**Short story competition – Eleanor Ma 9V**

Uncontrollably, I plunge my hands into the sodden ground, searching, I find his arm. I pull. His limp body lay engulfed in the mud, his eyes staring fixating into my soul. He’s dead. Yet still I believe that we could all be alive, we could all have a different story, but we don’t. This is the timeline we were destined for. A life of war and destruction. That’s where we always end up. Hatred overpowers our feelings of love, understanding and compassion. We are mean and love to see the iridescent blood ooze uncontrollably from our enemies. We excel in rage, the want for more power despite having more than we could ever need. Who have we become? What does this mean?

My sudden return to reality sees me searching for the mask, its safety from the wretched gas that feeds off our organs, taking away the life we have left in us; if any. Fumbling around, I cannot find it. I want to escape. Get away from this place. This place of torture and destruction. I can feel the gas drowning me as I choke and splutter for safety. I can hear them shouting my name, dragging me away from this place. People with strange faces spoke longingly towards me, with words I shall never hear. I can feel my froth-corrupted lungs pushing my life away. I want to die. To escape this. Be at peace.

Darkness. It surrounds my thoughts, my body, everything. Is this what it feels like to die? I can feel the warmth of deaths hand as he takes me away with him. We walk towards the light.

I awake with a start, lights blaring uncontrollably at my face. Is this heaven, or am I destined for the trauma of hell, its wrath blinding me for all eternity? Her face draws closer, her eyes peering, full of distress, at me. I try to take a slow breathe, but my lungs hate me for it, ending with a splutter and a pool of blood. I sit up, affliction flooding my body, my head spinning as I am told to lie back, that I need to rest.

I am not at peace. I am not dead – not yet. I am still in this monstrosity, clinging on to life with my bear hands. I want to let go. I want it to end. Rather hell than this undesirable place of war.

“Please,” I whisper to her, “let me die, let me die.”