

THE HOUSE THAT SHADOWS BUILT.

FINAL PART : A SLOWLY UNFOLDING APOCALYPSE

The House That Shadows built is an audio novella spanning six episodes. It's written and read by Joe Coplestone with a Original soundtrack by Alix Lhoumeau.

If you haven't listened to the other parts you should probably go back and do that first.

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It had been almost a year since I had found the Fat Man's house. I wondered if I was better in any real sense, any more prepared for the world that had been working out full strength this whole time in spite of us, throwing up new apartment blocks and front lines while we had been in here readying ourselves without a deadline, playing catch up with a slowly unfolding apocalypse.

The feeling was getting harder to ignore. I felt like a fraud in the corridors, in front of all those people at the intoxications, following some idea I had, following me

with implicit faith that I knew what I was talking about.

There was the idea. The idea that had started that night in the police cell, short and pure. It had seemed so crystal but now it seemed anything but clear. The more I thought about it and the more people talked about and the more the idea was turned into pragmatic things the less I liked it and the less it seemed to hold up to scrutiny. Maybe an idea is just that, an idea and a good idea is a good idea, but it doesn't mean it can be anything else, a philosophy or lifestyle or solution.

Did I fuck up when I left what's in my head out. What if perspective isn't something that lives in your head but a situation? So I'd decided to bring it to an end. Sid was with me.

This final dose was to be the high point - the final ordeal after which we could consider ourselves vaccinated, thick skinned, oily black hearts ready for what was coming to us; glass and sand.

Everything had shifted out of my control. I was no longer able to view what we were doing here. When the group was small I'd understood their motivations and my own, re-animating the cinema's corpse as a functional temple in this age of frozen escalators and holy days marked by stampedes in shopping centres.

There was a knock on the door and Sid rolled over opening the door without

taking her eyes off the screen. With her arm extended I could see the yellow patches under her armpits. I barely recognised the young figure who now stood in the doorway holding two hard-drives. It was the son of the journalist who was obsessed with locating footage of his own photojournalist father's death somewhere out there in the infinite pool of broadcast media. A few weeks ago someone had found it, the footage of his dad's death. It was barely a pixel, ripped from some local station, a shoddy video camera, his dad's last moment a shaking pixel, half there, half not.

Now he served as one of Sid's most committed assistants; a systematic and attentive collector. His mother had, over the course of the past few months become more and more involved with The Kid's inner circle and was now a resident of the basement. The thought sent a shudder down my spine.

When the door was closed again Sid drew my attention to the central screen. Sid had created something that transcended a montage; it was a landscape. It had a physicality that made it feel that rather than travelling linearly forward through time and space - coming at us - it enveloped the viewer. Shotgun suicides and dismembered sex workers were presented as artefacts. As something to be observed and learnt from. There was a structure and tempo to the intoxication but it was in no way dramatic. Neither was it hypnotic; it mimicked in some way peaceful breathing interrupted by sudden fits of coughing. It made me think that perhaps that was what all of this was. All this violence, all this death and

suffering; it was the momentary failure of a healthy body. It was nothing to be feared, or at least feared with the intensity that it currently was. Dead leaves and mud, compost under foot.

We finished as the sun was rising. Sid's fingers were wrapped in plasters, skinned with blisters. She fell asleep in her chair, collapsed in on herself. I copied the finished dose onto one of the hard drives and left the room.

As I made my way from the top floor I could already see people making their way down the static escalators to the largest screening room. In the foyer I walked across the dusty red carpet with the hard drive containing the final intoxication gripped tightly between my hands and I watched as The Herd filtered into the screen, glancing at me over their shoulders and whispering into each other's ears.

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The Kid and his group hadn't attended the morning intoxication sessions for at least two weeks. Since that day when I stood at the top of the stairs to the basement and listened to the sound of The Kid's voice and the following applause but I knew I needed to venture down there and find out what it was going on but I'd skirted around the problem, filled with apprehension and that emotion I'd hoped to rid myself of, fear. But I couldn't ignore it any longer.

The door to the basement was locked from the inside. I knocked and waited. Then I heard the sound of a bolt being loosened. The door opened. Dave the Barman had changed since I'd last seen him, his once large and powerful arms and chest reduced to skin and bone, his hair now long and matted in imitation of The Kids.

"I want to talk to him"

"He's not taking visitors, we're deep in it"

"In what?" He smiled and raised a bottle of some spirit to his lips. His breath smelled like acetone and peat.

"Let me past Dave"

"As you want"

The bricks hummed with the sound of a distant electrical generator that made the ceiling feel lower, the corridors tighter and the air in front of me sinister. A young teen squeezed past me. His arms were marked with cuts and bruises. Some looked fresh, the blood still bright. As I pushed myself up against the wall - knocking dust onto my shoulder - and let him pass I could smell the alcohol on his breath, and his nose ran with bubbling bad speed.

I followed Dave through the rookery of cramped spaces lit by dim flickering lightbulbs through which wafted the smell of wet brick dust. Without Dave to

guide me I'd never have found my way to the excavated space which the Kid had made his own. They'd knocked down the connecting walls of four small rooms, to form one cavernous space, but not content with that they'd excavated down, digging a series of stepped platforms down into the darkness. These dark mud steps were littered with the sleeping forms of people huddled together for warmth.

The space was unfurnished except for the sofa from which The Kid held court, smoking and drinking wine from the bottle. Dave followed me into the room and hovered behind me. Followers with long matted hair were slumped against the walls, all eyes were on The Kid as he turned his attention to me.

"You haven't been at the sessions"

"We don't need them. We have our own way of dealing down here"

"And what is that?"

"We've gone beyond your silly imaginings"

The generator buzzed and Dave slugged at his drink and I felt his warm breath on my neck. The Kid put his cigarette out on the brick wall and lit another. When he spoke spines straightened in the room.

"You know there is more than just the mind. It's not everything like you think. The body is our tool"

The Kid now lifted his left hand into the light. The middle finger was half cut off, primitively cauterised and shiny black at the edges. Something deep inside me contracted.

I took a glance around the room. Some of the other were missing the tips of their fingers, scarred or burnt with patterned injuries on their forearms and cheeks. Wounds that could not be mistaken for accidents.

“Stigmata has always been a hoax, but that’s the point. It’s only by hurting ourselves or depriving ourselves that we can really get at truth. Sympathy is knowing someone’s pain because you’ve felt it yourself. It can be programmed”

He smiled broadly at this last statement and one by one the others in the room smiled with him, some of them began to giggle.

The amputated bits of fingers were nailed to the wall, rotten and black. On a string hung teeth that I knew must have been removed without anaesthetic.

“It’s too much”

“You’re a coward. Always were just a morbid pretentious scared cinephile”

“You’re a sadist”

“I’m just taking the logic to it’s conclusion, pure logic”

His lips were sore, cracked and dry. He looked old, not older, old. No longer a kid, he'd grown into something mature, menacing. I took a step back towards the door, suddenly worried my way out might be blocked.

I bumped into Dave who shoved me off him and I tripped to the floor. Lying there I caught site of a figure perched on the first excavated mud step barely visible because of how the shadows seemed to gather there, It was Renfield. I hadn't seen him for years, I wondered where The Kid had found him or if he'd found The Kid.

He was topless and his chest was a mass of self-inflicted cuts and burns. He was clutching pliers and blood was gushing from his mouth. Other figures were gathered around him. On a dirty rag they had gathered nails and pins, knives and scalpels and as Renfield tore his tooth loose they jostled to be the next in line to choose the implement to be used and the spot it was to be used upon.

"This has to stop, I want you out"

"You can leave if you want but we're staying"

I rushed out the room and as I blindly sought the exit I heard Renfield moan in pain as some part of his body - some delicate extension - was removed and thudded as it hit the floor. A dull thud like meat on a shopping board. Then I



heard the sound of clapping, flesh on flesh, skin meeting skin applauding the loss of meat and what a fear more than anything else recently; a loss of humanity, an amputation of that invisible organ that makes us care.

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I was gathering my few belongings when I smelled the smoke. At first I thought it was coming from inside the room, that I had accidentally left a cigarette in the ashtray or that The Kid had lost it and set the place on fire. Then I saw billowing smoke out the window. I opened the window and leant outside. In the back yard The Kid and his followers were having a bonfire. I watched as they tossed rolls of old film posters and cardboard cut-outs onto the fire. Faces that were once lauded and valuable, minor and greater deities of escapism, sex and money, first curled, blurred and then disappeared in the rising flames.

I watched as they began to throw film cans into the fire, the metal cases blackening and the celluloid flashing - incinerated in a moment. One by one, carefully conducted time sculptures were destroyed. The Kid leant in and lit a cigarette on the fire. Some of the others copied him and one of them set fire to his hair, panicking as he tried to put it out before running his fingers over the burnt patch, licking his blackened fingers and chewing the scorched ends.

Other members of The Herd watched silently from the windows or stood on the

edges of the yard. They didn't know what to do. Some of them looked up at me. I looked away. Sid rushed out with a bucket of water but was pushed back by Dave the Barman and brutally kicked in the groin. Doubled over she was kicked twice more in the ribs, one or two of the group tending the fire film as Sid crawled away. On all fours her thin form reminded me of a stray dog I once saw dying at a bus station having choked to death on petrol fumes, bleeding from the mouth, the blood stuck like burnt caramel to the hot tarmac.

I felt faint and braced myself on the window frame. I leant out and tried to breath in spite of the smoke billowing upwards. The smoke of destroyed narrative; cinema on the bonfire. Narrative renounced as a false god when it was in fact the most perfect, infinitely complex in it's simplicity, parables and fairy tales. Story was a code for storing and passing on information - a form of telepathy, an encrypted hard drive - making what you did not want to forget unforgettable.

I felt the pain inside my head. It took grip and clenched around my brain. I stumbled back and fell down on my bed. Before I passed out I saw slogans in my minds eye. Things I'd said, things I'd thought, thoughts I'd said that I should have kept to myself.

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My room had closed in on me, to shrink every night as the darkness set in and

fail to expand to it's original size in the morning light. The window sill was full up with dead wasps, moths and flies. The corners of the ceiling were ornamented with cobwebs. It had been days since I had taken part in an intoxication or spoke to anyone. The final dose hadn't worked. I'd tried and I'd failed.

I knew The Kid had taken over. His inner circle no longer dominated only the basement. Floor by floor they had taken over The House. I found myself glancing anxiously at the door whenever I heard voices or footsteps outside. I lay in bed and closed my eyes, listened to the creaking of the window frames in the wind and the distant sound of screams and gunshots.

Early in the afternoon I moved the piss bottles from next to my bed to the window. I opened it, letting the smell of piss escape from the room. A gust of wind carried a few insect corpses with it. I watched as they spiralled downwards into the backyard, still dominated by the great, black circle of ash and contorted bent film canisters.

I knew I had to summon the strength to escape. Outside my room the corridors throbbed with the sound of emergency radio frequencies; paramedics requesting a helicopter, policemen requesting support. The Herd listened to these private emergency channels constantly, enveloping the already claustrophobic corridors of the old cinema in the anxiety of crackling static.

At the top of a frozen escalator a group were huddled. They spoke in hushed voices as I passed. I heard one of them spit once I was at the bottom of the stairs. I didn't turn around.

In the former stock room that had once held the group therapy sessions I found a group watching CCTV footage of a group of young men violently assaulting an older homeless man on the platform of a train station. Rain drops kept his blood from appearing bright. It merged with the dirt of the platform and the soles of his assailant's shoes. I remained unseen in the doorway.

The footage was remarkably high quality and clearly visible in the background was a small crowd, in amongst the crowd I recognised some faces, they were members of The Herd and as I moved my eyes from the screen, where the homeless man was begging his assailants, the crowd of bystanders and perhaps also the cosmos for his life, I saw some of those same faces in the audience.

Some were sat cross-legged on the floor, others slumped against the wall. The tell-tale signs of insomnia written on their faces, as were the indicators of personal neglect; yellow sweat stains and unbrushed teeth.

As I stepped around the doorway I saw that the front row of the group, men and women alike instantly recognisable from their hair grown long like The Kid's, were masturbating. One of them turned and looked at me.

“Sex is humanity. To maintain your sex drive in the face of the true horror of the world is to maintain your humanity”

She turned back around, eyes locked on the screen. A man stamped on the head of the now unconscious tramp, his leg pumping like a piston, inhuman in its automisation. The arms and fingers of the front row moved in time with the pumping of the man’s leg.

One of the young men let out a shriek as he ejaculated. From the corner of the room a watcher stepped forward and kicked him in the head. The young man fell on his side and reached up to touch his red and swollen ear, the cum on his hand becoming matted in his hair.

I felt a deep disgust, a disgust that I hadn’t felt in a long time. An earthy natural disgust. I watched as the man’s jaw was suddenly de-structured under the sole of his assailant’s trainer. The man’s shoe reduced the other man’s head to rubble. Matter that once possessed self-awareness.

My stomach cramped and I felt the queasy tickle of my gag reflex. Suddenly it just happened. It burned its way up my throat and I dropped to my knees and vomited onto the floor, my stomach squeezing as I wretched up stomach acid. Members of the group now looked at me. A middle aged man with a neat beard

and a large hoop earring reached out and touched the pool of vomit. Others copied him. Fingers dipped, they anointed each other in my stomach acid.

I got out of the room and leant on the wall outside. I could still hear the sounds of the video being played in the room and my head span. The walls were pasted with cuttings, murder victims tied up in ditches; a row of burnt corpses on a suburban sofa, a falling person frozen against the symmetry of a drab high-rise office block.

I found Sid in her editing suite. She flinched as I entered the room. She was editing on four screens. Her face still bruised and swollen. I watched in silence as he played back what she was working on; a montage of images structured to excite - jagged cuts and rapid increases in tempo. This was far from the intoxications we had worked on together; it was something different altogether. This was made to illicit an adrenaline response.

There were other figures lurking in the darkness of the corner, smoking and watching. Maybe The Kid was among them, but it was hard to tell now that they all had the same hair. But then there was something in the way the glowing ember shook in the darkness.

“Sid do you have a moment?”

Sid didn't move but the figures in the corner did. I was surrounded, I could smell their unwashed armpits, their shared sweat.

I was struck on the side of the face and my head banged against the wall, sending blood rushing to my ear, which screamed. I fell down and watched as a boot swung towards me, I blocked it with my hand and one of my fingers bent with cracked. Then the blows came so fast that the individual impacts merged into something like the revving of an engine and I gasped for an escape as I lost my sight.

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I was an emotional child. I was scared of the dark and in social situations I felt paralysing embarrassment, like there was something volatile and fragile inside me that I needed to protect. My fear and emotional reactions to situations were heightened by an uncontrollable imagination. Every shadow and half overheard adult conversation was filtered through that unstable instrument and became swollen with heavy meaning. My anxieties manifested themselves as complexly woven narratives, multiverses of terrible possibility. I always felt that just out of sight, around some corner or locked door was something waiting to shatter my weak exterior. A monster, but a monster that was in no way fantastic. It was the monster of the adult world, the real world that I knew was being carefully hidden from me with hand knitted jumpers from grandma and children's movies.

I lived in constant fear of the external world intruding into my internal world. I lived in fear of being surprised by existence. Not pleasantly surprised but suddenly confronted with some moment that I wasn't ready for. I worried about my parents getting divorced, I worried about house fires and I worried about being kidnapped and murdered. When I worried, something inside me felt like it was rattling itself loose like some vital small bone screw or cog might fall out of place, and once that happened anything could happen.

I felt thin skinned and fragile and it paralysed me. I'd seen people applying suncream to avoid being burnt and I wondered if there was some kind of cream for my problem. I remember watching a skinny teenager browsing for videos in the video rental shop. He was picking up weight lifting and body building instructional videos. Every now and again he pinched his bicep between his fingers and smiled. While browsing he left a shopping bag at the end of the aisle. I walked over and took a look inside. Jars of peanut butter, porridge oats and a pair of simple weights.

I suddenly realised I didn't know where my mum was and I felt the palpitations starting, the screw-bone rattling. I went from aisle to aisle with sweat and tears before my eyes, increasingly losing control, feeling like I was about to break. I found my mum at the counter paying for the film she was renting. Immediately I felt pacified and stupid. I looked back at the skinny teenager. He was touching



his pecks and smirking as a tear rolled off my chin and moistened the queasy red isometric pattern of the cheap carpet.

That was the first moment I remembered really thinking of it in terms of being a muscle - something to be exercised. Later while I lay at home in bed watching the lights from passing cars disrupt the shadows that danced before my eyes a jagged theatre of unformed fears and anxieties. I thought about how I could exercise this muscle, this control over my imagination. It was clear I was never going to be able to control the external world. Even as a child that was clear. But the internal was my domain. What I came up with was a systematic form of desensitisation. I had to become used to the world out there. I had to be kicked in the balls and punched in the face, I had to know about the worst of the worst to prepare myself. I wanted to wall in my imagination, confine it within atrocious facts.

The first time I was really beaten up was in my first week of school. I was in some abandoned staircase, wasting my lunch by walking alone lost in my kids imagination. Trying to project scenes from American school movies onto the walls peeling with creamy grey paint. I don't remember seeing anyone but before I knew it I was knocked down the stairs, the edge of my hips falling against the steps with a heavy force. One of my fingers bent back on itself as I reached out to stop myself tumbling. When you're being kicked and stamped on by a group of people it's hard to notice individual blows. It's more like your being smothered or

choking and your whole body gasps, your fingers wrapping knots in your hair as you cover up. You squeeze your eyes and jaw tight, scared that you might catch a toe to the face and bite through your own tongue. These thoughts all rush upon you at once and then it's over. The sound of laughter and men walking away, patting each other on the back.

I stayed curled up until I knew they were really gone, then I let myself feel the pain. I cried, sobbing into the sleeve of my school jumper as I pulled myself to my feet. The metallic tang of blood dripping from my nose along the back of my throat and into my mouth greeted me as I stood upright. I spat blood onto the wall. It seemed to pour out of my nose and onto my trousers and new shoes.

Later when I'd snuck past my parents, I got undressed in the bathroom. I laid my jeans out on the tiled floor and stared at the blood stains, spattered brown and red. I looked at myself in the mirror and ran my finger over the bumps on my forehead and the painfully swollen tissue around the bridge of my nose. I felt a kind of nostalgia when I pressed on the most sensitive spots, a sweet nostalgia that I could almost taste. It made me feel very close to something, something real and earthy. Close to my own genes or roots. It shook me. It was like my humanity was hiding in my aching bones and spreading bruises.

I kept the jeans hidden under my bed. I took them out and put them on at night. They were like armour. I felt safe and real when wearing them; they were a

trophy of my momentary glimpse into that world that was hidden from me. The world of pain, the world of suffering. I trawled second hand bookshops in my blood stained jeans and bought trashy true crime paperbacks, books of prison interviews with serial killers, books about natural disasters and epidemic diseases. I immersed myself in the study of real horror. It was around this time that I also began my scrapbook.

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Outside of The House the air was cold and still and damp, like the stale air of a cellar. I headed towards the city, trying my hardest not to look behind me. As I walked I felt myself being watched but when I turned to look in the direction of some sense gaze or another, I saw only empty homes, shadowy windows and peeling adverts.

The people I did pass on the street glanced over their shoulders and strafed around corners, their focus twitching between the screens of their phones and the world around. The contact was immediate and intense - a darting look to assess any possible danger, it didn't linger or ask to be reciprocated.

I ran my fingers over my swollen and sore jaw. I reached inside my mouth and ran my finger over my teeth. One at the back of my mouth stuck out of above the others; it's root was loose in the gums, knocked out of place by one of the many

blows I had endured this morning, crumpled in the corner of the editing suite while The Kid watched smoking and smirking, his child like eyes lit with up with malicious pleasure. Schadenfreude of the lowest kind, acting like the spoiled son of a Dictator, the second generation stripped of even the most shallow pretence of ideology. Wanton, horny for pain.

I need a place to rest. To lay my head down, be alone and take stock, so I headed to where this all began, to The Spot. Enough time had passed that I could probably spend a night or two there without anyone caring one way or the other. After a while I started to see people again, one of two at first, still walking faster than needed and making eye contact but not with the same power of purpose as before. Gradually this softened into looks of recognition, then greetings and finally, warm smiles.

I'd almost forgotten this world existed. Coffee shops and bakeries, school kids and couples on first dates, parents feeding ducks in the park and teenagers sharing their first spliffs, watching them. I took a seat on a swing in a children's play area and felt shudderingly uncertain about everything except that I wanted I a vanilla milkshake, I checked my pockets for money and found a few coins in the lining of my jacket.

I got off the swing and walked to the main road and bought a vanilla milkshake. While the woman behind the counter prepared it I got a chance to look at myself

in the shiny metal rim of the counter, my chin and my cheek were marbled yellow and blue. A child with curly ginger locks rubbed a ball on his hair and delighted in the magic of static.

The milkshake soothed my aching jaw and I found a bench near the duck pond and took a seat. After a while I was joined by a man in worker's overalls. He ate a sandwich and drank shandy from a can. While I swilled the milkshake my teeth and let it mix with the remaining blood, I observed him from the corner of my eye.

"Looks like you took a kicking"

He'd seen me watching him of course.

"Yeah I suppose I did"

"Your first time?"

"No, but the worst yet"

"It's just a matter time really. The pain is one thing but it's waiting to heal that's the real pain, so to speak"

He finishes his drink and crunches the can in his hand and drops it on the floor.

"They'll be a lot more, you're only young"

"A lot more beatings?"

"Pain and waiting to heal, that's life ain't it"

"So what can you do about it?"

“Fuck all maybe, or take it on the chin, act like every beating is the first one, what else can you do?”

“Be prepared”

“That normally means being a cunt those doesn't it? Being a cunt and walking around thinking everyone else is a cunt”

He finished the sandwich and took out a packet of cigarettes and offered me one. I took it and we smoked. He smoked his right to the nub. He didn't say good bye when he left and after he'd gone I just sat on the bench and spent the rest of the afternoon not thinking much at all. When it started to get dark I got off the bench and continued to The Spot.

Someone had made a very half hearted attempt to secure the main door, but our way in through the catacombs and behind wardrobe was still as we'd left it. They'd done a number on the inside though, ripped out anything and everything we'd added to make the place semi habitable. I found a corner and rolled my coat to make a pillow and closed my eyes.

My mind drifted for a while and visuals danced before me on the inside of my eyelids, breaking waves or storm clouds made of television static. There were moments where the shapes looked like faces or crowds, but these were only lingering impressions that revealed themselves to be nothing but mirage when I turned my attention to them.

I woke up feeling refreshed but with a dead arm and when I sat up I my jaw reminded me about what had happened to it. I didn't want to stick around The Spot so I went back the way I came in and not knowing what to do with myself starting walking. As I walked I touched the side of my face, it was still sore and as I clenched it, pain shot through the nerves and one of my back teeth wobble. I reached inside my mouth and ran my finger over the loose tooth.

I took my finger out of my mouth and continued walking heading without any real purpose towards the city centre. Pushing through the throngs of people I looked at them and saw the crowds as the steroid enhanced muscles of a body builder. Artificial, an illusion, pumped up.

But in the faces of the people that made up the muscles, the crowds, I saw the peaceful tranquility of the dead, the paralysis of emotion that I knew so well from the many hours of intoxications. In the past year I had seen more corpses than living strangers. It was the blissful ignorance of a no-more-thought.

I leant on a wall and once again played with the tooth that had come loose in my gum. I rocked it slowly from side to side like I did when I was a child. For every tooth I was given a pound, which was waiting for me under the pillow when I woke up from another night of dreams where I became lost in a supermarket or trapped inside the inner mechanics of an escalator becoming slowly crushed to

death under the feet of the shoppers.

My mother told me she had a recurring dream where I fell from the top floor of the new department store and she couldn't find my broken body amongst the crowds and rotating clothing stands. Over the course of a few weeks I managed to remove four teeth from my weak gums and exchange them for currency before my mum caught me out on the scam. The tooth was almost free when I noticed some of The Herd in amongst the crowd of shoppers. They were leafletting, handing out leaflets and usb sticks containing copies of intoxications.

I cut through the shopping centre to avoid them, taking the lift to the top floor and then heading over the skyway that was once filled with toy shops and name fashion stores but was now home to African hair care shops and Chinese run nail parlours; in this forgotten corner of the centre people smoked and pensioners sat looking out of the windows on the shops below and the crowds that thronged around them, anxiously playing with the twisted handles of their plastic bags. I stopped and sat down on a bench next to a discarded chicken box and a few security tags and began working on my tooth again.

I rocked it from side to side, slowly loosening the gum's hold on it. From my viewpoint in the skyway I looked down onto the markets that surround the entrance to the main station. This was where cheap knockoffs and copies of expensive brands were sold. It was where people somehow still out of touch with



internet bought pirated films and pornography. I knew from The Herd that compilations of our intoxications were sold there too. Greasy food stands and shops that sold everything you could ever need made from brittle plastic.

I pressed my face against the glass and closed my eyes. I finally worked my tooth loose and opened my eyes to look at it between my two fingers when a huge explosion tore through the entrance of the station.

The window shattered and crumbled. I stepped back and watched as a wall of dust and smoke rolled out of the entrance of the station. Car alarms and screams oscillated as everybody ran. I ran too, heading for the escalator which had locked itself off in accordance with some automated emergency response system.

Sprinklers kicked in despite there being no fire and with wet hair and a shared look of having suddenly stepped out of their own lives and into someone else's skin, people rushed to escape, minds now shot empty of shopping lists and dinner plans, of connecting trains and 'everything must go' closing down sales.

An even layer of broken glass lay like ice, the crunching inescapably evoking the pleasant childhood memory of stepping out of the back door and walking tentatively into the frozen garden. The first people emerged from the station as the rolling wall of smoke and ash broke against the last remaining glass front of the shopping centre and collapsed, dissipating into the air.

Sirens joined the screams the car and shop alarms in a cacophony that was only surpassed in volume by the repeating echo of the explosion and the cracking of the glass, the sound of which tore its way through my eardrums, on an infinite loop.

A lone policeman struggled to move as people clung to him, hanging limp but gripping tightly to his safety vest which he was forced to remove so that he could move forward. Still the people faces caked in pulverised plasterboard, clung to his discarded ballistic vest. Running their fingers through each other's hair, in the foetal position, eyes squeezed shut.

I felt the sheen of sweat forming on my face and back as I got nearer to the screams and sounds of collapse, implosions; caved in architecture. The skin of the buildings had been torn and shredded. Everywhere wiring and supporting beams were exposed and heat stained. I saw the first injured people as I stepped back outside of the station, onto the platforms.

A man leant on his collarbone (a bone which always made me think of breaking. I had always been unnerved by the way in which I could almost pinch around my own with my thumb and forefinger) against a pillar, his head slumped forward, one hand on his face the other hanging limp at his side. Blood poured constant from his sleeve, pooling on the platform, seeping into the breathable fabric of his

running shoes.

The air was still clearing but I could already see the outline of the elevated train track. Paramedics in hi-visibility jackets rushed past me and began treating the man lent against the pillar. The train form was violently contorted, the metal walls of one of the carriages peeled back by the shock of the explosion. A sculpted wave of jagged bent metal, an image of the velocity and mass of the expansion to go together with the terrible echo in my head. Blackened, two carriages hung precariously vertical, derailed and battered.

Bits of metal and glass fell from the hanging carriages like leaves dropping from an autumn tree. The ballast and rails were tinted red. I gazed upwards, drawn towards the hanging train, the dissipating smoke and falling dust and ash. Behind the train I could see office workers clustered around windows and balconies in the high rise office blocks, the blinking of cameras recording. All around me people were filming. Even those who were themselves scorched and dusted, with dirty nosebleeds and ruined clothes, reached for their cameras.

There was a terrible creak as the two hanging carriages tore themselves from the rest of the train and fell to the ground. The impact knocked me off my feet and a new wall of hot dust and ash and litter enveloped me and the others around me.

Through the clearing air I could see the two carriages lying on their sides,

crushed and shedding glass and flaking metal. People began to crawl out of the carriages, people made unhuman by damage, totally black or totally red, naked, mutated. I was unable to move. I wanted to help them but I couldn't bring myself to move. I felt that any step I took would be wrong, a false move.

People approached the carriages, some reaching out to help the wounded but finding themselves helpless when confronted face to face with the world turned upside down. Others filmed, entranced by some particular puddle of blood or fragment of burnt advert that had previously hung on the inside of the train, just above the heads of the passengers, drawing the wandering eyes.

I began to wonder if they hoped that by playing the role of the observer they would be stripped of any responsibility to help, to be active; as if being present in the moment is something you could opt out of and maybe they were right. I was of course observing, asking myself if all of the intoxications had prepared me for this? Or did the beating of my heart betray a palpable excitement or fear? Maybe all I had done was to remove my ability to tell the two apart; fear and excitement.

Then I saw The Kid and a large gang of The Herd climbing over the walls that separated the station from the streets. They ran like children after an ice-cream van. They approached the carriages and began to tear their clothes off, stripping themselves naked revealing their malnourished and sun deprived bodies to the watching crowds of paramedics and uprooted shoppers.

The Kid led the charge, his arms raised above his head like a teen on a rollercoaster. He ran his fingers along the mashed metal of the carriage, then his tongue. The others copied, dipping toes and fingers, tongues and nipples in fluids and scorched dust. They skipped and hopped, throwing arms over each other's shoulders, smiling uncontrollably.

I watched as a woman rolled over a corpse, removed it's shirt and put it on herself. She lay face to face on top of the corpse and kissed the dead man on the lips and closed her eyes as if in relaxed meditation, or post coital bliss. He couldn't even have been cold yet.

Dave the Barman bathed the blood, crawling between the torn up bits of people and rolling from side to side like a pig covering itself in mud to protect itself from the sun. The Kid entered the carriage and returned with a disembodied hand which he used to rub his chest and caress his face. There was a sense of festival in the way they picked their way among the corpses and destruction, tasting and feeling, holding cupped hands under the broken throats squirting blood. They reached out for each other with blasted eyes and urgent fingers, spreading the pain amongst themselves. The Kid climbed atop the carriage and raised above him a decapitated head of an old man, bits of spine falling from the head and becoming caught in The Kid's pubic hair.

The scene reminded me of a classical painting of a feast held by Bacchus I had once seen in a museum; they were partying as the world fell apart around them, cavorting with the dead, eyes glazed over in bliss, sharing in bodily fluids like they were delicacies to be savoured for their rarity; unusual flavours from a foreign land, the offal of human suffering.

The sight of them took the bottom out my stomach and made me sick in only the way your own actions can, when that modern sense of uncertainty and ambivalence takes a veer towards those ancient gut microbes, shame and regret. The feeling was full bodied, in that moment I was shame.

I stumbled and found myself being held up by a kind stranger. He looked at me and then looked at the scene playing out in front of us and I saw a wide grin torn across his face, not a happy smile but a panic smile, the smile of a captive pleading with his captors. A tear welled up at the corner of his eye. His supporting arm tightened around me and he squeezed me as I watched, not saw, not observed, not witnessed, I watched.

I watched the Kid, my best friend, a naked teen with the face of a malicious cherub, his long hair matted with fluids, his shoulders adorned with entrails, his nipples sanguine with gore. He saw me in the crowd, amongst the human fear and the mechanical eyes. He began to cackle and despite the sirens and the screams and the echoing of the blast, I heard it as if it was right inside my ear. I

pulled myself free of the grip of the panicked stranger. I'd made his jacket red.

"You're bleeding"

He was right. I was right, just under my left armpit was an opening. I touched it and my finger dipped inside.

The panicked stranger grabbed me by the shoulder. I shrugged him off.

"It's okay, it's my blood"

I turned and began to walk away and not for the first time I felt like I was slipping or perhaps lying down, prostrate on a conveyor belt, or walking downhill losing control of my own momentum because I didn't expect it to be this steep.