari who is alive. Ruari's weakness sickens him.

Geoff – this is possibly the most disturbing of the visions so I would ask that you exercise some discretion. Geoff is in a dark cellar. The floor is damp and he is slumped in a corner. In his hand is a syringe and he can feel revulsion flooding up in him as he looks at it. There are other people in the cellar and there is a stench of decay. Beside him is his friend Robert. If he looks at him, he will see that his face is almost a skull it is so worn. He stinks of rot. From here there are a number of options. Robert can start to decay, oblivious to this and asking Geoff what's wrong. Alternatively, he could notice Ruari being brought in and something showing him how to shoot up. Friends, loved ones, or the other members of the group could be lying around in drug induced stupor.

When the vision finish, they tumble out of the library tunnel, the doors swinging closed behind them.

The Library Building – The library building is a bit odd, but here is a description of it from the point of view of someone who has just come out of the library tunnel. If you go left and then into an alcove there are lifts and stairs to five floors of offices. Nothing special, the corridors are a bit twisty, but not overly complicated. If no one from your group knows UCD, I'd advocate leaving this out as it just confuses matters (or even if they do, they could find a blank wall where the lifts should be). To the right are glass doors which lead into a landing area. In there is an office known as the forum (it's the centre for college societies). At any given time, that place is crawling with hacks. Also to the right are the stairs down to the student union shop. The doors downstairs which lead to USIT and 911 are locked. Straight across from the tunnel is the library itself. The entryway has swing barriers across it and detectors and in normal times is guarded by library security.

The library – Upon entering the library you stand opposite the long (approx. 50 ft) main desk. To the right are stairs to upstairs and library catalogues (both computer and paper). To the left are the escalators. Left of the escalators is the entrance to the legendary Special Collection (where students fear to tread), to the right is the Short Loan Collection. Here is a general layout of the library. There are 3 floors above the main one. It has no real sense to the layout. There will be rows upon rows of shelves, and then suddenly you are in a study area. There are also banks of computers tucked away on the top two floors (the one on the second from top you really have to look for). The floors get progressively smaller, with the biggest being the gargantuan floor just above the main one. In general anything on Arts or Commerce can be found on the big floor, anything science based is higher up.

There are actually a surprising amount of strange books in the library. *Malleus Maleficarum* is freely available in the Arts section. Who knows what kind of weird stuff is available in the special collection (nothing too blatant like the *Necronimicon* though)? There are also many religious texts available. In general, they should be able to find stuff that might seem to help. They will not find any real answers though. Red Herrings aplenty. Also to be found in the library is *Stephen* (see NPCs).

The SU shop – the student union shop is very little to speak of. It resides in a big cage. There is a long counter selling sweets, biscuits and stationery as well as UCD clothes. For some reason though there is an arcade game outside which is playing itself. The

game is *Area 51* and the guns are actually moving.

The Blob – UCD has a thing for strange art. One of the most notable of these is the Blob. It's stands on a 3-ft pedestal beside the BC stairwell. It's supposed to be a bird in a nest. It's a common meeting place.

The Wall – This is a large social area where UCD Gamesoc hang out. There are two wooden benches and some pointless wooden sculptures. Either being read (if part 2) or just lying on a bench (if part 1) will be a copy of the game *Conspiracy X*. There is also a refill pad containing a rough description of a ritual to 'draw back the materiel plane'. Feel free to let the players try it if they want (although obviously it's just for a campaign). If they are at the wall while people are present Geoff will recognise Dave who is a pretentious goth (reading *Conspiracy X*) and Donncha who is always very quiet and withdrawn. There are several others there, but no one seems to own the pad.

The other tunnel – on the first floor between A and B is a tunnel leading to the admin building. Characters wouldn't necessarily know this. People walk underneath that tunnel everyday and it never occurs to them to wonder where it is in Arts. Entering this tunnel also produces strange whispering noises, but unless you specifically want to produce visions again, all that happens is that they walk out of it exactly where they entered (game is complicated enough without another building). Be aware that players will very often spend hours trying to figure out how to get through tunnels like this. There is no solution.

The lecture tunnels – There are spiral staircases at the side of lecture theatres which lead down into tunnels which go behind the theatres themselves. These provide access to the bottom of the lecture theatre (so a lecturer doesn't have to walk down the tiered steps), and also contain locked store-rooms. Each one services two block of theatres (i.e. there are two tunnels). They are very dark, cold and quite dank.

Important NPCs

Quite apart from those people who've already appeared for little bit parts (and died), there are three NPCs who can be interacted with in a more concrete way.

Stephen – a familiar name to anyone who has read the Delta Green book, but obviously not the characters. He is most likely to appear in the library. He is a well dressed man who seems to be in his late twenties. He has a mobile phone with him that he can actually ring out on. He is going to be singularly unhelpful and will seem sublimely amused by the PC's predicament. He won't give a full name. He may introduce himself as Stephen, Alzis or even Godot. If in the library he is quite likely to pluck a copy of *Waiting For Godot* off the shelf (no matter what section they are in) and read the following passage:

ESTRAGON: What exactly did we ask him for?

VLADIMIR: Were you not there?

ESTRAGON: I can't have been listening.

VLADIMIR: Oh ... nothing very definite.

ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer.

VLADIMIR: Precisely.

ESTRAGON: A vague supplication.

VLADIMIR: Exactly.
ESTRAGON: And what did he reply?
VLADIMIR: That he'd see.
ESTRAGON: That he couldn't promise anything.
VLADIMIR: That he'd have to think it over.

He will at all times be supremely cordial if very unhelpful. He will make vague comments however which can be used to send the player scurrying about the building. Things along the lines of seeking out those who play with people's heads (Gamesoc? Psych. Dept.?).

The Man in Black – this individual can be spotted at various junctures throughout the scenario. Usually he won't stop to talk to the characters. He is especially useful in the later part of the scenario where he can be spotted in the unmoving crowd and then disappear. He can also be used in the earlier parts when he will appear in corridors and then disappear around corners. It will be quite a while before he even attempts to interact with the PCs – just freak them out. At later junctures he may react to them in a number of ways. If he talks to them, he will not under any circumstances reveal why he is there. He is a MIB after all. He may also take it upon himself to attack the characters at some stage. If you decide to do this, I'd suggest just having him shoot a PC with some kind of stun ray in the leg, while they are being chased by the beastie. It makes him seem far more nasty and evil than just shooting someone outright. It also raises questions as to motivation.

The Little Girl – once again, this character appears whenever and where-ever you wish. She seems to be about 8 years of age, and is the kind of little girl that you don't really see anymore i.e. she is wearing ribbons in her hair and a cutesy dress. She is skipping as she moves along and singing a little tune to herself. The song is very much mocking the PCs. Sample verses might be:

*Six little rats trapped in a rat-trap,
How many die before we let them out?
One, two, three, four...(general to all PCs)*

Or to the tune of 'Down the Mississippi'

At the fourth floor window, where the kids go push (specific to Shawn)

If the monster comes the kid will genuinely seem to be frightened and will stand in it's path screaming. It will just pass over her without harm though.

Tips, tricks and important notes

A few things to bear in mind

- It is perfectly ok to have the beastie catch one of the PCs and maul them. This way, the other PCs have a liability to lug around with them. Make sure they are still conscious though
- College students aren't used to pain. If they get injured, remind them of it lots.
- Mobile phones won't work under any circumstances.
- A nice trick is to have one of the frozen people reach out and grab a PC as they are being chased. No reaction other than grabbing.
- Bear in mind that some of the themes in this game are very nasty. If someone is getting genuinely upset, give them the opportunity to stop.
- Read the characters. Cthulhu is a game of personalised horror. The keys to what will

freak out the individual characters are on the sheets. While the visions are supposed to tap into such things, most characters would be distressed by other things as well e.g., Christina's lack of emotional control.

- There are a number of locations mentioned in the scenario without much relevance. Feels free to use them, especially when people like Stephen send the characters on wild goose chases. The Blob as a nexus for arcane energy?
- Let the players see the maps at the start of the scenario, then take them away. It can kill a lot of the mood if players try to navigate by the map. Obviously, this will depend on the group.

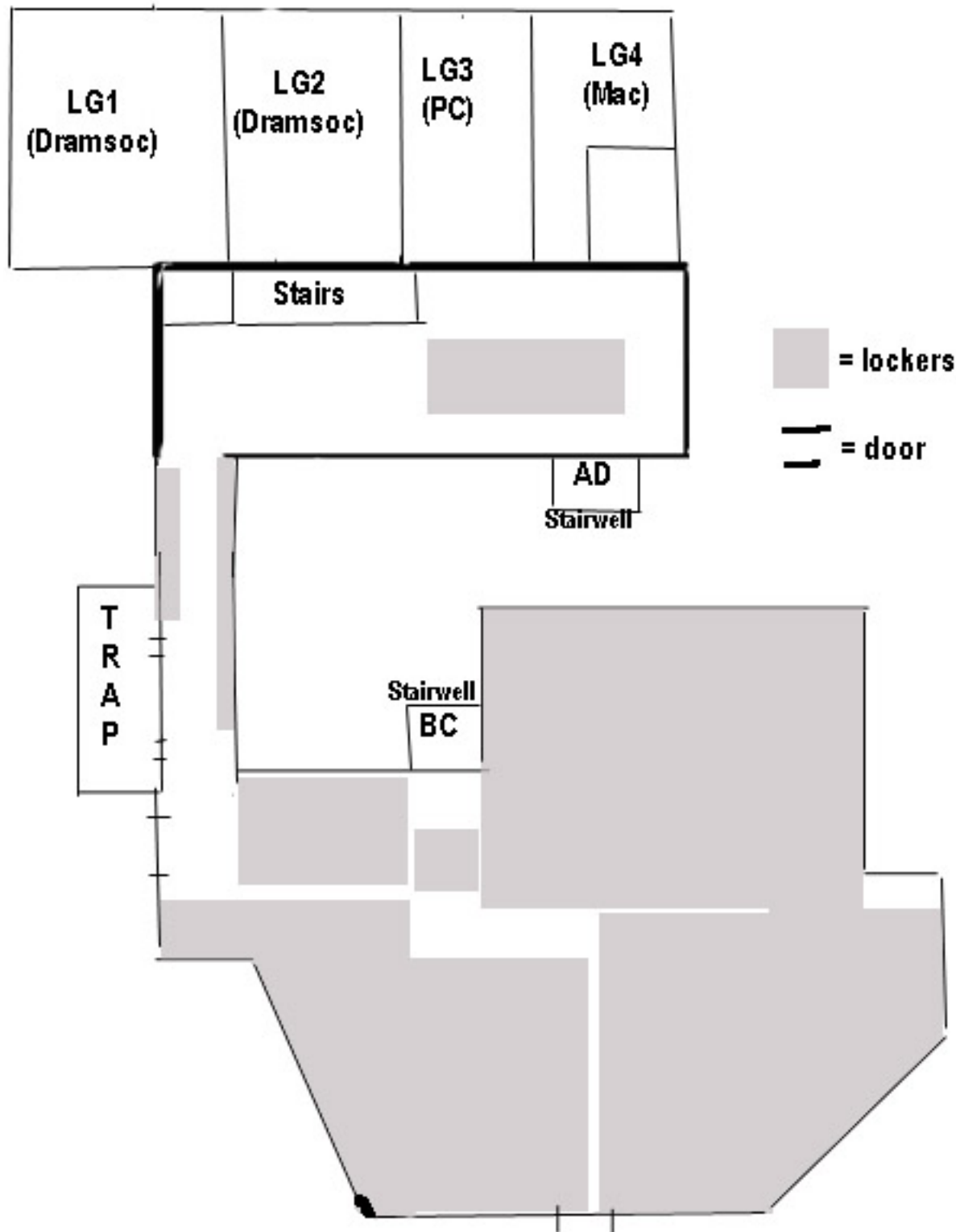
The End (apparently)

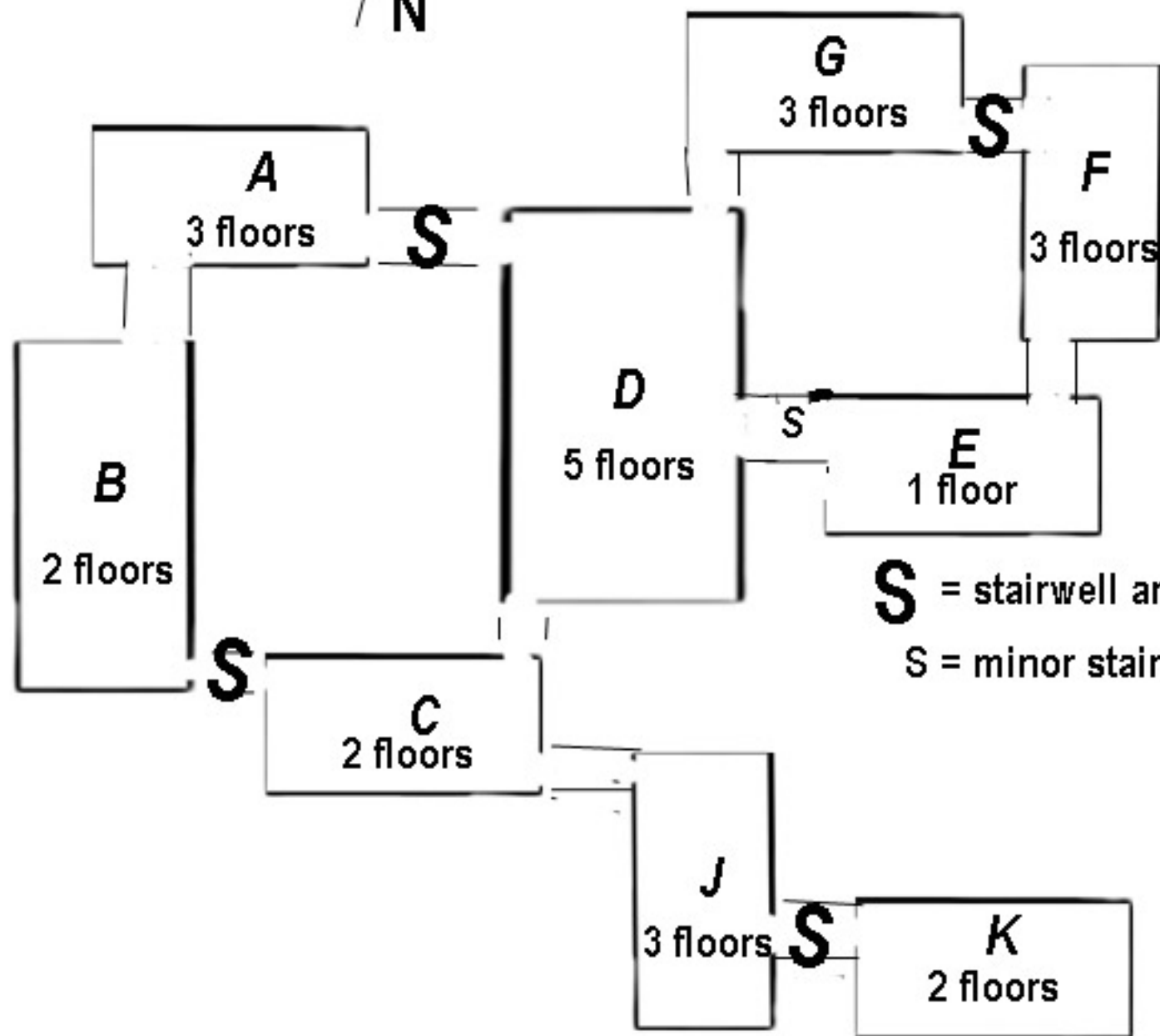
The ending of this game is not at all climactic. The characters just suddenly are back in the tutorial with no recollection of what just happened. One or two of them will have a bad headache; one or two will have a strange stabbing pain in the back of their necks. The phone conversation with Shawn picks up from where it left off (it would be a nice touch if you could remember exactly what word you broke off on). And that's it. No major bad guy, and no conjunctions of the stars. Most of all, no explanations.

Anyway, thanks to anyone who goes through the hell and possible storm of recriminations involved in running this. Also thanks to Clare Bradley, who actually inspired this game, though she knows it not.

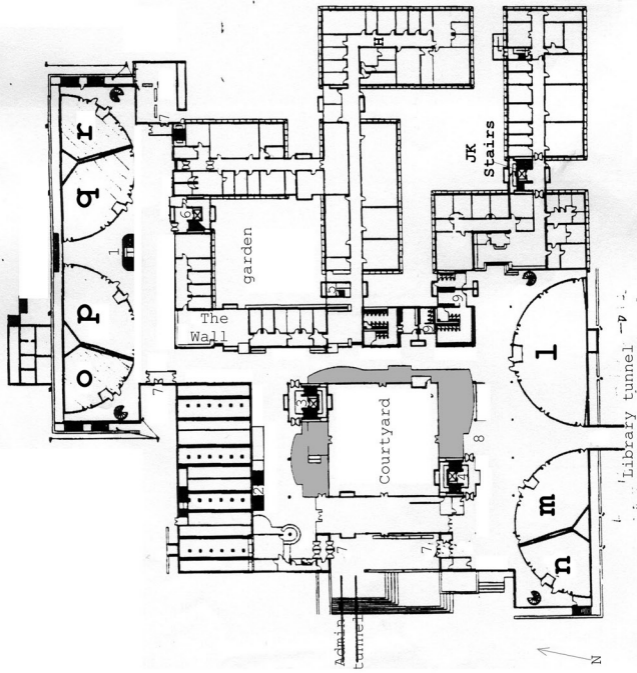
Fergal

Incidentally, yes I do have an explanation for the events in this game, but I'd love to hear other theories. Feel free to mail me at psysquid@gofree.indigo.ie with any notions you may have.





- = social area
 - 🌀 = spiral stairs to lecture tunnel
- 1 = stair to underground toilet
 - 2 = stair to LGs
 - 3 = AD stairwell
 - 4 = BC stairwell
 - 5 = EH stairs
 - 6 = JK stairwell
 - 7 = doors out
 - 8 = the Blob
 - 9 = toilets



Library tunnel

Waiting for Godot notes for Shawn

There are many ways of interpreting Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Some believe it to be genius while others believe it to be atrocious rubbish. Jean Anouilh's reaction possibly is the most representative of the various views as he commented 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is *terrible*', and yet concluded that the play was the most important one premiered in Paris for forty years. As tutor it is your job to help the student's explore the text and develop well rounded opinions on it, rather than expound your own views. With this in mind you have selected a few different theories on just what the play is about and have gathered a bit of evidence to back these ideas up.

Godot might actually be God. When the boy comes to give Didi and Gogo (Vladimir and Estragon) the message that Godot will not be coming that day, he mentions how Godot beats his brother but not him. His brother is a shepherd. This could possibly be a reference to Cain and Abel. Also later on in the play, Godot is referred to as having a large white beard. This would be consonant with common Christian portrayals of the supreme deity. Seen in this light there are numerous possible meanings for the play. Didi and Gogo are waiting to have a religious experience. They lack faith, and wish to come a step closer to God. What keeps them from God? They often state that maybe they should part. Are their paths to Christ not the same? Must they be more active in seeking faith? Or have they missed the point and must not search for faith.

Waiting for Godot contains many scenes (such as those with Lucky and Pozzo) which could be interpreted as expressing disgust with supposed intelligentsia. Perhaps *Waiting for Godot* was what would later be called an Art Attack, ridiculing so called art. For example Lucky says:

"Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labours left unfinished crowned by the Acacaeacademy of Anthropopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is.."

Of especial note is use of the word aphasia; a psychological term referring to a language defect; which might express Beckett's view that academics are constantly spouting nonsense. Perhaps the play is a practical joke as it has occupied the minds of so many academics as they ponder it.

Didi and Gogo might be gay – while certain 'theorists' are reading homosexual overtones into almost everything these days, this is one play where they are quite justified. The two men often show quite a lot of affection for each other and embrace frequently. Perhaps Beckett preempted the Gay Rights movement by showing how trapped such couples could become.

Didi and Gogo may be being punished – they constantly refer to the fact that maybe it would be better if they killed themselves. When they do try, the tree branch they attempt to hang themselves from breaks.

The play is about the futility of life – people come and go but everything stays the same. Didi and Gogo often express confusion over when things happened and whether or not they are in the same place. Their existence is banal and pointless. They are willing to believe almost anything they are told and are easily swayed. They drastically swing in their opinions about Lucky after just a few words from Pozzo. They are puppets of greater powers.

Perhaps it refers to a fractured personality – with all the confusion that is going on, it may be a study in madness. The mind is constantly searching for something that will make it all coherent.

It is also worth noting that Beckett was incredibly rigid in his insistence on how his plays should be performed. He once berated an actress for pausing for two dots instead of three.

Here is a passage you wish to discuss today:

VLADIMIR: You'd rather be stuck there doing nothing?

ESTRAGON: Yes.

VLADIMIR: Please yourself.

He releases Estragon, picks up his coat and puts it on.

ESTRAGON: Let's go.

VLADIMIR: We can't.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON: Ah! *(Vladimir walks up and down.)* Can you not stay still?

VLADIMIR: I'm cold.

ESTRAGON: We came too soon.

VLADIMIR: It's always at nightfall.

ESTRAGON: But night doesn't fall.

VLADIMIR: It'll fall all of a sudden, like yesterday.

ESTRAGON: Then it'll be night.

VLADIMIR: And we can go.

ESTRAGON: Then it'll be day again. *(Pause. Despairing.)* What'll we do, what'll we do!

VLADIMIR: *(halting, violently).* Will you stop whining! I've had about my bellyful of your lamentations!

ESTRAGON: I'm going.

VLADIMIR: *(seeing Lucky's hat).* Well!

ESTRAGON: Farewell.

VLADIMIR: Lucky's hat. *(He goes towards it.)* I've been here an hour and never saw it. *(Very pleased.)* Fine!

ESTRAGON: You'll never see me again.

VLADIMIR: I knew it was the right place. Now our troubles are over. *(He picks up the hat, contemplates it, straightens it.)* Must have been a very fine hat. *(He puts it on in place of his own which he hands to Estragon.)* Here.

ESTRAGON: What?

VLADIMIR: Hold that.

Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head.

Godot Notes for Rachel

This play is the most atrocious piece of rubbish you have ever read. It galls you that you have spent precious time during which you could have been enjoying yourself reading this self important twaddle. You've sat in lectures and heard them trying to find a meaning to it. Wake up. There is no meaning (although that in itself may be a meaning). This so called tragicomedy is just a joke being poked at the artistic community. Beckett is just showing off that he can write whatever he wants and people will just accept it as being wonderful. That in itself might have made the play somewhat entertaining were it not so boring. All it is is two obviously gay guys poncing around waiting for Godot to show up. What a load of toss.

Characters – Vladimir (Didi), Estragon (Gogo), Lucky, Pozzo, a Boy.

Godot notes for Geoff

Bollix, you forgot to read the bloody book. Normally you wouldn't give a damn, but you know that Shawn is getting generally annoyed at this stage with the fact that you never have any of the work done. You're desperately trying to think of what you know about it so that you can bluff your way through this tutorial. You remember that the main characters had Russian sounding names, one of which began with a V. Not much info there; what you really need is a good theory that you can waffle about. A friend from Gamesoc said something about it reminding him of some kind of demon worshipping contract. There is slavery and blasted landscapes, and it's almost as if they are trying to summon a demon called Godot, but they don't have the necessary knowledge. Maybe you can spin something out of that.

Godot notes for Marianne

They call this play a tragicomedy, but you don't see anything funny about it. It is actually one of the most poignant things you have ever read. It's obviously about people trying to find some kind of companionship in a cruel and senseless world where no-one cares a whit about them. There is evidence of abusive relationships when Estragon has been beaten. All around them the world is cruel, as that monster Pozzo beats Lucky and has the gall to blame him for it. It has all the hall marks of abuse. Vladimir and Estragon feel they should part, but they can't for they are all that each other has. Even when they try to commit suicide together they are denied this by a quirk of fate. It's a monstrously sad play.

Characters – Vladimir (Didi), Estragon (Gogo), Lucky, Pozzo, Boy

Godot notes for Christina

This play is an outrage. It mocks the notion of spirituality. Beckett casually portrays all those who would seek out the divine (characterised by Godot) as inane and doomed to futility. He mocks the very idea that there might be something worthwhile out there. How dare he? What gives him the right? The so called tragicomedy is just an excuse for barely disguised prejudice, as Vladimir and Estragon bumble around like fools. There is even evidence of fascism in the play apparent in the song which Vladimir struggles over at the start of Act 2.

Obviously, Beckett's well known inflexibility and stringency in the way his plays were performed was to make up for his own impotency. Serves him right.

Characters – Vladimir (Didi), Estragon (Gogo), Lucky, Pozzo, Boy

A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead.

Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb-
He stops, broods, resumes:

Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb
And wrote upon the tombstone
For the eyes of dogs to come:

A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead

Godot notes for Ruari

Oh no, not Beckett. Why do they have to be discussing Beckett? It's such unadulterated crap. It's a petty swipe at the accepted norms of art and beauty. It has nothing on the works of Joyce, which were truly innovative, or the marvellous poetry of American artist E.E. Cummings. At least that's what you normally think. Sometimes the idea of two people irrevocably stuck together in a world which they lack the skills to interact with strikes a note with you.

Characters – Vladimir (Didi), Estragon (Gogo), Lucky, Pozzo, Boy

Christina O Malley

Why does this place have to be so big, cold and lonely? The crowds wander past each other, and the noises of supposed companionship echo off the walls, but in spite of everything this is a lonely place. A person could get lost in these crowds as the different groups drift past, not acknowledging anyone outside their group. Yes, this is a cold place.

Raised into a middle class family, you don't actually know who your real parents were. Put up for adoption at the age of two, you were taken into a new family living in Blackrock. You were never told anything about your previous family, but sometimes you wonder. What were they like? Were they kind to you? Did they have to give you up because of financial trouble? No-one will tell you. Your parents go quiet at the mention of the other parents and won't say anything. After a while you realised that it was unfair on them and stopped asking. Yet you still wonder, if you had stayed with your original parents, would it stop the nightmares? Would it stop the cold feelings that sometimes talk you when you are alone? So very hard to tell.

You were a thoughtful child. Emotions were sometimes enemies as they would get the better of you at inopportune times and embarrass you in public. Many was the other child who used to torment you for crying in public and many was the time you wished that you could leave and never come back. You found another way though. You found religion. More to the point, you found many of them. Each one you felt gave you part of the picture but never the whole thing. You found yourself especially drawn to the buddhist and pagan beliefs which revolved around energy flowing through the universe. This made sense to you. This gave you comfort. A far bigger revelation was made to you when you arrived in college though. There you found that amongst the throngs of the lost there were people who thought as you did. There were people with whom you could discuss your ideas. Even better, there were psychology lectures where you could learn more about the fragile human mind from the moment it was brought into existence through it's long journey through life. Your beliefs have also given you insight into your other subjects. You can see how almost all literature is an attempt to understand the divine. This is a cold place, but you believe you have found a home.

Christina is a troubled young lady. Always a bit clumsy and awkward, she nevertheless is quite talkative. Many people find her difficult to talk to as she is constantly sincere and intense. Worse, she is quite easily upset. She is determined to keep hoping though.

Shawn – it's nice to be able to argue your points with someone who is well educated on the topic. Why is he always so serious though? You feel he didn't really appreciate the points you raised in your last essay.

Rachel – she is so mean and inconsiderate. Why can't she ever be nice to anyone? She needs to learn how to be more in tune with everyone around her.

Geoff – he's a fun person, but sometimes you don't appreciate his jokes. They could really hurt someone. Also, he's not very responsible.

Marianne – you don't really understand her. She's sometimes very attentive and brings up great points, the next she's away with the fairies. Is she afraid to be intelligent?

Ruairi – college is a very frightening place, especially for someone who isn't used to it.
He must be terrified. You'll make an extra effort to be nice to him.

Geoff McGrath

It's really just too much. This whole place is so big and it's easy to get lost. You could spend hours wandering around and still not know have of the campus. Of course the only problem with that is that the only place you tend not to wander into is your lectures. You don't get the point of them anyway. Why have six hundred people crammed into a theatre straining to hear the ramblings of some female troll who doesn't even know what lecture she is taking?

Born in Bray, you were always something of an outsider in your family. You always wanted something more for yourself, to be one of the high-fliers. Whatever your dreams of the future involved they certainly didn't involve living in Bray for the rest of your life. Not that you have anything against Bray, but to you leaving would be a symbol of accomplishment. While your brothers and sisters never really had any ambition other than living from day to day, you had a goal. You weren't quite sure what that goal would be, but it was there nonetheless. It guided and you followed, or so you thought. You were a fool. It's ironic that as the one who wanted to better himself, it is you who has ended up the biggest mess. It started off so innocently. You just slipped a few amphetamines to keep yourself going while you studied. Despite the fact that you were only fourteen, you were determined to be something, and you would do anything to get there. You're parents never realised, they were just proud of your commitment. Soon though the amphetamines weren't enough. It's amazing how fast you went downhill. By some great miracle, you never became addicted to the harder drugs. Your friend Robert wasn't so lucky. Guilt eats you from the inside, because it was through you that he got into the drug scene and now his body is falling apart on him. Your fault. All your fault. The dream has gone bad. You aren't sure whether it is a side effect of the drugs you took, or just of experience, but your motivation is gone. You can't bring yourself up to your driven state again. You're off the drugs, but you certainly aren't high on life. Instead you have built yourself a new persona. The new Geoff isn't cynical he's just happy go lucky. He is buoyant, and happy, and could probably be described as a rogue. He's a lie. But then, you've learnt to embrace lies. For the last few months you've become heavily involved in role-playing and Gamesoc. You want to be anyone except yourself.

There are really two Geoffs. Inside, he is broken and cynical. On the outside he is a strangely likeable rogue. He always has an excuse for everything, and it's very hard to stay angry with him for long. He has a very quick wit and can make most people smile with his insightful sarcasm. He isn't laughing though. More than most people the thought of death terrorises Geoff – he has a lot of ghosts to face.

Shawn – you like him. He's one of the only people who actually motivates you anymore, and you actually feel guilty when you don't have work done for him. He's intense but very fair.

Rachel – spoilt ignorant bitch. You wish you could think that, but you've lied to yourself for long enough now to recognise when you do so. You actually fancy her, and you aren't happy about it.

Marianne – what does she have to be so glum about. If you can make an effort then so can she.

Christina – there are times when you want to strangle her, but on others you want for yourself what she talks about. Redemption.

Ruari – just a kid who you are showing around campus as part of the shadowing scheme.

Maybe you thought having to act as a role model might get you back on track. Maybe you just wanted to make sure he didn't make your mistakes. Very quiet and shy.

Marianne Doyle

It could be worse that it is. College isn't so bad. So you have to show up for lectures. There are worse things than that. So you very often don't see your house during daylight. That isn't necessarily a bad thing. All in all, you can live with attending UCD, even if it does mean travelling across the city early every morning. All things considered, it's probably better than the alternative.

Three children is probably considered a small family in your neighbourhood. You remember clearly a friend of yours once saying how it would be wonderful to have such a small family, as everybody would be so close and intimate. You remember how you would just smile and agree then try to change the topic. That wasn't something you wanted to discuss. You didn't want to discuss how your father would sometimes get roaring drunk all alone down in the kitchen while your mother with a worried look on her face would shoo you all up to bed. You remember lying tucked up in bed in the room you were privileged as the oldest child to have all to yourself. Even with the covers pulled up over your head, you could hear the sounds of violence downstairs and then the sound of your fathers sobbing and heavy footsteps coming up the stairs. Sometimes you imagine that you can still feel his tears dropping on your face, as you lay trembling in your bed. But only sometimes, because you don't think about that any more.

You heard it said that in such situations everybody finds some sort of refuge. You found your refuge in study. Determined to get out of the poverty trap, you worked yourself night and day until you earned yourself a scholarship to UCD. You earned a scholarship to Trinity to but chose to attend the Belfield campus – better, further. It's not so bad here. It's almost a different world, one where you can forget all about your other life until it is time to go back home. Recently that home time has been getting later and later. There is always somewhere to go – the bar, the library; even the sports centre. With all this study you should be on top of your work. That isn't always the case though. You're very distractible of late, especially in tutorials. You don't find the work especially hard, but you are just having trouble applying yourself. This worries you – you aren't out of the poverty trap yet. Keep on trying.

To all intents and purposes Marianne seems to be a normal, cheerful college girl. She has a lot of experience in keeping this façade up. She'll smile and be cheerful, and will seem to really be enjoying her time in college. Then she will go distant and seem glum for a while again. Recently she has noticed that people are noticing these distant periods, and isn't sure whether this is a good thing or not.

Shawn – it's a bit disturbing how you feel about him. He's only a few years older than you and yet you find yourself thinking about what life would be like if he was your father. This is distracting you in tutorials, which is bad because you really don't want him to know.

Rachel – there are times when you find yourself hating her. She has everything she needs, and she's probably never had to really be afraid in her life. It's not fair of you to hate her though. You should be happy that most people haven't experienced your pain. If only she wasn't such a pain in the ass.

Geoff – sometimes he cheers you up and sometimes he just annoys you. He's funny, if a little lazy, and his antics can be amusing. Or they can just be irritating.

Ruairi – you wonder where he comes from. Where is he going to fit in when he comes to college? It's such a big change.

Christina – all here talk of love and happiness is a quick way of getting you angry...sometimes. It sometimes just makes you sad. You really want to believe what she is saying, but you can't bring yourself to it.

Rachel Law

College is just the coolest. Sure the building itself is big and concrete and boring, and hey so you're repeating, but that's fine. You get to socialise all the time and don't have to worry about getting a job. You don't really need to worry about getting a qualification either. It's wonderful being a Dublin 4 girl doing an Arts Degree.

Born an only child you have never wanted for anything. You have always had all the clothes you want, all the money you need to go out and enjoy yourself, and you were never really forbidden from doing anything you really wanted to do. You have always been the centre of your group. Confident and outgoing, all the other girls in school used to look to you for how to behave, how to talk, how to dress. This continued into college. While many people were intimidated by the prospect of being a Fresher, you have never let anything like that bother you. College was a whole new world for you to conquer and set your mark on. Determinedly you set out into a whole new social setting and had the time of your life. It was no surprise to you that you failed English and had to repeat it. You hadn't really been to that many lectures last year. But you don't mind being in First Year again, especially as you now only have to bother about one subject and have even more time to yourself. Life is going to be fun for the next few months.

You're dying. No-one in college knows it, but you have been diagnosed with an incurable cancer. There is no hope for you, it's just a matter of time. It's frightening to think about it, to think that eventually you are going to be bedridden and then you will die. It's possibly the prospect of waiting bedridden that worries you most, rather than actually dying. You have always been in control, in charge. You don't want to be helpless. Such thoughts disturb you so you don't think them. Instead you live your life to be as much fun as possible. You haven't told any of your friends. You have seen the look in your parents eyes at home, and you don't want to have to see that everyday of your life, in the face of everyone who you meet. No, you aren't going to go through that. You are going to be the arrogant, confident spoilt kid everyone knows until it's too late to be so anymore. If that means that your tutor gets annoyed by the fact that you won't turn off your mobile, so be it. In fact, you welcome the imminent confrontation. Nobody gets the better of you...nobody.

To all intents and purposes, Rachel is the ultimate spoilt nouveau riche bitch. She talks loudly into her mobile on buses (when not driving the car Daddy bought her), and uses the word 'like' almost to the extent of a California valley girl. She is determined to enjoy what is left of her life and anyone who gets in her way will just have to provide the next bit of entertainment. It's fun to be a bitch.

Shawn - Ok, so maybe he is the tutor, but does he have to be so serious. He is always so boring, and last week he had the gall to get annoyed when you mobile rang. He needs to loosed up and maybe look in the mirror and realise that he is good looking and could have a life.

Geoff - complete and utter loser. Admittedly he is kind of fun sometimes. His excuses and attempts to cover up that he hasn't done the work get more elaborate all the time. You can't abide the fact that he hangs around with that Gamesoc crowd though. I mean, there's wasting your life and then there's wasting your life.

Ruairi - why it's a little stray puppy. How cute. Hard to believe you were ever that young. At least you know you weren't that hopelessly shy.

Marianne - get your head out of the clouds woman. Fun to talk to and you get along with her quite well, but having a secret crush on the tutor is just so secondary school. She's smarter than that.

Christina - complete freak. She just doesn't know when to shut up. If she doesn't stop preaching to you, you'll be tempted to tell her the truth and see how she deals with that.

Ruairi O Keefe

It's big, it's frightening, and it's not at all like home. You're not going to be frightened though. You are quite determined about that. It took an awful lot of pride swallowing for you to accept being part of the shadowing project, you aren't going to act like a terrified young kid trailing around behind Geoff in the manner of a lost puppy. You are far too good a person for that. You are a genius after all.

You were a late born child. Your brothers and sisters were all at least ten years older than you, and that left you leading quite a solitary childhood. That didn't stop you from exploring your world though, and relations were always commenting on what a bright young child you were. It wasn't long before professionals noticed this too. Your teachers in primary school were quick to notice that they were dealing with a genius and that was where all the trouble started. Soon it was special schooling apart from all the other kids, and extra-curricular activities to encourage your burgeoning talents. No child should have to grow up so lonely, especially one who wasn't actually alone. All your life you had felt another presence, pushing at the edge of your consciousness – sad, angry, lonely. It was quite a while before you found out what it meant. It seems that you were meant to have been a twin. As sometimes happens though, one embryo was absorbed by the other in the womb. That should have been all there was too it, but not everything was laid to rest in that incident. Your brother remains in part, a part of you that yearns for the life it was denied and can only taste through the filter of your experiences. Sometimes he makes his presence felt. While you are quiet and accepting of what life brings you're way, he can't accept anything which mars what limited existence he has. He is often there eroding your self-control when things go wrong, whispering songs of rage and retribution in your ears. Perhaps this is another reason why you never really had many friends as a child. They learnt to avoid you after you broke the schoolyard bully's arm. You know now that it wasn't you who broke the arm, but your brother. For one terrible moment he had control of your body. You've spent your time since then keeping him back.

Now it is almost time for you to go to college. Your parents thought they'd make it easy on you by signing you up for the shadowing scheme. You get to follow another student around for the day and see what college is like. You don't really like what you have seen so far.

Ruari isn't the most balanced of people. He is convinced that his unborn brother haunts his mind, lashing out with all his negative emotions. He doesn't want to let anybody know though, because he knows what they'd say. He even knows what dissociative diagnosis they would give him, but they're wrong. He's sure of that. Outwardly, Ruari is very quiet. He never quite came to terms with social life and can be very shy, except when he is talking on an area in which he has expertise – which is quite a lot of them.

Rachel – she seems to have all the intelligence of a pot plant, and yet she is popular?
Why? She doesn't have any real social skill.

Geoff – it's strange, you normally hate layabouts, but there is something compelling about him. And you actually enjoyed the quick war-game he brought you through, even if it was a bit simplistic. An interesting abstraction of violence.

Marianne – she seems to be so sad. She's quite captivating. You want to see her smile.

Christina – oh dear God; a ‘philosopher’. Geoff told you about her constant pop psychology. Maybe it will be amusing if nothing else.

Shawn – this guy is the tutor. You’ve never actually met an American who wasn’t administering a battery of psychometric tests. A new experience then, on this day of overwhelming experiences.

Shawn Hayes

It's hardly what you expected. In the States where you lived for most of your life and earned your masters degree, the colleges were verdant and green. It's such a change to come here to this concrete monstrosity in what is supposed to be the Emerald Isle. Still, for someone who never expected to go to college, it is at least an experience.

Born into a Boston family of six children, you have long struggled to leave your past behind you. No longer are you the frightened little boy who lied to his parents about how he got the bruises on his arm. No longer are you the child who lived in terror whenever his father left the house. No longer the guilt wracked waif who stood by the grave....That's all far behind you now. You worked long and hard on your grades in school until eventually you earned yourself a scholarship. College was a revelation.

There you could be a new person. While you still retained a certain shyness, you found you could have friends without feeling shame for what you were. Still, there was work to be done and the workload got heavier and heavier as time went on.

Finally, after you earned your Masters Degree in English Literature, a friend suggested that rather than being a professor's slave for the next five years, you should study abroad. You considered yourself lucky to find a temporary teaching post in University College Dublin, Ireland. Sometimes you aren't all that sure that it was lucky. The facilities really suck. Instead of the attractive New England campuses you are used to, you have ended up in a nightmare of concrete ineffectively disguised by force grown greenery. By virtue of your work you are afforded an office somewhere in the maze known as the Arts Block, which you timeshare with another graduate student. While you know that other grad students would kill for this 'luxury' you feel that it is scant payment for the horror of these tutorials.

Shawn is a quiet young man. While passionate about English literature, he sometimes has problems asserting himself. One of life's naturally likeable people, he still has doubts which nag at him in social situations, and buried deep inside him is a nasty temper. He rarely smiles, but when he does it melts hearts.

Rachel - she really bugs you with her superior attitude and her constantly ringing cell phone. What's worse is that you know that she isn't really stupid, just lazy. And she gets away with it all because her parents are rich.

Geoff - how do people get away with being so lazy? You worked your butt off to get through college and now this cocky.....nggh.

Ruari - you don't know this person. He isn't even in college. Maybe he'll have something intelligent to say.

Marianne - the way she sometimes looks at you is a bit uncomfortable. A good student nonetheless when she gets her head out of the clouds.

Christina - she talks, and talks, and talks. Here opinions are different. Very different. Strange how you though you wanted enthusiastic students, but she is just too much.