

THE HOUSE THAT SHADOWS BUILT.

PART ONE : Mausoleums Of the Boom.

I swilled the mixture of blood and toothpaste and spit around my mouth and let it dribble out spoiling the perfect white of the sink. My teeth were crooked and stained the same mustard colour as the walls of old pubs. I ran the nail of my thumb along them and think about how they barely fit in my mouth, all competing for space and purpose like the shops and houses on the terraced streets I grew up on, before all the broken down charm was neutralised by the great renewal, that never ending rhinoplasty, that glass and steel assassination. I splashed my face with water and stared hard into my own eyes reflected in the mirror.

"The first girl I ever kissed is dead"

"What the fuck am I meant to do with that information?"

"I dunno, it's just interesting we were both kids at the same time, I kissed her and now she's dead"

"I don't think that means anything, you're talking total shit"

"It's a connection to death, a palpable link"

"Sometimes you're so pretentious it makes me sick"

"Death is the currency of change, always has been, always will"

"You should copyright that and sell it to the army, it would make a good slogan, the army always needs good slogans"

“Did you put the key back?”

“Yes”

“She’s really dead you know, I met a guy I knew as a kid in the supermarket and he told me, she had some rare incurable bone disease, she died last month”

I went into the bedroom and grabbed my bag. I emptied the jewellery box into it and collected the books I’d set aside earlier. When I got downstairs The Chewing Gum Kid was stubbing a cigarette out on a picture hanging in an ornate frame in the hall. The picture was of a rich woman wearing expensive clothes standing by the window of an expensive house; outside of the window in the distance was a poor looking man and some cows. The man and the cows looked like an afterthought. The rich woman must have been the type of ugly that even a classical painter can’t hide. Nevertheless you can see in every stroke that he gave his all, but had to draw the line at the point where the resemblance was going to end, so that in the painting she was still ugly, but not as ugly as she must have been in real life.

“Rich people are philistines”

“Do you even know what a philistine is?”

The Chewing Gum Kid scraped the still smoking nub end across the rich woman’s face. A blackened line of ash cut through it with an aggressive, dismissive slant.

“Yes, I know what a philistine is”

“Can we go now?”

Outside of the house it was one of those foggy English mornings that set your imagination loose. As we walked away from the house, my pockets and rucksack heavy with swag I contend with hallucinations triggered by the smothering of the physical world in low lying clouds. Half obscured cars floated past. The drivers like ghosts, stuck on the other side of a great divide, a sheet of glass, mouths wide and torn at the edges, gasping or screaming, either frozen or moving too slowly for the human eye to register. It was hard to tell. They disappeared into the fog, on their way to work, a figment of some imagination or another.

The Chewing Gum Kid lit another cigarette and we shared smoke as we crossed onto the main road. It was still dark and the only light came from the gaudy illuminated signs above the bargain shops, slot machine casinos and tanning shops. The names looked smudged through the fog, some of letters flickering on and off creating epileptic dirty jokes - "The D....c...unt Store"..

Most of the shops on the street that had once been called the crown jewel of suburban shopping were empty and boarded up and had been for a while. Suburban shopping parades like this had just stopped one day, as if someone had pulled the plug on them. They were now places of an eerie silence, the kind of uncomfortable silence and stillness that can only exist in places that weren't intended to be silent. An absence that everyone feels. We had a

nickname for these places; we called them Mausoleums to the Boom.

Only the inner-city ring still showed signs of bustling outside life. The party zones and the shadowy residential areas hidden under the flyovers: the territory of the booby-trap kids and half-brick snipers who preyed on early morning commuters forced to traverse the streets and lost clubbers and rave zombies who took a wrong turn on their search for the next big club in some gutted industrial building.

The Kid took a leak against a roll down shutter and I looked up and down the street. The luckier shops had been mercifully burnt down and had guilty-conscience epitaphs spray painted on the smoke charred bricks: "another fire, another payout". The unlucky ones had just been walked out on. Inside tea-mould grew over the edges of mugs and bacon sarnies turned colours until they resembled bloated fish, shimmering silver blue. Anything of value had long since been looted. Sometimes if we were desperate and really down on our luck me and The Chewing Gum Kid spent a night in one these shops, but that was seldom. They were unpleasant places to be, reminding me of abandoned spouses, contemplating their ruined lives, looking for a reason where there was only unreason to be found.

When he was done pissing The Chewing Gum Kid turned around with an argument in his eyes. He wanted to get rid of the swag right off the bat and go

spending. I wanted to stash the stuff in The Spot and come back for it later. I still had a ton in the heel of my boot and didn't see why we should take any risks. The Kid wasn't having any of it and ground his teeth and rolled the end of his cigarette into ash between his finger and thumb.

"Well, I want my half now. I wanna eat a steak in a restaurant and drink something better than that pissy beer you've been lifting recently"

"I'd like it to last more than a few days this time - I don't like pulling those jobs and the least we can do is make it last"

"You're a cowardly swine"

We hadn't started out burgling houses. At first we'd just been scavenging - pilfering the stuff left behind in the countless homes abandoned by fleeing middle income families on their slow march back to the slums, a century or so after their family and mine first emerged from those rookeries eyes bright with the promise of facing the future together. When we started running out of empty homes we transgressed. There was something spiteful, a static malice, to the large houses standing proudly furnished in a minimalistic Scandinavian style in the face of our hunger pangs.

"Let's go to The Spot first then we can talk about it"

"Talk? I don't wanna fucking talking - I wanna eat and drink and exercise my jaw on something better than your petty bourgeois arguments"

Neither of us slept often or for very long and as a result our fuses were short, disagreements like this often escalated quickly and we both had scars and busted knuckles to show for it. The arguments were part of the daily routine; our lives were lived under the thumb of invisible forces beyond our control. We deduced their existence by the presence they exerted on us, but we only had each other to strike out at.

The Kid was impulsive and eager, this disposition manifesting itself overtly in what he called his 'warps'; sudden and total whole body spasms that caused him to hop off the ground and squeal, limbs extended outwards and tensed like he'd just received a high voltage shock. The 'warps' were most common in the morning but could strike at any place and any time. I could tell he was on the edge of one right now, his veins popped in his neck and he sneezed black snot, blood and chunks of speed. His heel tapped against the paving stone. Either the stone or his heel was about to crack.

"You know that the first thing the cops will do when they get the call is phone around the shops asking if anyone's come in with a load of stuff"

"I don't give a fuck, and besides, the places I go don't talk to the cops"

The Kid twisted his toes so that he fell into a wide boxers stance and curled his right hand into a fist and his left moved slowly and carefully like a gunfighter in a western film to the peak of his baseball cap. The Kid stared at me and I stared

back. The Kid threw the cap forwards hitting me in the face and dived forward into my body. We rolled around on the floor: The Kid tried to throw a punch and I grabbed his arm and started twisting it back behind his back. He lunged forward wildly with his forehead but I rolled to my right and we untangled. We both started laughing and stood back up.

“Everyone talks to the cops you fucking idiot, especially the people who make a point of letting you know they don’t”

Our home, The Spot, was located under an overground carpark opposite a closed down swimming baths where we sometimes swam in the stale pool while chunks of asbestos fell down on us from the rotting ceiling.

To get inside The Spot you had to cross the carpark and climb through a hole in an immense red brick wall of what had once been a Victorian school building. Once behind the wall you removed a manhole cover and climbed down into the dark tunnel below. Next you had to find your way unguided through blackness to a second hole. This portion of the journey, however many times you’d done it, never failed to create a sense of deep seated worry, a heavy claustrophobic fear of becoming eternally lost; an ancient and universal fear however momentary. Feeling the edge of the hole with your toe you had to lie on the floor and slide through feet first. The upper portion of the spiral staircase was caved in so you had no choice but to continue heading deeper underground. The first cellar room

was flooded with water from a burst pipe but me and The Kid had built a bridge from planks and milk crates. Then you reached a door and on the other side of the door a second staircase. As you walk up the staircase you have to avoid the empty beer bottles we placed on every step as a kind of primitive alarm system. At the top of the stairs you see a wardrobe, when you open the wardrobe you see light for the first time, you climb through the wardrobe and the hole in the wall and you're in The Spot. It was suitably fortified from the outside but the paranoia still crept in and kept us up at night, perched at the top of stairs clutching homemade weapons.

The area we lived in was warmed and lit by stolen electricity and furnished from the streets. We each had two large rooms and a bathroom with running water. We weren't sure what the building had previously been but the toilets and showers suggested some kind of factory or warehouse with a large staff. If that was the case then I could only assume that the area we called The Catacombs, the cavernous unexplored and seemingly endless rooms underneath the floor we occupied, was the main working area. How they had sunk so far underground was just another mystery. The city was rapidly decaying, almost as if once the veneer of economic stability had been removed all other forms of stability followed. Garden sheds collapsed as the banks closed up shop. What remained in the relinquished homes and workspaces was a labyrinth of enigmas, of unanswered questions and the suggestion of epiphany somewhere in the anatomy of the city that had lost sight of what it was meant to be and who it was

meant to be for while in places not so far away society rushed forward with glaring eyes and raging appetites.

“You left the lights on again”

“So what?”

“Someone could notice”

“The windows are covered”

“But it’s still good practice”

“Fuck off”

We sat down opposite each other in battered arm chairs. The Kid resumed his game of chess with himself. His hand shook as he considered the moves, he whispered curses in his native tongue, words that sounded like the cracking of contorted tendons or the rumbling of a broken motor. A few moves in the Kid kicked over the board, then swearing again, he set it up again from memory and continued the battle with himself. Cigarette after cigarette turned to ash, burned his fingers and scattered over the board, the pieces standing waist deep in grey powder.

I watched The Kid for a bit and then went into my own room and opened a beer. I let it froth onto the back my hand and licked it off. I drank the beer and another and turned on the projector we’d half inched from the University. I chose a film; an old one I’d seen many times before. I lay down on my mattress and turned off the lamp. The peeling wallpaper flickered and then lit up.

The film followed a group of kids over one summer in a city. They lived in the shadow of a huge iron bridge and spent their days swimming in the river and stealing fruit from market stalls run by men in flat caps with moustaches. The film climaxed with a big rumble, the bridge kids against another gang. The leader of the other gang had a stiletto knife and managed to injure the quiet bookish kid of the bridge gang. In revenge the leader of the bridge kids, a handsome tough talking kid, killed the enemy gang leader with a brick. The film ended with him being dragged away by cops in blue uniforms. The bookish kid watches from his hiding place behind a dustbin in an alley, a single tear appearing behind the broken lens of his glasses and running down his cheek. The words 'The End' appear on the screen and then blackness, the curls of peeling wallpaper once again visible.

I went over to the window and peeled back the curtain. It was day now and in the distance the overhead trains cut through the fog, momentarily visible before disappearing again. I strained my eyes to see the river. I imagined kids swimming in it but I know it's too cold. I closed the curtain again and sat in the darkness wishing I had a stiletto knife like the leader of the bridge kids in the movie.

Ever since I was a child I've been like this, hyper sensitive to the effects of films on the brain. The way I figured it films are like infections; like a twenty-four hour bug, they work on the grey matter and distort the way you see the world. A kind

of commodified fever. After a while it's hard to separate the lessons you learnt from reality and lessons you learnt from fiction and dream, if there was ever any separation at all.

That's how I knew that all this talk of personality and inner self was bullshit.

There is no self, in any real constant way anyway. There is only you here after doing that, or you here after seeing this, people are their point of view and their point of view is built on experiences both real and fantasy, like films and dreams. That's not to say it's simple. Not every person reacts the same way to experiences. Some people are hyper reactive like myself while others are totally numb. In actuality there is no link between experience and understanding. Not for everyone anyway.

Take Renfield, he used to live with us at The Spot. In fact he was the first one to find The Spot and recognise it's potential. Renfield was a veteran guttersnipe, he'd seen the inside of more pigpens than The Kid or me combined. We called him Renfield because he once told them that he'd survived a week in an old style pig pen on the border somewhere by eating the spiders and flies that lived in his cell. We also called him Renfield because he was protective over his real name. In fact we weren't really sure where he was from. He'd been travelling and living on the streets, hustling and pulling jobs since his early teens. That should have made him street wise, he'd been around, he knew the score. But after all of that he was still thick as shit. Renfield got ripped off all the time, he fell

for every scam and con going, he got conned by kids half his age only a few weeks in the game, and him an old hand, it was depressing. He just wasn't that sharp.

He just couldn't learn from his experiences, he never got any better at anything. He never got to be a good lifter even though he did it every day, he was slow and lost his nerve, he let his body show it and he got caught, sweating and taking deep breaths. Part of it was that he never treated it like work, which it is; anyone who tells you otherwise is lying. The Kid practiced every night before bed and could fill a bag in under ten seconds, it was impressive. Renfield never had anything of his own either. That is he never focused in on one unique hustle or way of working, he copied people and played the old games but he never struck out alone. It started to be a drag on The Kid and me. Worst of all he fucked up our hustles, he blocked all the shops with his lazy workmanship until it reached the point where me and The Kid had to walk for 40 minutes just to lift something to eat. After a week the sole of my shoes fell off and I had to get some more. When your lifting appearance is important. You don't want to look like a tea leaf or you're fucked. The Kid's schtick was to pass as a child. I used what I called the 'gentlemen' technique. It relied on boot polish and a well fitting jacket. Shoes without soles would have bought me a coma in the pigpen. The big pause, as The Kid called it. All these times me and The Kid were out we left Renfield alone and that's when he started fixing.

He didn't just start fixing, he dived as deep into it as he could, his skin turned grey and his arms erupted in sores and scabs that he picked at constantly. He whined and begged and cried. He stole from us and showed the guys who lived in the garages on the other side of the lot the way to The Spot in exchange for a fix. That was the final straw. The Kid lost it and locked Renfield in a room with a mattress and a bucket, we fed him once a day and after a few days even that was a horrorshow. The smell of shit and vomit was too intense. It was like he was trying to poison us into letting him free, but we didn't break. The Kid was convinced Renfield was acting out of malice, pushing his face against the gap under the door and spewing his guts up. After 8 or 9 days he somehow gained the strength to break out and emptied our piggy bank. The Kid had the mother of all warps that morning and left the house with a crowbar up the sleeve of his jacket. He came back cursing the heavens. We never saw Renfield again.

I pulled the curtain back over the window, turned on another film, this time without the sound, and lay back down on my mattress. Staring at the images cavorting on the dirty wall and listening to the sound of a police siren wailing somewhere in the distance and behind that the sound of a plane taking off at the airport I suddenly realised what it was I was hiding from in the hidden spot. It was the constant assault on my imagined life. The practical assault I could take; I could steal food to avoid having to work and I could live in places like this to avoid paying rent.

The Kid had taught me all the tricks, all the grey area hustles between downright illegality and tiptoeing on the line to survive. What I couldn't escape when living out there was the constantly evolving narrative of a world-on-the-up. An amazing feat of decentralised and uncoordinated narrativisation that incorporated every small event, every human tragedy and success into The Great Story. Like the fog I'd seen earlier that day, something hung over the truth of the world obscuring it, smothering it with a thick layer of fancy and obstructing some of the sharper edges.

Out there - connected to the world in the form of constantly rolling updating news sites, heavily edited documentaries and gut wrenching guilt trip charity advertising campaigns I felt disconnected from some essential truth, and worse than that I felt like I was being enveloped by an other people's reoccurring dreams and nightmares, so omnipresent that it became hard to separate from my own subconscious wanderings. My ideas hadn't gone un-noticed by The Kid and we had one argument over and over again., books vs films. It normally went something like this;

I'd be in my bed watching either an old film, a legit film, or a just some Film, that is some piece of moving image and he'd come and stand in the doorway and start with the barbs.

He'd not been reading English for very long but already he could quote whole

passages at length verbatim. I found something about that somehow sinister.

He'd clutch whatever big book he was reading, it's the pages grey with smudged ash and cover tarnished with spilled wine, and start trash talking.

Waving the book in his hand like a TV evangelist with a bible, it's size and heft becoming part of his argument, he'd practically froth with fervour and shoot daggers at the scattered hard drives that held my film collection, they had no weight to them, no heft, and cracked underfoot. It was true my room buzzed with the the struggle of dust clogged fans, a far cry from the holy silence of the library.

So he'd rave;

"How can flickering images, momentary photo spasms achieve or define anything?"

Looking at our living situation you'd think they'd be more pressing matters, but no this was it.

"Films aren't made of pictures you idiot, they are made of time -

He'd interrupt

(Bellowing)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"

He'd kick a hard drive or backhand a pile of DVD's for emphasis. It was also a problem that I thought he didn't really understand books properly. He saw books as these solid blocks of knowledge, experienced condensed, and definite, but I

didn't.

Books are just like films, just like relationships and everything else; every person has their own experience reading a book. Rather than being solid, books are full of gaps, hole and vagueness. It's these gaps that make the reader bring their own experience and ideas to bear and that's how the symbiosis happens, that's how books and people merge.

I told him this and he retorted.

“Yes but words act on the imagination, on the the bit of our mushy mush that plans the future, books merge with the soul! But films, films play around with our nervous system, the eyes are a self defence mechanism, a hunting tool, they have fuck all to do with the soul, eyes serve the muscles and the sex drive!”

With that surprisingly astute blow he spat on the floor, his spit was brown like he'd taken to eating his tobacco, and stormed out the room.

When I opened my eyes The Chewing Gum Kid was sat in a torn up armchair in the corner of my room with a hammer in his hand. His feet were resting on the spherical top of a stolen chewing gum machine, bits of plaster still visible on the bolts where it had been torn from the wall. He reached inside the hole he'd made in the plastic with the hammer and threw some gum my way.

“Breakfast”

“Thanks”

“Get up”

“Why”

“You swine, you scum bag, just get up, I scored big, the machine was as full as your mother’s teats, bursting with gold and black coins”

“Well done, so what you wanna do?”

“We’re going to take acid and kill that rat”

“What rat?”

The Kid had a warp and put a few holes in my wall with the hammer while I pulled on my trousers. Afterwards he pulled himself up from the floor and his arm still shaking lit a cigarette and dusted his baseball cap off on the leg of his jeans which were stiff with dirt just the way he liked them.

“You fucker”

“What rat?”

“What rat? The fucking rat that has been shitting everywhere for the past few weeks. I’ve tried before but he’s too powerful, he’s a beast, at least as long as my forearm”

I sat up in bed and he threw me a cigarette. I picked it up, flicked the small barely visible insect that was already crawling along it to the floor and lit it.

“But today we’re gonna buy some sharp knives make some spears, eat some microdots and we’re not going stop till the cunts dead and his head on a spike”

“I gotta say, I like you when you’re passionate”

“It’s not passion it’s hate. You know I have an affinity with rats but this fucker has gone too far”

“I see”

“You’re a fucking turncoat”

“You got anything to eat?”

“Some steaks”

“Whack them on then”

The Kid left my room and a few minutes later I heard the hissing and popping of the gas heater and him cursing under his breath. When I finished my morning cigarette I rolled over and found the newspapers that I’d collected the day before. I licked my page turning finger and flicked through the pages as fast as possible. Before long my thumb was a blue-black and I had a good selection of pictures for the book.

The first picture was of an inferno that tore through one of China’s pre-abandoned megacities. In the image three tower blocks spew black smoke from raging fires into a grey pollution smothered sky. If you didn’t know that the burning structures were immense towers one could quite easily confuse them for matches or candles. The second image showed the aftermath of a suicide

attack on a convoy of soldiers on a desert road somewhere in the Middle East. I didn't recognise the name.

The last photo I'd selected from the pile was of an old homeless man who'd died on a underground train in an American city. It was one of those circular train lines that runs constantly twenty four hours a day, every day of the week. He was dead and riding the train for three days before anyone noticed. While looking at the image of the old man's corpse, he looked peaceful in black and white, slightly out of a focus. I was reminded of another story I'd heard or read somewhere. It was about the oldest roller coaster in America, it was a kind of wild west themed ride and it had this cowboy in the first carriage that people could sit next to and pose for photos. The cowboy was painted in shiny cartoony colours and looked quite unrealistic. One day the owner noticed that the paint was cracking so decided to give it another coat. Whatever happened the guy knocked off a load of paint and was confronted with rotten flesh or maybe a bone. The cowboy was an actual dead body, probably a real cowboy. The ride was that old, and he'd just been coated with so much paint over the years that at some point people stopped knowing it was a real dead body. The fact was forgotten and easily hidden under layer after layer of cheap paint applied over the course of many years. There was a metaphor in there somewhere if you cared to look for it.

The Kid came back into my room and gave me my steak, it was over cooked.

“This is overcooked”

“It’s rare”

“It is not fucking rare, there is not a drop of blood in it”

“You’re a fucking vampire”

He came at me with a steak knife. I jumped back and scrambled up into a corner of the room balancing carefully on a pallet turned on its side.

“Calm down”

“You swine”

He grabbed my book from the floor.

“Put that down”

“What scared I’m going to fuck up your scrapbook of suffering”

“I’ve told you before it’s important”

“You find this comfortable?”

“Relatively”

“Sometimes you’re so pretentious it makes me sick”

He threw the knife into the corner of the room. He opened the book and flicked through the pages, natural disasters, murders, riots, revolutions, wars, assassinations, accidents, obituaries, more natural disasters, more work and death and lives suddenly cut short by the unpredictable swinging of the times, black and white and red all over. The Kid closed the book and looked at me and threw a cigarette my way. I lit it and we both sat down on the mattress that

served as my bed.

“You know my Father was a priest”

“Yeah you told me”“He didn’t believe in God but he was a priest”

“Sounds about right”

“Priest is a good job, but he was a shitty priest he stole from the church and he got drunk on the sacred wine and he rented the church out to a film crew. They used it to film a horror film and in a state of madness, drunkenness and religious fervour my Father burnt the church down claiming it to be possessed by the devil”

“What’s the point?”

“You know what my Father told me?”

“Carpe diem?”

“Fuck off, no, he told me that history is just a list of times when people got fucked over”

“Wise man”

“No, he wasn’t”

“You know why they call me The Chewing Gum Kid?”

“Cause you steal chewing gum for a living?”

“No, it comes from my first time in the pigpen, I was only a kid. I was at one of those group meetings, it was fucking boring you know? I kept looking around the room for something to distract me. Eventually my eyes were drawn to my shoes and the sole of my shoe, I noticed that there was a piece of chewing gum stuck to the sole and that it was black and dirty from walking around. So at this

point the guy running the meeting, some cunt with his tie squeezing like a noose around his neck, asks me what's on my mind and I told him that I just realised that people and life and the human race and everything are just like a piece of chewing gum on the sole of a shoe, they get dirtier the further they go”

The Kid reached in side his back pocket and pulled out a small plastic baggy. He opened the plastic baggy and using his finger he placed a small red star on the end of my tongue.

A little bit of insanity goes a long way. Before we'd become too embellished we'd already forgotten about the rat and instead found ourselves on the crowded stair way of a basement bar where everyone was smiling as if it was compulsory. At some point it became clear, well in fact the opposite of clear, that my night had been taken over by some malicious and clumsy puppeteer. My actions and the reactions of others, the dialogue, in both content and form were being controlled and directed by some entity beyond my comprehension. It was an inverted mirror image of social interaction; people and things but without the logic that usually binds them. Paranoia and fallacy reigned supreme. I was momentarily convinced that while I had been in the toilet taking a piss everyone swapped faces and small pieces of paper were handed out with scripted phrases. Cryptic chunks of audible nothingness to be uttered at me on my stumbling way back to the bar.

“I invite you, I invite you”

“You have a stone for me”

“I am a bank clerk, what do you recommend me?”

When I was done contorting myself The Kid grabbed me and gnashing his teeth together with a furious intensity whispered in my ear.

“Symbols hinting at an underlying truth that we’ll never grasp, these people live in houses and the kernel of their lives is the workplace, we gotta go, we have a rat to hunt and if I know that monster he’ll be spitting shit all over my bed right now”

At some point night we cornered the rat deep in one of the furthest unexplored corners of The Catacombs and with a barrage of clumsy jabs of a blunt blade, killed it. As we walked back through the blackness The Kid suddenly felt bad and decided he should go back and that we should have a funeral for the rat. He might have been crying or laughing, maybe even dancing invisibly just a few inches from my face. Nothing was clear.

Back in my room I tried to clean up the broken mirror and closed the many paint pots that had been opened and spilled over the past few hours. I settled down into my bed and turned on the projector. The wall lit up with an arial image of a dusty looking town somewhere in the Middle East. The video was from the

point of view of the helicopter's guns and as we floated over the main square of the town the guns tore apart buildings and people. There was no blood, or at least there was no visible blood, there was just dust turning in the air, a muted hurricane of bullets and shattered lives. I realised that I was still tripping, each of my pupils fell in love with another part of the image and then it was like my face was being drawn and quartered. I was now lying on my neck, upside down, it hurt a lot and I got really scared that my neck would break and I'd die here in this dirty room, frothing at the mouth. I turned off the projector and looked up to see The Kid standing in the doorway. He was eating something, he offered it to me. I stood up and looked at what he was holding, it was a piece of dark black rye bread covered in a mixture of butter and some kind of white powder and occasionally dotted with red. When I looked closer I recognised that the red dots as microdots.

"What is it?"

"Speed on toast"

I slapped the bread out of his hand.

"You fucking idiot, there's about six more microdots on there - you'll turn into a dishrag"

"Better a dishrag than a white man, the white man is the lowest of the low, slave master and the supreme king of repression"

He picked the bread up from the floor and shoved it into his mouth. He jumped on the bed and bounced up and down, spitting crumbs and bits of paste and

slithers of red mind benders. He had a warp. I grabbed my sleeping bag and rolled over, I closed my eyes and held them closed with my thumb. I guess I slept.

Before I met The Kid I was living a normal life while struggling with the feeling that there was something very abnormal about everything around me. As the rules and regulations that my parents and their parents generations had held dear seemed to dissolve before my eyes I wondered if the entire human race was entering into a prolonged state of hypnogogia. The homogenised society was fallen and had given way to peaks and troughs, the anatomy of the City had changed rapidly the divide between the deadly inner city neighbourhoods with spiralling murder rates and the gated corners where expensive restaurants proudly sold dumpster dived food at high prices to the privileged few, whose fumbling attempts to come to terms with their own places in this new body politic made them modern day flagellants. Like a plague or a war the stumbling of global financial system had brought the latent hysteria of the to the surface where it was beginning to bubble and spit - ready to erupt.

While trying to decide what to do with myself I spent weekends asleep on strangers sofas after long nights spent partying with other people who acted like every time the sun set maybe it was never going to rise again. I'd been receiving money from the state for being habitually unemployed until the payments stopped and then the appointments stopped and I started seeing the

people who worked in the office at the parties in the abandoned warehouses that lined the hill leading out of the city centre, pupils big or small, giving me sweaty pent-up-hugs, the type of physical contact that never leaves you feeling sure if the person is touching you because they know you or because they don't, physical contact in the age of no eye contact fucking.

Since the money had stopped coming in I had to get a job. I heard there was a place where you could always get work on the other side of the shopping centre built on the remains of what had once been the central train station, now another contorted foetus of glass and steel, made to rot, to rust. The train tracks were still there deep underneath the chain stores, tracks that lead now where, uncomfortably still and silent. As I walked towards the shopping centre I noticed the streets sloped downwards forcing you to walk on an incline towards the main entrance. I almost slipped on a free magazine as I found myself being compelled by gravity to approach the great gate at a skipping pace, the pavement is covered in free papers and magazines. Brightly printed covers and bold headlines trodden underfoot, above the entrance to the shopping centre, clumsily named 'Central Plaza' in an attempt to make it sound cosmopolitan to people raised on films about people going shopping in Manhattan, the news is projected and the the newsreader mimes while in the corner of the screen a video loops of a female celebrities nipple popping out of her dress as she slips getting out a taxi surrounded by a mob of cameramen and members of the public filming on their phones.

I walk quickly through the shopping centre, stopping only to let a gang of young men in balaclavas carrying bags of stolen trainers rush past me being pursued by security guards slowed by steroids and too many hours powerlifting in one of the budget gyms that have taken over all the glass fronted buildings that used to be furniture shops or travel agents. Once out the other side I found the place I was looking for, I remembered it now and wondered why I hadn't been able to recognise the name when I'd heard about it before, I'd been there many times as a child. It was a multi-function event location that held conferences and trade shows and had a stadium and arena more than one hotel, a casino and multiple restaurants with a name that was long it was abbreviated to a more easy to say I.D.E.A.L, at one point I'd know what it stood for but I'd couldn't remember however hard I strained. The building itself was so large that it was hard to look at it and conceive of it as a single building. The central construction had numerous extensions and long winding corridors and connecting sky way bridges contained in a semi transparent blue glass, the building was uniformly bolted in red corrugated steel plates, presumably to give a sense of unity. In the distance I watched as crew of sunburnt men in shabby hi visibility jackets tore off the red steel plates and dumped them into a waiting container. I remember now why there was always work going, ever since it's conception twenty years before I was born the building was never finished, as soon as one part was completed they tore down another and started with reconstruction.

Once inside I found the central office and got myself placed on a team working in what had once been the main arena for large concerts and travelling shows. My teams job was to tear out the tiered seating. For 10 hours a day for for a week we tore out the seats and threw them into containers that were dragged into the main area where the stage had once stood by lorries that looked like they belonged in a quarry. After all the seats were torn out we all gathered in one of the restaurants that was located on the outside of the upper echelons of the stadium, the restaurant was called 'Lakeside' although the nearest thing to a lake I could see out the window was a large pebbled concrete fountain with some globular metal sculptures of a couple holding hands in it, the fountain had long since been drained and was full of coins and cigarette butts and sun faded empty beer and soft drink cans. A woman with a clipboard and a hands free telephone told us that over the next few weeks we'd been installing the new chairs into the arena. For 10 hours a day for a week we installed the new seats, they were almost identical to the old seats except that there were blue instead of red and the logo of the sponsor had changed slightly, been made more aerodynamic, modern, the edge of the letters resembled a shark's fin or the tip of a plane's wing. On my lunch breaks I explored the seemingly endless corridors that lead away from the main atrium where we eat our lunch. Office after office with plug sockets torn out and lightbulbs unscrewed, cheap carpet and blank hanging signs yet to be embellished with purpose. In one room I found many bin bags filled with sim cards, thousands and thousands of sim cards, in another I found heaped pile of out of date computers and monitors, I named it The Hell Of Old

Computers and I imagined how many room and landfills there were around the world like this, full of short lived bits of technology that will never rot. But most of the rooms were empty and characterless, built for some great event, some eruption of conferences and heated discussion that never materialised. In one room I found a cleaner masturbating into his mop bucket to an old porn magazine tacked to the wall with chewing gum.

After my last day reinstalling the new chairs I walked back up the huge concrete ramp that led back into the shopping centre. For some reason it was unusually empty, I imagined there was a sporting or political rally on or there had been some kind of bomb scare that kept people off the streets, maybe contagion but as I walked further up the ramp trampling over free papers and discarded discount vouchers and the internal periodicals of coffee shops and fast food restaurants and banks designed to look like newspapers or women's magazines. I didn't see any headlines about a plague or an election.

But I wasn't entirely alone on the ramp, in the distance I spotted a figure of an old man bent pushing one shopping trolley in front of him and pulling another one behind him. The trolleys were piled high with collected rubbish and trash. Tied to the trolley's were kites made of old crisp packets and other sewed together waste, I watched as the man stopped and tied one of his kites onto the iron railing that ran up the side of the ramp. He tied it then took a sip of a bottle of something from one of his deep pockets and carried on. I followed the man and

found that when it came time for me to go in a different direction I couldn't bring myself to do it, so I kept following him, out of the city centre, through the ring of abandoned buildings that I vaguely remember once being a thriving area of restaurants and clubs and until eventually he stopped outside a building that was painted on the outside. There were many kites hanging flying from the roof top and no windows, someone had poured paint out the windows and written in big dripping letters were the words 'FUCK YOUR ANSWERS'. I watched as the man went inside, from a window high up in the house I found myself being watched by a what appeared to be a child with long matted hair, the child smoked with a the erratic movements of a wasp, he spat something at me and it landed on the pavement in front of me, a huge glob of dirty chewing gum. That was the first time I ever saw The Kid.