

When a computer game has  
The ability to kill,  
You have to start..

# PLAYING FOR REAL



R. E. BARRINGHAM

**PLAYING**  
**FOR**  
**REAL**

The debut novel of  
**R E Barringham**

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**Warning:**

Prepare to be afraid.

# Chapter 1

## Prologue

Neville Johnson threw open the door and ran from his upstairs study. Behind him thunder roared and lightning flashed, filling the room with bright pulsating colours.

“CATHALU!” the voice roared behind him. “ABADDEN I invoke you!”

There was no time to stop and look back. In fear for his life, Neville Johnson didn't even believe that he had time to run down the stairs so instead he jumped over the banister railing and dropped to the floor below.

Too late he realized what a long drop it was. He braced himself for a painful landing.

*CRACK!*

Neville wasn't sure if he actually heard the sound but he definitely felt it. Both his ankles broke simultaneously as soon as his feet hit the floor.

The agony made him fall onto his side and scream, but nothing could be heard above the din coming from the study. The pain shot up his thighs and into his groin.

With his mouth open wide he continued to scream, afraid to move because he knew that would make the pain worse, but also knowing that he had to escape his tormentor or be killed.

So much had happened recently and so many had died. Now he lay there feeling utterly helpless and he couldn't stop screaming.

Then the chanting began.

*“Nema reve dna reverof, yrolg eht*

*Dna rewop eht, modgnik eht si eniht rof.”*

Neville knew the thing upstairs meant to kill him and was invoking and employing as many evil demons as it could to destroy him.

He needed help.

Why had he jumped over the upstairs railing? He shouldn't have allowed himself to panic the way he did. But he had been taken completely by surprise when the thing had suddenly manifested itself before him.

Now it towered over him, and he could see it was a wizard, at least seven feet tall. It wore a long, black, hooded robe, its face obscured by the blackness within the hood, except for a pair of red glowing eyes.

Neville Johnson had already seen the warning and knew that if he feared the wizard then he would die. But he couldn't help being afraid when it suddenly appeared right in front of him, and so he had fled.

Now he lay cursing himself for having reacted the way he did and not simply running straight down the stairs and carrying on out the front door.

But it was too late now for regrets. The front door might as well be a million miles away because he could never make it in time with the pain he was in.

His only hope of surviving was to reach the telephone that sat on a small table a few feet away. But would anyone be able to get there fast enough to help him? It didn't matter. It was his only chance and he had to try.

He put his palms flat on the floor and pushed himself up slightly. The excruciating pain in his legs made him scream even louder and higher.

As he began to move he heard footsteps on the landing and the dreaded voice sounded much closer.

*“Live morf su reviled tub,  
Noitatpmet otni ton su dael dna.”*

As Neville heard the words he knew exactly what the wizard was saying. It was reciting the Lord’s Prayer in reverse. This was a common incantation but he knew that the wizard was powerful enough to use these simple words for great evil. Neville Johnson was scared. He was more afraid than he’d ever been in his whole life, and recently many things had made him afraid, but not like this one.

The pain from moving was great but his fear of dying was greater. He inched along the carpet, screaming all the time. His throat hurt and his open mouth ached, but his screams continued regardless.

*“Su tsniaga ssapsert ohw esoht evigrof ew sa.”*

The wizard was getting closer to the top of the stairs. Neville continued screaming as he inched along, dragging his legs behind him. He wasn’t sure if he was screaming from the pain or his partial loss of sanity, because he knew he couldn’t stop screaming even if he wanted to, but right now, he didn’t want to. Too much had already happened these last few weeks and his mind was struggling to cope with this new surreal situation he now found himself in.

Coloured lightning continued to pulsate and thunder clapped loudly and continuously, only now it was all around him.

He used his arms to pull himself along the floor. The pain made him feel nauseous and he came close to passing out. His progress was slow, almost nonexistent, but he had to keep trying because time was running out. The wizard was now at the top of the stairs and continued to chant.

*“Sessapsert ruo su evigrof dna,  
Daerb yliad ruo.”*

Neville turned briefly and glanced up the stairs. The wizard’s head was turned and its eyes were upon him. Neville started to shake uncontrollably and heaved himself forward as fast as he could.

The pain from his ankles bolted all the way up to his chest and Neville screamed harshly, his throat already dry and sore.

He reached forward as far as possible and his fingers just managed to touch the telephone lead. He leaned a fraction further and yanked the wire towards himself. The telephone clattered onto the floor and the cordless receiver landed by his chest.

*“YAD SIHT SU EVIG!”*

Neville glanced up the stairs again and saw that the wizard had its arms raised and its hands pointing skywards.

Despite his fear and pain, Neville noticed that although the wizard’s arms were vertical, its long loose sleeves still covered the full length of its arms and didn’t slip back to its shoulders as anyone else’s would have. It was a simple thing to notice and he wondered why, in amongst all this horror, his logical mind picked up on such a triviality. But he paid scant attention to these thoughts. There was no time left to think about anything but escaping this waking nightmare.

He picked up the receiver in his trembling hands and pressed the “talk” button. The red light illuminated to show that the receiver was connected and he could now dial 999. He wasn’t sure what he would say or how he would speak because he was still screaming.

As though sensing it was running out of time, the wizard chanted faster.

*“Nevaeh ni si ti sa htrae no*

*Enod eb lliw yht*

*Emoc modgnik yht*

*Eman yht eb dewollah*

*NEVAEH NI TRA OHW REHTAF RUO!”*

It screamed the last sentence as loud as it could, just as Neville pressed 9 for the third time.

The sudden searing heat in the back of his head and down his spine told him that the incantation had worked. He'd fought so long and hard lately and defeated everything that had tried to destroy him. He'd beaten them right up until this last battle, but this personification of evil standing above him was his Waterloo.

The pain from his ankles now seemed to be spreading. It felt as though every bone in his body was breaking one by one. It was unbearable, more than any human could cope with. Neville felt his consciousness slipping away as the agony increased. It was as though he was leaving his body and the breaking bones now belonged to someone else.

His screaming abruptly ceased but his mouth stayed open. A low guttural sound began deep in his throat and gradually became louder before fading away.

Slowly he began to fall forward, until his face was pressed firmly into the carpet and his arms lay limply by his sides. The telephone lay near by, useless and forgotten.

“Hello. Emergency services. Which service do you require?” came the voice from the telephone receiver.

“Hello? Is anyone there? Hello?”

But no one heard.

Neville Johnson was dead and the empty house was now quiet as a tomb.