

THE HOUSE THAT SHADOWS BUILT.

PART THREE: WALL OF TAPES

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I crisscrossed the first room with torchlight revealing that the wall was floor to ceiling with stacked VHS tapes. I searched the wall for a light switch and to my surprise the light came on. I turned off the torch and then gathering my courage approached the wall of tapes...

As I got closer I saw that every video was labelled with the date and a title in careful almost runic biro script. I slid a tape out of the first stack on my right. It read "19.10.89 - Heart attacks". I put the video down and slid out the next video from the stack: "2.3.01 - Floods". I put that video down as well, went back into the corridor and pushed open the door to the next room. It was bigger than the video room but equally full with stacks of tapes.

There was one corner that was free of tape stacks instead was taken up by a small sofa in front of which were three large televisions and two videotape players. The sofa was broken in the middle, cracked from the weight of the Fat Man's frame. I sat in the ditch and turned one of the TV's on. I took a tape off the nearest stack: "12.12.93 - Memory loss". Took a deep breath and I put the tape in the machine and pressed play.

Static snapped. A beat. A clicking noise. The static formed a band in the middle

of rushing darkness. An image emerged on the screen. A news reporter looked straight at the camera. His mouth hung open and the edge of his lips quivered slightly. He put his hand on his face. Snap. Next image.

A man wandered down the middle of a suburban street. A police car pulled up behind him and a policeman walked up to the man and started talking to him. A closeup of his face showed his eyes were both glazed yet panicked. Snap.

A chat show in which a doctor with greying hair like spouts of fire explained some of the symptoms and causes of amnesia. Snap. Next clip. Snap. A frame. Snap. A second. Snap. A moment. Snap.

The tape continued like this. On and on and on. Moments of television, some only seconds long, others more extended; interviews with Alzheimer's patients, interrupted by an episode of a chat show in which a woman called Michelle discussed how through long sessions with a psychiatrist she came to remember that she was ritually abused by Satanists as a child.

A quiz show in which a young student with his glasses sliding down his nose enthusiastically buzzed then had a blank moment and looked like he was about to die of shame. Sweat ran down his forehead and drips on to the desk.

There were more snapshot moments of varying lengths and quality. Unrelenting in their disunity but made one by repetition. Repetition gives the illusion of form. Repetition gives the illusion of form. Structure.

Captured moments from every type of television show over what must have been a fifteen or twenty year period. It was overwhelming, the crashing static and torn apart sequences. The rhythm of the cuts was uneven, rising to crescendos and then dropping off into nothing, hissing absence as if to punctuate the flurry that had come before.

I imagined the Fat Man deep in the ditch, the remote in his hand, ready to click record. Is that what he did? Or did he record it all and cut it together later? I got a chill and decided to stop the tape.

Feeling uneasy I tried to suppress the image of The Fat Man and his hungry eyes. I tried to ignore my suspicion that the shadows of the corridor had been gradually advancing into the room since I'd been watching the tape. The sudden adrenaline rush thought that the silence of the house was about to be broken by someone rushing in presented itself before me with startling clarity.

It was a thought that came from somewhere deep inside. Far from the conscious reasoning in me. It originated in some leftover bit of brain tissue that our hunter gatherer ancestors relied on but that we have let shrivel up but which

every now and again arises to have it's revenge.

It consumed me and I dashed out of the room and back downstairs, slamming the door behind me and pushing the sofa bed up against it again.

What happened next was a week of hermitage of tape watching and almost meditation in the ditch. Before I committed to it I stocked up on tins of beans and soups and a few bottles of liberated whiskey to take the edge off the creeping fear, the magnetic weirdness and helter skelter of the situation.

I moved my sleeping bag and supplies into the video room and decided to catalog the videos and stare down the image of The Fat Man that I couldn't get out of my mind. Drunk and sleepless I wrote a list. Among the stacks there were tapes devoted to;

...childbirth, cancer, underground pipes, decay, storms, burning flags, wheels, political demonstrations, canals, psychoanalysis, Hitler, murder, earthquakes, electric shocks, shopping centres, arrogance, smoking, mechanised production, hot air balloons, princess Diana, military parades, cogs, aliens, furniture, breast enlargement, cake recipes, polyester, space, nervous ticks, cameras, doors, road construction, smooth faces, brass instruments, toxic gas, debates, window shopping, mountain climbing, excuses, theatre, farming, brains, spilled drinks, ammunition, breaking glass, pasta, mould, robotic arms, submarines,

insulation, chemotherapy, horses, surveillance, football celebrations, riots, refreshments, lie detection, pub gardens, hotdogs, survivalism, punches, black ice, cupid, red wine, vikings, nationalism, good uniforms, bad uniforms, thanksgiving in America, starvation in Africa, sharks, bicycles, bank robberies, skydiving, marriage proposals, The Beatles, trials, astrology, tapas, gems, power-tools, caves, democracy, adultery, fallen regimes, collages, New York, taxis, helicopters, the miniskirt, hair loss, sedimentary rocks, sculpture, car chases, erosion, races, waste disposal, cults, growth, terrorist attacks, magic tricks, tea, hunting, fear, boats, dreams, beds, microphones, improvisation, maps, classical music, lightening, addiction, guitars, quantum mechanics, high heeled shoes, cleavage, airports, cement mixers, pets, roads, telescopes, fungus, construction, open heart surgery, stalkers, cogs, repressed memories, addiction, leather, trousers, black holes, dead stars....

When one tape ended I immediately replaced it with another. I lost hours and eventually day. Mixing the whiskey with energy drinks and cigarettes to keep myself awake. Eyes on the ball. I stopped thinking about sleep or worrying about staying awake. I had broken through to some kind of plateau. Once the whiskey was gone I somehow managed to keep on with the tapes for another twelve hours but by that point the walls of my vision were flickering and my tongue tapped out a rhythm on the back of my teeth. I could no longer distinguish between the light that came from the screen and the light that came in through the window. In truth I could no longer distinguish between light that illuminated

and the shadows that obscured.

The irregular edits on the tapes became indistinguishable from the blinking of my eyes. I had become scared to stop. What started out as game with myself, something comparable to a child trying to scare themselves safely within arm's reach of a parent, had gone too far. I was totally alone. I had gone so deep into the tunnel that to go back seemed as impossible as moving forward. I was not alone in the room and the house. I was alone in that I was the only person who has watched the tapes and I felt like it had changed something in me. That I was alone with this new perspective. I had to get out of the room. I had to do it now, before the terror got me.

My mind was rushing. The thoughts scratched over each other to harass me. I stood up and berated myself out loud for being such a fucking coward. The lowest of the low, creating fear for my own amusement. I turned off the television and took my mattress back downstairs and lay there in The Fat Man's bedroom until eventually sleep came to me.

Time must have passed again without me noticing. I deduced as much from the stubble on my face and the state of my personal hygiene. My clothes were stale and what had once been white had become yellow and grey.

I'd received another convoluted jail house letter from The Kid. I pondered what

must the postman have thought, delivering a letter from jail to a boarded up house in the middle of a street of only other boarded up houses.

In among his dyslexic ramblings about the past and future exploits of other prisoners, and some rudimentary sketches of chess puzzles, scratched on the page with what could have only been the very last remains of a biro, there was a promise that he'd be out in a week or two.

I read the letter many times, turning it over in my hands to follow The Kid's labyrinthian wandering lines. It was the first time I'd had a chance to examine his writing. It was clear he had never really been to school but there was a machine gun poetry to it that could only be achieved by a none native speaker. A sense of the language being bent and contorted and of getting the most meaning out of the fewest words.

I didn't go back into the video room. I kept the last of the tape titles hidden in the back of my scrapbook. I had started taking long late night walks to avoid being alone in the house at night. I crisscrossed the city turning corners with as little sense as I can muster.

Outside twenty-four hour off licences and chicken shops I traced the words on the list with greasy shivering fingers until they became transparent and eventually disappear entirely. I absorbed the list and abandoned the bit of paper on which it

had previously lived to be trampled underfoot. The video room was never very far from my mind. It had grown roots in the recesses of my imagination, had become the stage on which my flickering thoughts played out. Someone else's perspective lodged in my mind. A squatter virus, a hijacking deity.

On this stage in the back of my head The Fat Man began to take on a position of authority. His area of influence grew by the minute. His incessant listing, partitioning and defining challenged my human capacity for pattern recognition to find some sense in his data. Who would list for the sake of listing alone? I counted down the days until The Kid got out. I hoped he'd understand that The Fat Man was a kindred spirit, lost in static, ugly and threatening. A slovenly idiot savant.

I woke up suddenly to a sound inside my ear. Tape rewinding. It was inside my ear, it shifted it was now coming from upstairs. A terrible idea became sharp in my mind. A certainty. There was something or someone in the room with me, a presence that seemed to be growing in size although I couldn't see it. I just knew it from the way in which the air hung in the room, the pressure, the gravity.

I sat up and stared at the corner of the room but there were only shadows that seemed to be slowly moving out of the room, being sucked to where the sound was coming from. Upstairs.

But I was not sitting, I was lying flat down on my bed unable to move. Then there was no sound but I could still sense the presence in the room. I felt something slide over my mouth and my head was forced down into the pillow, bent nearly at a right angle so my eyes were facing the wall behind me. I wanted to reach out and touch my mouth but I couldn't move my arms either. The only thing I could control were my eyes.

I looked into the corner and saw that the darkness seemed to be increasing in density. Coalescing in the corner. Then I felt a pressure on my lower legs and heard the creaking of the stairs. I closed my eyes and told myself I was just dreaming, but I didn't believe it and I felt the pressure on my body suddenly increase. I knew that whatever it was that was in the corner of the room was now on top of me.

I could hear deep laboured breaths and a drop of something wet hit my forehead, then my tongue. The taste sparked instant recognition: sweat. The weight of the presence was unbelievable and I imagined that my ribs were going to snap and pierce my lungs. Another droplet hit my tongue. I tried to force myself to wake up. Focusing my mind. You're dreaming. You're dreaming. Wake up. It only got worse, liquid running across my stomach. I smelled piss and the staccato putrid breathing was now palpable on the skin of my lips. It was a feeling that released in me a rush of bottomless disgust and despair.

I opened my eyes and looked at his face. It was hard to tell what was natural ugliness and what was deformation and injury. There were bumps that look like they were made by a cudgel and red lines that could be scars or a rash or the mark left by a thin rope pulled tight. He was inescapably visceral, that face, dripping and smeared by the blood which ran from his nose. A face so solid and there that it eclipsed reality and I shivered with the total body realisation that if you let it, the wall-less space inside your head can usurp reality. It can become the entire universe. His eyes were blank like those of an animal. Empty yet full of panic. I stared into them and lost consciousness.

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At first I thought I must be awake because of the pain. Pain that echoed, that increased its intensity in waves, pain so perfect that I couldn't tell if it was...

...hot or cold. I felt unsteady on my feet, the world span and tipped, shadows and darkness fluctuated. Forces passed me like a crowd of people, solid, heavy and aggressive. I could see tarmac as if illuminated by the headlights of passing by cars. I saw...

... two cars moving towards each other in slow motion. I could see the lips of one of the drivers opening into a scream that never came, cut short by the mass of the other vehicle, the other driver's face braced for impact, features reading,

too late...

...too late. The car bonnets melted into each other, a mutual conjoining - a mutation of two tools into something else, a third, a crossbreed of metal and pleather and torn up people, leaking petrol and glistening plasma. The cataclysm left behind me in the blackness, I heard the crash, the terrible squeal of twisting metal, impacted mechanics, instantly pulverised cogs and...

...crumpled industry. When the crashing sound subsided I became aware of a rattling. I saw figures emerging out of the darkness towards me as if stepping out of a cloud of smoke; paramedics pushing hospital beds; old men and women threaded through with tubes, blue and red like veins but tough and plastic, forcing the skin back as they throb. The patients are featureless- who they are doesn't matter. What is happening to them is all my mind cares about. They were suffering, they were on the cusp of death; moaning, their pale lips and loosely rooted teeth quivering, shaking themselves...

...free of the gums. Dragged forward I passed by tableaux of murder and assault and torture and war, shop mannequins playing the roles of soldiers and killers. Faceless textureless shapes that dripped real blood onto the tarmac, which passes under my feet with the mechanical determination of a...

...conveyor belt. I had a torch in my hand. I shined light into the darkness- he

beam cut through the black and picked...

...something up. Myself and The Kid, on all fours licking at a pool of blood like...

...thirsty mutts.

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The next morning I woke up, my body aching. I was lying on the floor, naked and bruised, my chin covered in dry vomit and my body slick with cold sweat. I knew that my time in the house had come to an end. I packed my things and as I left the house I glanced one last time back up the stairs. The shadows shifted and from somewhere deep in the darkness I heard a cough that echoed and seemed to follow me out of the house and half way up the street.

After a few rough days in the central station I found a couple of comfortable spots, and even took something reassuring from the open air privacy of roof tops and the silence of multi-storey car parks past midnight.

The Kid was due out any day and he'd always managed to find us a place to stay. To distract myself during the day I walked around the shopping centres- the lit up hubs that had replaced the old and inefficient shopping streets- and lost myself in the crowds. Free papers were discarded and dragged under foot, inching nearer to the gutters over the course of the day until the ink and paper

formed a soggy mass, headlines like gusts of wind: another spree of beheadings, an earthquake killing a few thousand peasants somewhere in the East, and in the great kingdom to the West the great, great grandchildren of slaves die in jumpsuits and once again flooded sweat for paler men.

The earth turned and I spent my hours watching the debt ridden shoppers with their head's bent in prayer, fingers rubbing their shopping lists like lucky charms. They clamp their children's hands tight, their very bones infected with a fear of kidnapping and rape. The world is held together by grinding teeth.

And so I wandered through the city and then out into the suburbs. On the front of a boarded up cinema on a round-about someone had hung a banner. The words were written in dripping gold paint: "STRIP ME NAKED MAKE ME FAMOUS".

The Kid got out early on a Friday morning and found me sleeping in the alley between two abandoned shops. He woke me up with a toe poke kick.

"That's low, it's an embarrassment, after everything I taught you. It's only been a couple of months"

I stood up. He looked bigger, stronger, his knuckles hardened by hours doing press ups on concrete floors.

“I have to show you something”

He patted me down for tobacco and rolled almost half of my collected nub ends into a fag that had more in common with a cigar than a normal rollie. He lit it and exhaled a cloud of smoke. Now smiling, I grabbed him by the arm and dragged him off in search of the house.

It took me a while to find the it again. The streets all looked the same, but then again it could've been that I didn't really want to find it. The thought of it scared me. Worse than the thought was the feeling; the feeling of The Fat Man's eyes meeting with my own. When I thought back to that moment all of the muscles in my body seemed to loosen. While we walked The Kid talked about the people he'd met in the pigpen.

“Will was a school teacher before he got fired for losing his shit in the cafeteria and screaming that the school was putting something in the meat to keep them dumb. He said that red meat makes the tongue swell up, it makes it hard to articulate yourself and easier for you to accidentally choke to death while eating. He got shopped for taking a live pig into a McDonalds and slitting it's throat in front of the midday eaters. He told me that he only meant it as theatre but once he started he got lost in his own mind. He didn't stop sawing with the knife until he felt the pig stop kicking. There was so much blood that it almost reached his ankles”

I stopped in front of a house and looked at it, unable to tell if it was the Fat Man's. I walked right up to the window and saw that it wasn't. We carried on walking along the streets that seemed to bend as if in fact we were walking in a spiral, when I knew from memory that they were actually straight. The Kid stopped to buy a bottle of wine off a man waiting at a bus stop. The man, who had the type of sinkhole eyes that only come from decades backed into a corner, had a bag of stolen booze pinched between his feet. At first he said he was saving it for his missus' Christmas present but The Kid managed to have him part with it.

One tea leaf to another.

It was night by the time we found the house, or what was left of it. The bricks that were still standing were black with smoke. The type of deep smoky blackness that I remember them scraping off the city when I was a child, erasing the industrial past. Pulling the city into Now with one collapsed lung. To find the house burnt down was a disappointment and a shock, that quickly turned to fear.

The idea of the Fat Man being freed from his prison rushed through my head as I watched The Kid poking around in the crumbled rubble.

I would never be able to show him, however many times I explained what I had experienced in the house. He would never know it. It would only be my story,

something that he could look at from outside. I walked through the destroyed house, touching bricks and stamping on ash, and found before me something that took me a moment to recognise. At first from a distance it looked like a pile of bricks, but as I got closer I saw that it shone and reflected the light of the lampposts and wasn't shaped like bricks either. It was bulbous and smooth, somewhere between a beetle and a flower. Then I recognised what it was; the melted tapes, the Fat Man's archive destroyed and at the same time preserved. A thought came into my head, hot as a flare, tearing through the pathways and perhaps even burning new ones. An idea became so hot in my mind that I felt that I would faint. I realised that this was what all prophets must feel when they heard the word of God. This was my epiphany and the pile of melted tapes was my altar.

"What was it I was meant to see?"

The Kid was smoking and drawing on the pavement with an ashy stick.

"Come here"

The Kid joined me in front of the melted cassette altar. I put my hands on it. I thought about all those images and ideas lost forever. For this first time I asked myself: why did he do it? But I knew the answer. He did it because he had to do

it.

“Have you ever thought about vaccination?”

“Why are you diseased?”

“No, I mean have you ever thought about it conceptually, about the concept of vaccination. About how it works? Deliberate infection, exposure”

“Yeah”

“Well you know what you said about the chewing gum and about how it just gets dirtier the further you walk?”

“Yeah”

“Well what if we could speed up the process. I mean what if we could deliberately infect ourselves with the horrors of the world? The death and violence. So that we became immune. We can reform the human mind, change our subjective perception of the world so that it incorporates the experiences of others. So that we need not live in fear anymore, fear of the unknown”

He chewed the end of his cigarette and spat it into the ground. He looked at me like I'd just beat him on the flip of a coin. One night after one of our competitive

acid binges where we pushed each other to see how far we'd go- how many hours we could spend alone in the darkest corners of the catacombs, our senses at the whim of the seasons- The Kid told me that he believed the human race to be the result of an experiment conducted by the the last surviving member of an alien species. We're in a petri dish in the laboratory of the last scientist of this ancient and superior race and he's desperately throwing diseases and wars our way in an attempt to see if he can work out what went wrong for his own race. He later told me that he believes the scientist to be dead, but either way he says it doesn't matter. We don't have any control.

"What are you proposing?"

"Just what I said, that we bust ourselves up and rub poison in our wounds. That we seek out the darkest alcoves of human action, the purest cruelty and most undeniable evil and not only stare it dead in the eye but swallow it up. That we reform our brains as they should've always been, free of the weight of denial. Aware I mean, fully aware of what it is to be human - a creature that beyond all doubts can be most efficiently described as cruel, violent and malicious"

For a moment I thought he would have one of his warps, but he didn't. He just spat out his answer along with a large globule of blood, spit and masticated tobacco.

“How could I say no to such a shiny, shiny plan?”

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That night me and The Kid slept in the office of a closed down car dealership at the edge of suburbia. Chinese take away calendars and sales charts still hung on the walls and the drawers were filled with blank payment plan applications that never got filled out and turned down, or accepted and sold on to the greasy cheap men in office space rented by the hour. The type of men who know they are scum and wear it like a badge of honour, men who look and live like leeches.

We found an unopened bottle of wine in the fridge in what must have been the staff room. The Kid tore the cork out with his teeth and we polished it off pretty fast. He smashed up the managers desk and we had a fire in the courtyard. He still wasn't one hundred percent convinced of my plan but I knew that was only because he hadn't come up with it himself.

As we watched the embers of the managers desk burn into the tarmac of the car dealership forecourt I began to formulate a plan. We needed a building, our church, a replacement for The Spot but one that could evolve into something much more than that.

The cinema with the banner, STRIP ME NAKED MAKE ME FAMOUS. It was

perfect. I told The Kid and he said he knew the spot. He emptied filing cabinets onto the fire. The flames licked through the documents and lit up the smile on The Kid's face. I fell asleep right there on cracked concrete of the the fore court, warmed by the fire.

Me and The Kid scouted out the cinema. At night the roads around the roundabout were dead, and in the day time only the occasional lorry or police car passed by. At weekends drunken men with heads like lightbulbs chased squealing girls in the middle of the roads on their way back from the party zones, but otherwise the cinema provoked no reaction in the outside world.

Stranded as it was in between the roads, an oversight on some long since shredded planning application. An inconvenience, a decrepit pensioner taking a rest between the rushing avenues of the future. It was like it didn't exist and never had, a bad memory of a time when people went outside to see the world or to find out what other people thought about it. Before they found out that everything they had held dear had just been a drawn out scam. A hustle, a way of making money out of them, a half-baked long con.

The Kid was handy with a crowbar and took off a back window without causing too much damage to the building. When we climbed through we found ourselves at the foot of a flight of stairs and I shone a torch light around and found a switch, but the electricity needed to be reconnected so we found our way up the flight of

stairs by torch lights.

Old film posters hung on the walls and on the first floor we found a store cupboard full with mouldy cardboard cut outs of film stars from the golden age of the blockbuster. It was strange to see them like this, their pretty photogenic faces puckered with green edged holes, their skin blotched black where damp spots have long since rotted. Even in immortality the famous get ugly.

We found a master set of keys in the managers old office in a drawer with some porn magazines, in which the faces of the porn stars had been replaced with the cut-out faces of film starlets from the free programmes available in the lobby. No wonder the cinema failed when the manager was still making DIY porn with scissors and glue. I closed my eyes and saw sweaty palms coated in cum and PVA anxiously counting crumpled up 5 pound notes. I imagined the way he leered at the female popcorn sellers and the young couples on dates, frantically wanking in his office.

We split up and explored different parts of the cinema. I found the old staff room and decided I'd take it as my own. It had a small stove and a kettle that still worked, and a sofa that would make an alright bed. The walls were covered in film posters for the most run of the mill types of films; family comedies starring TV stars and horror films designed with the sole intention of bringing teenagers together in sticky back row unity.

When I woke my teeth were burning and my jaw was clamped tight. After a ripple of searing pain and a few self inflicted blows I was able to open my mouth and the pain subsided.

I felt un-slept. As if all the time I was sleeping my brain had been working and exerting, independent of my control. It was an unnerving feeling that my mind wasn't fully mine.

I found The Kid in one of the cinema screens. Somehow he'd managed to get the projector working and was watching an old print of an action film. The chairs were thick with dust and in places the red felt that backed the chairs was rotten. I took a seat a few rows behind The Kid and watched the film.

I'd seen it many times as a child. It wasn't a big box office success, or an even hit on home video but my parents had recorded it off television and so as is often the case with things you do many many times, through repetition I'd granted the film a certain status, a status I later found out it didn't have in the outside world, it was considered trash. As much as I remembered the film, I remembered the advert breaks, they were as much part of it as the film itself.

The titles, written in that font you see printed on ammunition cases, played over

shots of white picket fences and pensioners on lawnmowers. A car with blacked out windows pulled up outside a house a man who stands as straight as a board in a military uniform dripping in medals approached the door. He knocked and the door is answered by a muscle bound man carrying a daughter in each arm, twins. In the following conversation it's revealed that the muscle bound man is a former commando and the man dripping in medals is a general.

The general asked the former commando, this is our hero, to come out of retirement for one last mission. Terrorists have taken over a compound in a tropical country and they need him to go in, he's the only one for the job not just because of his skill set and experience but because the terrorist group are the very same who ambushed and killed his own squad five years previously, him the lone survivor.

This is where the first break occurred in the tape recorded version I remember from my childhood. There was an advert for a Christmas hamper stuffed with meat and cheese and chocolate and wine, what stuck out in my memory is a joint of glazed ham, it glistened like no piece of meat I'd ever seen, otherworldly. I know now of course that the meat and the glaze was fake, an inedible prop made to glisten designed to look different and better than any other joint of ham.

After the break, our hero parachuted into the jungle. In an extended action sequence our hero single-handedly kills twenty or so camouflage clad terrorists

at a jungle encampment before he's knocked unconscious and locked away in a bamboo cage. Among the group holding him prisoner is a beautiful English speaking girl who explains to the hero that the men he has just killed were not terrorists but members of a local tribe fighting against their tyrannical government.

She leads him to a room filled with guns and ammo, boxed and labelled as the product of his own country. Then she showed him a tape it contains a conversation between the general who sent him on the mission and the local dictator, discussing their shared involvement in drug smuggling. Shocked and appalled the hero promises the village elder (and father of his love interest) that he will bring his government to justice.

This is where the second advert break would have been. There was an advert for a razor that, through use of cuts and shot choice made to evoke fighter jets or race cars. After this was an ad for breakfast cereal, with three puppet mascots who danced around the bowl of sugary grain like it was a magic cauldron.

When the film restarted. There was a montage of the protagonist training the villagers in the use of the weapons they've recovered, this is intercut with a dragged out sequence in which he makes love to the beautiful chief's daughter.

He led the villagers in a sneak assault on a military compound. The soldiers

surrendered when confronted with the speed and aggression of the hero and his native commandos. In the compound the hero finds more evidence of his government's involvement in the illegal supply of arms and money to the dictatorship and both governments complicity in the drug trade. There is an out of place flashback in which we learn that his wife and the mother of his two daughters died of a drug overdose, I always thought they must have put this in later, what I now know as an adult is called a pick up, having realised that without it the hero's carrying on with the beautiful English speaking villager would come across as adultery and why not when giving the chance add an extra screw, an extra motivation. Commercial narrative is an iron maiden, it's a product. A story is a start up in our world.

Armed with the evidence and accompanied by his native commandos, the hero leads an assault on his own country's embassy, interrupts a meeting between the evil dictator and his own ambassador. He's confronted with that same general who originally sent him on the mission, they stripped to their waist and throw karate chops and side kicks at each other until finally, drenched in sweat, blood and jungle dirt the hero emerges the victor.

Victorious. the hero stands on the balcony and announces to gathered crowds that a new day has arrived, that they are free from tyranny. He kisses the chieftain's daughter and then raises his weapon above his head, the image

freezes and the film ends on this moment of perfect individual macho triumph.
The hero looks like a statue.

On the version my parents had taped from the TV, the end credits were abruptly cut off by an advert for a charity. Image of starving children, bellies bulged by hunger were intercut with a desaturated time lapse shot of crowds ignoring a charity worker. The ad ended on the face of particularly starved, particularly photogenic child. Despite knowing this was coming, I don't think I'd ever stopped the tape before this ad. It had seemed to me to be part of the film, a kind of after credits sequence and played it's part in my feeling about the film.

When the film finished The Kid stubbed out his cigarette on the seat in front of him and turned to me.

"I've thought about it and you're right. We have to do it"

"Do what?" He carried on like I hadn't said anything.

"These films are all tricks, full of anti-government, anti corporate sentiment. They're used like leeches to suck it out of us, get all that thick bile of ideology and outrage out of us. It's fake exorcism, catharsis as prep for consumerism. You're right, we have to do something"

He snarled and spat and took a switchblade out of his back pocket and slashed at the seat in front of him, cutting the cushioning to shreds.

“So you’re with me?”

“Why not?”

He drove his knife into cushion of the seat and pulled it out with a twist.

“I always wanted to change the world, or at least stir the pot”