

Finn's eyes opened just a fraction.
Hardly more than a whisker.
But enough to see exactly what was going on.
And it was some sight.
There were people floating all around him.
A succession of human shapes, wreathed in black.
Men ... women ... children ... appearing as if
from nowhere and gliding down a gigantic black
tunnel ringed with golden ladders.
It was beginning to make a horrible kind of sense.
The tunnel. The dark chasm. The weird forms
drifting downwards.
He should have guessed sooner. After all, he was
hardly going to end up in Heaven after all the things
he'd done recently. Nicking the car, for a start.
Skiving off school whenever he felt like it. And those
last, terrible words he'd spoken to his father. Finn
Oliver was no way destined for the Pearly Gates.
"This is Hell, isn't it?" he whispered. "This is Hell
I've landed in."
Faces swarmed towards him. Concerned faces.
Amazed faces. More and more of them. A riot of
anxious expressions.
A huge, red-faced warrior dressed from head to
foot in scarlet robes, a bloodied axe at his side ...
a woman in a bright green dress ... a dumpy little
monk with a string of beads around his neck ...

a silver-haired old man wearing a puffy red jacket and
tights ... and each one nothing but a human shimmer
of tiny dazzling light particles.

"Tell me!" he asked again, his voice urgent now.
"Tell me! I have to know!"

Silent mouths opened and shut.

For a moment it seemed that no one had an
answer for him.

And then somebody hovered out of the shadows.

A red-headed boy in a shining helmet and
flowing crimson robes.

A boy with pale lips and dark, dark eyes.

He floated down until his face was just inches
from Finn's.

And when at last he spoke, Finn could feel not a
flicker of breath behind his words.

"This isn't *Hell*," said the boy contemptuously, his
eyes flashing with a strange and luminous darkness.
"This is the Underworld. Exit 43 to be precise. You
are under the surface of the Earth. You are in the
place where the Dead wake up."