

Until You hear that Bell.

By Sean Mahoney

Prologue.

The chipped paint
green gates
are hot to the touch.

A shadow,
bigger than the sun
cools, darkens,
and opens the gates
to fortune green playcentre.

Rory walks towards him

Hi Mick

You alright Rory
Yeah, Sean cried today

Oh, did he Rory?
Yeah. Again.

Thanks Rory
Cos, he cried yesterday as well

You've got any other parents to talk to Rory, or is it just me?
Nah. Well, I'm gonna go now. Bye Mick.

The tears have dried, in their place
are dark lines showing where they fell.

You alright Son?
Yeah.

Playcentre alright?
Yeah.

ROUND ONE

Batman and Raphael are with me in the car. Batman has the bat-sword, Raphael, the Fork Daggers. They fight for answers on how they've wound up on these blue sand dunes. They're evenly matched, they realise they're both good guys and at that moment, decide to become allies.

Dad says we're going to St Pancras and that it's going to be fun. He said football would be fun. Leave your toys in the car, we're here.

We walk past several houses and come to a place that definitely isn't a house It has a large fence surrounding it. A metal, triangle roof and big blue double doors

Dad opens them and there's an explosion of sounds of bells ringing and men shouting and chains rattling.

I step back, hands by my side, camouflage into plank. Dad offers his hand. Come on.

we walk in, the action of walking making us the slowest people moving and there's a movement in everything. the lifting of weights, spinning of a ropes throwing of arms, the in and out stomach from a man standing still.

The swinging of a bag. There's a man *hitting* a bag. I don't understand. He looks so mad like that bag's so bad. I'm like,

"Dad, why's that man hitting that bag?"

"He's training.

"Why's he training?"

"To get stronger."

Dad puts his hand on my shoulder and walks me deeper into the dungeon, where there are boys my age doing star jumps. All of them missing their cartoons. I figure they must have done something wrong. the man supervising the prisoners talks to Dad. they talk like they know each other they probably do. I don't know anyone he doesn't.

my head isn't high enough to hear their conversation I look around and see a ring. There are two men in either corner, They're wearing helmets and gloves, drinking water.

There's a bell. They move to it, circle each other one of them hits the other one *In the face*. There are no cartwheels, or backflips, or arguments They're just hitting each other *In the face*. I look for someone to stop it but no one even notices. one man on the side claps and another tells a Jerry to move to the left

"I've done the press ups!"

My head twists back. It's a boy my age, he has a chipmunk face and a long red t-shirt going down to his knees.

"You've done all ten press ups then?"

"Yeah!"

"Oh alright,

Do another ten then!"

The boy rolls his eyes like it's a joke he's heard before and then drops to the floor. the trainer smiles at dad and gives me a wink. Dad and man shake hands. it's agreed. I'm going to be Boxing next week.

BREAK

I've parted the war zone
Got All the good guys on the left of my room,
All the bad guys, on the right

Frozen in twisted uppercuts
and flying kicks
Faces twisted in a permanent fury.

Within this space, I make just enough room
for my body.

"Go on, do another ten then!"

Round Two.

Ronnie Smith is planted at the centre of the ring. He's wearing a white sweaty t-shirt and grey jogging bottoms. I've never seen Ronnie Smith outside the centre of the ring and I've never seen Ronnie Smith in any clothes that aren't a white sweaty t-shirt and grey jogging bottoms, but I've never been in the ring with Ronnie. Until now.

He's watching the clock move from the three to the zero.

Break time.

I'm in the corner. Looking at him with pupils so big they could swallow a fist. Looking at the sweat he's covered in, the thick lines covering his eyes around his mouth, where he smiles.

Ronnie turns to me and gives a wink ,a wink that only someone called Ronnie Smith could give.

I hear the the bell. and I turn deaf to all noise outside the ring All I hear is my heartbeat and all I see is him. I realise how tall he is. How small I am. He lifts the left pad (Left pad is for the left hand) (left hands are called Jabs) (I know that) I jab.

I don't bring my left back. Ronnie's pad moves towards my face

Tap.

My chin. Ronnie *hit* me

I look to dad to do something but he's just putting his fist next to his face and pointing to it.

Keep my left up.

Ronnie lifts both pads. One two. I drop both hands before I throw them

knock.

My forehead. Ronnie *hit* me

I keep my hands next to my mouth to protect my chin, and also so he doesn't see my wobbling bottom lip. Move round Ronnie. Move round Ronnie. I look to see where dad is but I can't see him. Move Round Ronnie. Move round Ronnie.

Ronnie is analysing my guard, my stance. I'm looking at his arms. Wondering how arms so large could move so fast.

“Jab”

I jab, bring it back

“Jab”

I Jab, bring it back. all I have to do is bring it back He lifts up a one two, I drop them before I throw them again and **Tap.**

My chin. Again.

I bring my hands back to my chin, mouth, nose, eyes, forehead. Hiding. Crying. Still boxing rubbing my eyes with gloves bigger than my head

"You alright?"

I nod.

Ronnie lets me throw jabs till the round ends. The bell rings and he gives me a pat on the head I step under the third rope with my head hung low leave my gloves on the side of the ring start undoing my wraps I walk towards the door and I leave.

BREAK.

The sky is orange
my skin is warm.

I hear the creek of the door.

It's Dad. He's smiling.

I hide my face.
I'm crying.
I cry a lot.

Dad's smiling

What's wrong

Ronnie hit me.

Did it hurt?
No.

Do you want to stop?

No.

Do you want to go home?

No.

Should we get back in then?

Okay.

Round Three.

My feet manoeuvre over tree roots and slip on wet grass. My face lands against the branch of our neighbour's tree a right hand comes and it slaps against my cheek, another right comes and it slaps my cheek, another right comes, and I dodge, and the right hand hits the tree.

I step, move to the left, and take centre of the garden. My sister turns around. She's angry. Dad is at the back of the garden, holding a stop watch. Eve has to hit me, I have to not get hit. This is the game that Dad has created. This is what happens when Mum's out

Dad's watch beeps and he shout's "stop!" I lower my gloves. Eve hits me in the face.

Kitchen.

Dad's shows me the gumshield

"You ready?"

"Yeah!"

Dad then drops the gumshield into a hob of boiling hot water. Leaves it for a minute, gets some tongs, takes them out, offers it to me and says

"Now put this in your mouth"

This a boiling hot piece of plastic, I have to bite onto for a minute as hard as I can so it moulds round my gums so when someone punches me in the face really really hard, my teeth wont fall out. I want to say, I think this is all getting a bit out of hand.

BREAK.

Tuesdays and Thursdays, on the way to the gym
we listen to the same three songs.
Not because we love those three songs,
but when we arrive at St. Pancras five minutes early
and park a bit further down the road
the tape is perfectly lined up for the fourth.

(Breeeeathe in and)
Stand! up! and fight! UNTil you hear that bell!
Stand toe to toe, trade blow for bLooow
keeeeeeeep punching till your punches tell!
Let! That! crowd! what you knowwwwww
and until you hear that bell,
that final bell,
stand up and
fight
like
helllllllll.

Round Four.

I knew Phapa's name before it was told to me. For him to be who he is, he has to be called Phapa. He has to look just like his dad and his dad has to be a Commonwealth silver-medalist who has plans for his son to follow in his footsteps. He has to of had the darkest skin I've ever seen and there was no way he can't walk in the gym, on his first day Smiling this smile that said he was better than everyone. There was no way any of us could disagree with him.

In shadow boxing I keep him in view. He bobs and weaves, dropping his head like it's dead weight, when I try It's like my head is being lowered by a crane.

“Have you seen Phapa? He's really good”
 “Not as good as Pat though” Taylor says (Taylor)

I'm on the bag with Alfie when they touched gloves, by the time I get to my third punch Patrick jumps out the ring, wailing, crying, rips off his head guard, gloves, runs into the changing room grabs the door and, slam. The gym is in an open mouthed- silence. Even the boxercisers.

Johnny points at me from the centre of the ring.
 "YOU. IN."

I walk the slow walk to my boxing bag Phapa beat Patrick. Patrick is our best. Headguard. Actually, Patrick isn't best. Left glove He's the best fighter. Right glove. and he hits really hard, hits a lot. Gumshield. it makes me cry. I've got to stop crying so much.

Jump into the ring. I've outboxed Patrick a couple of times. I'm a better boxer than Patrick. Phapa is smiling. Dad calls Patrick fat Pat. I smile back.

Bell rings. I move to the centre. Phapa circles. Eye contact. Eye contact. I lower my hand throwing a jab, and Phapa leaps as if someone threw him, I fumble my stance jumping back and jab- it **scuffs** the top of his head guard. He changes his direction going backwards, I chase him and jab him into a corner.

He's got his hands glued to his face, I throw every combination I know
 One Two! One Two Three Four! One Two Three Four Five Six!
 One Two Three Four Five Six Seven Eight! Jab!
 Nothing I'm throwing is actually connecting, I'm just hitting him, to stop him, from hitting me.

He parts his guard just enough for me to see his face. Eye contact. Eye contact.
 He smiles. Oh no.

Black, the room spins
Black, the room spins
Black, the room spins.

step back, face him.

In the world filled with thuds, I hear the tiniest. Blood from my nose hits the canvas. I smile at it. Sean was here. bell rings. Phapa sticks his glove out. I touch it. Next thing I know I'm in the corner and Ronnie is holding my nose Tells Johnny I'm one of his, and gives me a wink.

BREAK

Shenmue is the sickest game ever!
Shenmue is the sickest game ever!
Jade seriously, shenmue, is the sickest game ever.
No I know, I know, it's the sickest of the sick to the icK!

The beginning, when Lan Di, lifts Ryo by the throat!
It was so sick!
and then just drops him!
So sick!
and then Ryo's dad tries to fight lan di
So sick
And Lan di dodges every one
so sick!
And then Lan Di does that sick move that kills ryos dad!
So deep

and then Ryo is holding His dad
and his dad is like
Ryo San. Your friends. Those you love
Keep them close.

Ryo is like, father, father
noooooo!!

and then it zooms outand it's rainingand the graphics are so sick!

Round Five.

Step, pivot, punch.

I was meant to be one of the first fighters on the bill, there's a scheduling mix up

Step, pivot, punch

When someone charges at you, you Step, pivot, punch.

When someone charges at me I step back, crouch, put my hands up. Fighting against that instinct is harder than the fight itself

Johnny says when my opponent charges at me, Jab. And when I'm going forward, Jab, and when I'm too close to throw a jab, Jab. 'Cos I'm tall.

Johnny is a short, tattooed scottish man who counts the circuits in french

"Sit errps! Un! Deux! Trois! Quatre! Cinq! Six! Sept! Huit! Neuf! Dix! Prllass erps!"

Johnny was in the French Foreign Legion. Dad says it's an army for people who don't want to go to prison. That's not why I find Johnny scary.

Half ten- the fifth time I've warmed up only to be told "Not yet" take my gloves off, rest. Rest. Rest. My opponent is on the other side of the hall. He's grown taller, stronger and uglier since the last time I saw him. He grows taller, stronger and uglier every time I look at him.

Johnny encourages aggression. Two warriors in the centre trading punches, That's what Johnny sees heart in I think in every spar I leave him broken hearted. It's not that my heart's not in it. I just want to be able to hit and not get hit. Johnny doesn't think it can go both ways. This isn't why I find Johnny scary.

Dad takes me for a walk outside, To clear my head. He tells me how brave I am for getting in the ring and if I fight like I did last night in sparring I've got nothing to worry about. and he's proud of me no matter what. Sometimes I think that he sees too much He talks about this bravery I have for not-quitting when I see it as accepting fate. proud of me no matter what what if I told him I wanted to stop?
We come back in

Johnny says "Where've you been. You're on.
Glove up."

It's a posh night in Essex. Lots of fat men in suits sat on circle tables Johnny leads me to the ring and I'm scared of him. because I know no matter what techniques or secrets he decides to share with me, right now he's putting me into the ring when I am not ready. My opponent has had three fights already. I'm not ready

Centre of the ring the ref asks us if we're ready. I nod. We touch gloves. Go to our corners The bell rings.
He charges and I Step back,
Crouch,
Put my hands up.

BREAK.

“So we’re finally on the Oblivion yeah
 and I’m looking at Kellan like
 yes finally we’re on the Obblivion
 and I’m looking at Matt likes yess Obblivion
 And we go up, slowly, up
 And it just drops a tiny bit and you hear in the speakers
 “Oblivion”
 and then it drops us all the way
 dowwwwwwwwn!
 and then it twiiiiists and turrrrrns and then stops!
 And that’s it.
 That’s the ride.
 That’s it? We waited for three hours. For that?
 What a load of rubbish!

An audience of parents are laughing.

Akin asked me if I was scared
 Sared of what?
 What if they don't laugh.
 Akin, if they don't laugh they don't laugh.
 It's drama club, nothing to be afraid of.

I see mum laughing, dad isn't.
 He's smiling the way he did
 when he saw me cry after Ronnie took me on the pads.

Round Six.

The legacy I left at St Pancras began and ended with my blood on the canvas. My record is two losses. The first bout ended in the first round in the space of thirty seconds. I come home from school to dad watching the tape of the second fight pointing out how obvious it is I landed more punches. He says it's not right. doesn't like the way I'm treated by the trainers so we go to a new gym.

the Allstars in Harrow. It's where Phapa and his dad now go to Every time I'm there the instrumental for Big Pimpin' is on a permanent loop. The Allstars is what boxing gyms look like in American films. Posters from Sugar Ray Robinson to Roy Jones adorn the walls, ripped from boxing Magazines as far back as the seventies, not laminated but stuck on with blue tac and staplers, each page in a different stage of losing it's colours. I spend hours looking at all these pictures I see how big the world of boxing is, a million men of different backgrounds, shapes and sizes. All you do to enter it is be good at it, and not have braces.

Dad says we can leave boxing if I want but still gets the dentist to make me a special gumshield. So I can't have bouts but I can spar, so I can get into the ring with Phapa and get completely outclassed. I try to learn from him but at the speed he moves it's hard enough seeing him. Each time I get a bit better, get in a jab, a one two, a right hand, and just when I think I've stepped to his level, he throws a combination I could never even think of, let alone throw, let alone land.

What hurts more than the punches he hits me with is the thought that he might be holding back I want us to be on the same level Ashley and Jamal are on They're heroes to Phapa and I, Both in their twenties and spar with punches so fast they leave sparks, Phapa and I's eyes wide while ringside we just watch. They train like kindred spirits, throwing medicine balls hard as they can into each others stomachs

At the end of the night there's a trainer named Sarge who we do a gruelling circuit with. Only difference between Sarge and other trainers is that he does the circuits with us, and is faster. three sets of ten for every exercise you can imagine (plus a couple you couldn't) And at the end, with arms hanging like dreads, the test is to see if we can do ten pull ups

It's taken me a year to get to ten. Nana has passed since then. Dad's argued with mums step brother and we haven't talked to that side of the family since then. We have had our flat flooded and moved to a new house since then. The new way home requires two busses. Two weeks in a row I get lost and even when I don't, I get in at around ten. Settled then,

We need a new gym.

BREAK

We're in the new house,
We have bean bags
I'm a man who has a bean bag for a head.

Running across the room.

Hellllooooo Niiiiice to meeet youuuu!

I hear Evie Laughing

Then she stops
I lift the bean bag above my face
Dad is standing. Mum is behind.
His eyes are puffy. Face red.

You think that's funny?
What if you feel out the window.
You think we'd can afford it?
We've just moved house.
Do you have any idea how much it costs to fix a window?
you'd fall on the neighbours car, we'd have to pay for that.
We'd have to pay for your funeral
we just finished paying for your nans
I'd have to organise it
talk to all these people I don't like just because
you decided put a bean bag on your head

do you still think it's funny?

No.

Dad goes downstairs. A door slams.

The bean bag slides off my head.

Round Seven.

Simon rushes to the centre, dragging feet across a dusty canvas. I lead with my left foot so far that if my arm was raised it'd be a black power protest. Eye contact. Eye contact.

I edge towards him, guard up. He shows his gum shield and his eyes wince. My knees drop. His right goes over me. His feet are stuck, planted, throwing punches and my head is by his stomach, bobbing and weaving. Before each punch I hear him breathe in.

A left hook scrapes my head guard, it twists round my head- velcro scratches my chin
Stand up, stop. try to adjust. See his right hand, **black** (Decked. by a curtained hair, foot taller, year older, two stone heavier Irish freight train called Simon. He calls the van his car and for the past six months after every time he's beaten my arse he's said "good spar") The room spins.

keep my guard up, his left hook hits my glove which hits my face, it's like I'm hitting myself. If I could laugh I'd laugh.

I move with the weight of his punch and swing a left of my own. It connects. I can't let him catch his breath I put another in his body- he's angry. Throws hook, hook, hook, hook.

I bob, weave, bob step, fall over, scramble across the ring, dust my gloves. Simon wants to throw more but breathing is getting in the way. He's tired. He doesn't do the exercises. Now.
Kill him now.

Eye contact. I have to get within distance of punching, have to stop running, because apart from punching he's defenceless. He jumps with a tired jab. I step to the right. Put all my weight on the ball of my right foot
Twist my hips
Extend my arms
Turn my fist
Bang
Right hand to the head. He almost loses balance

He sticks his left out, not a punch, but a plea to stop for a second. Fuck off. I throw another right. *Bang.* and another right. *Bang.* and another right. *Bang.*
Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang.

He's leaning forward facing the ground. Stop looking at my shoes. I dig in a left uppercut. Punch the top of his head- He pushes me for distance while stepping backwards. I give a left hook and take the centre of the ring.

When he's not trying to kill me, Simon has quite a childlike face. Eye contact. Eye contact The first right hand has left a mark. He'll carry that home.

He doesn't go forward to fight but instead circles, back to the ropes. I leap forward with a right hook he ducks it and moves out of range.

The bell rings. Simon puts his legs over the ropes

Simon. Simon. good spar.

BREAK

On the way home
Dad talks about the right hand
about the smack, about how
it's a changing of the guard
He talks me through all the moves I did
and the way I did them and how
brilliant I was.
He knew I could beat him.
He knew it.

It makes the car ride all the more short.
He can't park directly outside or he'll get a ticket
he says it's ridiculous

He wants to shout something
but he doesn't. He tightens his grip on the steering wheel
looks away from me. Looks at the steering wheel.

Grips it tight.
Eyes close.
Loosens.

Says he's proud of me.
That he loves me.

I love you too Dad.

Send my love to your sister.

I will.

I open the car door.

And your mum.

Okay.

Round Eight.

There's a German girl at the gym. I say girl, she's older than a girl. Older than me. Like- older than twenty.

She's good at boxing but doesn't spar which I secretly think is a good thing. She's very pretty. Apparently Paul took her on a date once. Paul.

I can't help look at her ankles when she skips and I'm not, attracted to ankles anymore than I am to elbows which, isn't anything at all but I'm just lost in these ankles. Not realising I've been pressing the incline button on the treadmill for a whole minute to save face I run uphill for five miles.

There aren't any other women here. Just me, trainers, Irish travellers, Dad, and Lavent. Lavent says when he grows up, he's going to be a butcher. I think his right hand is going to replace the device they use to stun cows.

In the ring he **catches** me on the dodge almost knocking my head off. My neck stays stiff. I'm alright. I'm alright. inside my brain is doing backflips

Lavent's eyes widen. with a gum-shield in his mouth he says "Thorry"
The familiar tap. tap. My nose is bleeding.

Paul says take a break.
(Thanks Paul.
Good timing there)

An all too casual crash out the ring starring at the ceiling
when there's a pull at my hand. I follow her. Her ponytail swings. It's a ponytail but It has that double thing, that curling into itself thing. David.... Platts

I'm led into the girls toilets. They're pink. They're the girls toilets. She rests a tissue below my nose, her right hand holds the side of my chin, lifting my head, one of her fingers brushes my ear lobe. if she let go, I'd fall down.

Her face is concentrated on my nose My face on her face. I've never been this close to someone I wasn't supposed to hit.
"You're always fighting"
"Thanks"

hands leave my face. She leans back and assesses. Instinct tells me she'll throw a right. No rights. Just smiles. Can't dodge that.

She leaves, ponytail swings.

The toilet mirror shows me, me.
Oh. My. Dayyys.

BREAK.

Homeopathic.
don't know what it is
but he looks it.

a small grey goatee
talks like there's nowhere to go.
Probably because
the office is in his home.

Asks how long the eczema has been there.
About six months.
Mum says we've tried everything
taken out every food, tried every diet
tried every balm.
Every cream.
Everything.

He scratches his goatee scratch with the middle finger.
Is he swearing at me?

Asks if there's been anything in the past six months
that has been emotionally, stressful?

No.

Mum says Sean.
and then looks at me
and then says no
to herself
and then looks at the ceiling
and says, to the doctor
recently, me and his father,
his dad, Mick.
We've decided to separate.

Round Ten.

I'm within an inch of a squat and I'm certain that if I breathe out I'll fall down. I don't know who this person is and the stance he has me in has my newly lengthened legs sprawled across the ring. It's less orthodox-more Baby Giraffe

He's taller than six foot and standing at four feet He lifts the pad. I Jab.

His mop of brown hair dips below my eye line, rises to my left hand side and he lifts both pads

One two.

I rotate to face him, each one of my cogs, visibly turning.

One two.

He steps to the side of me and then explains a combination for me to throw that involves two left hands being thrown in a row, using the momentum of the hook to bring me further to the left and before he gets to the end I need him to explain it to me again.

“Could you say that again please?”

Most trainers I know are mid-forties cab drivers with mid forties cab driver stomachs and as far as the knowledge goes it's strictly historical landmarks: Piccadilly circus, bob and weave. Trafalgar square, double jab right hand.

The man I'm in the ring with is in his mid twenties and doing wheelies down south london side streets. The round ends and he says we'll go again in half a minute.

In my thirty seconds of stillness he holds his stance, and practices a burst of movement to the left while throwing a right and then a left hook. Move and right, left hook.

Move and right. Left hook.

He slams the pads to begin the new round and before he says anything I dive in with the combination.

He smiles. Shows me how to properly do it. and then tells me to do it again. Again.

Colin Wilson is twenty four and used to box as well. He doesn't anymore and is looking to be a trainer. This is his first day at the gym. He says he's lucky he's found me because I'm like him, tall and skinny.

Colin's love for boxing is infectious, he tells me about Willie Pep and we practice his over the top right on the pads. When I'm at bus stops or at corners in school halls. I practice my hooks and turns on opponents Every time I'm at the gym we start earlier and finish later.

He keeps throwing new stance ideas training regimes at me but I don't tire much. In fact, I'm hungry for it.

I get in the ring with his older brother Ian- Someone who is able to not just punch someone in the face but can jab you on the forehead throw a right hand to your nose and then put a left hook on your chin. He's also impossible to hit, but I've come close a couple of times.

My legs get wider, to stay lower. I no longer carry the weaknesses of a tall boxer. I stay within range throughout a fight, never letting up on pressure, constantly moving with, and after, every punch.

After a twenty minute sparring session with three separate partners, two of them adults, Colin asks me if I'm ready. For what-a bout.

when I'm boxing. I don't really talk a lot.

So I nod.

BREAK

Colin said it'd be a good idea to go toilet before the weigh in.
That was half an hour ago. Weigh in is in five minutes.
I stand up, look back.
Nothing. Still wipe.
Flush. Wash hands.

I step out- Dad and Colin are outside
pretending they weren't waiting.

That they aren't as nervous as I am.

It's alright.

Round Eleven.

Magic Mahoney

Sean secures victory on debut

TEENAGE prospect Sean Mahoney had a debut to remember as he made his bow for the Islington Boys Club on Friday night.

Mahoney, 15, from Tufnell Park, picked up the 'Best Visiting Boxer' of the night award on the Newham BC show held at the Territorial Army Centre in Stratford, East London.

The IBC boxer won a unanimous points verdict over the host club's Jason Lovejoy in a thrilling bout that had the fight fans on their feet after a pulsating three rounds.

"For a junior bout it was an excellent fight and Sean put on a really classy tactical display of boxing for such a young lad," said Paul Hammick, head coach at the Archway-based club.

"It was in a championship-size ring which really suited Sean as he is fast on his feet and he used his defensive skills well when he was under pressure early on in the fight."

The Newham boy started strongly in the opening round and had Mahoney on the back foot but the Islington boxer's confidence grew in the second round when he started landing some blows on his opponent.

That left it all up for grabs in the

AMATEUR BOXING SCENE

third and final round and both boxers went for it with Mahoney clearly gaining the upper hand and getting the judges' verdict.

"It was a real eye-opener for Sean but he has been with us in the gym for a year now and has been working hard and we decided he was ready to get into the ring," added Hammick.

"There were a good 18 bouts on the card so to get voted as best visiting boxer was a big boost for Sean and a lot of credit must go to his coach Colin Wilson who has done a lot of work with him.

"Colin is a former junior national champion so knows exactly what it takes and he and another coach John Richards have been doing really well with the juniors," added Hammick.

■ MEANWHILE the famous Angel ABC look certain to pull off a boxing coup in that they have located a boxing venue in the heart of the borough where they hope to stage their next tournament on Thursday March 25.

Angel club spokesman John Jacobs said this week: "We are about 99 per cent certain that we shall be able to stage our next club tournament at the Boston Arms in Islington on March 25.

"Licensee Pat Murray is a good friend of and supporter of our club, he is one of our Honorary Vice-President's and he is willing to make part of his premises available to us for this tournament.

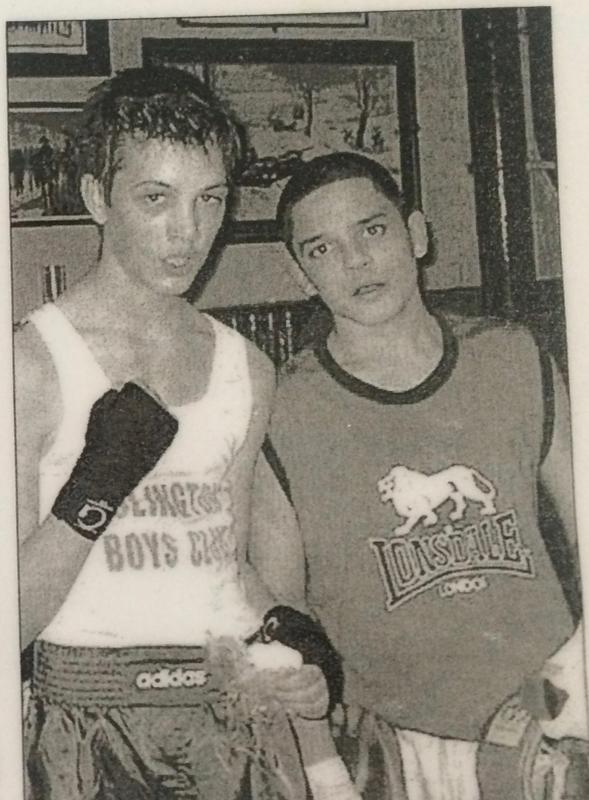
"The venue which will be exclusive to the Angel Club will be known as the Angel Amateur Boxingdrome and we are very hopeful that is where our show will take place.

"It is about time that there was a venue in Islington to stage top amateur shows and we are delighted to have found it."

■ HOXTON'S Lion Boxing Club are pleased to announce that their forthcoming dinner boxing tournament at the Prince Regent Rooms in Chigwell on Friday March 19 is a complete "sell-out" with all tickets having been sold six weeks before the show takes place.

A delighted Lion Club chairman Alan Parry said this week: "We are so pleased that we have sold all the tickets for our dinner show on March 19, it is a fantastic achievement by everyone at the Club.

"Now that we don't have to concentrate on ticket sales we can devote all of our time to putting all the other aspects of the show into place and to ensure that we have another great evening at the Prince Regent Rooms like we have done there in recent years."



■ TEEN TERRORS ... Islington Boys Club debutant Sean Mahoney (left) and his opponent Jason Lovejoy (Newham BC) pictured after their thrilling bout on the Newham show on Friday night.

Break.

Explain the policy of Vietnamisation.

Explain, the policy, of Vietnamisation.

Explain the policy of, Viet.Nam. Isation.

Chris. Chris is asking the teacher for something.

He needs extra writing paper.

Fucking Chris.

Explain the policy.

Of Vietnam.I.Sation.

Round Twelve

The dust rises as my feet land. Elbows tucked. Knees bent my whole body under his fist.
The longer an arm swings the quicker the air he punches through turns to treacle

Twist on the ball of my left foot. Left arm thrown. My right fist locked at my temple. Body twists to the right
Left fist digs into his side. I hear a small gasp through his gumshield
I've stolen his air.
Colin shouts outside the ring- to the head!

Right foot steps back left hand *swings*. Head guard wobbles right hand lands, *clean*.

He steps backwards, lower back touching the ropes, hands clasped to his face ready for an onslaught. The crowd roar.
The same Essex venue I broke down at, still filled with fat men in suits. They're screaming "Hit 'ems" and "Get 'ems" and "Kill 'ems" like they're tacticians.

I listen to Colin, Stay on him.
I go forwards, towards him. Keep my hands up, knees bent. They're simple steps but each skill has been raised by trial and error to be equal in importance. Fists in my face reminders, I've spent too many years being reminded.

My jab searches for spaces in his guard. Apparently my opponent didn't show, so they've put this boy in. Apparently he's an England hopeful, hopeful.
A stone heavier, and his trainers asked Colin if it'd be alright if he could fight me instead and Colin was smiling while telling me all of this, knowing everyone in this crowd has bet against me
because I've only won four fights. and he's on thirteen and we're twenty seconds into the second round and he hasn't hit me once.

He throws a jab to show the crowd he's still in it, a jab just to keep me back a bit, a jab for appearances. I know those jabs. I've thrown those jabs. I parry and jab back with conviction. Show him how to do it.

He has frilly shorts and a mechanic sponsorship on his vest. He's planning to be something great. All my plans hinge on the next right hand.

He charges forward, rabid a swinging hook, both of his feet are in the air. I meet him first, my right hand acting as a **stop** sign.

He flies across the ring running backwards falling over. He's fallen over. He fell over...
I knocked him over. The crowd are so loud, it's like they've forgotten their bets. The ref points the the white corner, I got to the white corner.

him being off balance makes the punch look harder than it was.

The ref still gives him a standing count. Maybe he thought he'd have an easy night.
He's looking at me, trying to figure something out. Maybe he thought I'd be an easy fight. I've got my knees bent, and my hands up, even now.

BREAK

Excuse me everyone and when I say everyone that means you Andres!
Thank you.

I'm just letting you know that, if there's anyone here that can't- or might not want to- do an A-level, don't worry, because
but want to feel like they're doing A-levels
You can sign up to do a BTEC
on a table, on the other side of the hall. That's all I wanted to say.
Thank you.

I walk to a desk with a paper
that has a lot of D's on it.

Lets see what I can work with.

Home economics. Cool.
Something to do with being a Mechanic. Cool.
Performing Arts. Cool.

Performing arts. What's that.
Is it like drama? It's like drama but, every day?

Can I do Performing arts please? Thank you.

Round Thirteen.

My right hand makes a home on his nose. He goes to the ropes, I should follow, instead I hold the centre. Eye contact. Eye contact.

The final bell rings, he spits out his gum shield and collapses into my arms. says I won that. I say "Thanks, you never know"

I walk to my corner, look for Colin, he gives me a nod. I look for Dad he gives me a nod. I've done enough.

Dave takes my head guard off, struggling with the velcro probably hurting me more than the last three rounds did.

Walking back to the centre of the ring, I wonder how many of my school halls could fit inside The York Hall. How loud a sound would have to be to reach it's ceiling. Colin said that this is a place where history is made, history you'll be apart of mate. IBI Semi finals, don't know what the two I's stand for but the B is a given.

The Ref opens his piece of paper, shrugs, and lifts the other boys arm. He won. I lost. Someone shouts Fuck off I think it's Dad. There's a polite clap and a couple angry shouts by some other angry men. I shake his trainers hands They say unlucky, they thought that was mine.

I step out the ring and am swarmed by big men wearing flat caps and jackets made of leather or sheepskin. Giving me whiplash with back pats. Saying I fucking had that. Dad takes me away from the crowd like I'm Britney Spears or something.

"It was his Michael! It's a Disgrace."
Michael?

In a now depressingly low ceilinged room, Colin and Dad are in agreement that I've been robbed. Colin reassures me of the judges idiocy, the conviction in his voice bouncing off the walls. I nod, lost, looking at my wraps, taking them off. Watching the white shine out from the black. The indentations left on my hands. "We won't have to worry about this when you go pro"
"Pro?"

Professional.

my eyes search for dads, an instinct as learnt as keeping up my left. He doesn't look back. His eyes, like mine, have been lost to somewhere else.

"Yeah. Definitely. And, we're still training tomorrow?"
Colin says I can have a rest if I want.
"Nah, sundays. Sprints."

Before we leave, dad says bye to his old friends and he ends up shaking every mans hand. And every man grabs his arm with a plea like, Michael, have a drink. He nods them in my direction, and their grips release.

On the way to the car dad dips to my left relieving my boxing bag from my hands.

Break

Because you know jade, like
I watch tv, and so much of it so shit

So shit, I know, so shit.

and what we do Jade, like, you know
at train stations, at mine,
We make like, we make stories.

I know, that's what I was saying to my mum yesterday
like, we make stories.

I think that, if we started filming them,
If we rehearsed every day,
and tried really really hard
and went to comedy clubs every night
I mean, what we make, it's our own thing
It's our own world
I don't see how we can't---
I don't see, if we work hard
and are good enough
how we can be denied,
by anyone.

Yeah, like, yeah. Yeah. Every day?

Yeah. Every day.

Every-day?

Every. Day. What else are we going to do?

Play computer games?

Well yeah, we'll play computer games too. Obviously.

Round Fourteen.

I can feel a bead of sweat run down my forehead, it hits my left eyebrow, then settles into a cut in my eyelids. There's a sting, if it had a sound, it'd be bacon hitting a hot frying pan. Eczema has made my eyelids a deep red you can see from across a football pitch and if I didn't have so much adrenaline inside me, I'd have tilted my neck, feeling the sweat on my cheek.

the floorboards creek as I twist my feet, grab Alex's collar and shout at him, David is slow to pull me back so I start shaking him while laughing, David is very slow on cues. I keep laughing. I don't know why it's funny. We've killed a baby.

The spotlight makes a sound turning off and it's heat leaves my skin. I grab a chair, take it off stage, and start running.

The world turns white as my eyes adjust to the sun. Alex shouts from outside the Drama block that I grabbed his collar too hard. I twist and face him mid run, putting my finger over my lips if he shouts like that the audience will hear him. There's a ramp, I run up that, stairs, I run up those, Room thirty one, find my back pack, change my clothes, check my phone. Five o'clock. I've got an hour, I can make it, I can make it.

Ms Brown catches me at the door, blocking my way, trying to catch my eyes, asking me about UCAS, I nod at the ground and slide under her arm and keep running all the while saying I know, I know. Sorry Miss.

Run, stairs, run, door, run, door, run, school gates, bus stop.

Wait for C11.

Run to the next bus stop.

Wait for C11.

Run to next bus stop.

Wait for the C11

Run to West Hampstead train station and throw my body through the doors as they're about to close.

Sorry, sorry. Thank you.

My sweat gets cold. And I realise, my t-shirt is heavy. I lift it with pincer fingers. it makes a sound leaving my chest, a bit like velcro. Wet velcro. So much sweat.

Catch my breath

Kentish Town West.

I treat the automatic doors like a starting gun shoot straight from them and sprint till I'm at the Irish Centre.

I make it just in time for the weigh-in, Colin gives me a box of pasta, taps the lid, says to eat it now. I'm on in ten minutes.

I look to the corner of the hall and find dad, as that's where he is in halls. I put my bag behind him and put my boots on.

How did the play go?

It was good.

What was it called?

Sweat drops from my nose onto my laces. I stare at my laces. Laces. drip. Laces. Shit. I've forgotten how to tie my laces.

You okay, son?

I stand up, soaking wet, wobble a bit, drenched in sweat. Wobble a bit. Blood catching up to my head.

Putting my gum shield into my mouth, look up to see dad, then forget I'm now taller than him. I make eye contact and say yeah. yeah. Definitely.

Dad eyes open up bigger than I've ever seen, if I could give that look a name, I'd say it was fear. I try to smile Dad tries to smile, my name is called and I go to put the red sash on.

BREAK

I feel the sun's heat on my skin.
 I'm wearing a t-shirt and jeans.
 I had to grow my hair out for the play, Saved.
 The show's been over for half a year now.
 And I still haven't got it cut.

Dad looks at it suspiciously.
 As if my hair is a bad influence.
 My fringe whispering into my ear at night
 telling me to not to listen to him.

Did you go Boxing on Wednesday?

Yeah.

Are you sure? Because I went,
 and I didn't see you there.
 I asked Colin, he didn't see you. I looked like
 a fucking idiot Sean. I had to leave after five minutes
 because I was so embarrassed.

I'm sorry.

I don't even care. I went to see you.
 I don't get to see you every day son.

I had to finish my coursework, for Drama.

Then what about all the other times?
 It's like, I know this wasn't forever.
 But. You've got to tell me what's on your mind son.

I don't know.

You do Sean. You do know. You're just not telling me.

Epilogue

Look at the street, look at my notebook. Look at the street, tilt my notebook. Look at the street. put my notebook on the ground. Look at the street, study the map I drew off google, following the route till I get to the venue. Left, left, straight. Easy. Should be. This method of getting to gigs works rarely.

most times I turn left instead of right and walk around London all night. There's a lego brick click satisfying feeling when I go from a part of London I don't know to a part I do. Walking till Vauxhall turns into Charing Cross or Realising how close East London is to Angel.

London at night time is like a training section in computer game, practicing for when it matters. For the days, but the days' roads are filled with people, with *jobs* ,going to *places*.

I'm trying to pass off free-falling-flopping for walking. Giving out CV's for weeks with the wrong phone number on, going to parties and clamming up to people I want to speak to and it's the same story for job interviews. It's like talking is a language I'm still trying to learn.

Left

Kings Cross has changed a bit. Since the Eurostar there aren't any women saying the word "business" outside McDonald's to whoever walks past.

Left

I see the big gate, but I try not to look at it. I even try to hid my face in case it recognises me.

Straight.

The Cross Kings pub, I manoeuvre past all the functioning people in search of it's basement. There's a man in an empty room with a clipboard. A row of chairs have been set up. And a spotlight.

“Alright?”

“Yeah, can I sign up for the open mic please?”

The feeling of falling only stops when I'm holding a Microphone. For five minutes I'm in complete control of where my life goes. And for most of those minutes, I'm battered with silences and dry coughs, but that's only for most of the five minutes.

He writes my name down on a list with only my name on it and says “Well, you're an hour early”
“safe”

Stairs, door, beer garden. Wait. Look at the big gate.

My old boxing club, The Times, is behind that big gate. The big gate I'd usually jump over to get to the gym quicker, and because jumping over gates is fun.

I can see it. I see it. I see it till I realise I've been seeing it for twenty minutes. I give what's left of the heat in my hands to the metal bars as I launch myself over the gate. Just to see if I can still do it. I see the lights are on in the gym. I walk towards it, just to see if anyone is in. I go inside just to be inside again.

I don't know why, it's all too soon. I told myself to not comeback till I've made something of myself, or at least until I prove that my choices are the right ones because when so many people have looked out for you it feels disrespectful to not do so for yourself.

"Marlon Brando!" Dave's voice catches me by surprise, I feel like I've been caught sneaking in. He's smiling, The spit on the side of his mouth prominent as it's ever been. I learnt more about about boxing dodging his spit than i did listening to him talk about boxing.

He asks why he hasn't seen me on the telly yet like it's a real question.

“I don't know”

He then explains to me that Colin isn't training here anymore and I pretend to have known that.

I hear the sound of pads being hit hit with an efficiency that satisfies my soul. Three slams, I don't need to see it, to know it's a one two, left hook.

It's George. Alfie's little brother. His' eyes have a focus that I think only an athlete could have. Having nothing matter more than the task at hand. The round ends and he immediately smiles at me. He knew I walked in, but for three minutes, kept focused and in that, I know he's the real deal.

He sits on the edge of the ring. Blonde cropped hair shining with sweat. The night is dedicated to training him. He's got a big fight coming up. IBI Finals.

He asks how dad is.

"He's doing well"

Alan asks how his writing is going

"Well as well, he had a play on at the Royal Court recently"

Alan says "*Royal?* That's alright"

George asks if I'm here to train tonight.

"No, I, My, mate, is doing stand up, and I'm going to support him"

Georges eyes go big. He shakes his head and says "Wow, stand up. You must be so brave to do stand up"

"Maybe. I don't think it's that different from what you do, in a way"

"Yeah?"

I feel a smile on my face. The ones no one can dodge, it makes George smile too.

"I think so. Anyway. I've got to go. Good luck with the fight George. You're looking really good in that ring."

I give Alan a nod, I shake Dave's hand. I walk towards the door, and above the door I see boxing clock.

Haven't seen one of those in years, and funnily enough, I've got a little bit of time left before I get to hear the bell ring. So, why not. I wait. and I wait.

And I wait.