

GRINDER

By William C. Martell

Young suburban husband James Hackett watched as his wife and daughter were struck and dragged a hundred feet by a drunk driver. Hit and run. The ambulance didn't arrive in time, and both died - holding tight to his hands. Though skid marks and paint chips were left behind, James didn't get a clear look at the car's license plates... and the crime went unsolved. His life was over... until the phone call.

An unidentified informant can lead him to the drunk who killed his wife and daughter. Depression turns to rage and vengeance - James grabs a baseball bat and goes to an abandoned factory to meet the reckless wretch who destroyed his family and his life. But when steps he out of his car, he is shot with a tranquilizer dart and blacks out...

Waking up inside a small room of the abandoned factory...

No shoes or socks.

All of the pockets torn out of his clothes.

In his left hand - a sickle.

His right hand is handcuffed to a huge brutish stranger - Richard Coburn.

Coburn has a hammer in his free hand.

And they aren't alone.

Young, beautiful Yvonne Rosso has a key in her right hand, and is handcuffed to older woman Dyan Mason who has a big padlock in her free hand.

Trailer trash Bob McShane has a .38 revolver in one hand and is cuffed to refined gentleman Ian Elliott, who has seven bullets in his free hand.

Bitchy Lee Benjamin has an axe in her right hand and is cuffed to aggressive and abusive Serge Geisinor, who has a pair of heavy-duty work gloves in his free hand.

Before they can get to know each other, James notices the cameras in the room... then a voice (known as "Control") comes over the speaker. Control asks if they would like to play a little game. Before they can respond, the voice tells them that the room is about to be filled with deadly gas. There are three doors out of the room, and each door will automatically lock behind them. Once they choose a door, they are locked into that decision. They have been provided with tools, and may find other tools along the way. If any of them manage to survive, they will be rewarded with one million\ dollars.

Bob doesn't think that's much of a prize - he won forty million in the lotto a year ago and still has a few million left. Ian sneers that he earned his million the old fashioned way - he worked for it - and wonders what the seven bullets are for. Bob's gun holds six shells - why not give them only enough to fill the gun? Bob's theory is that whoever has the loaded gun can kill all of the others and win the million.

That's when the gas spigots open and begin flooding the room with deadly gas!

They race to the three doors and each pair argues over which door is best. Each door

leads to a different room in the huge maze. Every room has cameras and microphones. Every room also has at least one booby trap...

One room where fish hooks fire from the walls... and you only have two minutes to remove them before they start reeling in - stretching your skin until it rips off.

Another room where the floor is a pin-cushion of nails, and you must cross a 2" wide board to the other side. Lose balance and you will fall into the nails. If they pierce your bare feet, you may still be able to pull your bloody foot from the floor and continue.

One filled that is a maze of razor-sharp knife "sculptures"... and when the door closes behind you the lights go out. Can you remember the path across the room to the exit door so that you won't be cut to ribbons in the dark?

In the center of one room: three kitchen sinks complete with garbage disposals. In each of the clear plastic S pipes under the disposal is a key... and the door on the opposite side of the room is locked! One of the three keys will probably open the door, but if they touch the edge of the sink for balance, the disposal turns on - grinding anything in it... like your arm.

A room filled with hot coals and hidden jets of flame. If you catch on fire, it's up to the person handcuffed to you to help put you out.

Another room that begins filling the water the moment the door closes, you must find the secret way out before you drown. *If* there is a way out at all!

One where broken glass shoots from the walls at irregular intervals - can you race across the room before you're shredded? If you stumble and fall - you land in broken glass. And what if the door you have chosen from the three across the room is locked? Or opens to expose brick wall?

A room filled with a grid of laser triggers across the floor that will fire spears into whoever breaks the beam. But if you had a rope, you might be able to tight-rope walk over the floor and avoid triggering the spears...

And a rope is one of the items they find in another room. Should they try to carry it with them? With no pockets and only one free hand, each tool they discover is a major decision to make. The flashlight? The screwdriver? The monkeywrench?

When they begin, Yvonne's key doesn't fit Dyan's padlock - should she throw it away? Or is there a room where they will need that key? Is there a room where the padlock will save their lives? James wonders what his sickle is good for... or Richard's hammer.

As each pair makes their way through the maze, they realize they have something in common with the person they are handcuffed to. Trailer trash Bob won his millions overnight in the lotto, while millionaire Ian is old money earned over generations.

Bitchy Lee is pregnant after being brutally raped by a ski-masked man... Serge!

Housewife Dyan's husband is cheating on her with a younger woman... Yvonne!

And our hero James' wife and daughter were run down by drunk driver Richard... an alcoholic who is slowly going through withdrawals as they navigate the deadly maze. Should James kill the man who ruined his life? He came here with the baseball bat to beat him to death. His only reason to live since his wife and daughter were hit and dragged down the street was to find the one who did it and kill them. Now he has found the man - he's handcuffed to him! Should James try to work with Richard to get through this deadly maze? Forgive the man he hates?

Each pair must decide whether to put their past aside and work together or hold onto their grudges and work against each other. Each room they go into forces them to make this decision again and again, because like the doors which close behind them - once they have made the decision they are stuck with it...

Early in the maze, Lee makes the decision to remove Serge from her life with the axe. Now she drags his still-cuffed arm behind her. His work gloves lost forever... what if she needs them? What if she needs *him* to help her with a task?

James realizes he needs Richard, and they must learn to overcome their past to survive the deadly maze. The most difficult of all the tasks. Working together, they make it through room after room.

One-by-one the eight "contestants" fall prey to the maze... or each other. As they fight each other, they create allegiances and enemies with the others - working together or working against each other to make it through one more room - past one more door - one more bobby-trap. Ripped to shreds by booby-traps, bleeding, barely able to drag themselves to the next door and the next peril, soon only a handful are left...

But near the end of the maze, when James needs the hammer to pry nails from a boarded-shut door, Richard uses the sickle to chop off James' hand and escape his partner. Yvonne tears off part of her skirt to make a tourniquet, and stop the spraying blood. They two become reluctant partners... While Richard picks the wrong door and they hear him torn apart by a tiger. Too bad he didn't have the gun and bullets.

Eventually James and Yvonne make it through the maze to the final door...
And a cheering crowd of spectators!

The Control - a famous TV announcer - congratulates them. They have been contestants on a secret satellite Pay Per View game show - high rollers all over the world made bets on the outcome. No one expected either to win - they were longshots. In a world where sporting events are frequently dull and gambling in casinos is for suckers, this secret life-or-death maze game is a major thrill for real high rollers. The \$2 million that James and Yvonne will split is nothing compared to the billions being bet.

Would James and Yvonne care to double their money in the next game?

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