

ZOMBIE JAM

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Zombie Jam excerpt

(Note: "Incursion" and three other sections not included in this excerpt make up an original zombie short story.)

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incursion

So I asked the guy if he had any weapons and he said follow me to his tent. There was dust everywhere, not mud—250,000 bodies'-worth of raised dust. Optimists would call it sunny but I called it hot, flared temper hot, generic bovine bourgeois hot.

A lot of people at the festival were armed, the guy said. He gave his name as Morgan, but if he was moving hardware out of his tent it was probably a fake name. He was just the guy with the guns. When he said "tent," I expected pup tent. He had a double-wide all to himself, more like a huckster's booth at a fair. You could stand up inside without brushing the ceiling.

He shut the privacy flap and showed me a customized SPAS-12 auto riot shotgun. It was a gigantic motherfucker; obviously the first thing he showed every customer, and it worked insofar as it got my heart pumping faster in a purely metaphorical sense. It came out of one of a row of crates tarped with clear plastic to hold back the dust. It wasn't loaded.

DAVID J. SCHOW

Next up was a competition M-111-A with night sights and a stabilizing sling. He popped the cover and bragged about the anti-tamper system. It looked like a fat red jelly bean with a lot of ganglia. It coded to your palm print and the heat from your hand when you grabbed the pistol grip. Anyone but you tries to use the weapon, and the jelly bean explodes, sort of goo-gumming the breech into obsolescence. The gun could still be used as a club. Nobody at the festival had any bayonets that would fit.

Outside, on the main stage, some lame rockshop wonder tried to hump his way through "Purple Haze," making a mess of it. I wanted Jimi Hendrix, three decades dead, to lumber forth like some *Tales from the Crypt* comic and bite out the singer's adenoids. *S'cuse me while I kiss this guy.*

The festival was a pitifully commercial attempt to cash in, three decades late, on a communal rock 'n roll happening that had caught national attention about the time my first wife was a fetus. It was corporate manip at its most blatant, and today's headline generation ate it up like the good little consumers they had been programmed to be.

Things would not change that much, not really. All their lives they had been led, fed, lied to and controlled. Predicting their reactions was no more complicated than guessing whether a rat would just say yes to cheese, the stinkier the better.

I could still remember when live bands held delivery on the promise of excitement. The generation that followed me had not grown up in the idiom, and faced musicians as though they were watching a big playback, what Frank Zappa had called a jukebox performance. They stood or sat, as obedient as acolytes at a Nazi rally. When they made fuss or noise, that was out of propor-

ZOMBIE JAM

tion, too. None of it had anything to do with the effect of the music. All of it had to do with a venue that was more an outlet than a public meeting of performer and audience.

The next generation after that was even weirder. They were the coached audiences you saw gyrating and thrashing and applauding to anything and everything the blinking signs told them to. They had become shells for the corporate entertainment machine, lab rats for the hand-to-wallet response. They consumed as directed. They conveyor-belted themselves into the Hard Rock Cafes and House(s) of Blues and plopped, turdlike through the exits with their billfolds flensed. The music was no longer anything but a visceral cue, to which they responded. The stinkier the cheese...

(Yeah, I know what you're thinking because it was my first thought, too. I'm 45, so what the fuck do I know, anyway. You're probably right. But I'm still buying the goddamn shotgun from the guy who calls himself Morgan, fancying himself a wily New World pirate of ballistic commerce.)

I could give you *my* real name, but that doesn't matter anymore, either.