

RUNNING INTO TROUBLE.

Eric had had problems at school. It wasn't his fault, of course. He blamed his parents. They had not appreciated the importance of the number 7. Instead his teachers had spoken about autism, but Eric had understood that this was just a term which they used in order to 'keep him in his place'.

As Eric grew into a young man, he found that running gave him the purpose and escape that he sought in life. He loved the focus, the determination and, most of all, the opportunity to win.

Today was the day of the local seven mile run. It was not a coincidence that Eric had chosen this race. It was his race because it was his number.

Eric stood at the front of the runners as they stood on the starting line. He surveyed those around him, seeing a rainbow of colours. Each of them was destined to become a loser in Eric's eyes.

The starting pistol was fired and the race began. Eric had a plan that would lead him to victory.

It had been raining, but it had stopped now, and the puddles that decorated the route only served to create a further challenge, as Eric's laser-like focus would not allow him to be deflected from victory.

Thump! Thump! Splash! Splash! Eric's heart beat to the rhythm of his strides as his legs drove him forward. The final mile was in sight, but what was this in front of him? He saw two runners, side-by-side, jostling each other in a competition to get ahead, or so he thought.

Eric put in an extra effort to sprint past them, when he heard one runner, who appeared to have more energy than the other, say,

'You're nearly finished'.

What?! Eric knew that one runner was threatening the other with unsolicited aggression. What was worse was that the man doing the threatening was wearing Number 13 and the man being threatened was wearing 77. So that was it! The Devil was seeking to impose his will on the innocent.

Despite his horror, Eric continued to focus, keeping his eyes fixed on the finishing line, before passing everyone else and raising his arms in the air, projecting his chest forward to claim the winner's medal.

Eric felt triumphant but, more importantly, he felt vindication.

But that is not the end of Eric's story.

The following week, as he turned to the front page of his local newspaper, Eric read a headline that shook him to the core. There, right before his eyes, was a photograph of the man he had seen the previous week, Number 77. He had died.

Then Eric understood. The Number 77 had not died a normal death. He had been murdered. Eric had heard the threat as he had passed by during the race. 'You are nearly finished'.

Eric knew his duty.

He picked up his phone and rang 999. It was time for the evil to suffer and for justice to prevail, God willing.