

Chains

—Sam Chow

After taking a sniff down each of the passageways, M, A and L pry their noses off the ground and exchange knowing looks between each other. They start walking down one of them, urging you to tag along. Not at all convinced by their mystical ritual, you make a grab for M's cloak, demanding a formal explanation. The garment comes off with little resistance, thereby throwing you off balance. You catch a glimpse of M's denuded countenance as you fall to the ground, and for a split second before your head strikes the floor, you are flooded with childhood memories of after-school snacks, playground sand pits and banana flavoured ice cream at Auntie Laura's place.

M is for Morgan!

Nursing the throbbing pain in your head, you sit up and try to clear your head whilst M, A and L are trying to reach some sort of agreement. *M for Morgan, A for Amy and L for Lulu*, how could you have been so stupid! And the Twins – *the Bananas in Pyjamas!* In fact, come to think of it, if your vague memories of year 10 Latin are correct, then Mr. Comp Tusrattus or comptus rattus must be *Rat in a Hat!*

Well, that certainly explains a few things: the bananas left on the ERC computer desk, the debacle at the airport juice stand, the olfactorial display you'd only just witnessed. Lulu notices that you're awake and the Teddy Bears rush to your side. After checking that everything is fine, Morgan looks to the other two and gives them a resolute nod. But you disappoint his plans for a giant plot-revealing epiphany by unveiling what you've already figured out.

Progress along the path grows evermore difficult as the air increases in heat and humidity. The cloying scent of pineapples begins to nauseate you, so much so that even the spicy stench of gunpowder permeating through the air is like honey to your nose. Even the Teddy Bears are having to ditch their cloaks in this acrid air. To take your mind off the thought of suffocating in this hell-hole, you ask Morgan about the Bananas and why they're doing this.

"They weren't always like this. A few years ago, they went somewhere a bit warmer and came back much darker. B1 and B2 are very friendly and they made a lot of friends when they were there, and they must have stayed in contact. But some of these friends are pretty bad apples, and...hey look! There's the entrance!"

You and the teddies rush to the end of the tunnel but cannot find a way in. They thump on the soil encrusted door and tearfully exhort the Bananas to give in and open up. The dislodged dirt sprays all over their sweat-filled fur, but their cries are in vain. You, however, without your years of emotional investment, stand back in silent reverie. Just before you decide to reach out a calming hand, their violent rattling triggers the release of a ceiling panel and a series of pictures and a keyboard drop down. You scrutinize the pictures and wonder how they might be linked to this door in your way.

