

SILENCE YOUR DEMONS



SIMON HARTLEY

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DEMONS



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We all have demons... the destructive voices in our heads... the gnawing fears, doubts, anxieties, and insecurities.

Wouldn't it be great to silence them!

Seb Hall would agree. He has a demon of his own. His doubles as a terrifying fire-breathing monster.

But, overcoming the demon is just one of Seb's challenges.

There's also the bully that wants to beat him to a pulp... the prospect of playing a solo in front of thousands of people... and trying to escape the criminal web that he has become entangled in.

Tired of constantly feeling like a failure, he sets off on a quest to overcome his greatest fears, defeat the bully and conquer his demon.

Along the way, he learns some incredibly valuable lessons ... lessons that could help us silence our own demons too.

£12.99

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SILENCE

Your

DEMONS

be world class

Simon Hartley

We all have demons.

You know... that voice in your head that chips away at you...
constantly pelting you with doubts, criticism, and self-
judgement.

It's the voice that tells you you're not good enough...
... that you're stupid... fat... ugly... that no-one likes you... or
you'll never do it.

That voice.

If any of that resonates, this book was written for you.

I really hope you like the story.

But, above all, I hope it helps you silence your demons.

Chapter One

THE END

The light shone straight into his eyes, obliterating everything else. Gradually, the murmurs died down and the room fell silent. For a moment, Seb Hall stood motionless, transfixed, dazzled, desperately trying to remember what was next, as he rolled the cold metal tube between his fingertips.

He searched the gloom just beyond the cone of the spotlight, scanning the faces on the front row. There she was... his mum. She looked like he felt – a rabbit caught in the headlights. The audience were growing restless, coughing, shifting in their chairs, muttering. She stared at the glistening flute in his hand.

“Play!” she mouthed. She did not look happy.

What was he supposed to be playing?

“Ahem. Are you ready?” asked Mr Bamfort. The small bald music teacher stood on the edge of the stage, looking even more irritated than usual.

“Uh, yeah,” came Seb’s feeble croak.

“Shall I play you in?” Mr Bamfort asked.

“Thanks,” he replied, his mouth dry, heart pounding.

A sinister voice came from the dark shadows of Seb’s mind.
This’ll be interesting...

He shuddered at the sound.

“Fine,” said Mr Bamfort, pulling his stool up to a small piano. “A Happy Dawn. On three... One, two...”

A string of playful notes skipped from the keys of the piano. Like children set free into a playground, they danced joyously into the air. Seb raised the flute to his lips and took a breath. To his horror, a series of awkward notes stumbled out. They did not sound like gleeful children playing. More like a funeral march.

Oh God. It's even worse than I imagined, the sinister voice in his mind said.

For a while they played on. The melancholy sounds of his flute wrestling with the cheerful notes from the piano. It was awful; like the Grim Reaper dancing with Tinkerbell.

They're laughing at you, you know.

This was supposed to be a glorious moment, his one chance to make her proud, and it was falling apart. Months of practicing until the early hours, and this was all he had to show for it. He caught a glimpse of her, shielding her face... humiliated. She probably wished she'd never come, wished he was not her son.

He caught a sob in the back of his throat and his flute squealed indignantly.

What are you doing? growled the voice.

This was a nightmare. His worst fears were becoming real. He screwed his eyes up, trying to hold the tears back, but it was no good. Any moment now, he would break down on this stage.

Loser!

He took the flute from his lips, turned on the spot and ran. He hit the bar on the fire exit and burst through it. Cold air flooded his lungs. The blue green imprint of the spotlight swam before his eyes, but on he ran. There must be somewhere he could hide. Somewhere quiet, where he could disappear. Somewhere no one would find him.

Slowly the world came into focus. Ahead was the rusty corrugated iron bike shed. Maybe that would do. He tucked

himself behind the wall and slumped onto the concrete floor, desperately trying to catch his breath. What had he done? Tears streamed down his face. He curled up into a ball, clutching the flute to his chest.

“Seb,” called Mr Bamfort. “Where are you?”

“Sebastian!” came his mum’s hysterical cry.

Maybe, if he sat here long enough, they would give up. How he’d love to just disappear. That way he wouldn’t have to endure the interrogations. He already knew the questions...

What on earth happened?

Why did you just run out like that?

He hadn’t even finished the piece. But what was the point? It was a horror show. Playing the flute was the only thing he’d ever been good at. It was the one thing he loved. But, clearly, he was no musician. He was a failure... a loser...

More shouts, this time much closer. Footsteps echoed off the walls. They couldn’t be more than a few metres away. If he kept quiet, perhaps they would pass. He held his breath and stared at the scuff marks on his shoes. He wasn’t ready to see anyone. Maybe in a few minutes. Right now, he just needed to be alone.

“What are you doing down there?” His mum’s voice was so shrill it was barely audible. There she stood, hands on her hips.

He didn’t reply.

“We’re going home,” she announced, her voice dropping an octave. “Come on.”

Seb didn’t need to look at her to know she was wearing *that* look... the look he’d seen so many times before. It was the look she gave him when his report came back from school or when he received exam results. It was that look of pure, unadulterated disappointment.

For a fleeting moment, she seemed so proud that he’d been invited to perform at the annual recital. Seb suspected she’d been waiting for something like that for years. But it had gone.

She marched ten metres or so before she turned around to see him still cowering in the corner of the bike shed.

“I haven’t got all day,” she barked. He glanced up to see whether she actually had steam coming out of her ears.

He sighed. It was no good. He couldn’t stay here forever.

Slowly he pushed himself to his feet and slumped along behind her. The journey back was going to be torture. He knew exactly what she’d say. He’d heard it all so many times before.

“I feel so let down.”

“I’m disappointed.”

“I can’t believe it.”

“What will they all think?”

He opened the car door and crawled inside.

Seb lay on his bed, staring at the ceiling. The emotion that he’d been holding back for what seemed like an eternity was spilling out. A hot tear trickled down the side of his face. Then another. Before he knew it, the stream had become an uncontrollable torrent.

Beyond his bedroom door, the stairs creaked, and heavy footsteps crossed the landing. He couldn’t let his dad see him this way. He buried his head in his pillow to muffle his sobs. For a few moments he lay there as thoughts rattled around his head.

I can’t go on like this.

I’m seventeen.

I’ve got a whole life to live.

I’ve got to do something.

He sat up and wiped his eyes. Sobbing wasn’t going to get him anywhere. He needed answers. For a few moments he sat, gazing blankly into space. Then, one by one, the cogs in his head began to turn. Like a rusty machine that hadn’t worked in years.

An idea... then a second... and a third. One after another they emerged and were rejected. And then something clicked.

He went to his desk and opened the drawer. There, beneath the pens and sheet music was a book. This was no ordinary book. It was a brand new, leather-bound notebook – a Christmas present from his dad. He had been saving it for some special purpose. Perhaps this was it. Maybe this was the book in which he'd document his journey from nobody to somebody.

He lifted it out of the drawer, like a museum curator holding a priceless artefact, and laid it down on the desk. Now all he needed was his best pen and the perfect opening line.

He turned to the first page, searching for the right words, pen hovering over the page. But nothing came. As always, his mind seemed to have failed him.

With a sigh, he replaced the lid on the pen and slid the book back into the drawer.

Another day, maybe.

Six months later

“Seb... SEB!! Get up! You're going to be late. I'm leaving in twelve minutes,” his mum yelled from the bottom of the stairs. “If you want a lift, you'll have to be ready.”

He flew out of bed, flung some clothes on, raced downstairs and jumped into the passenger seat of his mum's aging red hatchback, slamming the door behind him.

“Careful!” she snapped.

With a huff, she screeched through the farmyard gates, narrowly missing the post van, sped out of the village and through the winding country lanes towards the nearby town of Yeoborough.

“First day at college and you're already late,” she said as the hedgerows flashed past.

“You’ll have to be more responsible now,” she continued. “You’re seventeen. You’ll be driving soon, if we can scrape enough money together for lessons, that is. Anyway, you can’t rely on me to get you out of bed every morning.”

He didn’t reply. His gaze followed a money spider that was climbing up the side of the rear-view mirror. Every now and again a jolt would knock it off. Seb watched it abseiling on its tiny thread and then climb back up, only to be knocked down once more.

He knew that feeling.

The car squealed in protest as she slammed on the brakes. The seat belt cut into his chest. “Mum!”

“Have you listened to a word I said?” she snapped. Her sharp features were illuminated in the morning sunlight.

“I know.” He sighed. “I need to be more responsible.”

“Humpf.” She screeched away from the junction.

He sank into his seat.

Sandy would have been special, he thought. Sandy would have made her proud. He’d have been a “straight A” student. He would have been selected for the school sports teams or starred in the school play. He would have given her something to tell the neighbours.

Maybe she wished it was Seb who had died on that fateful day, instead of his older brother.

With the words “Don’t be late” ringing in his ears, he stepped out of the car and looked up the grassy bank towards the college. The imposing grey concrete block towered above him; shabby and unloved, decorated only with patches of rust and chipped stonework.

Slowly he wandered up the path towards the entrance. Withered trees that had been baked during the scorching summer heat stood forlornly around the entrance. It reminded him of the local hospital. A small road looped around a roundabout, at the centre

of which stood a dead rose bush. Next to the huge glass doors was a six-foot-high sign, adorned with the words “Welcome to Yeoborough College.” Even on a bright sunny morning, with a backdrop of blue sky, it looked distinctly uninviting.

The glass doors slid open.

Hundreds of students were packed into the reception area. Through the mass of jostling bodies, Seb noticed an array of tables manned by slightly frantic looking college staff. They were all wearing shocking pink T-shirts with the words “Here to Help” plastered across the front.

He checked the time on his phone. He was already late for his first class.

Great first impression, said a sarcastic voice from the deep recesses of his mind. *Well done*.

He scanned the handwritten signs above the tables. Helpdesk... Student Registration... Lost?... Maps and Information... Welcome Packs. He snatched a map from the nearest table. His first class was psychology, on the fifth floor. He began pushing his way through the crowds towards the lifts across the hall. Then it dawned on him. The crowd *was* the queue for the lift.

Damn it.

To his left a staircase spiralling upwards.

As he passed the second floor, Seb concluded that the lift would have been a far better option. His legs were burning, and a nasty acidic taste bubbled up in his throat. To be honest, he was surprised that he made it to the fourth floor alive and was pretty convinced that he'd be dead before he reached the fifth.

Beyond his wildest expectations, Seb made it to room 534. He burst through the door, dripping with sweat and gasping for air. The room fell silent. Thirty pairs of eyes stared at him, doubled over in the doorway. The lecturer peered quizzically towards the door. He was a very well-dressed man, probably in his late thirties. His dark hair was slightly greying around the temples.

His eyes were chocolate brown, skin lightly tanned.

“Ah. Sebastian Hall, I presume?” he said in his mild Scottish brogue.

“Ye-Yes,” Seb stammered. “Yes... sorry... sir,” he panted. “Sorry I’m late. Stairs...” he spluttered, pointing down the corridor. The class burst into laughter. He could feel their eyes boring through him, like white-hot laser beams. Beads of sweat rolled down his face. More than anything, right now, he wanted to shrivel up and disappear.

The lecturer smiled gently and gestured towards a seat at the front of the class next to a plain looking girl wearing horn-rimmed glasses.

“I’m Mark,” he said. “You don’t have to call me ‘sir’ here. I haven’t been knighted yet.” More laughter from the class. “Anyway... It’s nice to have you with us, Sebastian,” he continued.

You are such a loser! That voice was back.

Seb sunk into his chair.

As he dismissed the class at the end of the lesson, Mark called Seb to one side.

“I’m sorry I was late, sir... Mark,” Seb blurted out.

“Sir Mark?” he replied, raising an eyebrow. “Well, I suppose that’s progress.”

“Seb,” said Mark. “You didn’t murder anyone. You were a couple of minutes late to a lecture, and I’m sure that you’ll get here in good time from now on.” Mark looked him in the eye. “May I share a thought with you?” he asked.

“Uh... yeah,” Seb replied.

“Experience tells me that we spend far too much time and energy worrying about what other people think of us. They will think what they want to think. They will form their opinions.

Some will even pass judgement on us. The opinions that they form and the judgements that they make always say more about them than they do about us. Anyway, I don't want to make you late for your next class. See you next lesson," he said.

He probably thinks you're mad. I didn't see him call anyone else back.

The monologue rumbled on inside his head as he made his way through the still crowded reception area towards the canteen. The echoes of Mark's words wrestled with the relentless nagging voice. He was so preoccupied he didn't notice his foot catch the trailing strap of a bag. Time slowed as he sailed through the air. Books fell from his grasp as the ground rushed to meet him. He landed sharply on his shoulder and skidded across the floor. But the searing pain was nothing compared to the humiliation. He looked up, dazed. Hundreds of eyes; all fixed on him. From a few feet away, through the deafening silence, came a silky-smooth low voice.

"That is *so* uncool."

A tall muscular figure towered over him. He looked like a comic book superhero, with broad shoulders, a chiselled jawline and stubble. Behind him stood a group of five or six athletic lads, plus a handful of very glamorous girls.

"I-I'm sorry," Seb stammered.

"Lucky for you there's nothing *too* valuable in there," said the lad, extending his hand. Seb held out his own hand and the lad grasped it with a bone-crushing grip. In one effortless motion Seb was lifted like a rag doll and set back on his feet.

"Uh... yeah... sorry," Seb mumbled.

"You might want to watch where you're going next time, hey," said the lad, running his fingers through his jet-black hair. For a moment he examined Seb closely. Then he clapped him on the back, slung his bag lazily over his shoulder and sauntered back to his friends.

Seb scabbled around the floor collecting his things.

Idiot. They're all staring.

"There you go," came a shy voice behind him. It was the girl with the horn-rimmed glasses from his psychology class. She handed him a book.

"Thanks," Seb replied.

"I'm Alice, by the way," she said. "Nice to meet you."

She's just saying that. She's not really pleased to meet you. She thinks you're a waste of space like everyone else.

Seb screwed up his eyes, trying to ignore the voice.

"I'm Seb," he replied.

"I know." She chuckled. "Sebastian Hall, I presume."

"Oh... course," Seb muttered, examining a patch of floor.

"I'm going to get a drink. You coming?"

Seb half shrugged, half nodded and followed Alice.

They sat with their cups of coffee in the far corner of the canteen. Like the rest of the college, it was drab and uninspiring; rows of grey tables were flanked by unbearably uncomfortable orange plastic chairs. But at least they could look out over the sunlit lawns.

"What did you think of psychology?" she asked.

"After my spectacular entrance, you mean?" he replied.

"It wasn't that big a deal. Everyone will have forgotten by now," she said. "Mark seems nice."

"Yeah," replied Seb.

"Did you study it at school?" Alice asked.

"Psychology?" he replied. "Nah. Our school didn't offer anything like that."

"What made you choose it?" she enquired. He looked up from his coffee cup. Behind her glasses she had bright blue eyes; the colour of sky. Her mousy brown hair was loose and fell just past her shoulders.

"Not sure. I guess because it's new. Means I haven't failed it

yet,” he said, trying to sound flippant. “And I’d love to know how this thing works,” he said, tapping the side of his head. For a brief moment, her expression changed. Was that concern or judgement?

Oh, well done. You’ve known her two minutes and now she thinks you’re mental, too. No wonder you don’t have any friends, the voice taunted.

She took a sip of her drink.

“By the way, his name is Michael Malone... the lad who picked you up,” Alice said. “He went to my school. He was captain of the football team, the rugby team and every other sports team we had, I think.”

“Which school did you go to?” Seb asked.

“St Joseph’s,” replied Alice.

“The posh school?” Seb blurted out, almost choking on his coffee.

“It’s an independent school, yes,” Alice said, looking slightly affronted.

He paused for a moment, desperate not to offend her. In many ways she was an unremarkable looking girl, but there was something about her. If friendliness and kindness had a look, she would have embodied it.

“How come you’re here? Doesn’t St Joseph’s have a sixth form of its own?”

“The sixth form building burned down at the end of last year,” Alice said. “It was pretty freaky. Some people said it was arson but apparently there’s not enough evidence to prove it.”

“Well... I’m pleased you’re here anyway,” said Seb, to his own surprise. “And your friend Michael seems nice enough, too.” A look of concern crossed Alice’s face.

“Just... be careful there,” she said seriously. She checked the time and drained her cup. “Right, must go,” she announced. “I have another class.”

“Uh... me too,” replied Seb. “See you in psychology.”

Alice smiled, picked up her bag and gave an awkward little wave as she headed out of the canteen. Not wanting to be late for his second lesson in a row, Seb pulled his bag over his shoulder and set off for philosophy.

Thankfully the day drew to a close without any further catastrophes. He lay back and stared at his bedroom ceiling once more. Why did life feel so tough... like he was wading through treacle while everyone else skated gracefully across a frozen pond? He'd made a fool of himself on his first day, humiliated himself in front of the entire college. There's no way he could survive two more years of this.

Exhausted, he sunk his head into his pillow. For a few moments he stared blankly into space before closing his eyes and drifting off to sleep.

Seb was in the Bluebell Wood. It was autumn. The late-afternoon sunshine cast long shadows across the fallen leaves. He knew this place like the back of his hand. It was his own personal paradise... his playground... his sanctuary. He walked along the path he'd trodden so many times before, pine needles crackling beneath his feet. Past the dense holly bush he'd hollowed out to make a den when he was eight. Past the swing that his dad had made for him just after Sandy had died, all those years ago, and on towards the pond.

But something was different. No bird song... no animals scurrying through the undergrowth... just an eerie silence. A chill wind picked up and mist swirled around him.

You are pathetic, came a vicious growl from beyond the mist.
Why can't you just be normal, like everyone else?

Seb spun around.

“Who’s there?” he shouted, his voice trembling.

Humiliated again, came the reply.

Seb turned one way, then the next. Then he caught a glimpse. Two gigantic horns flashed past then merged back into the mist. He stepped back, panic rising.

Why can't you get through just one day? Is it so hard?

A skull and a pair of eyes – pure fire, pure hatred – appeared and then disappeared in an instant.

Panic became terror. Seb turned to run.

Demonic laughter filled the woodland.

You think you can outrun me?

You'll never outrun me.

I am fear!

How to Silence Your Demons

You can see what goes on inside Seb's head.

Do you recognise these kinds of voices?

What kinds of words and phrases do you hear in your own mind?



Towards the end of the chapter, Mark gives Seb some advice. He says, "Experience tells me that we spend far too much time and energy worrying about what other people think of us. They will think what they want to think. They will form their own opinions. Some will even pass judgement on us. The opinions that they form and the judgements that they make always say more about them than they do about us".

What do you think of Mark's advice?

How could it help you?



The Story Behind the Story

Writing a fictional book is one of the greatest challenges I've ever faced. You'll probably have noticed that Seb encounters a few seemingly impossible challenges during his journey. It's been a similar experience for me writing it!

Although I've written eight non-fiction books, this is completely new territory for me.

It's taken me over five years to write this book. During its life, I've completed twelve full edits. It's also on its third title and its second mythical creature.

Along the way, I've written a couple of diary entries, to capture my thoughts at a few 'defining moments'.

We've made this available as a downloadable PDF on the *Silence Your Demons* website.

I hope it's helpful and provides a little inspiration when you need it most.

Acknowledgements

It's taken many years to get this book from the spark of an idea to a published final copy.

I have so many people to thank for helping me get this far.

Firstly, to my wife Caroline and my daughters, for their unwavering support, their patience and for reading so many draft chapters (particularly the terrible ones in the early days).

My youngest, Francesca, did an amazing job helping to write the 'How to Silence Your Demons' pages at the end of each chapter.

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and

Hal Leonard Permissions, for obtaining the rights to use the lyrics from *Diamonds* and *Demons*.

And, of course, you... for reading it and sharing it!

Thank you!

The Author

Hi, I'm Simon.

I'm passionate about helping people overcome their mental and emotional challenges ... and become masters of their own heads! My background is sport psychology. I've spent much of my career working with elite athletes and sports teams, helping them to get their mindset right.

After a few years I started to realise that what I called 'sport psychology', is actually human psychology.

It doesn't just work for athletes.

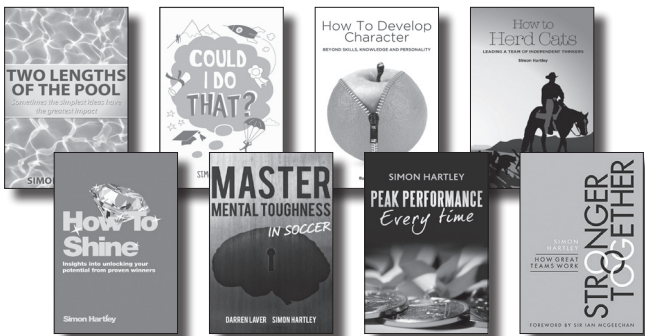
It works for everyone!

Since then, I've been using exactly the same approaches in business, education, healthcare, charities and the military.

Over the years, I've written a few non-fiction books, to share what I've learned about mindset and world class performance.

I also share these lessons through my coaching and speaking work, and through a few digital programmes.

Feel free to check them out.



And, if you'd like a little more, hit the Be World Class website

<https://be-world-class.com/>

