

getting sleepy and it's time to head back. Back in the car System of a Down comes on the radio and you turn it up as loud as it'll go and scream along with it. Your throat hurts from all of the smoke but tonight you think it makes your voice sound cooler than usual. The munchies hit again and at the Jack in the Box drive-thru you order a cheeseburger and a vanilla shake. By the time you get back to the room, Hale is asleep so you strip down to your boxers and crawl into your bed without washing up. You dream about fire.

8

Around eleven, you wake up and the room is empty. Hale has left the window by his bed cracked open slightly and it's fucking freezing in here. For some twisted reason you are angry at the window for being open. You know it sounds completely stupid but you are. The goddamned window is pissing you off and you spy a sneaker under your bed and want to throw it at the window, to hit it and let it know how angry you are with it. With your luck you'd end up breaking the damn thing and Lord knows, as far as shit goes, you have a full plate already.

You look at your watch and are surprised at how late you've slept. Once again, you are missing your Friday, ten a.m. Lit class but it's okay because you still haven't read more than the first page of the piece of shit Joyce book that you were supposed to have finished by today anyway. You'll have to start going back to class soon though but the hell with it, you'll deal with that after the weekend and that's what Cliff's Notes are for anyway. Procrastination—the American way, goddammit. You start thinking about Bo and the fire and the faceless people you burned up and your head begins to throb. The last thing you need at this moment is a dose of reality ruining a reasonably good morning. You try to convince yourself you don't really care.

The guys aren't going to be coming by for about another hour so you toss some stuff in your gym bag and head out to do your laps. Your

throat feels like an old ashtray no one ever empties so you grab a Coke out of the vending machine. The carbonation tastes like burning rust in your throat but your body soaks up the sugar and the caffeine like a sponge. Your energy gauge gurgles up a couple notches and you think to yourself on the walk over how a Snickers would have gone down pretty smoothly too.

Right away, you know you probably won't be able to make your usual ten trips around the track. Your legs feel stiff and the knee you used to hold Bo up starts to ache after the third lap. Man, that dead jackass was probably going to mess up your chances of making the team again and you'd end the season riding pine, in the bleachers. You had stretched before running as always but probably not enough since you were in a hurry. The pain gets worse so you quit after an uninspired effort at a fifth lap. No doubt

about it, the pot is taking it's toll on you already. This is so not good. In your present condition, you'd need to get yourself high on adrenalin before every game to be in shape to play. You joke with yourself that you don't think there are enough people around here you'd really want to kill to be able to pull that off.

Disgusted with your pathetic self, you quit for the day and head for the showers. The hot water feels good on your stiff muscles and you stand there for a long time letting the needles of spray hit you in the face. The tenseness you feel is sapping your strength on top of everything else. The semester just started and you already need a break again. It isn't too late to get it all back in sync though. At least not yet, you hope.

Your mood picks up a little when you get a good look at your hair in the mirror. Damn if Manny hadn't done a pretty decent job. Yeah it's much shorter than you are used to but you guess

she had to do that to even it all out after your crappy hack job. You are digging it. It looks less Texas and way more California. You think if you bleach it out and put a guitar in your hands you'd look totally MTV. You do a Pete Townshend air-guitar windmill in the mirror and shoot yourself a Dan hand sign. Maybe you'll scrape up a few extra bucks and get some peroxide and a pair of wrap around shades after lunch. Or a tattoo? You are feeling pretty badass, why the hell not? Something like a lightning bolt or a skull or maybe a row of five little stick figures of people like the way fighter pilots mark their kills on the sides of their airplanes. How about a dog playing poker? Okay, it's going to take some thought. The only thing worse than a shitty tattoo? Two shitty tattoos.

Back at the room Hale is reading the paper

which would normally seem kind of strange. As long as you've known him he's never seemed to take much of an interest in current events unless it happened to be a Warped Tour or a big pot bust. It's obvious what he's looking for though. When you are a current event, you guess it's only natural to take an interest.

As you had feared, the story is plastered all over the front page. The finding of a new body and a particularly slow news day probably kept it from getting buried ten pages back. If there was one day that you needed a Tsunami or a Rodney King beating in your life it was yesterday and the big G. has let you down.

There is a picture of the burnt out shell of the building and with the exception of soot and smoke trails from the windows and a mostly caved in roof, to tell you the truth, the damn thing looks nearly the same as you left it. The story says the flames gutted the old building

within minutes.

There isn't much more in there you don't already know from last night's news. Five bodies, still unidentified, and only one, so far, found on the first floor. No suspects but police are indeed talking to eyewitnesses of the blaze. Nothing about four dope-smoking college jerks in a white pickup truck. Not so far.

You look through the college paper and, not surprisingly, there isn't anything on Major Dick's disappearance. Why would there be? He wouldn't be officially gone for forty-eight hours until today and anyway, this was California. Here you almost come to expect someone is going to flake on you and not show up for a date or a class or a meeting or whatever. But this isn't a surfer dude or valley chick, this is a Marine and most of them are just obedient machines programmed to be on time. Hell, most of them wouldn't even know which end to shit

out of if a superior didn't tell them. They are too mindless to flake. Bo's being AWOL is going to get noticed soon enough if not already. Even if they never I.D.'d Bo's barbecued body from the fire, someone may get around to putting two and two together and come up with four. Four skunk smoking jerks in a white pickup truck that is.

Nikko and Fuckin' Dan show up separately about five minutes later. You turn on the set to catch the news at noon and there is nothing new to report. At least it has been replaced as the top story by yet another high-speed police chase on the 405. You feel a little better about that. L.A. is the kind of place where anything at all could happen at any minute and you are praying someone will go out and do something much more terrible than you just to take attention away from the damn fire.

Dan skims the article in the Times and

hands it to Nikko but he shrugs it off since he's already seen it. You are all on the same page as to what's happening here and you are guessing you are just going to just sit and wait until this whole thing just blows over.

Boy, are you wrong as wrong could be on that one.

“The paper says that the fuckin’ police have eyewitnesses to the blaze,” Dan says, mostly to you.

“Eyewitnesses to the blaze, which probably means people who saw the building on fire. Not necessarily anyone who saw anything beforehand though,” replies Nikko.

“Yeah, but we really don’t know that for sure,” Hale adds. It’s a good point. You have absolutely no idea what anybody saw or when they saw it. The unspoken agreement in the room confirms you are all thinking the same thing. Somewhere on the other side of town,

some crackhead or some kid may have seen the truck, one of your faces or the whole damn thing. Cop cars could be on the way here right now for all you know. Aw, Christ, if you hadn't burned up all those other people you'd probably believe this was actually all over.

You speak up. "Yeah, but what about the whole 'only one body found on the first floor' thing? Correct me if I'm wrong but I distinctly remember seeing two bodies."

"Yeah," blurts Dan. "That's fucked up."

You direct all of your questions to Nikko. It's almost like it is his press conference. You guess since it was his bomb, he'd have all of the answers.

"I was thinking about that too," he says. He speaks matter-of-factly, in a way that reminds you of Robbie the Robot from *Lost In Space*. "The news last night said the police found 'the remains' of what they thought was another

victim on the first floor. That bathroom was ground zero of what should have been an incredibly hot fireball. Bo and that junkie should have completely vaporized. Your guess is that they found no more of either of them to fill a lunchbox with. They just think it's one person. They'd have better luck trying to I.D. a dog turd."

You'll be damned, the little firebug did have all the answers. And if not, you'd just as soon believe the ones he had already.

"What if they aren't completely vaporized? What if they find teeth?" asks Hale. "Can't they I.D. someone by dental records if they have an idea of who that person was."

Hah, you knew it. He was watching "CSI".

"Yeah, what about the fuckin' dental records?" Dan chimes in.

"The fireball at the source is going heat the pulp up in a tooth to where it'd just pop like a

chestnut.”

“Are you sure?” you ask.

Nikko doesn't have the answer to that one. At least not the one you want to hear.

“That's why I brought this,” says Nikko. He reaches into his knapsack, the same one from two nights ago and pulls it out. Your heart misfires like a bad engine when you see what it is. It is almost as bad as if he had pulled Major Dick out of his bag.

There in his hand is another detonator just like the one from two nights ago.

What the hell have we started? you think to yourself.

This is one sequel to a bomb that you don't want to see go into production but it is too late. Lights, camera, action. You start to feel as if someone has just stopped payment on your reality check.

“Whoa baby!” Hale blurts excitedly. His

eyes light up and he takes it from Nikko's hands. You knew it, these guys were loving the big game.

You look at the detonator and don't understand what it's doing here.

"Why?" you ask.

"Because—" he starts to answer but Hale interrupts him.

"Because now we've killed enough people that the police aren't going to be satisfied to let this case go unsolved."

"Right," Nikko says, agreeing with Hale. "They're going to follow any lead they find and if they happen to tie in the sudden disappearance of a college student to the same time they may come sniffing around here."

"We have an alibi though," you say. "The fire alarm. Everybody in Stonehouse saw us."

"Yeah, but we don't really know exactly when the bomb went off," Nikko tries to explain.

“My best guess is the beans took two hours to set off the fuse, give or take twenty minutes or so. Even though we were all seen here at four in the morning, the alibi’s about as airtight as a screen door.”

“Fucking fuck!” Dan exclaims.

“We’ve got to throw the cops a bone that they’ll follow in the wrong direction. By the time they figure it to be a dead end, school will be over.”

It makes sense. If the cops go off thinking it was some bunch of loonies that did it, they might investigate that angle for months and end up chasing their tails like a pack of monkeys. Better yet, they’d toss it to the FBI and it would get bogged down for even longer. You could stay clear long enough to graduate and be out of here entirely. Any Bo trail would be pretty cold by then and they’d have a pretty hard time linking anybody to anything.

The problem was simple. The first bomb was supposed to get rid of Bo's body or at the very least make it look like he had gotten himself killed trying to get his junior arsonists merit badge. Unfortunately, no one foresaw you'd end up killing a bunch of other people who were unlucky enough to be crashing for the night at the Hellfire Hilton. The worst part was that you couldn't be sure nobody had seen you. You set this thing in motion and now you are going to have to see it through. There was just no way that after all of this shit you were going to jail. Not for one death and certainly not for five. For all you knew, the other bodies could have been more dead junkies. You weren't going to ruin your life because they were too fucking stoned to get off of the tracks before the train came through.

“So now what you're saying is that we have to set off another bomb,” you say.

“No, not exactly,” says Nikko. “I’m not too terribly keen on killing more people.”

“Yeah, I think we reached our quota for this lifetime,” Hale adds.

“Then what?” Dan asks.

“We set up the detonator to go off and then call it in as a bomb threat before it goes off,” explains Nikko.

“Cool,” Hale says. “ I get it. The cops show up, disarm it easily and no one gets hurt.”

“The caller takes responsibility for the first bomb too, right?” you ask.

Hale puts his fist up to his face like he’s making a phone call and pinches his nose with his other hand. “Excuse me officer, do you have Prince Machiavelli in a can?”

Nikko keeps talking.

“Right, and when they actually find a bomb they’ll be inclined to believe that the whole thing is the sick and twisted work of someone or

someones calling themselves The Doomsday Club,” Nikko says. “Bada-bing, bada-bang and Bob’s your uncle.”

“Wow,” you say in utter disbelief. A bomb scare. The idea couldn’t be any more stupid than throwing a sheet over Bo and carrying him out on your shoulder. This whole thing is about as serious as a cupcake.

“Maybe I’m a fuckin’ dope but why do we have to use a real bomb then? Why not just call in a fake bomb?” asks Dan.

“Because,” Hale answers. “They need to find a device like the one that could have torched that slum building. Then they’ll think the lead was real and off they’ll go down the garden path and away from us.”

You are impressed. Your situation has continually gotten worse and somehow you’ve managed to keep from getting bitten in the ass by staying one step ahead in the little game you

have devised for yourselves.

“Maybe I’m fuckin’ crazy but I don’t mind the bomb so much as I mind going back into that neighborhood,” Dan says.

“I agree,” says Hale. “We have to hit another type of target. The hood is too suspect now anyway.”

You can think of a bunch of places that could use a good blowing up. Man, you’d be bound to get a writing cramp that list would be so damn long. Problem is, most of these places were on campus which would be like inviting the cops to crawl up your asses with a microscope.

You think if you were a cop and something blew up on your beat, the first place that you’d go to would be the nearest college. It is the way obvious choice in your book. Cops are such dopes though. Give them half a chance and they’ll want the excitement of busting the big

one that gets their faces splashed all over the front page of every fish wrap in the state. Get them jazzed that it's terrorists and they'll make it be a bunch of terrorists regardless.

The next target has to be big. The kind of big where the cops who find the bomb get treated like heroes. Dinner at the mayor's house, key to the city, ticker tape parade, guest shots on *Good Morning America* and *Leno*. The kind of big where it looks like they saved the lives of a whole shitload of people.

"A bank," you say.

"No, too difficult and they have security cameras," Hale shoots back.

"Security cameras in department stores too," Nikko says. "So that's out."

"And malls," you add.

"Yeah, but I fuckin' hate malls," Dan says.

"A mall," says Nikko, rubbing his chin. "That would almost be like a public service."

“A restaurant,” Dan says. “One of those fuckin’ chi-chi places on Melrose or Rodeo.”

“Oooh...” You can tell Hale likes the idea by the way this comes out of his mouth like he was admiring a big diamond or a pierced nipple. To him, a yuppie target would be like striking back at his own folks. You can see him picturing his dad sitting down with a big greasy mouthful of veal picata when the fireball hits. He is chuckling.

“Yeah, we could do that,” Nikko says pensively. “Thing is, we need is a source of water in a closed and undisturbed room to keep the acetylene gas in. The smaller the better, that’s why bathrooms work so nicely.”

“It has to be exact even though we’re not going to set off the bomb?” you ask.

“Yup.” Nikko sounds kind of annoyed as if you should already know the answer.

It is a stupid question. The whole thing has

to look as right as rain. If it doesn't appear to be a totally righteous setup the cops would smell a phony a mile away. You have to play this one exactly as if you are doing it for real. That, you are afraid, is the real danger. Knowing you don't have to really set off the bomb makes it more likely you'll end up getting yourselves caught because you were sloppy.

After this stunt, you are out and back to your drab and silly little lives. Although it is exciting being an ersatz terrorist. You are pretty sure that what you really need is a semester of worrying about the inside fastball, getting yourself laid and not having to look over your shoulder every ten minutes. This whole mess is real close to being over and you have to see it out until the last hand is dealt. If you blow it now, you'll all go to jail and you are perfectly happy with keeping your asshole the same size it already is, thank you very much.

“A restaurant may be too hard to rig.” Nikko shakes his head. “How do you keep people out of the bathroom if the place is open for business?”

“I got it,” Dan answers. “Go in there and sling some chocolate pudding all over the walls, then go tell the manager and they’ll shut the can for the rest of the night.”

“Ladies and Gents,” says Hale. “The long lost child of Mr. Magoo.” He starts clapping.

“Fuck you very much,” responds Dan.

Picking on Dan once you got him going is a favorite pastime in this room. You have something you always love saying to him.

“Speed kills, Dan.”

“Fuck you too, Scott.”

You are going to suggest you all need a toke to jump start the inner terrorist in all of you. Your throat still feels like shit from being the human pot chimney all day yesterday though.

You'll never be able to sit there and watch them smoke without you though.

"Okay, then how about an out of order sign?" Dan says.

"Huh?" asks Nikko.

"Out of order sign," Dan repeats. "Men's room out of order, kindly go fuck yourself."

You look at each other. He has something. It isn't the complete answer but you are getting closer. All those years in school, learning to read, learning to add and learning to do, are marrying everything you've been taught in the movies by the Cages, the Diesels, the Connerys. Trying to plan a real terrorist attack was proving extremely difficult. It made all of the Joyce, the Fluid Dynamics, the fastballs seem about as complex as the recipe for an icecube.

This is all doing something to you but you're not sure what. You know you have somehow changed from the Scott Lorton who wore this

skin just a few days ago. The boy has been shed off. It would be hard to say there is now a man in its place but instead maybe an older boy, a tougher boy. A boy now ready to someday become a man. But not yet. It is the boy in you, like all boys, who enjoys thinking of the excitement of the rush.

You suppose that's when you know you've grown up. When the rush stops being important and instead you care more about just keeping what little you've managed to accumulate, the boy in you has flown the coop. The day that comes is the day that part of you dies. Congratulations bud, you've hung up your hunting horn and become a nester.

Of the four of you, you are hands-down the biggest wuss of the whole group. There's no way you could have kept out of this kind of trouble yourself. You'd probably never be in this kind of trouble yourself but that's the point. Your life,

by your own design, is so middle of the road, so bland. Vanilla ice cream without hot fudge. You've always seeked out the bad influences to follow because it kept things interesting. College was going to be the last big party because that's what your parents had drilled into your head. This is your last semester. This is last call. A year from right now you'll be stuck in the first of forty years of nine to five, client meetings and morning traffic.

The thing is, there's still a whole lot of dumbass kid in you. It's the part deep down that cares more about where the next party is than where your future is. The part of you that is willing to wager your life against the hollow promise of the rush. The part of you that is unable to hold onto the best thing to ever fall into your life. The dumbass kid still in you wants badly to be part of this now more than ever, because pretty soon it will be too late to be

anything other than you, and that is scarier than anything else you can imagine.

When you were younger, you moved around a lot and didn't really get the chance to make the kind of friends a kid needs growing up. There wasn't anybody that you'd known longer than high school that you still kept in touch with and every holiday season there seemed to be less names on your Christmas card list than the year before. Hale, Nikko and Dan were undoubtedly the best friends you've ever had in your life but it took you until now to figure that one out. Sticking together through this whole thing just went to show you how close you had become. Friends help you move, real friends help you move bodies.

The idea is slick alright but there are way more variables involved here that needed filling in. You'll have to pull this off in the light of day and

doing that without drawing witnesses is the real sticky trick. There is no longer any doubt as far as you are concerned—you have a real sick, twisted head full of works. You feel like there isn't any kind of problem here you can't come up with an answer for. There isn't a time that you can remember that you've gotten this excited about anything.

It starts to seep into your head that school is utter bullshit. They give you this rosy-ass picture of life and sucker you into believing that all the answers can be found in books somewhere. That's a major league load of grade-A, hot, steamy crap. Now you know that most of the time in life you're going to have to go out and find all the answers yourself and the world will be more than happy to just bone you in the ass if you don't. The room has become a cacophony of madness, with all of your sick and genocidal musterings romping in your minds

like a psycho-savage ballet. There is no blueprint for the insanity you've created so you close your eyes in the smoky room and improvise.

“We need a target first. We can't make an effective plan without a target,” says Hale. He is looking at his watch and you can tell what he's thinking. All of this black-ops stuff makes a man hungry.

You break for lunch. On the way to the dining hall you bump into some guys you know from baseball and you start talking shop with them. All of the bomb talk has stirred a strange primal feeling inside of your head and you need to get yourself grounded again by thinking baseball again. They talk about a scout who came by practice the other day.

These guys are saps, you think to yourself. One of them plays like he has a hole in his glove. Together, they had a better chance of riding

pine than going pro. Some fucking guys are so unrealistic about their chances in life. Just because you are the best whoozit in your small pond back home doesn't make you shit in the real world. You are starting to believe that balls and brains will get you through life a lot better than a handful of talent.

You get to the cafeteria and the line is a bit longer than you thought it would be. Usually you'd bitch about something like this but today it seems too trivial to matter. Out of the corner of your eye you see two of Jackie's crummy friends gorging themselves on ice cream from the sundae bar. You are hoping they don't notice you but it's too late. They keep looking over, whispering to each other. It is completely ridiculous and entirely beyond getting on your nerves. They have to be two of the phoniest bitches you could ever meet. The kind of skanks who'd probably trample each other trying to get

the other's boyfriend. You could never stand either of them anyway. It's people like that who make you think the gene pool could benefit from healthy dose of chlorine. You start to wonder if you could bean both of their empty skulls with a dinner plate from here.

Wolves always travel in packs since they're too afraid to go out alone so you are almost certain that Jackie is around here somewhere. At the same time, you want to see her but you are deathly afraid that you won't know what to say to her. It's a big school but you run in too many of the same circles to keep avoiding each other. Take this dining hall for example. It's the closest to Stonehouse and to Park Hill, her dorm building, and all of your collective friends eat here. You'll be damned though if you were going to start eating on the other side of campus and run like a dog with your tail between your legs. It's not like she hasn't embarrassed you enough

already, so in a sick way, it's more fun to see them squirm not knowing what to say to you. Fuck 'em all, you know who your friends are.

You are so distracted by your thoughts that you don't even notice your teammates have been griping to one of the servers about the lack of meat on today's lunch menu.

"Hey, what gives?" Old hole-in-his-glove is yelling. "I didn't fight my way to the top of the food chain to become a vegetarian."

"Yeah," says the other teammate. "Any chicken in that kitchen?"

It never ceases to amaze you where inspiration comes from. Sir Isaac Newton was sleeping for God's sake when he created his theory of gravity. If that apple hadn't fallen on his head we'd probably walk around believing that the earth just sucks, which is truly an arguable point as far as you are concerned.

Your honor, just look at me, you think. I

rest my case.

As it turns out, just by listening to these two idiots piss and moan about the menu, the absolute perfect target comes to you in a flash.