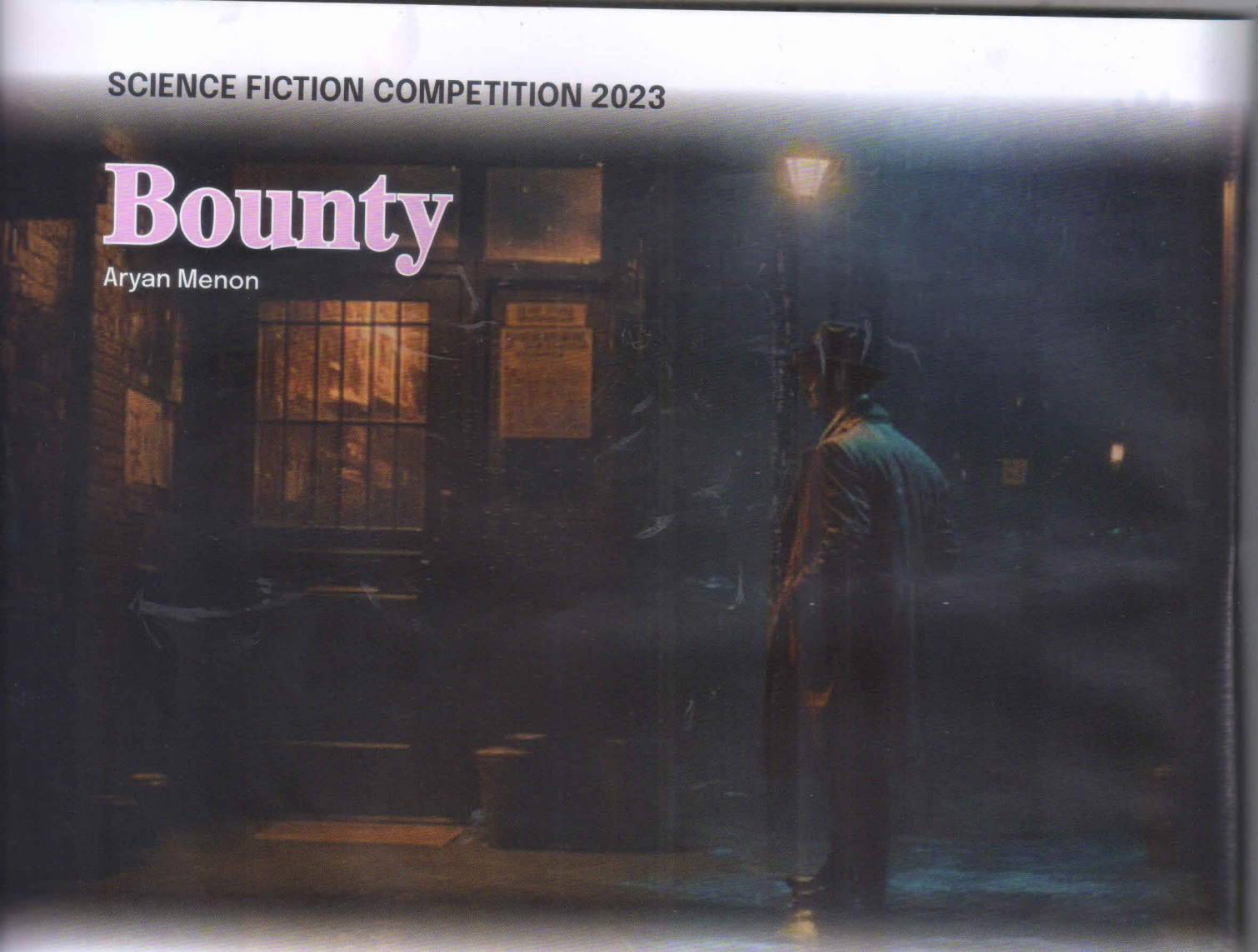


Bounty

Aryan Menon



MY mud-caked boots sat in the corner of the room, decorated with brown cracks that spread around the sole like a fungus. The sight of my possessions lying undisturbed often induced this state of thoughtlessness. It was comforting, juxtaposed to the constant drone of industrial and mechanical noises that continued outside the tinted window of my apartment. The days were long and draining. Being on alert throughout took a toll on your mind, although it prevented any potentially fatal slip-ups. Moments of tranquillity like this were rare and treated like a luxury. There were people everywhere, inhabiting every corner of the vacant earth, reducing the concept of privacy to a myth. It disgusted me.

I heard the ping from my target disc and saw the holograph of my next target. I let out a sigh of defeat muddled with frustration, and headed for the door. I collected my keys, my HUD watch and my gun. The cold metal of the barrel comforted me to a degree that helped me stay sane during the toughest parts of my job. I holstered it and stuffed the armour disks in my clothes. This small practice had evolved into a routine after countless bounties and granted me the peace of mind required to focus on myself to ensure no anomalies during the job.

My target's name was [Redacted], whose most well-known alias was the Stinger. Head narco in The Galley, whose infestation was plaguing the entire city. His supply routes ran deep in the city's veins and covered every square foot. Of course, with such a big name from the criminal underbelly, many had taken up the bounty to either make a massive dent in the rampant crime in the city or make a small fortune. I didn't bother to differentiate between which would benefit what more, and I found it hard to care at this point. It was a job like every other, and it didn't matter whether it was Stinger or any other pathetic felon who considered himself to be a big-shot criminal.

After the War, the ruins of the city, Evergreens, were restored, but this time, the scorched soil was too infertile to replace the green cover that gave it its name, so it was substituted with the dark, glossy surface of reinforced metal. Now, the name was a cruel reminder that before everybody here breathed in filtered air or looked up to watch the animated dome of the city, there was a prosperous, green community destroyed purely by the greed and mercilessness of humankind. With the gentrification of the Upper-East side of the city, the South was left derelict, a breeding ground for larceny, gun violence and narcotics. It grew to be called