



2.3 CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

By Daniel Stifler

—aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?” you shout.

Nobody answers.

You look around the hall. It’s been ransacked. Chairs have been thrown at tables. Tables have been thrown through windows. The podium is upturned and the smart whiteboard is hanging helplessly off the wall. The brick is absent. So is everybody else.

“Hello?” you enquire, “where did everybody go?”

You retrace your steps. You gave the speech. The brick interrupted. You made a classic catch. The Device shook. Everything got a bit weird. Now everybody is gone. You look out the window and see that it is no longer a sunny day. It is raining.

“Strange,” you say to yourself, “it wasn’t supposed to rain until tomorrow.”

You leave the hall and wander downstairs and out into the rain. The ground outside is littered with broken glass and chairs from the hall up above. The south wall of Old Arts is covered in strange graffiti. But for some reason the rain is bothering you most of all. A man runs by, hiding under his umbrella. “It wasn’t supposed to rain today,” you shout to him.

“What are you talking about?” he shouts back.

“It’s not supposed to rain until Tuesday” you say, quieter this time.

The man laughs.

“It is Tuesday,” he says.

It is at that point you realise that you are still holding The Device.

“Oh no,” you say, “what have I done?”

You spin around, looking for answers. The graffiti on the wall catches your eye. The Device has started shaking again and you begin to feel that curious sensation of being sucked through your own nostrils. You stare at the graffiti, trying to make out the words. The Device gives a lurch and you fall to the ground.

You wake up this morning with a hangover and an awful feeling of Déjà vu. What happened last night? The sun is streaming painfully through the curtains. You reach for your phone to check the time but realise it's not on the bedside table.

01

As you rummage through the pockets of your jeans left unceremoniously on the floor, a piece of paper falls out onto the unmade bed. Still no phone. Perhaps you left it in your jacket?

02

Unfolding the paper reveals a crude drawing of a fish of some kind in red pen. What could this mean? You decide you need a shower and stumble off towards the bathroom.

03

After running the shirt under water and scrubbing for a few minutes, it looks as though the stain has mostly lifted.

04

As you finish getting dressed you notice that there's a small mustard stain on your shirt. You sigh to yourself, not again.

05

Scanning the fridge for seltzer, you notice that you're running low on everything except mustard. You make a note to be better at keeping the fridge stocked.

06

There's a sign hanging in the window of the Taqueria that says "Cerrado." You speak no spanish but from the looks of the dark empty interior you've guessed the meaning.

07

A man in a trenchcoat with a black hat pulled over his eyes walks up to you and grumbles in a deep husky voice tinged with a slight mexican accent, "are you the Coyote?"

08

The man wordlessly passes you a small package wrapped in brown paper. He checks briefly for any witnesses from under his brim before turning swiftly on his heel and striding off, his trenchcoat billowing silently behind him.

09

You fill a glass from the kitchen tap and drink noisily. Your head is throbbing. You promise yourself you'll get your binge drinking under control.

11

Turning out all of the pockets of your jacket reveals nothing except a few pieces of shrapnel and a receipt from a fast food joint. Disgusted with yourself, you flop back into bed and decide to forget the whole thing.

12

As you're towelling off you have a tiny epiphany. A herring! But you still can't remember why or how that drawing ended up in your pocket.

13

You've managed to dry the shirt but the stain reappears as if by magic. Flabbergasted, you throw the shirt into the hamper and pick out a new outfit.

14

The pantry search proves fruitless. No seltzer here either. Feeling resigned, you take off the shirt and pick out a new one.

16

Satisfied, the man nods and strides off into the distance. His trench-coat billowing slightly behind him. There's a faint sweet smell of almonds hanging in the desert air. Feeling hungry you decide to stop for some food.

17

The man grumbles again, "Perdónname." He tips his hat and turns to leave but hesitates and turns back to you. "You forget, yes?"

18

Tearing off the brown paper reveals a stack of orange monopoly bills. Confused and nervous, you quickly stash the cash in your jacket pocket and wander off into the sunset.

19

As the taxi speeds off you feel a weight lift from your chest and you look around for the first time. Times Square in New York City never looked so beautiful.

21

"Who do you think you are?" A woman in an awful pink latex dress with matching handbag and pumps is yelling in your face. Oh right, you remember, I married this woman.

22

She continues raving as if she didn't hear you. She probably didn't. She looks like a balloon animal version of a fish of some kind. She's stopped talking and is looking expectantly at you.

23

The air is dank and cold. You shiver and pull the thin scratchy wool blanket over your emaciated body. You look up at the tiny piece of sky through barred gap at the top of your cell.

24

A guard bangs at the door and the small window slides open. You slip your thin bony hands through and a wooden bowl of gruel and a piece of stale bread is thrust into your arms. You take it back to your threadbare cote and eat hungrily. The window slams shut.

25

You pause a moment until the guard's heavy footsteps can no longer be heard down the hall. You slide the bed out from the wall revealing a small hole just large enough to squeeze through. You crawl inside and begin digging furiously with the wooden spoon. Progress is slow but sure.

26

Holding your breath, you lay perfectly still. The beast begins pawing at the edge of your tent, centimeters away from your head. Squeezing your eyes shut you think about the life you would never have a chance to live.

27

Lying awake, staring up at the top of your tent, you hear a rustle of leaves and the distinctive sound of something huge sniffing not a meter away from your head. Petrified and breathing in short, shallow breaths, you weigh your options.

28

You let out the loudest, fiercest yell you can muster. For a moment the beast pauses. You can hear your heart pounding in your ears. The beast's response shakes the tent and you can feel the wet musky warmth of his breath. Wasting not a moment, you tear out from the tent and run towards the river.

29

In a huff, she turns and hails a cab. Her pink purse dangles stupidly at the crook of her arm. As she steps in awkwardly she glares angrily. "We'll discuss this later," she says and slams the door.

31

Her mouth hangs open in shock. Then she closes it. Then she opens it again as if to speak but no words come out. She looks like a fish of some kind. The silence is a welcome relief. "What did you say?" she manages.

32

Seeming satisfied, she turns and hails a cab. As she steps in and drives off, you feel a weight lift from your chest and look around for the first time.

33

As the guard's footsteps fade, you slide out the bed and continue working. First a small crack appears. Then with another strike, the crack becomes a hole and beyond it you can see the sky and the world beyond. Within minutes, you're sliding down the stone and your bare feet land in grass. Sweet, glorious grass.

34

The sound of footsteps returns and you slide the bed back in place. The small slot in the door slams open and you pass bowl and spoon through. The slot slams shut. You lie back on your cot and wait for the guard to return with the tools of your escape.

36

After an agonizing hour, your eyes snap open. Straining your ears, but not daring to move, you listen for any signs of movement. None. You carefully sit up and open the flap to your tent. You peer out into the darkness but only the darkness returns your gaze.

37

You grab the pot at the foot of your sleeping bag and a wooden spoon and begin hammering them together as loudly as you can muster. Startled, the beast lets out a few roars, but you can hear him backing away. You continue banging until your ears are ringing and your arms are sore. When you finally stop, there isn't a sound.

38

Without warning, an enormous brown mass comes barrelling through the brush. You let out a small yelp and leap into the river. The icy water grips you and as you struggle up to the surface, the current whisks you away. From beyond the rapids, you can see the bear watching you from the shore.

39

You knock at the door and adjust your cheap suit. You glance down at your clipboard as the door opens and a disgruntled looking man barks, "Waddayuwant."

41

"Good afternoon, Mr. _____. Is that your car in the driveway?" You ask with a perfunctory grin on your face. "Yeah, wataboutit?" The man grumbles.

43

A man slurps coffee noisily across the table from you. He's wearing an opulent Hawaiian shirt and perched on his old wrinkled head is a hat with Veteran stitched across the top. He grumbles a little too loudly. He seems to be struggling with his laptop.

44

You offer to help the old man. He grumbles back, "mind your own damn business." You sigh and sit back down. His laptop beeps incessantly. The man grumbles loudly again and mashes some more keys. In this moment you're sure laptops can feel and this one is crying for help.

46

Edging closer to the lip, a few stones tumble and fall. The wind sends them in little circles as they plummet and disappear silently into the surf. You let gravity pull you against the wind and you tumble forward carelessly, wind rushing past and pulling tears from your eyes, before opening your wings and rising up and out over the sea.

49

Click. You make a small mark next to Mr. _____'s name on your clipboard and click the pen closed before returning it to your shirt pocket. Glancing up at the empty blue sky, you stroll over to the next house and saddle up at the door.

51

"What if I told you I could save you up to \$500 on your car insurance. What would you say to that?" The man squints suspiciously. "Notinterstd" he grunts before slamming the door.

53

At the end of a long vaulted hall is massive stone door. A weathered sign above it reads, "Danger. Enter at your own peril." Light pours in through arched stained glass windows from one side onto old faded portraits of men and women long dead.

54

With some effort, you push on the old stone door. It gives slowly as it slides over the masonry, its hinges unoiled for many years. As it opens, air rushes inwards giving the impression of some great creature taking its first breath in a long time.

56

As you approach the exposed promontory, the cold ocean air whips around and cuts through your thin jacket. A fog obscures the horizon. It feels like standing at the edge of the world. You look down at the grey waves crashing against the rocks below.

57

You turn your back to the wind. As you walk, a small patch of sky opens and you can see the blue beyond. You touch your hand to your cheek. It feels cold and numb.

59

You push the yoke forward and the shuddering and shaking intensifies. Several alarms sound as the altimeter spins crazily. You break cloud cover and glimpse the white chop of the sea illuminated by lightning. You swear and pull hard on the yoke. Your angle is too steep.

61

As the plane bounces violently in the storm, the cabin lights begin to flicker. The wails and screams of passengers can barely be heard over the roar of the engines and the wind.

62

You do your best to keep the wings level. Several lights on the dash come on indicating pressure malfunctions on both fuel injection systems and the loss of power to most of the automated pilot systems.

63

You turn to leave and wander through the old castle looking for an exit. The halls are all impressive and well adorned, the tapestries old and ornate. But despite your efforts, you find yourself back at the foot of a large stone door, perhaps the only door, with a weathered sign above it which reads, "Danger. Enter at your own peril."

65

As the man lunges forward, you swiftly turn and dive headlong through the window. Your arm catches some of the broken glass. You fall through the branches of the tree outside and hit the ground less than graciously. You scramble to your feet and start running.

67

A man in a hockey mask threatens you with a rusty machete. You can see the crazed violence in the wild eyes behind the mask. Backed up against a table you survey the room. A broken window at your back, through which the man entered. A door left ajar on the far side of the masked intruder. You feel a glass shard on the table behind you.

68

You make a break for the door. The man swings at you with the rusty blade but you managed to evade his attack. You kick through the door and run down the hall. As you reach the stairs, you glance behind you and see the man stumbling towards you.

69

Angling the nose upwards, the shuddering briefly stops. A weightless silence blankets you and for a moment you're far away on a tropical island, basking in the clear blue waters warmed by the brilliant sun. You're jerked back into the cockpit as both engines stall and sound of blood roars in your ears. You black out.

72

Without warning, the engines suddenly sputter and cut out. First the left turbine, then the right. The dash is a wall of flashing lights and warning beeps. The cockpit is shaking so hard your teeth are rattling in your head. You hit the radio broadcast for all frequencies and grip the yoke, white knuckled.

73

The house must have been abandoned for some years. There are plants growing up through the floor. Sunlight filters in through the gaps in boarded up windows. The staircase to the second floor has rotted and fallen through. You can see the remnants of a dining room to your right and a crumbling brick stair leading into the basement.

74

The crystal chandelier has fallen and is lying on a heap of what looks like the remains of a long ornate dining table. Looking closely you can see some lacquered details on some of the better preserved pieces. The next room over looks to be the kitchen.

76

You hear a rustle followed by a thud and a crack as the man follows you out the window. The man bellows and you look behind you to see that he has fallen and broken his leg. You don't wait to see if he gets up.

77

You grip the triangular shard and lunge forward, driving the glass into the man's right thigh. He lets out an animalistic scream. You back up as he hacks the air in front of him, limping forward as he does so. You pick up a second piece of glass and ready yourself.

78

As he lunges at you with hand and machete, you jump back. The man tumbles forward over the railing and down the stairs, striking the wall with a heavy thud and sprawling out on the floor. You wait a few moments before proceeding downwards.

79

As you descend the brick into the gloom, several stairs give out and crumble under your feet. The walls are cool to the touch. The air here is earthy and wet. Some small creatures scurry and crawl at the edges of your sight. At the bottom of the stair, your feet touch down onto soil. You gaze into the darkness and something glints several meters away.

84

Feeling your way along a wall, you make your way towards the shining object. As you approach you can make out the silhouette of a man. You hesitate for a moment but as your eyes adjust, you find it is just a statue. His face is distorted into a hideous grimace and his body contorted painfully. You retreat back slowly.

85

Stepping over the crumbling door which separated dining room and kitchen, you find a tree has taken root and grown out through a window to your right. The roots have pushed the cracked tiles out to the edges of the room and the window has warped and shifted around the trunk. You marvel at the restorative power of nature.

86

The dog eagerly snatches the scrap from your hand and begins devouring it noisily. He looks happy. At least as happy as an angry mistreated guard dog can look. You smile and head home.

87

The dog barks viciously from behind the chain link fence. You dangle a scrap of meat just out of reach. The dog stops abruptly and sniffs intently at your offering.

89

Winding back, you hurl the scrap over the fence and deep into the yard. The dog follows. Taking the opportunity, you start scaling the fence and hop down gracefully on the other side. You glance around to see if the street is empty before proceeding.

97

You try the back door, but find it locked. Moving around to the window on the side of the house, you can hear the dog chewing noisily on the scrap. You try the window which opens with a rattle. You take a quick peek in before slipping into the building.

99