# The Trading Room (flash fiction)

**By : Richmaggs**

A short tale for convention goers. Don't always believe what the dust cover tells you. Some stigmas are a little unfair! They're quick to be labled nerds but all seem very content and happy. There's a lesson there somewhere!

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Clive stands in the silent queue. Every soul is exactly one rucksack apart. Nobody speaks. Clive hasnâ t bathed since Tuesday, but this doesnâ t matter because itâ s only Friday. He scratches behind his ear and the underside of his uncut nail fills with matter. He subconsciously rolls the dead scalp out from under the nail with his thumb and flicks it towards the floor. Nobody notices. He switches the carrier bag that he has in his left hand to his right in the hope that it will occupy and distract the right hand and admonish any guilt that it may feel from his unhygienic deposit. Again, nobody notices because everybody in the queue has a carrier bag. The door at the front of the queue opens and all of the rucksack clad, carrier bag carrying, parka wearing folk file passed the post-it note stuck to the door. It reads, â Trading Room & Book Signingâ .

Three things are humming inside the trading room. A disgruntled bluebottle head butts the light bulb that has illuminated this sterile interior and rudely awakened him from his slumber. The hotelâ s air conditioning, for we are in a hotel function suite, groans into existence and commences the perpetual recycling of air. This is just as well because our third hummers are the dust clusters themselves who are swiftly gathering in their unsanitised lines around the traders tables.

There is a uniform scent in the Trading Room, a gathering of the great unwashed. And, a word on their uniform; presumably woven from the place in oneâ s mind that courts isolation and solo pursuits, their garments contrast with the painstakingly symmetrical and clean presentation upon the traderâ s tables, yet show a consistency and symmetry all of their own upon each wearer. If you will, a polar opposite to the product that they will all potentially purchase. Again, nobody notices this aroma of social defeat except for a convention operative stationed beside an opened window. Clive isnâ t any different to anyone else. There isnâ t any need to feel self conscious. Come to think of it, Clive never does.

Clive makes his way to his favourite trader and stands patiently behind two rucksacks awaiting the opportunist gap that may appear at any moment. He doesnâ t feel he can manage the required, â excuse meâ , so he waits with nervous apprehension. The rucksacks part and the table presents itself to him. Ecstasy. Fresh from his own meticulous cataloguing at home in his room, Cliveâ s eyes widen and he gazes over the tantalising display. His mouth waters and he feels a stir of excitement deep within his loins. Pristine plastic wallets housing mint condition product. Creaseless wipe clean cellophane stretched over priceless picture perfect presentations of heroic protagonists posing with their props.

Clive looks on enviously as a brave soul punctures the polite silence and asks if he can examine a copy of issue one. Our courageous friend lifts his desire from the table and brushes a careful hand over the protective

sleeve. His other hand slides expertly inside the transparent outer shell and completes a manoeuvre of sublime stealth and accuracy. Clive inhales sharply as Mr Brave prepares his thumb and forefinger to lift the cover away from page one and peer inside. Our erstwhile trader glances above his horn rimmed spectacles and then pushes them up to the bridge of his nose feigning a lack of concern that he is clearly harbouring. He shifts on his stool behind the table and squeezes his crossed legs tighter together. Dr Courage passes the test with flying colours. His fingers tease and his gentle breath blows as page one is severed from its umbilical cover. Clive exhales and continues to browse.

From the open window eddies the street noise of an unfolding day. It is still early and commuters are fulfilling the obligatory requisites of their morning routines. The timid and introverted silence in the Trading Room allows the hullabaloo of alien lives outside of this hobby to flood the air with danger. A car back fires, a siren urgently shrieks, a wolf whistle, a confident bellow and the ubiquitous clatter and clank of the cityâ s coffee shops sends a bearded, lanyard sporting man wearing a faded black t shirt towards the window. Clive monitors the manâ s progress and is comforted when his eczema clad, fat fingers wrestle the window closed. Having lost his source of fresh air, an observing hotel porter takes his leave. This building is a barrier to the outside world. Their uniform parkas, a barricade from pointless social interaction unconnected with the hobby. The hobby itself, and its stigma is another veil under which the dust clusters are happy to assemble, safe in the knowledge that the membrane is unlikely to burst.

But burst it will. Those down on the pavement colouring the ether with their noisy lives hold an aloof interpretation of the dust clusterâ s societal malfunction. This communal breakage is presently browsing in the function suite. Impossibly sheltered and clouded in naivety, heads hanging to shroud their pale faces that readily embrace being collectively obsolete.

Clive smiles at the dampened racket and shuffles his shy, polite plimsolls further along the horseshoe of vendors. Still unable to manage an â excuse meâ , he stuffs his frustrated impatient fists into his satisfied parka pockets and waits once more for a yielding rucksack to permit him a momentâ s flirtation with the tableâ s formica edge. Clive sees his holy grail and moves to occupy it. As he does so an officious convention operative pierces the peripheral crust and releases the fetid atmosphere once more into the horrifying reality of outside through the reopened window. A flue exhales, a seagull screams, shutters rattle and a little boy is crying. Clive places his hand to his ear and our fussy friend respectfully once again refills the pane with glass.

Like wayward yet predictable flies around an orange sodium streetlamp, the clusters of dust continue to hover around the table. One turns and sees Clive who immediately looks shyly to his feet but finally manages an, â Excuse me, pleaseâ . Dusty moves and stares at Clive. As he does so he begins rummaging frantically in his own carrier bag and extracts a heavy hardback. Clive is welcomed behind the table with the shake of an eczema ridden hand and takes his place upon his stool. â Hello Clive. Itâ s a pleasure to meet you. Would you mind signing my book please?â

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