

Mechanical Sin

John Lynch

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned,” said Barry. “I plagiarized an essay.”

“Why have you done so?” asked Father Markus.

“At three o’clock in the morning before it was due with only one paragraph written, my options were scarce,” said Barry.

“How did you obtain a complete assignment?” asked Father Markus.

“I bought a copy of an essay from the ‘go-to’ guy in my school,” said Barry. “He offers help to many other students as well.”

“Offers help?” asked Father Markus.

“Well, he sells copies of essays to other students,” said Barry.

“He helps other students cheat,” said Father Markus.

“Yes, a tempting, rampant, and successful underground market as bad as a drug cartel,” said Barry. “Completely run by one person and participated in by more than half of the school.”

The confessional becomes silent as the rest of the church as Father Markus develops an act of penance. Although Barry assumes the penance will include several prayers, he feels as though that may not satisfy his guilty conscience and must express his true sorrow and redemption.

“What is the name of your contact?” asked Father Markus.

“I only know him by his username ‘Red,’” said Barry.

“Then you are the one who must bring an end to his ring,” said Father Markus.

Barry agrees to the request as he exits the confessional and church to deliver a copy of the essay to his contact named

Red. Red's home and hideout, which rests at the edge of town, mimics a haunted house. No sane person would in such a frightening and archaic place decorated by gargoyles. The windows are darker than the surrounding night, but bright lights emerge from the small windows outlining the basement. Loud waves of heavy metal, thrash metal, and death metal music burst from beneath the house as though the songs are recordings of an exorcism.

Red will certainly not hear the doorbell ring, so Barry's only option is to enter through the back door which leads directly to the basement. He shouts down the staircase several times, but the intense music clouds Red's senses. Barry descends into the basement and discovers Red tending to his cheating ring on his computer without notice of Barry's sudden arrival.

This is Red? A simple-looking high school student? Convenient. His favorite color is red. His shirts are red. The room is completely occupied by posters of his favorite bands, a plastic skeleton on one side, and a statue of the three-headed dog Cerberus on the other side. His e-mail box is flooded with hundreds of requests not just from students in his own high school, but from all across the country who betray the academic code of honor by submitting to an easier, satisfying, exciting, and rewarding route like members of a cult. In several simple clicks and keystrokes, Red uploads several copies of his own assignments and sends them to his buyers in return for a money transaction.

Red earns green.

A thick power cord slithers across the basement floor like a serpent. Barry pulls the plugs apart as the music and computer completely shut down like an EMP effect of a nuclear holocaust.

“What the...?”

A tap on his shoulder startles Red.

“What just happened?” asked Red. “What did you just do to my computer?”

“I’m Barry. I bought a plagiarized essay several nights ago.”

“Ah, yes, what was the final grade?” asked Red.

“Obviously, the teacher did not notice, right?”

“You can say it was written by Red,” said Barry. “And it was marked in red.”

Barry places the essay on the table before Red who notices the front page marked with a large red “F” and a capitalized lettered comment: “PLAGIARIZED.”

“How? Hundreds of students throughout the country use this exact essay,” said Red. “The plagiarism is nearly unnoticeable.”

“It’s very noticeable,” said Barry. “So is your operation.”

The ring of the doorbell echoes through the house. As waves of blue and red lights flash from the street through the small windows, Red bursts from the basement in an attempt to flee his private underworld.