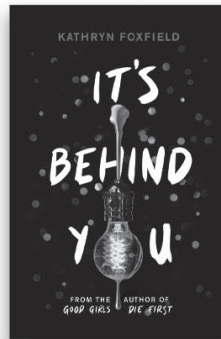
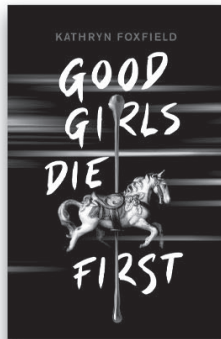




Kathryn Foxfield is the bestselling author of *Good Girls Die First* and *It's Behind You*. She blames her love of the creepy and weird on a childhood diet of Point Horror, Agatha Christie and Dr Who. She writes about characters who aren't afraid to fight back, but she wouldn't last five minutes in one of her own stories.

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KATHRYN FOXFIELD

TAG.



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GAME ON

Disgraced teenage millionaire Anton Frazer stages a comeback, but continues to be haunted by ghosts of his own making. Year twelve student *Emma Sano* reports for *St Bernadette's School Press* on the controversial reboot of the *Shadow City* tech-genius-turned-social-media personality.

Anton Frazer, as well known for his public pranks as he is his hugely popular iOS/Android cross-platform game *Shadow City*, is back.

After nine months in hiding, following an accidental death at his home, he brought Central London to a standstill last night to announce his latest stunt – a livestreamed game of tag.

Teasers appeared online last week in the form of a countdown and GPS coordinates. Thousands of Anton fans descended upon Shaftesbury Avenue, where Frazer took over the Piccadilly Circus electronic billboards with an unauthorized broadcast.

According to his announcement, he plans to stage a citywide game of tag in one month's time. He revealed that one hundred competitors will be chosen to compete for a prize that includes £100,000 and the opportunity to join his team as he relaunches his online presence.

But police have already slammed Frazer's plans, decrying them as "dangerous, illegal and utterly irresponsible".

Frazer has previously been criticized for the disruption caused by his stunts, which have included camping overnight in a furniture superstore and releasing seventeen male peacocks on to the London underground.

According to an insider, Frazer hopes that his game of tag will move the conversation on from the events of last year, when eighteen-year-old Rose Tavistock drowned during a party at Frazer's now abandoned London mansion.

Tavistock was one of Frazer's co-creators. She is widely credited with helping him make the leap from game designer to one of the world's most popular social media personalities. Her death came at a time when Frazer and his team were under scrutiny following rumours of in-fighting and a toxic working environment.

Tavistock's death was ruled to be a drug-related accident. Frazer's admission of drug use at his home caused him to lose most of his lucrative sponsorship deals and led to him shutting down his social media accounts.

This latest stunt appears to mark the end of Frazer's self-imposed exile. Judging by the online response to his announcement, his fans are ready to move on from the Tavistock era. Not everyone is ready to forgive and forget, though.

"I don't understand why anyone still pays him any attention," a past employee of Frazer's told St Bernadette's School Press. "Does no one care that a girl died on

his watch?”

Anton Frazer responded to a request for comment with a photo of his tongue.





ONE

GRAYSON

By the end of tonight, Anton Frazer will be dead. But first, I have to convince the world that I'm his biggest fan.

"Do these sunglasses make me look *too* handsome?" I say. "I don't want to steal the limelight."

Lenny glances at me, a liquorice bootlace hanging from her mouth and dark braids dangling over her face. She goes back to her magazine, ignoring the stall-holder's glare. "You look like a dorky Harry Styles."

I replace the sunglasses on the rotating display and pick another pair. "You know how to make a boy feel special. What about these?"

I crane my head to see my reflection in the little mirror.

The red frames stand out against my pale, freckled skin. I swish my hair to one side. Chestnut waves skim the collar of a bedazzled leather jacket that belonged to my ex, Rose. It sits heavy on my shoulders.

Rose would have told me to get the damn glasses. Hell, she would have strolled off without paying for them and no one would have said a thing. Rose was stop-and-stare beautiful. She was a lot of other things, too. But nearly a year after her death, it's her face that most people remember. The beautiful dead girl found in a teenage megastar's pool, as if that's all that matters.

"I'll have these," I say, handing a ten-pound note to the street vendor.

Lenny pointedly tucks the magazine into the rack. Anton Frazer's gurning face watches me from the cover. *Anton Makes His Move*, reads the headline. Ever since he announced his stunt, the bastard is everywhere. There are no consequences for him. He gets to wipe his reputation clean and relaunch his empire, but I'm stuck with my police caution, school exclusion and no future.

Sirens approach. An ambulance noisily weaves through the chocka Oxford Street traffic, forcing black cabs and cyclists to mount the pavement. It's all background noise, drowned out by a shit-tonne of dark thoughts that I don't want to think.

"Why am I here again?" Lenny says. "I have coursework to finish."

"I don't function well on my own," I mutter, still glaring

at Anton's picture. It's true. Other people get me out of my head. Pretty sure I'd get lost in there if I spent too much time alone.

"Do I look like a plug?" Lenny says.

"Huh?" I glance up at the sharpness of her tone. Her warm brown skin is flushed, arms are folded.

"To fill the holes in your life?"

I don't know if she's teasing, serious or both. So I escape to a public bench, dispersing a million manky pigeons who were loitering on the cracked pavement. I take my phone out and pretend I'm reading a very important message. Lenny sits next to me, a few inches of air and a million miles between us. I brace myself, but the usual complaints about what a rubbish friend I am don't come.

"I get it, it's a big day for you," she says gently. "You nervous?"

"Shitting myself." I glance up at her. Lenny doesn't wear make-up and usually her skin is shiny and flawless. Today, thanks to her late nights studying, there's a sallow tone to her face and shadows under her eyes. She looks how I feel.

"You'll be OK." She pats my knee with not much affection.

"You're not going to try to talk me out of it?" I ask.

"Entering Anton's game of tag to avenge your ex? I guess it's your choice."

Except it doesn't feel like a choice. This is all I have left. "It's not fair that he gets to carry on like nothing happened," I say. "Rose's death was his fault."

“Do you think he killed her?”

My stomach flips. She’s never asked me that before. I’m hit by a vision of Rose, floating dead in his pool. The water’s pink and her skin’s grey-white. I push it away. “The police said it was an accident. But that doesn’t mean Anton wasn’t responsible. He dragged her into his fucked-up world. If it wasn’t for him, she’d still be alive.”

“I suppose she would.” She fixes me with a questioning stare. “Would you still be together?”

I can’t answer that one. Rose was always too good for me, I know that. She burnt so bright that when I blink she’s there, seared into my memories. There was this magnetic pull surrounding her that drew people in, but it was me she chose. For a life-changing, magical ten months she was mine. And then she applied for a job with Anton Frazer.

I hadn’t heard of him back then. Few people outside the gaming world had. He was seventeen, and already a multi-millionaire thanks to a combination of tournaments, online play-alongs and designing his own Minecraft and Roblox games. But he was about to release *Shadow City* as an immersive hyper-reality experience. And when he did, everyone would know his name.

Shadow City is a bit like *Pokemon Go*, only without the cuteness. The game claims that it can use subtle fluctuations in light and shadow to detect the presence of ghosts. Through your phone’s screen, it reveals these supposed ghosts overlaid on top of the real world as creepy

shadow-things. When one comes at you, you have ten seconds to exorcize it. Or, in my case, you switch the game off.

It's too scary for me. I don't believe that the *Shadow City* ghosts are real, but ghosts definitely exist. What if the game lets them sneak into our world, like a Ouija board? Rose used to laugh at me for being such a coward. She never understood my problem with the game. But then Rose wasn't scared of anything, except boredom.

She started collaborating with Anton six months before she died, one of the team helping him stage his famous stunts – ridiculous things like jumping out at people dressed as ghosts, firing money out of a cannon and floating a Lego house down the Thames, all captured on TikTok and YouTube. Anton called his co-creators the Accomplices and moved them into his house.

I didn't like the sound of any of this. Rose told me I didn't get it. That I had the soul of an old person when it came to online stuff. Turns out I was right to be uneasy.

Within weeks, Rose was ignoring my calls. The few occasions she found time to see me it was like I didn't know her any more. I'd watch the videos she was making with Anton and my imagination ran away with me. We had this huge argument where she called me a jealous bore and I called her a pathetic fame chaser, and that was it. I didn't speak to her again. Five months later, she was dead.

“I wish I could let her go,” I say, more to myself than to Lenny.

“Me too. She’s always there.” She takes a deep breath. “I’ve got to get going.”

“Len, I know that this must be weird for you.”

She laughs and flicks her hair over her shoulder. “Weird is your taste in T-shirts. Our entire friendship revolving around a ghost is something else.”

“It’s not all about her. You and me, we’re—”

She silences me with a raised hand. “I don’t know how this is going to pan out tonight. Just remember that I’m rooting for you.”

She walks away and, being the asshole I am, I let her leave.

Sighing, I watch the blank screen of my phone. I applied for the game weeks ago but didn’t find out I’d been chosen until this morning when I received an anonymous message telling me to come to Oxford Street at eleven a.m. It’s now eleven-thirty, and no one’s contacted me with further instructions. Maybe they’ve spotted that I didn’t come alone and decided not to risk it. Ever since it was announced, the police have been trying to shut Anton’s game down.

I eye the road in both directions. Oxford Street is heaving with people and traffic. Cyclists yell at tourists who cross the road without looking. Taxi drivers hold down their horns. I see no sign of anyone who might work for Anton. I see Anton, though, peering up at me from the front pages of the free newspapers discarded next to overflowing bins.

I pick one up and dust it off. In the officially-released photos, Anton’s purple-streaked hair is styled into its usual

exaggerated quiff and his skin is clear and healthy, like he has shares in a skincare brand. He's the epitome of boy next door good looks, with his perpetual smile and strong jaw. His secret, though, has always been the slightest hint of geekiness. Enough to make him seem smart and original, but not so much that people think he's a loser.

It's a carefully constructed image and it's bullshit like everything else his PR machine puts out. It infuriates me that he rode out the storm surrounding Rose's death with such ease. Men like him always get away with it. He's white, straight and rich. The rules do not apply.

My phone buzzes. I hesitate, then answer. It's a woman's voice, heavily distorted.

"Are you alone?" she says.

"Quite possibly for ever," I reply sadly.

"Turn right and keep walking."

The line goes dead. I get to my feet and peer around the corner. To the right there's a thoroughfare lined with racks of bikes for hire and scaffolding-surrounded buildings. I walk down the street then stop. The city's noise dims almost immediately, replaced by an eerie hum.

I turn on the spot, even looking up at the rooftops to see if I'm being watched. I really wish I hadn't let Lenny leave now. It's broad daylight, but this is as creepy as hell. *Teenage boy murdered metres from expensive shoe shop*, the newspaper will read. I'll be the page two to Anton's headline. When Rose died, the articles were all about him. The famous man and the beautiful dead girl in *his* pool.

Suddenly, I hear the roar of an engine. I leap aside as a big black van hurtles towards me. It bounces off the kerb with the clunk of metal against concrete. It screeches to a halt, the front wheel arc scraping noisily against a large black bollard. The door opens and bashes into a bike rack. I stumble backwards. *Shit shit shit.*

The driver swings their body out and jumps down. “Oh my god,” she says, crouching to examine the damage. “What is wrong with me?”

I place a hand on my heart to stop it from trying to escape my ribcage, *Alien*-style. As my visions of being murdered in an alley recede, I realize who the girl is. Beatrix Frazer, Anton’s younger sister and one of his Accomplices. She’s the nice one. The cute, smiley one who blended into the background while Rose took centre stage.

“OK, OK. Maybe it will rub off.” She scrubs at the scratches with the sleeve of her chunky knit cardigan. A big flake of paint comes loose, making her shriek.

“Um, I think you’re making it worse?” I offer.

She sweeps her two long plaits behind her shoulders. One of them is a shiny brown, the other is bleached blonde. “Do you know about cars?”

I laugh nervously. “Do I look like I know about cars?”

She stands and gives me a huge, fake smile, Anton-style. She double points at me. “What you *do* look like is a winner. Are you a winner?”

“I mean, people don’t tend to use that *exact* word,” I say. “Um, are you all right?”

Her smile drops. “No, I’m not actually. My brother has me driving up and down the city dropping off kit to *thirty* people, and there’s this whole script I’m meant to say, but I’ve only managed four contestants so far and one of them was sick when they met me. Also, I passed my driving test last week so this is...” She pauses to take a deep breath. “A lot. It’s a lot.”

“Tell me about it,” I say.

She shoves a rucksack at me. “This is for you.”

I hold her gaze a little too long. Her eyes are ridiculous. Like, this golden-hazel colour that has to be contacts, with long dark eyelashes and black eyeliner that makes them even more striking. Her face is rounded and young-looking, and she dresses like a skater-granny. But her eyes are amazing.

I remind myself that I’m here to destroy her brother. It doesn’t matter that his sister seems really sweet. I’ll take her down too, if I have to.

“*You* all right?” she says, scrunching up her face.

I pull myself together and remember that I’m meant to be acting like a massive Anton fan. “Yeah. You look like your brother,” I say quickly.

Her expression darkens. “I will for ever be Anton’s sister,” she says cryptically.

I clear my throat. “I’m being weird. Sorry. I’m just excited.”

She eyes me suspiciously, then waves her foot at me, hopping to keep her balance. “You see that?”

She's wearing slightly grubby red Converse boots with baggy jeans over the top. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to see.

"That's sick on my shoe. Literal sick," she says. "So unless you're going to puke like the last contestant I met, you're doing fine."

I laugh. She's nice. To distract myself, I open the rucksack. Inside, there's some kind of bracelet like the electronic tags criminals wear on their ankles and a pair of chunky glasses in a plastic case that reminds me of Snow White's coffin. They're ugly things, with thick lenses and bulky arms. Beatrix reaches to take the glasses and puts them on. They look good on her.

"I'm meant to tell you that there's nothing like this on the market yet," she says. "Anton owns shares in the company that makes them, so we're getting to take them for a test run."

"What's so special about them?"

"Augmented reality smart glasses. You know how *Shadow City* works?"

I wince. "You look through your phone and the world becomes a literal hellscape with ghosts jumping out at you?"

She laughs. "You're scared of *Shadow City*? Oh my god, it's so tame. Well, I hate to tell you this, but we've hooked these glasses up to our *Shadow City* servers, so instead of looking through your phone's screen, the glasses will make it seem like you're actually *in* the game."

That sounds horrifying. Terrifying. Awful in every way.
“Can I be sick on your shoes now?”

“Shush, I’ll forget my lines. The glasses have a built-in camera. We’re going to livestream everything you see and say during the game.”

“We’ll be playing *Shadow City*?” I ask.

“Not exactly. It’s a special modified version of the game that we’ve put together for you lovely contestants.” She returns the glasses to the bag. “They’ll activate at five p.m., along with the wristband, ready for the game to start at five-thirty.”

I take out the bracelet and try it on. It’s a wide plastic thing that clips round my wrist.

“This is where the action happens.” She takes my hand and gently turns the bracelet the right way up. Her fingers are warm and the frayed sleeves of her cardigan tickle my skin. “The wristband will also send your GPS location to Anton HQ, precise to less than a metre. You see this light? It will change colour depending on whether you’re a Chaser or a Runner. But Anton’s going to explain that to you.”

Her fingers linger on my palm. I remind myself again that Beatrix is Anton’s sister. She was one of the people who took Rose from me.

“Do you miss Rose?” I say quietly.

Her whole demeanour changes and it’s like the temperature of the entire city drops. “Yeah. Of course. She was a sister to me.”

I force myself to meet her eyes. “Only ... I guess

the prize is kind of her job. The winner gets to be her replacement. Gets to be an Accomplice.”

“No. That’s not going to happen. Rose’s death ... changed things. The Accomplices are gone, no matter what Anton wants and—” She stops talking. “Look, the game will be lots of fun, but keep your expectations in check.”

“I’ll get to meet Anton, though?” Because that’s the reason I’m doing this. To ruin his game and humiliate him to death. Or, failing that, cause him some lasting psychological damage.

She looks at me sadly, then gives me a small smile. “Yes, you’ll get to meet my famous, wonderful brother, don’t worry.” She nods at the van. “I have kit to deliver to another twenty-five people. So. I’ll see you around.”

“Yeah, I’ll see you,” I manage. “Good luck with the driving.”

She’s already slamming the van door. She reverses off and manages to perform a ten point turn without hitting anything.

My phone buzzes. It’s a link to a pre-recorded video. I click it and Anton’s face pops up on my screen. “Hey *Accomplice*,” he says, drawing out the words like they’re made of treacle. “I’m back!”

There he is. This is the boy who Rose ditched me for, leaving me with nothing but regret and this cheap leather jacket that no longer fitted with her image.

He leans forwards so that his face takes up most of the shot. “Did you miss me?”

The sharp edge to his tone and his unblinking leer is unsettling. But then he pulls it back with a grin and slumps into his chair.

“This game’s going to change *everything*,” he continues, “and you’re part of it. We had over a hundred thousand applications, which is ... well, that’s a big number, right? I’ve whittled you down to the top one hundred. People who made me laugh in your application videos, or impressed me with your commitment to the cause, or were plain easy on the eye.”

He pretends to slap his own cheek and grins crookedly.

“Kidding, kidding, this is a serious operation. Let’s talk rules. The game’s a lot like tag. Everyone will take turns being a Chaser and a Runner.”

A game of tag I can manage. Although I doubt it will be that simple.

Anton continues. “When it’s your turn to be a Chaser, you will need to locate the Runners and tag them out of the competition. You can tag someone by getting close enough that your bracelet registers theirs. Stay within five metres of a Runner for longer than ten seconds, and the Runner is tagged.”

My brain struggles to take in the information. He starts talking about special challenges and bonuses, but my attention drifts to memories of Rose. Her smile, her laugh, the way her hand felt in mine. The thought of her kissing Anton Frazer. His plump lips smeared red with her lipstick.

“Got all of that?” Anton says.

My attention snaps back to him. Nope. I got nothing.

“Finally, let’s talk what happens if you’re the winner of my little game. Oh my god, these prizes are excellent. I can’t wait for one of you to win. Not only will you receive one hundred thousand pounds, but you’ll get the opportunity to audition to be my new Accomplice.”

My stomach clenches. I guess Rose really was disposable when there are thousands of others lining up to take her place.

“Oh yes, I nearly forgot the best part. You win a BFF hangout sesh with me. No cameras, no audience, just you and me.” He waggles his eyebrows. “I know what you ladies out there are thinking and, yes, I am single. Who knows what might happen?”

My swirling thoughts coalesce to a single point. I know exactly what will happen.

“I’ve got everything you need in life,” Anton says, with a hopeful half-smile. “Money, fame and maybe even love. Tell me, which one are you here for?”

He begins to laugh. I pause the video on a close-up of his face. His mouth’s open in frozen laughter but it could be a scream.

“You missed one out,” I say quietly. “Revenge.”