

FAMILY TRAIN

the *'Higher Than The Sun'* remix

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1450 words

I can't sit still any longer, I have to do something.

The reversed rolling buffet of the plasticene scenery sets my teeth on edge. The birds perched on the wires aren't even real as they disappear backwards away from me – you can see the high specularly of shame impressed into their artificial eyes by the cynical manufacturing process. The trees are flat planes that are so well textured you only feel betrayed when you inadvertently catch one edge on. The grind of the wheels on the track is a million sparking brain hammers a second igniting the lined up victims of their own ego in perfect synchrony. One after the other crushed by the hammer.

Those birds that do pass by flapping lethargic wings look so radio controlled – you could imagine the controller thumbing up then down, up then down, the up then ... until he got cramp in the hand and the bird going down out of range falling to a dull thud in a pre-fabricated cowpat in a lonely field. Tunnels briefly bring a black curtain down over your mind highlighting the gut-heavy sense of fear in you. You see the resolution of the skyline geometry flipping in and out as reserves of processing power are swapped between foreground clutter and background depth – there shouldn't be fog on a beautiful Summer day like this.

Briefly, cardboard cut-out car mechanics asses a battered old vintage Vauxhall Viva, their aimless mutterings yakkety yak like the foreign hiss of steam jetting from a boiling pipe in the depths of kinetic discharge. Eyeballs momentarily catch the light reflected off our fully rendered travelling shell. I don't mind travelling backwards, it is something that has never bothered me, makes me think of the time slip back towards the comfort of the womb.

The ghosts in this death-bound machine, you can actually feel them all around you like cat fur or belly down or ... the end is always the same. The sudden jolt of realisation followed by the inexorable forward momentum. These are the times we cherish. These are the times when Time is your friend. The only time. At these temporally liberated times, however, your bones become your greatest enemy – like you wouldn't believe until you live the ride. In the first few milliseconds of rapid deceleration your body weight gravitates to a bear-like 500 kg. The impact of the engine sending wicked bow waves up the length of the train causing one carriage out of three to shoot vertically up then twist violently to the right or left.

It always surprises one how the carriages before and after over take you, the position of your carriage reshuffled as easily as pieces of Scrabble on a rack.

Coming to a dead stop. Instantaneous switch of momentum. These are never clean crashes. Instantly, all the dead skin and rotting wood dust explode past you. Your eyes

are destroyed in the first impact, the retinas ripped away from the visual back plane, floating like torn rags in the aqueous humour. The new friend you made only moments ago; you may have shared his biscuits, or offered him you newspaper to read or nearly got her phone number, her eyes shining now filled with future lusts to expunge. This travelling friend lifts off their seat beside you and slams into the skull of the young girl opposite. Your friend's shoulders and chest slam into her horrified face and crush her backwards into her seat. Tables unhook from their housings and the double glazed safety glass windows explode. If you tilt your head slightly you can make out the separate blocks of glass moving away from each other hear them unhooking from their structural moorings like Velcro coming apart or tools spilling off a shelf.

You lose yourself in the brain carving analysis of the glittering glass cubes. You watch one as it slowly impregnates itself in an old man's eye faster than he can blink. You see the hole where the near molten cube drives a perfectly polyhedral hole in the soft white orb before heat sublimation of the surrounding tissue smudges the geometric edge leaving a sick coloured hole in the eyeball out of which pours old memories ticker-taping off the sheared retinas.

A business man's hand penetrates a mouth in mid-scream. The teeth, before they break loose of their foundation, tear off long strips of knuckle flesh and the little finger snaps right back, dislocated by a nostril.

You see all of this as if you are strapped into the most realistic 3D crash simulator of all time. Right down to the oh-so-delicate compression of your spine as it speeds towards your sternum. You can feel your lungs and heart being compressed together into a gluey mush. Your eyeballs fill with blood and your face goes strawberry pock-marked as your cheeks nose and forehead surge with your own blood.

You are not in free fall because your broken shin has constrained you table housing where your luggage jammed in tight in the deceleration confines of the tries to rip your leg off at the knee. But your leg can't come off - this is not your reality. You merely get the sensation that the stinking puke and piss swilling toilet is compressing in behind you, it's beer and carrot contents splattering high into the cramming cubicle a shower of filth. and as it breaks through the walls you can feel yourself getting showered with that filth the bitter beads that cling to your skin and leave a lasting nasal residue of sweet ammonia all over your clothes even after they switch programmes.

I have relived death after death in ultimate detail over these last few days stuck in my simulated seat. Strangers have been crushed, beheaded, broken in front of my eyes. I have seen the train reform itself after the ghosts of the shattered carriages have been hauled away and replaced with the everyday carriages of some other line. As if physicality itself had transported me into a new dimension, aboard the next disaster, waiting the spectacular in the face of the drudgery of public transport. I have read numerous local newspapers, in-train corporate magazines, left national newspapers, the odd soft core men's fashion mag, woman's weekly horoscope hopeful fodder. I have travelled many a faked landscape for what purpose? It is like a sick game, a sadistic funfare ride the mental authorities are not letting me off of.

My wife and daughter get on the train at the next station. Just like that among the general eagerness of boarding passengers. Where had they said they were going today? I must be on the Oxford to Brighton Express. This must be Oxford station. Why of all trains on the entire crumbling British Rail network would they choose to get on the Death Train. They sit just across the way from me in an empty six-seating area and go about their noisy undressing. My daughter asking for water and sweets. My wife reading kiddies stories to her from colourful books with words that don't make sense, all diction destroyed as the final passengers race onto the our compartment. The doors beep insistently and then close. Air lock ear pressure differential. My daughter ever fidgeting, ever questioning. I should go and say something, this is not the place for them. They could get off at Reading. As the train moves off, I move up from my seat to sit on the periphery of their area and smile at my daughter, like I am gonna give her a fright just turning up on their family train like this.

With an increasing dread, I realise I cannot attract their attention.

I reach over to my daughter and tickle her in her favourite spot. Nothing distracts her attention from the story. I slap my wife on the cheek. No reaction whatsoever. The train begins to accelerate out of Oxford. Frantically, I try to make a difference. Pulling the non-functioning safety cord until my forearm burned and my palm went raw. What could I do? Apart from run up the length of this train and kick the door down, cracking open the driver's skull making him let go of the dead man's handle. Exhausted, I reach the drivers' door and put my boot to it. But the door will not give. No one sees me and I can effect nothing on this Goddamn train of doom.

With utter resignation, I return to my family area to enjoy their last few moments as the northern bound express passes through a red light, heading right for us at 200 mph.

THE END