

THE LIGHT FROM DEAD STARS

**WRITTEN BY
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www.thelightfromdeadstars.com

**CHAPTER FOUR:
THE CHRONICLES OF COTTON DAVE**

We're heading for Charnock Richard Services for a reunion with Steppenwolf and Betty, my VW camper. The day is getting old and South Central Kelly is driving like he's leaving a bank robbery.

"Why did you think I would help you with the stone circle?" I ask of Kelly.

"It could have been anybody," he says.

"But you knew *someone* was coming?"

Kelly stares at me as we drive. He takes his eyes off the road for only a second but I'm a nervous passenger and I'm glad when he looks back in the direction of travel.

"You're not psychic so don't give me that shit."

Kelly smiles. "I was taking a break upstairs. I saw you wandering across the fields."

"What did you see me with, binoculars?"

"Telescope," he grins.

I shake my head and laugh.

"Ok, explain the ghost picture." I ask.

"I'm studying Henge for a University. I got bored. I might as well have been an accountant. I like fantasy novels as much as the books on theory and I found some druid literature. I read that for a year, all the astronomical instrument or celestial calculator theories, then I started travelling and found a druid enclave. They gave me copies of those parchments and drawings. One of them was the one I showed you, with the glowing light and the ghost."

"That's nothing," I counter. "Plenty of bands play Henge every summer."

"Still doesn't explain why it's on a druid parchment dating before electricity. How do you explain the ghost?"

"Ghost?" I frown.

"The image of a spirit or ghost that *you* said looked like Thomas Winter."

“It looks a bit like him,” I complain, not very convincingly. “But then so did a few people.”

There is a second of silence between us.

“No one looked like him, did they?” says Kelly.

“No, they didn’t.” I admit. Then I have to give in. “Ok it’s him, how?”

“Coincidence,” he shrugs. “Henge is a religious site. It’s only natural that they’d depict a spirit looking over it? Stained glass in a church and all that.”

“Have you always looked at weird stuff?” I ask him.

Kelly nods. “I used to fall asleep to the radio sounds coming from Jupiter.”

I have no answer to this, so I frown.

“You Tube has a download,” he says.

Desperate to change the subject, I blurt out, “How did you get a name like South Central Kelly?”

Kelly laughs and takes both hands off the wheel and runs them through his Mohawk in what I assume is a gesture of partial embarrassment. I silently pray until he puts them on the wheel again. “I went on holiday to Los Angeles. I used to wear combat gear in those days, camouflage pants and jungle boots. I had a red bandana tied around my neck. I got off the tourist route and caught a bus. Americans think you’re crazy or broke if you walk anywhere, so I’m walking through a housing project, no worse than a British one, a few car wrecks in front yards and piles of tires, and I get to the end of the street and there’s a huge barricade built out of boards and scaffolding and police tape. I climb through it and a patrol car rolls up and the cop inside points at me and starts yelling. I look back and there’s a sign on the barrier, GANG AREA; DO NOT CROSS! The cop asks me what I’m doing and hears I’m English and tells me to get in the car. He drives me away and tells me I just walked through a war zone with the opposition’s colours tied around my neck. He tells me I’m the luckiest son of a bitch he’s met all day. I didn’t see anyone, maybe a dog and a few kids but nothing to worry about.”

I smile and nod politely. “Here’s the turn off.” I tell him.

I find my phone and dial Steppenwolf. “Where are you?”

He tells me he is parked at the far side of the car park and Kelly cruises until I see Betty. My beloved camper is in one piece. Steppenwolf is leaning against her, his long coat flapping in the wind and his red hair streaming, his body language in a ‘what kept you?’ pose.

Kelly stops the car next to Betty and we get out.

“You fucking Muppet!” says Steppenwolf.

I shrug off my relief. “Ok, lay off.”

“How can you be that dumb?”

“I know,” I say, wishing he’d drop it. I don’t want the pair of them ribbing me all the way to Wiltshire. “I just wanted a bit of community spirit.”

“You sound like Rick Miller,” says Steppenwolf.

“What did you do?” I ask.

“Spiked them,” Steppenwolf deadpans.

“How did they find you?”

“More attractive than you,” says Steppenwolf. “One of them wanted to sleep. She pulled back the sheet and there I was. The scream woke me.”

“How come they didn’t throw you out of the van?”

“Because I have charm,” says Steppenwolf. “I told them I was hitching to Henge.”

I shake my head with mock wonder. “Silver tongued bastard.”

“Dead right,” he nods.

“This is South Central Kelly,” I introduce. “This is Steppenwolf, he works for Ozone.”

They shake hands.

“Come on before it rains again,” says Steppenwolf as he glances up at fresh piles of clouds blowing our way, “you coming with us?”

“He is, yeah,” I tell him, making sure Steppenwolf remembers who is driving and whose van it is. “What about your car?”

Kelly shrugs, “I’ll be away how long?”

“Up to you, get a train back when you’re done. You don’t have to hang out with us,” I tell him.

We get in and I start Betty, “Where’s the laptop?”

Steppenwolf reaches under the seat and shows me. “I took care of it.”

Thank God. He maybe a bit dodgy but he seems to be honest with me at least. Kelly climbs into the back and looks forward from behind the seat, where Sarah sat when she put the knife to my neck.

“Where are the girls?” I suddenly remember.

Steppenwolf scans the car park. “There’s one!”

We stare through Betty’s windscreen at Julia who has emptied out a refuse bin and is sorting chip wrappers and crushed soft drink cans into intricate patterns on the cold tarmac of the car park.

“Where did you get that evil shit?”

“Operation Julie,” says Steppenwolf.

“Where?” asks Kelly.

“Police raid in Wales busted an LSD factory. When they opened the doors a wave of fumes washed over them. A few got grains on their finger tips and they’re still in loony bins.”

I watch Julia try to climb into the refuse bin but there’s only room for her left leg and this seems to distress her. She begins to cry.

“We’d better get out of here. They’ll call the cops.”

“And tell them what?” he laughs. “If you gave them a phone they’d call the fucking Mothership.”

I steer Betty off the car park and head for the motorway, then events in the van go down hill faster than the angle of the motorway slip road. Steppenwolf has clearly ingested chemicals since waking and he’s a couple of elements short of a periodic table.

“It’s cold in here,” he complains.

“Heater’s on,” I tell him.

“On full?”

I nod.

“Kidding me? How do you live?”

“I got used to it,” I mutter, feeling more than the atmosphere turn cold.

“How? It’s freezing.”

“You get hit over the head with a tyre iron at nine every morning you get used to it.”

Steppenwolf sniffs. “I didn’t hit you with it.”

“You tried to.”

“I’d been curled up in the dark for hours. Don’t expect gymnastics even in self defence.”

In the rear view mirror I see that Kelly looks like he might say something, but changes his mind at the last second. Probably for the best.

“What did you mean, I sound like Rick Miller?” I suddenly remember to ask.

“Too generous,” replies Steppenwolf.

“You should be more like Jerry Moore. Rick grew up in a community atmosphere. His father was a carnie and his mother was part of the knife throwing act. When things were tough off season they all chipped in. He thought he could apply that to Ozone.”

“What about all the benefit shows?”

“Even charities have running costs. Rick saw a community utopia and Jerry saw a police state. Have to say he was right. Thomas Winter agreed. That’s why Jerry hired him.”

I keep Betty at sixty and head for Henge in the slow lane.

“Ozone had the bright idea for a charity gig for AIDS lesbians,” Steppenwolf announces. “They wanted to call it Lemon Aid.”

I stare straight ahead. “I have no idea why you thought that was something I should know.”

Steppenwolf’s looks mean and stoned and stares at Kelly. “Why are you here, brush head?”

“I rescued your friend from an afternoon of exposure to reality,” Kelly tells him.

“You haven’t answered,” Steppenwolf growls.

“Proving a theory at Henge.” Kelly produces his drawings and notes and passes them to Steppenwolf.

“This is fucked up...” mutters Steppenwolf as he flicks through the pages. “Druids have a time machine and they’ve seen this?”

“I don’t think so,” says Kelly.

Steppenwolf passes the notes and the drawings back to Kelly.

I take a breath and notice that I am gripping the wheel too tightly and my hands are slick with sweat. I slacken my shoulders and blink away the sudden tiredness.

“Want speed?” Steppenwolf asks.

I shake my head. I’m freaked enough.

“I don’t use it,” replies Kelly.

“What then?” Steppenwolf frowns.

“I don’t use drugs.”

“Fucking Hell.” complains Steppenwolf, “thank God for Amsterdam.”

“It might work in Amsterdam, but it wouldn’t here.”

“Don’t be so fucking Tory!” says Steppenwolf. “The bullshit that stops our drugs laws from being changed is the fear that decriminalisation will cause an explosion of Junkies. That’s bollocks,” Steppenwolf says, producing a bag of white powder from his jacket. “It’s the same as all these fucking green incentives. There’s a factory in China that produces more pollution in an hour than I will in my whole life and they want us to deal with the plastic bags, then everyone can feel smug about themselves while driving away from the supermarket in a four by four.”

“You’ve got it all worked out haven’t you?” I tell him, not hiding the sarcasm.

“Most of it,” he replies, immodestly. “They’ve got everyone brain washed. Last time I was in California I saw a TV show that said forty eight percent of Americans think religion is the answer to their problems, that’s the lowest proportion ever recorded.”

“So?”

“People are finding other beliefs, like save the planet and UFO’s and drugs.”

I’ve heard enough and decide to get to something important. “Why were you in the boot of that car?” I ask.

“What?” splutters Kelly, and I explain how I met Steppenwolf.

“Because I fucked up, why do you think?” says Steppenwolf. “They were going to kill me. You don’t put someone in a car boot if you don’t intend to kill them, right?”

“Could have been going to dump you?” I suggest.

“Not with what I know.”

“What do you know?” asks Kelly.

Steppenwolf thinks for a moment, as if unsure.

“Stuff about Ozone’s money. Trust me, stay ignorant, you’ll thank me.”

I exchange glances with Kelly that suggests Steppenwolf may have done too much powder today. I shake my head, signalling to him not to push the subject.

Steppenwolf snorts a line. “I’ll give you some of it if you like but don’t blame me if it scares you.”

“The speed?” I frown.

“The story, idiot!” he barks at me.

“I can’t speak for Kelly,” I tell him, recovering and looking like his outburst hasn’t fazed me.

“Well?” asks Steppenwolf.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” says Kelly.

“Good, keep that in mind,” he warns, doing another line.

Steppenwolf takes a breath and rubs his nose. “All bands have good shows and bad shows,” he begins. “Everyone accepts that. Ozone has a ninety five percent good gig ratio, that’s their estimate. If it’s bad then the audience don’t seem to notice. Don Nelson fell into his drum kit stark bullock naked and the fans thought it was part of the show.”

“It didn’t look rehearsed,” I mutter.

“So there is this show a few years back,” Steppenwolf continues, “things were changing. Danny became manager and Larry joined. They’d just signed to Terminal Records. Jerry didn’t trust Danny because he thought he was a wannabe. So this show they played really great. When they were done, they’re getting changed and this kid comes running into the dressing room. God knows how he got passed Hired Goons R Us but some people are just talented. The kid says he works at the venue across the street and they had this band booked called Wind Farm, but their bus has died fifty miles away and the crowd are shitty. He asks Danny if Ozone would do their show at his place before the crowd rearrange the architecture. Danny does a deal for Wind Farm’s money, which isn’t bad by the way, and Mick, Allen and Mr. Short hump the gear.” Steppenwolf takes a breath and continues. “They set up in record time. The kid makes an announcement to the punters that if they want to see Ozone they can stay but if they want a refund they can go to the box office. Most of them stay, even though they just want to take the piss. Ozone takes the stage to a hostile crowd, they open up with Star City and for the next two hours they send the place into orbit. They only had time for half the light show and no sound check, lots of dry ice though. The crowd went from chucking cigarettes, bottles and crap to a standing ovation and demanded three encores. Ozone came off stage like the masters of the universe, unstoppable.”

“Sounds great,” says Kelly.

“So far, yeah,” warns Steppenwolf. “That evening in the pub, Danny gets a phone call from a Warner Brothers executive who had gone to scout Wind Farm but saw Ozone instead, and they can’t believe their naked steaming ears. They want to make an offer but Ozone is signed to Terminal and Hector won’t let them go.”

“Shit,” I say, sympathising.

“This is where it gets hurtful.”

I overtake a large wagon and get in the slow lane again. I cannot believe what I am hearing.

“There’s a contract in Hector’s office showing that Ozone have a bad record deal with Terminal, shit in fact; worse than the Stones in the sixties. It’s barely legal. Who signed it?” asks Steppenwolf.

“Jerry Moore?” I suggest.

Steppenwolf nods. “Danny was busy getting laid and Jerry thought he’d be smart. I doubt he even read it. Jerry realised his fuck up when Danny read it and went ape shit, so Jerry asked me to steal it from Hector.”

“And did you?” I have to ask.

“I do more than distribute chemicals.”

Kelly and I agree.

“I fix things. I get stuff under the Hector radar. It took three fucking years of hanging out at the Ozone office on a daily basis until no one cared what I was doing there. I was just part of the furniture, so I could do what can only be described as a robbery.”

“Fuck,” I whisper.

“Jerry, Danny and me are the only ones who know about this. Don Nelson and the roll call of temps that have passed through the guts of Ozone have no idea.”

“So what then?” asks Kelly, firmly on the hook.

“I got the keys to Hector’s office and ran to a key cutter booth,” Steppenwolf is in full rock biz mode as he tells this. It’s a badge of honour.

“Now get this, at three in the morning, I go back to Hector’s office. The CCTV is looking the other way when I get there. Hector’s office has three rooms. There’s the main one with his big ‘I rule the known world’ style desk and two smaller rooms, one for chilling out after a hard day robbing people and a room full of cabinets that store his legal stuff. I’m in the filing room

hunting down the contract when I hear a voice. It's Hector, and he's with a girl. It's none of my business so I find the contract."

Steppenwolf pauses for another line.

"I'm on my way out and halfway to the door when my curiosity gets me. I can hear the girl gasping and panting with Hector and I know that voice."

"Who is it?" I ask.

Steppenwolf waves me quiet. "I see a pink jacket on the back of a chair and a pink shoe by the water cooler. I sneak to the door and look into Hector's chill out room. Hector is sitting in his chair with his back to me...and Jenny is bouncing up and down on his lap all flushed and wild eyed, not at the thrill of screwing Hector, but the fact that I have obviously beaten her to the contract."

"Who is Jenny?" asks Kelly.

"Ozone's personal assistant and Larry's girlfriend," laughs Steppenwolf. "Put yourself in my boots at that moment. There's not a lot either of us can say, Jenny is obviously busy and Hector hasn't seen me. So I creep out."

"Shit!" I laugh. "How did she know about it?"

"I don't know. She probably didn't expect Hector to be at the office that late and had to cover it. Hector thinks all women on Earth lust after him so it wouldn't have been hard for a tart like Jenny to fuck him."

"Then what?" I ask.

"The next evening I turned up at the Hammersmith show too late and saw Jerry running around the stage when he was supposed to be waiting for me."

"What did you do?"

"I gave Larry some information to pass to Jerry at the after show and then I got out of there. I was sure someone had followed me; Larry, trusting soul that he is, wouldn't know or care or have time to figure out what I handed him. It wasn't just a contract!"

"What else was it, besides a contract?" I ask.

"That's too much to tell," Steppenwolf winks. "Stay close and you might find out."

"You didn't get to speak to Jerry?" asks Kelly.

"No. Some fuck hit me with chloroform, then you find me and I'm four hundred miles away and Thomas Winter is dead."

“What happened to the contract?” asks Kelly.

“Fuck knows,” says Steppenwolf. “Larry should have it, but he hasn’t called.”

“So Larry doesn’t know what he has?”

“No. The keys to freedom are all his but he can’t imagine what the lock looks like, or where it is,” nods Steppenwolf.

“What does that mean?” asks Kelly.

Steppenwolf winks at me again, and smiles.

“What are you going to do?” I ask.

“Put Hector out of business in a way that fits his legendary status. If Ozone knew where their profits were going they’d shit themselves,” curses Steppenwolf. I remind myself that I told Steppenwolf it was up to him what he did after I meet the band.

“Tell me,” I ask.

“Ozone made records about freedom and community and peace and love and adventure and played anti war benefit gigs. Terminal Record’s share from those albums and shows for war protests is invested by Hector.

“Invested into what?” asks Kelly.

“Target systems for combat aircraft.”

We drive in silence for a long time.

*

This is where houses come to die.

A row of terraced graves with a pub at one end, all empty, all derelict and used as a campsite for the last stop before the Henge festival. I can see that Kelly’s doesn’t know if he should look forward to this. The street is one enormous brick frown with camp fires burning in front rooms and upstairs windows like lights in tired eyes. The slate roofing is slanted in the middle like a floppy hat. Blankets are nailed to door jambs for privacy. Travellers wave and shout as we arrive and I direct Betty around the mobile parties and groups tending a cooking pot whilst smoking pot. Hazy smoke and dust blows from kids wrapped in folded blankets and high above the dead street lights the fires reach up for the stars that shine brightly above. I park Betty at the end of the street and cut the engine outside the last house of the left. On a faded sign, ‘Clegg Street’ is crossed out and replaced by ‘Festival Street’ in red scrawl. We jump from the van and grab the cooking gear and walk into the dead house. An Ozone live album plays from a distorting speaker in the middle of the road a few yards away. Over a hundred people fill the dead

street with life. People who have never met before are talking in groups, all part of one convention. Despite the missing door the sounds from the street are distant and I look around at the gutted front room. Flakes of wallpaper hang like peeled and sunburned skin from charred brick and smoke damage paints the ceiling and the floor's bare boards, some of them split.

"No place like home," says Kelly.

I go back to Betty and grab the sleeping bags. When I come back, Steppenwolf has found an old kitchen chair and sat it before the crumbling hearth.

"Are you going to sit on that or burn it?" Kelly asks him.

"Got a match?"

I throw him a lighter and set up the gas burner.

"Not sleeping in the van?" asks Steppenwolf.

"I want a house around me for a change," I tell him.

"Lick of paint, it'll be all right."

Steppenwolf sacrifices his chair to the hearth and the flames warm the room, throwing shadows across us and up the walls. A few bikers call in and ask if we have any beer. Steppenwolf gives them some skunk and they go away happy with the local currency. We eat beans from cheap plates and wash it down with litre bottles of coke while sitting on our sleeping bags stretched over the dusty boards. There is something about a derelict house. They can take out the fittings and the furniture, strip the wall paper, cut the power, but the presence of people remain in the walls.

*

The morning of the festival starts at dawn when the dying embers of wood in the heath suddenly collapse into grey ash. It's only a slight noise, but enough to wake me. I walk to the door and push aside the hanging blanket and look out at the dead street. Travellers are packing their sleeping bags and cooking gear. No one talks. This is a slow build up to what will be the most memorable day of the year. There is a tension in the air. The first engine starts, soon followed by another and another, the noise waking Steppenwolf and Kelly and they gather the blankets and stove and load them into Betty. Pale yellow light shines on the dead street. It will be a few hours before the sun clears the cracked roofing slates and leaning chimney pots. In the rear view mirror I mentally wave the street good good-bye and thank the house for the shelter it provided. As I steer Betty onto the main road, the atmosphere of the street stays with me and I wonder how long this age of innocence will last. With people like Steppenwolf and South Central Kelly in my company, it's beginning to feel like borrowed time.

“What’s the stone circle in your back yard for?” I ask Kelly after an hour of driving in silence. Steppenwolf shakes his head and lies down on the bed. He closes his eyes, obviously wanting no part of this.

“Its research, I told you,” he yawns.

“I know, but building the whole thing? You did that on your own?”

“I had help. Students. They went home when it rained so I tried to do the last one on my own. Lucky you showed up.”

“Yeah, isn’t it?” I mutter, steering Betty around a mound of trash dumped near the edge of the road. The rich smell of country grass and wild open fields slips through Betty’s air vents and my stomach growls in response. The day is bright and blue before me and I push the accelerator toward it.

Kelly is on a roll, explaining his project with enthusiasm, every time he gestures, his tall red Mohawk flaps like a sail in the wind. “The circle is on a Ley Line connecting it to Stone Henge. It runs north into Scotland. Each stone circle, big or small, corresponds to a degree of arc used in Luna movement calculations. Where the house stands, there should be a circle but for some reason it’s gone or lost or never even built.”

“So you built one?”

“Yeah. If my theory is right, it’ll prove that the UK was used as a giant astronomical calculator, the circles tracing the path of Luna orbit.”

I nod, impressed.

“Then I saw the druid picture, with the ghost face?”

“Thomas Winter,” I remind him.

“It’s just a representation,” says Kelly.

“But it looks exactly like him,” I protest. “Coincidence?”

“That’s why I’m here,” says Kelly, studying the road ahead.

*

Buried in the dusty and spider haunted vaults of the English court system is a law that states a meeting of two or more people constitutes a gathering and can be legally dispersed by the police. If a gathering is held every year up to twelve years and not dispersed or prevented, then this gathering cannot be stopped in the future. I do not know this yet, but the combined forces of the National Trust, British Heritage and Wiltshire and Salisbury constabulary are about to educate us. Someone has clearly done their homework as the convoy approaches Stone Henge and the festival field beyond. The place is crawling with police. The day is melting into a timeless

Indian summer and the festival atmosphere is beginning to buzz with music from buskers, vehicle stereos, the shouts of children and adults as they wave from cars and vans, the reunion and community spirit soaks into the day like a warm drink and a good smoke. Despite the earlier chaos I'm feeling good. I hope to run into the waitresses again and make sure they come off worse. I've got a taste for vengeance now, and I can see in the faces of the gathering festival crowd that each one of them has been through some injustice of robbery, police harassment or scuffles with authority. For the moment though, all is calm.

Our strand of the convoy is one of three lines of traffic merging into a river of vehicles growing from two other tributaries of ramshackle cars, vans busses, coaches, minivans, four by fours and the major chapters from Ghost Riders and Highway Stars bike gangs. We are over three hundred vehicles strong, waiting to get onto the site where Steppenwolf thinks there will be at least another twenty thousand people camped and waiting for the first of the bands. Kelly is looking at the vehicles ahead of us, trying to see Stone Henge but we are too far back at the moment. Then very suddenly and without warning, the day turns to shit in a way that is sadly inevitable.

"Dibbles!" Shouts Steppenwolf and starts to unload his pockets, revealing the pharmaceutical equivalent of a well stocked chemist, some of it legal, most of it not.

Kelly freaks out. "What is this shit? Is he going to the moon?"

"He's already been," I tell Kelly and look into Steppenwolf's black hole eyes, "now what?"

"Chill, just hide it."

I steer the van onto the main road and join the single file main section of the convoy with the mobile homes and the bikes and caravans and coaches, the houses on wheels.

"Once we're on the site we'll be ok," assures Steppenwolf.

"Are there normally this many police?" asks Kelly.

Steppenwolf looks at Kelly. "Come here..."

"What for?"

"Just come here," Steppenwolf takes what looks like thin neck ties made of blotting paper. "Put these around your neck, if anyone asks what they are, it's a set of beads."

"I'm going to fucking jail!" wails Kelly.

"They won't bother you; it's me they'll look at."

"I can't think why," I say, sarcastic in my growing panic.

"I'm putting the rest of the gear in the sink waste pipe," says Steppenwolf, twisting around in his seat. "Don't turn on the taps!"

Steppenwolf scrambles around in the back of the camper and I catch glimpses of him struggling with the U-bend seal under the sink and stuffing water proof packages into the pipe. This could be the end of the road. I'm just glad the camper is taxed and insured with MOT, most of the vehicles in the convoy look like they aren't.

"Who is this?" asks Kelly pointing to a biker with the word Ghost Riders sprayed on his Belstaff. His jeans are shiny with grease and engine oil and his beard looks a thousand years old. His eyes are shielded by mirror shades. He is running up along side us as we crawl and stop in the convoy line. I lower the window and the smell of bike grease and burgers pours off the man and into my face making my eyes water.

"Need an MOT?"

"What?" I ask, confused. I thought I was about to offered a smorgasbord of drugs but the biker holds up a thick block of certificates. "Need an MOT?" he repeats, as if I'm retarded.

Steppenwolf leans over my shoulder. "Let's have a look."

The biker tears off a sheet and hands it to me. "It's stamped and dated. Just put the van name in."

"Where did you get these?" I ask Kelly.

Steppenwolf nudges him, meaning shut up. "How much?" he asks the biker.

"I've got an MOT," I protest, prompting another nudge from Steppenwolf.

"Fifty," says the biker,

"Forty," counters Steppenwolf.

"Forty-five," grumbles the biker, starting to look mean under his thick and greasy beard which begins to rotate as his jaw begins a chewing motion.

Steppenwolf nods and hands over a roll of notes.

"Cheers mate," then the biker is gone.

"What do you buy that for?" asks Kelly.

"I can sell it on. Things aren't desperate yet, but they might be later."

Kelly shakes his head, wondering what he has got himself into.

“Oh, Christ,” I say.

“Just relax,” warns Steppenwolf.

I roll Betty forward and Steppenwolf starts to laugh and then I do too as we see the problem. There is a bridge ahead of us that crosses a river. At the river banks are about two hundred naked men and women camped by the water. A bread delivery van is hanging half off the bridge. Probably the driver couldn't believe his eyes when he saw all the naked women. Now he is sitting in the cab of his van with eyes like bin lids as naked travellers push his vehicle back onto the road, assisted by the police.

Steppenwolf suddenly stops laughing.

“What is it?” asks Kelly.

“What's with the boiler suits?” wonders Steppenwolf aloud.

From across the fields I see an army of police in riot helmets carrying body length clear plastic shields and brutal looking truncheons. I cannot see a policeman less than six feet tall.

“They aren't wearing numbers,” says Kelly.

I look again. He's right. There are no silver numbers fixed to their clothing, they have no uniforms, just mechanic's boiler suits. They look like an army from a banana republic.

“I don't like this,” says Steppenwolf.

Ahead of us the bread van is reinstated on the bridge and allowed to continue.

“Shit,” says Steppenwolf, “look!”

Ahead of us, the convoy is being diverted into a field next to the festival land.

“Fucking road block,” I say, as all the vehicles in front of us turn and make a break for it, scattering like frightened sheep into a field that buries the vehicles up to their wheel rims in potato plants. The police react like a hive of pissed off ants, erupting and swarming across the coaches, punching in windows with their truncheons and dragging the drivers into the foliage. Blue clad arms swing, blood splashes onto rusty fenders and plant leaves.

“Stay on the road! Stay on it!” Yells Steppenwolf, “We go in that field, we're fucked.”

I keep my hands on the wheel as an orchestra of sirens cut the air, answered by the horns of the traveller's vehicles.

“What's going on?” screams Kelly.

“Pray they don’t find the drugs!”

The potato field by the festival site rapidly fills with vans, converted ambulances, buses and cars. Travellers are fighting with their steering as the police damage and occupy. I see women and children dragged from the coaches and buses, the ones who protest are clubbed and dragged away by the boiler suited police. I see one man standing before a police officer, his hands outspread palms up, empty in a gesture of explanation. A second later he is on the ground bleeding from a head wound. Women flock around to help but they are pushed away as more police descend on this incident now repeating all over the field, the few untouched vehicles are bouncing and rocking as the police give chase and drag people away. The air fills with screams and shouts, all the music stops! The sound of shattering glass reaches us and the sound of windscreens giving way under repeated truncheon blows.

“I can’t believe this shit, it’s a fucking riot. What are they doing?” I yell at Steppenwolf.

“Keep driving!” he shouts back.

Steppenwolf, the man of a million police raids, festivals and gigs is genuinely scared. Camera crews from local TV and journalists with telephoto lens cameras run into the field and fall victim to arrest but not before they capture this day for the evening news. I keep Betty level and on the road until a red faced and furious police man appears at my window. He is fucking enormous and wielding a fat extendable baton.

“In the field,” he barks like a drill sergeant.

“Fuck off!” shouts Steppenwolf! “We’re legal here! What are you doing, practising to invade Russia?”

“You want this, you cunt?” He yells, waving the baton.

“We’re here for the festival, what the fuck is your problem?”

A second of realisation seems to cross the officer’s face.

“License, MOT and insurance!” growls the officer.

I grab for the dash compartment and fumble the documents. The policeman looks at me as if I was going for a weapon. “You reach like that again mate, you’ll eat this!” he says, and the thing is, he means it.

He looks at the documents as Kelly starts to shake.

“What’s up with him?” frowns the policeman.

“He’s fucking scared of you lot!” I tell him and my voice comes out as a hysterical wine. The officer looks at the papers and throws them back at me.

“Fuck off!” he snarls through gritted teeth. We’re small fish and he’s throwing us back. I drive through the battle between the two factions; this is a deliberate attack on a way of life. Travellers are chased and hunted by squads of baton swinging cops, organised and out for blood; Rodney King on a massive scale.

“This is bad,” understates Kelly.

This is so fucking scary that I’ve forgotten about the drugs in the camper. I just want to get through this battle zone and onto the camp site.

“This is so fucking bad,” Kelly whispers again.

“Stop saying that, I can see how fucking bad it is!” I scream.

“They usually hit the scag dealers, not ordinary crowds!” says Steppenwolf.

At the bridge where the bread van ran aground there are no naked women to distract us, just cops ripping up tents and destroying belongings among the fleeing freaks and heads who scream in terror before the onslaught. I wonder if some are already tripping and think this is just a nightmare. I look down to my right as we cross the bridge and see the river water coloured by tides of blood. Kelly has nervously started to chew the blotting paper ties around his neck and has a thick tide of sweat on his face. With the windows rolled down I listen to the sirens, the smell of sweat and the stink of exhaust from over revved and oil burning engines. The crack of truncheon on bone and flesh mixes with the screams and shouts of police. At the festival site we are miraculously waved in by a group of police and we drive through tent city among thirty thousand people with huts and pitched tents or vehicles that serve as both. Camp fire smoke fills the air and the taste of Ganja from hot knives tents blows across our path. Tent city hasn’t seen or heard of the riot in the potato field half a mile away, but like the prelude to a devastating earthquake, dogs are barking and straining on leashes, smelling the fear and the blood on the wind. We are one of the few survivors of the peace convoy. A few other vehicles are let through and onto the site but not many.

“We should warn people,” says Kelly, still chewing on the blotting paper ties around his neck.

“I don’t think we’ll have to,” says Steppenwolf.

I point at a cloud of dust rising in the distance accompanied by the roar of bikes.

“Road rats,” says Steppenwolf, “and Satan’s Slaves.”

I brake and let them ride by.

“Heading for the potato field,” says Kelly, still chewing on the ties.

I'm exhausted and need some air so I find a spot at the edge of tent city and park Betty. I get a head rush when I stand up after so much time driving and find that I've stepped out of the van and into another world. As far as I can see, the tents, huts and shelters of every kind of people are serving half mixes for chillums and fat joints or lines of speed spread like buffet lunches on rusty tins and cracked plates. The crisp air is filled by sweet smoke. I see two stoned guys trying to erect a tent then stopping for a smoke, then trying again until they just prop the whole thing up on two sticks and crawl under it. Kelly gets out of the van while Steppenwolf unblocks the camper's sink pipe and retrieves his drugs. He climbs out of the van and stares wide eyed at Kelly.

I realise at the same second, like some awful telepathy!

Kelly lets the blotting paper strips fall from his mouth. He is in total shock,

"What have I done?" he asks, reacting to our horrified stares.

"You've eaten the Area 51 you thick shit!"

"What the fuck is that?"

"Acid!" says Steppenwolf, "and you haven't fucking paid for it!"

"You said it was beads! Why didn't you fucking tell me?" Kelly starts to moan and whimper. He scrambles back into Betty, his hands over his eyes.

"You can't hide, it's in your head," says Steppenwolf.

"How much time do I have?" squeals Kelly, turning pale.

"Not long," smiles Steppenwolf, proud of his product.

It's as if God throws a switch inside Kelly's brain, and we see all recognition of his surroundings flood out of his eyes and his personality replaced by some refugee from a psychic war zone. Before I can react he has fixated on the interior of Betty and wrenched the door open. He slides from the passenger seat, grabs the rubber chicken and his note books and is off and running with my trophy and ticket into Ozone, the whole point of driving down here.

Steppenwolf is in hysterics, tears on his cheeks.

"Don't let him take the fucking chicken!" I yell as I run around Betty to try and catch the insane Kelly.

"Leave him, I'll get you back stage," Steppenwolf laughs.

"I want that bloody chicken!" I warn, feeling my face turn red.

“Shit!” screams Kelly, his eyes rolling in his head like golf balls in a polishing machine as he clutches the rubber chicken and his Stone Henge books, holding them to his chest like a panicked school boy.

“Where are you going?” I shout at him, trying to make him see sense before he bolts off into the crowd.

“I’ve got to get this done before it starts!” He cries, heading off toward the monoliths. Steppenwolf calls after him, “It won’t make any sense in a few minutes. Your universe is about to be redefined.”

“Fuck you! I’m still half in this one,” he sweats and looks at his clothes as if seeing them for the first time.

“Come here,” Steppenwolf jogs after Kelly and grabs the remaining strips of blotting paper from around his neck.

“He’ll end up a druid!” I tell Steppenwolf. “God help him.”

“He might get close enough to ask,” says Steppenwolf.

“You think this is funny?” I confront Steppenwolf with clenched teeth. “You wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for me.”

“You wouldn’t be here unless I drugged the girls and got your van back,” he counters.

“Only because you can’t drive; why are you being such a prick about this Steppenwolf?”

He reluctantly relents and follows me to where Kelly is sitting cross legged on the grass, his books and charts in front of him. We stand over him and he only looks up when our shadows block the sun and fall across him. I look into eyes that have left the planet.

“Kelly?”

No answer, he just stares then he gathers his books and starts to walk toward the huge stones. We walk either side of him. Steppenwolf starts to chuckle under his breath.

“Kelly, are you ok?” I ask, trying to grab the chicken but Kelly turns and jogs a few yards every time I try.

Kelly starts to talk. Somehow it is not his voice.

“Help...me...” he gasps. “My mind! Everything I know, everything I came here to learn...” moans Kelly.

“What?” I ask.

Kelly claws at his red Mohawk, "It's melting, I'm forgetting about...dark fluid saving the Earth...light defying its own speed limit...why there isn't an anti world...ghosts are just magnetic fields messing with our minds...the distances and red shifts of orbiting black holes give the universe an expansion history..."

"Kelly, get a grip!"

"I'm trying, wait, some new stuff is coming in...chickens, I need to think about rubber chickens...theories, plans, projects, a new thesis on the rubber qualities of chickens..." Kelly descends into mumbling as we follow him to the monument of Stone Henge where some dickhead has written 'save the forest ponies' in straggled graffiti letters. I stop Kelly from walking and get in front of him.

"Kelly, Kelly? How many fingers am I holding up?"

Kelly tries to focus on the four fingers I am holding inches from his face, he smiles and an expression of part wonder, part terror crosses his face, "I dunno, I've got three sixty degree vision. There are fingers all around my head!"

He starts to whimper. Steppenwolf starts to laugh.

"I didn't tell him my plans," wails Kelly, "I didn't, I didn't!"

"Plans, what plans? Tell who?" I ask.

"I didn't tell God my plans," he wails.

"What the fuck are you on about?"

"I can hear God laughing!" complains Kelly.

Steppenwolf descends into uncontrollable laughter.

"Shut up, you're freaking him out."

"He won't mind in about an hour!" says Steppenwolf.

Kelly pushes me aside and continues walking among the stones, his face is a mask of total wonder with an LSD complexion.

"We should get him to a food tent," I suggest.

"Better let it run. If he eats now, fuck knows what will happen."

Then Kelly really goes to pieces as the Area Fifty One kicks in full throttle. He stops moving. He drops his books and charts. His arms go limp by his sides and he wears the expression of a man who is witnessing the dawn of creation in slow motion. Then he drops the chicken and sits on it. He pulls his shirt over his head, kicks off his shoes and starts to take off his jeans.

“He’s having an out of clothes experience,” says Steppenwolf. “We’d better go, leave him to it.”

“What if he hurts himself?”

“He’ll be ok. Plenty of people around.”

Kelly is now naked and a group of women start to cheer at him, clapping and whistling. Kelly ignores them, looking at his spilled papers. Then with an unexpected burst of energy, Kelly leaps to his feet and takes off into the next field, still holding the rubber chicken. The last we see of him is his bright Mohawk waving like a red sail and the rubber chicken covering his groin.

“Come on, let’s find the stage,” Steppenwolf grins. “You don’t need a rubber chicken, you’ve got me.”

We go back to Betty and I lock her up, then we walk away. I have the feeling that when we return she’ll be broken into and gutted but Steppenwolf assures me this won’t happen. We only have to worry if the bike gangs hassle us for drugs but they’ve gone to the riot, seeking fun and resisting arrest.

When we get to the stage, there’s a band setting up.

The stage is on a slight rise and supported by complex scaffolding and crowd barriers. A vast tarpaulin covers it and a few feet below that sits Ozone’s massive lighting rig. There are roadies all over it like a rash. Two huge sky scraper sized PA stacks crackle every time something is plugged in or adjusted, much to the annoyance of the folk singer standing stage front and playing an acoustic to the crowd pressed against the barriers.

“Who is that?” I ask Steppenwolf.

“Warm up,” he says, partially distracted and looking at the barriers near the edge of the stage. I look back in the opposite direction to the stage and see smoke and thick dust rising from the distant potato field. Steppenwolf checks what I’m looking at and sniffs.

“This isn’t over yet,” I tell him. “When they’ve done with the people in the field, what’s to stop them coming here? They couldn’t have checked every one and every van, now they’ve got a captive audience.”

Steppenwolf shrugs like he’s unconcerned, but I can see something is bothering him. I turn back to the stage and see something I never expected, as if I haven’t seen enough already today. There’s a fight on stage with the warm up guy and someone I swear is Don Nelson, who is trying to set up his drum kit half way through the poor guy’s act. We are distracted when a helicopter flies overhead. It has speakers built onto the side and an amplified and authoritarian voice blasts over us as it tilts and heads back to the potato field. *“I am not interested in anything you have to say! I am not interested in anything you have to say...”* screams the voice as it changes timbre with the Doppler effect receding. We aren’t sure we actually heard that, but one look at

the people around us confirms it. We are an island in a miniature police state. Festival life has transformed the immediate area and I see large groups of kids and dogs gathering into independent tribes, displaying classic pack behaviour during an impromptu football match that breaks out a few hundred yards away with the kids wearing paint and coloured clothing. I see things that don't belong; a milk truck loaded with pints and kids on a mission to steal the bottles like it's a game while a guy who looks like he rode shotgun chases them away. There's a scuffle as four policemen burst through a wall of tents dragging a hapless and shirtless stoner off the site among shouted protests until the scrum is out of sight and the locals settle down again. I'm reminded of lions attacking gazelles, picking off the perimeter animals without stampeding the pack. When I look back at the stage, the warm up guy has gone and Don Nelson is playing with a band I have never seen before. I'm just getting into it when a wedge of Accrington brick flies like a missile and hits Don square on the forehead. The crowd reacts with a collective and sympathetic "Oooooohhhhhwww!" But Don doesn't miss a beat. The crowd laughs and cheers. Don's set lasts half an hour and he staggers off presumably to get his head seen to. I get nervous. Things are happening behind me in the weight of numbers. Steppenwolf senses my nervousness and grins. "Got a lift here once, hitchhiked, you know? Cops pulled the Land Rover I was in and the fucking driver jumped out and ran off. Cops asked who was driving, I said I didn't fucking know. Turned out it wasn't the guys van. Some people just get a fifty quid car and then dump it here."

"Crazy," I say with some sarcasm, but Steppenwolf is on a roll.

"Knew another guy who came here and stayed; Winnie the Pooh he was called. He had a big jar of mushrooms and a pan full of honey."

"What happened to him?"

"He never went home, I saw him next year and he was making a film. God knows what he told his wife and kids, if he bothered to. Black cat acid was around that year. Change your life that stuff. I tried some once and I thought I was twenty feet tall. I went stomping off around the site for hours."

"I'm worried about Kelly," I tell him.

"He'll turn up."

"How do you know, have you tried Area 51?" I ask him.

"More times than I can remember," he replies, and I can see he isn't lying.

"What's it like?"

He smiles. "The past doesn't matter and the future becomes a liquid."

I turn around and look through a gap in the crowd, hoping to see Kelly.

Instead I see four familiar faces.

“Steppenwolf...” I mutter as I dig him in the ribs and point him in the right direction. Four pairs of beautiful eyes set in pretty faces stare at us.

“Hello,” says Steppenwolf.

Delicately, I wave at Asha, and they make their way over to us.

“How was your trip?” asks Steppenwolf.

“Not bad,” nods Asha, her dark hair tied back. Julia looks shell shocked, Sarah looks electrified and Charlotte seems incapable of speech.

“Sorry about the van,” says Julia.

“No problem,” I tell them. “We’re all here now. Don’t know why you thought you had to steal it?”

Asha shrugs and stares at Steppenwolf. “Handy with that shit, aren’t you?”

Steppenwolf grins. “It wasn’t your van, sweetheart.”

“Wanna hang out?” says Sarah.

“Ok,” I say, but wary of them this time. “Where are you?”

“Got a place by the food tent,” says Asha.

“Great, I’m starved lets go.”

With a girl on each arm we walk out of the crowd. Asha and Julia cling to me and Sarah and Charlotte are either side of Steppenwolf. Their tent is one of hundreds among the city of green and patchwork canvas and we crawl inside. It’s a four person tent but there’s room for two more on the laid out sleeping bags. Sarah leaves the tent for a moment and comes back in with a tray made from a piece of old signage and six bowls of stew balanced on it. Delicious steam rises from the food and we greedily tuck in. When the food is gone a greedy look comes across the girl’s faces and Asha closes the tent’s zip. I see Steppenwolf smile as Sarah and Charlotte push him back onto the sleeping bag and undo his shirt. I get a shiver of anticipation as Asha and Julia start to unbutton their shirts, revealing firm and ample cleavage in lace. We lie together for what seems like hours, touching, kissing and taking our time. The air in the tent grows hot and I feel the slow passing of other dimensions washing over our bodies, as though the world outside were expanding and shrinking all at once. I push my fingers through Julia’s hair as she kisses my neck and I turn my head sideways, lazily noticing that all the blades of grass protruding under the tent are a totally different shade of green.

I hear Steppenwolf say, “What’s wrong with the light?”

The orange patchwork of the tent is changing.

We've been spiked!

The girls withdraw their attentions and Julia and Charlotte pull on their clothes while we struggle to focus. Sarah unzips the tent flap and the girls scramble out. I realise that this probably isn't their tent as we follow them into the bright day to be confronted by fifteen bikers with 'Satan's Slaves' painted on their jackets.

"Fuck!" says Steppenwolf, as the girls run giggling from the scene.

We run with the bikers in pursuit. I don't know about Steppenwolf, but I've never been chased by bikers whilst on acid. I've never been chased by bikers sober for that matter so I just follow Steppenwolf as he weaves in and out of the tents. The light is turning Emerald as if shining through forest leaves and I'm not sure if I'm running or floating. We pass an old coach full of grey aliens from the X-files and I scream and laugh in a mixture of exhilaration and fear as the heavy boots of the bikers recede behind us. We pass a group of naked long haired travellers making tea in a large pot around the dying embers of a fire. We jog passed psychedelic hand painted signs for Henge crews that come here every gig, the Mutant Space Corp, United Mystics and One World sprayed bright yellow and pink or green on the sides of cars, vans and an old ambulance. I dodge a sign that reaches out to grab me with thick black writing that has a voice like a Cockney requesting a lift to Southampton after the show, the letters leap off the sign and bend around the corner after me like graffiti Doppler shift and I run faster to escape the syllables as they snap back onto the cardboard. Still running we bounce through the vast shanty town of tents, vehicles and clouds of dope smoke. I look back and the universe is twisting as if I am dragging it like a vapour trail. Then we are back at Betty, my beloved VW camper. I don't know how Steppenwolf found it but I'm glad he did. My thoughts are scrambling and I see him as a crumbling stone statue, then the vision flashes away and he is normal again except for some space time distortion blurring his edges each time he blinks.

"Keys!" he is saying, but keys could be anything, they might be seventy foot lengths of tubular steel that I can't get out of my pocket because of the weight, keys might be an animal that opens doors in the jungle, I don't know, I just don't know, and I'm frozen to the spot trying to figure this out....

"Keys! Keys! Keys? Keeeeeeeyyyssssssss?" Steppenwolf warbles in various speeds and timbres, each one fascinating in their musical possibilities.

Steppenwolf pushes me and I fall against the van and he stuffs his hands into my pockets and finds the....the...what? The what? What are they?

Trying to breath normally I am pushed into the back of the van and Steppenwolf is talking to me but the words float in the air and I study them, trying to get some meaning.

"We lost them, its ok now. Fucking bitches, wait till I see them again!"

He reaches into his pocket. "Eat this," he says and pushes two pills into my mouth. I swallow.

"Vallium," he answers in response to my laughter, which I had meant to make a frown. Steppenwolf swallows two of his own and lies down on the floor of the van. "Get some sleep, its low grade. It'll pass."

"Asha," I tell him.

"Who?" he asks, but my mind is remembering her soft body, a lie to trick us. A vast confusion of emotion and the smell of freshly perfumed skin, damp grass and the hot air of the tent invade my senses and I fall back on the camp bed in a rapture of boiling erotic nightmares. I shut my eyes but its worse so I open them again and sit up, propped against deflated pillows, watching the world of the travellers pass by. My mind hangs onto the random few minutes of sanity that wash ashore onto the beach of my forebrain and the hours pass as ice age time zones. The trip turns good now the fear of biker damage fades and the world is enveloped by calm. The festival might be a future Stone Age, or stoned age, or stoner age with rusted vehicles and technology, the Earth swallowing the cities, roads, airports, power stations and call centres, leaving this community as the centre of the world. The sun sinks in the darkening purple sky and the chill of the evening closes in. I see people dressing in blankets and sheepskin coats. Woolly hats and great coats are pulled from carpet bags and rucksacks. Exhaled breath adds to the camp fire smoke as wood and fuel are added to dying embers. I could stay like this forever but the world starts to shake. I open my eyes and Steppenwolf is staring at me with the nearest expression he has to concern.

"You ok?" he asks.

"I think so. What happened?"

"Your waitress friends, remember?" he says, dusting himself off as he rises from the floor of Betty.

"Asha's cute," I tell him.

"Forget Asha, and the other three, they'll pay with their minds."

I nod, but I think the girls are too clever for us.

"That's one each," I smile.

"Ok, so I fell for it. Who wouldn't, Sarah's got a body like..."

I laugh and smile.

"Ok, so I like the girls and crap drugs, I'm only human."

"What was it?" I ask as I rub the feeling back into my face.

“Low grade Blue Sunshine. Probably rip off stuff the bikers were selling.”

I suddenly remember the bikers and duck down below the level of the window.

“Don’t worry about it, they’re gone.”

“Why did they chase us?”

Steppenwolf shrugs and checks the coast is clear. “Depends what the girls told them.” Steppenwolf frowns. “They might be hiding from them too. I don’t think that was their tent. I think they promised the bikers something if they fucked us up. They did a strip for us with no problem, can you see them shagging the bikers for a favour?”

“No, never.” I agree.

I look out of Betty’s window and search the crowd, looking for Asha.

“It’s getting late,” says Steppenwolf. “Come on, we’ve got a gig to see.”

I climb off the bed and get a coat from the storage unit. Steppenwolf is still dressed in his shirt and pants and his long coat.

“You want a scarf or something?” I ask him.

“Don’t feel cold,” he says.

That I can believe. Probably numb from all the chemicals. We leave Betty and Steppenwolf hands me the keys. I remember the problem with the keys. Even now their shape and function is a bit vague. I lock up and we wander through a haze of mist and smoke toward the sound of a band.

“Rick Miller!” says Steppenwolf. “Urban Squad are here!”

We walk quickly, drawn to the distant pulsing lights and the enormous sound of the music. The edges of the gathered crowd push toward the stage like moths to a flame. We force our way to the front. The heaving mass of cheering humanity bouncing and jumping as a single entity as I look up to see Rick Miller in his bizarre hybrid space/animal suit. A ragged collection of skins and space suit like a future Stone Age man, circuit boards hanging around his neck like beads and the plastic casings from computer tower units worn on his shins like cricket pads. Within minutes I am dripping sweat as the heat of the compressed bodies press around me and I have no choice but to jump up and down with them to the beat as Rick Miller screams into the microphone,

“Run from the Iron Age riot cops, run from the Iron Age riot cops!”

As one collective consciousness the crowd know he’s signing about the police violence and a vast cheer of support for the band and hatred for the

police rises into the night. Urban Squad play five songs, Cyber death, Tech Forest, Living Light, Echo System and Luna Watch, then wave and run off stage. The crowd simmers and tides of a struggle ripple through to the front. I'm crushed against the barriers. Hired Goons Security are no where to be seen and I watch a girl pulled over the barriers by a roadie, her face is white from lack of oxygen and she's crying with pain and disappointment because she will have to go to the back and fight her way to the front again. I've lost sight of Steppenwolf, but he has his own agenda. I listen to the conversations around me, the mood turning ugly when the gallons of home brewed beer runs dry, the special brew crates are empty and the post coke blizzard settles to deep powder. Moody voices echo around me,

"Kick the shit out o' them...took Mick away without even charging him, wrecked all the buses...my kids were in there...fuckin' fascists... government doesn't want us...!"

I'm passed a chillum and get a generous toke on it. The world expands and the residue of the low grade acid fades. I look to the stage as Ozone's crew check the sound and the lights. The reason I've put up with a ton of shit is about to pay off. A heavy bass drone follows Larry's arrival on stage and thunders like a one thousand bomber raid. Strobes flare red and white as shadowy figures dart from the rear of the stage. Images of mathematical formulae flash onto a creased projector screen behind the band. A crowd roar of biblical proportions rises with the smoke from the chillum and up toward the moon...

*

It's two in the morning and four Ozone encores after a three hour main set. One by one the band disappeared. Marty went first, then Jerry, then Keith and Larry, leaving Rick Miller, their seemingly uninvited guest, honking away on his sax in an inexhaustible repertoire of six notes, some of them drawn out like a cat's wails, for another two hours. At four in the morning I wander away from the stage and go to find Betty. Rick Miller's still on stage, blasting and honking saxophone echoes through the chill air as tent city beds down and drifts into sleep. The dawn tints the sky with pink and grey. There would be a subtle predawn hush if it wasn't for the longest saxophone solo in the world, then, as if in answer to one communal request, a single exhausted voice rises in a heart felt cry from somewhere among the vast sprawl of canvas and camp fires. "Oh for fuck's sake, shut up!"

The saxophone stops.

Rick Miller leaves the stage.

Steppenwolf appears out of the ethereal morning mist and looks at me with the stare of a commando waiting for the checkpoint guards to fall asleep.

"I'm going back stage to see Larry," he says. "Coming?"

"I don't know," I tell him.

“You wanted to meet the band?” he snarls.

“But you’re going to do something shitty,” I remind him.

“I’m going to set up a meeting, I told you.”

I look down at my boots. “We should find Kelly.”

“Forget him, and fuck the chicken you bought to get you in,” says Steppenwolf. “This is your chance.”

“Kelly was there when I needed a lift to catch up with you at the services, I owe him.” I am almost pleading.

“He won’t recognise you,” complains Steppenwolf, and in a second I see he is going to tell me to fuck off and go on his own.

“How long does Area 51 last?” I ask him.

Steppenwolf looks at his watch. “He should be done in a while, but...”

“Will you help me find him after we’ve see Larry?” I ask.

“Ok, whatever,” he nods.

Steppenwolf moves off, heading for the stage, not waiting for me.

Back stage is a ramshackle area consisting of a half collapsed beer tent and makeshift bar. There are enough empty beer cans to build a house and enough empty bottles to use for the windows. The mud is freshly seeded by thousands of cigarette ends and blackened joint roaches. The stage itself is made from flat sheets of wood and scaffolding and the back drop supported by two old London double decked buses parked to form a V shape. Generator power cables snake from the bus and into the equipment still on stage. Beyond this I can see Ozone’s tour bus mired like a tank in the thick mud. There is a figure dressed in an old style bus uniform asleep at the wheel, his peaked cap over his eyes. Loud snoring escapes from under the hat. Steppenwolf waves me closer and points to someone standing near the bus and smoking a joint. I recognise the figure as Larry Bain.

“Go on,” he urges me.

“What?” I ask.

“Introduce yourself.”

“What?”

“Tell him who you are, and that I’m back here. He won’t bite,” hisses Steppenwolf. I exhale and walk toward Larry, making sure I make enough noise to attract attention. Larry turns around and nods at me.

“Hi,” I smile.

“All right?” Larry frowns.

“Can’t sleep,” I tell him.

“It’ll wear off,” he tells me, offering me a smoke.

I take the joint and inhale. It’s very smooth, not crowd quality weed.

“On the crew?” Larry asks me.

“No, I saw the show, I do DJ stuff,” I tell him.

Larry nods, wondering if I want something else.

There’s no way to break the news gently, so I decide to come out with it.

“I’m here with Steppenwolf,” I say and wait for the reaction.

Larry’s face freezes. He seems incapable of movement.

“I gave him a lift here, it’s a long story.”

“I’ll bet,” says Larry as he exhales and recovers his cool. “Where is he?” he asks, his eyes darting around like he expects to be jumped at any second.

“By the stage.”

“Come on,” he says, and takes the lead.

We walk to the buses and Steppenwolf emerges from the shadows like a ghost intent on revenge, his long coat wrapped close to him and his eyes bright in the dawn light. I stand to one side as their exchange takes place.

“Where the fuck have you been?” asks Larry.

“Ask Hector,” says Steppenwolf.

“I’m asking you,” says Larry, who is starting to look angry.

“Ask him,” Steppenwolf tells Larry, nodding at me.

I blink at Larry, who is still in shock and now looks like he thinks he is dreaming.

“I was on my way to a gig,” I begin. “I stopped at Charlock Richard for breakfast and I heard this thumping noise from the boot of a car. I opened it and he leapt out.”

“Charnock Richard?” asks Larry.

“It’s nothing to do with Keith Richards, and its fucking hundreds of miles away!” says Steppenwolf.

“You look familiar,” says Larry, looking at me and squinting.

“I grabbed your rubber chicken when Jerry threw it into the crowd at the Hammersmith.”

Larry almost chokes. “Have you still got it?”

“It’s around here somewhere,” I tell him as I give a sideways glance to Steppenwolf who says, “Fuck rubber chickens! I woke up in the back of a car after I gave you something to look after for me, know anything about that?”

“No,” says Larry.

“Have you still got what I gave you?” he asks.

Larry is slowly shaking his head.

“Why not, Larry? I told you it was fucking important!”

“I know, so I hid it,” Larry tells him.

“Where?”

Larry takes a breath and sucks at the joint. On the trail of a large amount of exhaled smoke, he says, “In the rubber chicken that Jerry threw into the crowd.”

We all stare at each other. Maybe someone should laugh?

“You’re taking the piss,” says Steppenwolf.

“Nope,” smiles Larry.

Steppenwolf struggles for reason, and I am witness to the pieces of a puzzle slowly coming together between them, but no one is giving me the big picture.

“You hid that piece of paper in the chicken and Jerry threw it into the crowd?” says Steppenwolf.

“He didn’t know there was anything in it,” says Larry.

“Oh, that’s a relief!” says Steppenwolf, not hiding the sarcasm. “I can relax now can I? Knowing that the biggest dickhead in the world is second only to the man in front of me! The guy who gets me out of the car boot after I’m kidnapped, has your chicken sitting on the dash of his van a few inches from me all the way here and now...” he loses steam and his eyes are the only indication of how serious this is.

“Where is it?” asks Larry.

“We have to find Kelly!” I say.

“I can’t fucking believe this, I just don’t fucking get it!” squeals Steppenwolf.

Larry starts to laugh.

“What’s funny?”

“Fate,” he says.

Steppenwolf is pulling at his clothing and almost stamping on the spot.

“Shit! Shit!”

“Where’s the chicken?” Larry asks me.

“Long story short,” I stammer. “A guy who came up here with us ate some of Steppenwolf’s Area 51 and ran off with it.”

Larry looks beyond the stage, probably imagining the chicken loose in the crowd.

“What was in the chicken?” I ask.

“Don’t ask,” Steppenwolf tells me.

“I’m asking.”

“Fuck all to do with you,” he snarls.

“Important though?” I test.

“Yes,” says Steppenwolf.

“I said we should find Kelly,” I tell Steppenwolf. “What did I say to you?”

“Ok, ok, we’ll find it.”

“Find it quick,” says Larry.

Steppenwolf frowns and fixes his terrible stare on Larry. “Why?”

“Jerry, Danny and me are out to get Hector,” he says.

“Go on,” whispers Steppenwolf, looking at the ground.

“We’re seeing a lawyer, we’re going to force Hector to show us the books and get out of the Terminal Records deal. The money is ours.” Says Larry.

“How do you know about the money?” asks Steppenwolf.

“I had a talk with Jerry at Stone Meadows. We’ve got an album in the can. Negotiation time,” he grins.

“Money?” I ask.

“Can you trust him?” asks Larry, nodding at me.

“I suppose,” says Steppenwolf.

“Tell him,” urges Larry.

“No.”

“Ok, I will,” says Larry.

“You just met him!” complains Steppenwolf.

“Everyone will know soon enough,” says Larry. “Ask him.”

I lick my lips. “What’s in the chicken?”

“Remember I told you I got into Hector’s office and got the contract out?” says Steppenwolf.

“Yeah, there was a girl...” I begin.

“Not now,” snaps Steppenwolf, “not important...broad strokes...”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” I stammer, remembering it was Larry’s girl with Hector.

“I also found a sheet of paper with bank details on it. A Swiss bank account where Hector has stashed all of Ozone’s assets from previous managers and labels, all the money they should have received since day one.”

I swallow. “How much?”

Steppenwolf frowns and Larry looks expectant.

“Go on,” says Larry, “I never had time to read it, I stuffed it up the chicken and ran on stage with it!”

Steppenwolf takes a breath. “Three...”

“Three what?” asks Larry.

“Three...” mutters Steppenwolf.

“Three hundred, three hundred thousand, what?” pushes Larry.

“Three million,” spits Steppenwolf.

The world seems to stop. The sun too scared to rise.

“Three million dollars?” I ask.

“Pounds,” says Steppenwolf.

Larry produces another joint and lights it. He looks like God just told him he is immortal. “You could have just taken the money.”

“No I can’t, Hector has to sign for it or a member of Ozone in the presence of a lawyer.”

Larry nods. “So that’s why we got one.”

“He’d better be a bastard to take Hector,” warns Steppenwolf.

“She,” says Larry.

“Yeah? What’s her name?” asks Steppenwolf.

“Lurisa Badsugar,” Larry tells him.

“Who?” We both ask at once.

“Klienschmidt, Godschalk, and Badsugar. They’re a Dutch South African firm in London,” Larry explains.

“Sounds like Hell,” I reply.

“I hope they are,” says Larry. “Danny and Jerry set it up. I only found out a while ago.”

“We’re getting ahead of ourselves,” I say.

“He’s right, the chicken is loose,” Larry reminds us.

“We’ll find it. Don’t worry we’ll find it,” promises Steppenwolf.

“Call me,” warns Larry. “It’s nearly light, the travellers will be travelling.”

Larry and Steppenwolf shake hands.

“What were you going to do with the chicken?” Larry asks me, “eBay it?”

“I was going to give it back to you, ask to play some guitar at the next gig,” I tell him, somewhat embarrassed after what I have heard.

“Find that chicken it’s a deal, plus a cut of the cash. Both of you,” smiles Larry. We leave the backstage area and start to run. Steppenwolf is in a panic.

“Fucking hell, of all the twisted fucked up...” he curses.

“I said we should look for Kelly!”

“You had no idea what was in the chicken, it wasn’t important. How was I to fucking know Larry would stuff the key to a fortune up a rubber chicken’s arse? I didn’t know they had arses, why would a rubber chicken have an arse hole? Did I just say that out loud?”

“Maybe he hid his drugs in it?” I suggest as we down a slope and into tent city. Steppenwolf stops dead and grabs me by the collar. “That’s it, you’re a fucking genius! Now put the grey matter to work on where we last saw Kelly?”

“At Betty, he ran toward Henge.”

“Come on then,” gasps Steppenwolf and we jog through the mud and the tents and into the twilight world of the cold dawn. Last night’s acid heads are wandering like zombies in the rising mist, muttering and mumbling as if in prayer. We reach the vast monument of Stone Henge and stop for breath.

“See him?” I ask.

“No, let’s split up, you go left.”

I watch Steppenwolf run into the rising mist. The orange ball of the sun appears on the horizon and the shadows slowly bleach and fade. Colours become sharper and the vast patient monument of Stone Henge stands defiant for another day. The mumbling from the acid zombies become shouts as the sunrise freaks them out. I am wandering lost among the giant stones, not knowing where to start and trying to take in the last few minutes and the impossible amount of three million floating free in the hands of a drugged mad man. I find a text book on the grass, the pages wet with dew. I pick it up and read the cover, its one of Kelly’s! I find another, and another. I run toward a Giant Saracen and turn its corner. On the grass, his back to the cold granite and looking like he’s seen God and now must confront the disappointment of the rest of his life, is South Central Kelly. He is shivering, naked except for a blanket.

“Steppenwolf! I’ve found him,” I call into the thickening mist.

Ethereal forms merge in the fog and the shouts of the acid zombies fade. Steppenwolf arrives and looks down at Kelly.

“Thank Christ, where’s the chicken?” he gasps as he staggers to a halt, the sweat on his face is glistening. We look around but there is no sign of it. I crouch down before Kelly and look into his unfocused eyes.

“Kelly? It’s me, Dave. Where’s the chicken?” I ask.

Kelly starts to laugh.

“The prophecy came true, I saw his face!”

I exchange a glance with Steppenwolf, knowing what Kelly means but having no way to explain it to him in his state of mind.

“Can’t you give him something?”

“Like what? There’s no cure for being this screwed up,” says Steppenwolf as he reaches into his pocket and brings out a Valium and pushes it between Kelly’s lips.

“Swallow it,” orders Steppenwolf.

Kelly swallows.

“Chicken!” Shouts Steppenwolf. “Where is it?”

Kelly laughs again.

“It’s not funny,” he says.

“You’re asking me, where’s the chicken?” babbles Kelly.

I wave Steppenwolf back and try to get Kelly’s full attention. I speak slowly, deliberately trying not to freak him out. “Kelly? You remember you had the rubber chicken, from the van?”

Kelly frowns. “Chicken...”

“Yes, rubber chicken...”

“Rubber chicken,” repeats Kelly.

“Where is it?” I gently ask.

“I don’t know, where’s rubber chicken?” Kelly looks frantically around. “Giant rubber chicken? Giant rubber chicken,” he starts to cry, the tears pouring down his face, “don’t let it find me.”

“We won’t, but we need to know where it is, if we can find it we can hide you,” I suggest.

“Rubber chicken,” says Kelly.

“For fuck’s sake you’re making him worse,” moans Steppenwolf.

“I gave it to my friends,” cries Kelly.

“Friends?” I ask.

“Going across the sea,” says Kelly. “They don’t like it here.”

“Your friends are going... to Europe?” asks Steppenwolf.

“They’ve been before. They’re going to see music and lights and...Ozone...” cries Kelly, his panic descending into sobs.

“Who are they?” I whisper.

Steppenwolf pushes me aside and grabs Kelly by the hair. “Listen to me, tell me where the rubber chicken is, or I’ll tell the other giant chickens where you live, they’ll eat you!”

Kelly screams and a thick warm stream of urine jets from under the blanket and sprays up Steppenwolf’s coat.

“Shit!” he curses.

“Nice move, scare him catatonic!” I yell at Steppenwolf.

“So beautiful,” mumbles Kelly.

“What is?” I ask.

“Asha,” says Kelly, dreamily.

Steppenwolf and I exchange glances.

“Girls?” he asks.

“Mmmmmm,” hums Kelly, as if tasting honey.

“Four girls?” asks Steppenwolf.

“For sex, for love, forever, Asha,” he sighs.

“You gave the chicken to four girls?” I ask again.

Kelly nods and passes out. There’s nothing to say. No need to curse or complain. It’s nothing short of fucking typical!

“Get him to Betty, let’s go,” I say.

We wrap the blanket around Kelly and march him away from the monument of Stone Henge and back to tent city and the distant stage. We pass a group of policemen explaining to a group of travellers that they have to return a generator to a road works as it doesn’t belong to them. The travellers are smiling and wondering what it could all mean. The morning light is fresh and warm around us when we arrive at Betty and put Kelly on the bunk in the rear of the van. I sit in the front of Betty with Steppenwolf and we stare at the dash where the rubber chicken once sat.

“They can’t know,” says Steppenwolf.

I nod in agreement. "So how do we find them?"

Steppenwolf exhales. "Four needles in a giant pharmacy. I can't believe this, of all the people!"

I look out at tent city, all the lost wanderers who will leave here in a few hours and travel to anywhere like a scattered and defeated army after their last battle. No agenda, no place to be, no destination.

"Kelly said they were going to Europe," I suggest.

"No, he didn't. He said they were going across the sea. He's still tripping. He might be wrong about the girls," says Steppenwolf.

"But he said they were following Ozone. What if he's right?"

Steppenwolf nods. "It's all we have. Ok, assuming they're still here, how do we find them?"

"First," I say, "reaching for the laptop, let's see where the next gig is."

I boot up the laptop and go to the Ozone tour page.

"Shit," I say, as I read and show Steppenwolf the uploaded picture of Hector in mid dance on Thomas Winter's grave. "What's all that about? Psychological problems big time," I muse.

Steppenwolf shakes his head slowly, "Yeah, that's Hector, the man who discovered his inner child and then molested it."

"The next gig is Paris," I read from the page.

"Got your passport?" I ask.

Steppenwolf checks and nods. "We'll need fuel," he says.

"You're forgetting something," I say.

Steppenwolf frowns.

"The girls?" I remind him.

Steppenwolf smiles and points through Betty's windshield and I see Charlotte, Sarah, Julia and Asha walking through tent city. They are surrounded by a biker gang at least twenty strong.

Asha is holding the rubber chicken!

"Let's get it!" I shout.

"Are you pissed, that's the Road Rats! They'll gnaw you down to the bone."

“What’s going on?” I wonder aloud. “That’s the bike gang that chased us earlier on, yeah?”

“Yeah,” laughs Steppenwolf.

“What now?”

“We follow and we rescue,” says Steppenwolf. “Rescue comes with a price, payment, one rubber chicken.”

We watch as the Road Rats mount their bikes, the girls riding pillion on separate machines. The engines erupt like mechanical thunder in the dawn as they roar off in a convoy. I start Betty and carefully follow them across the field and onto the main road. As we pull away from the chaos of Stone Henge we drive along side the potato field, the place of ruin for so many who broke out of their world and escaped the nine to five. Among the abandoned and wrecked vehicles I swear I see Jerry Moore digging up potatoes and filling what looks like his third bag.