



Taunton Racecourse is Decadent and Depraved

1.

Taunton. A sleepy town host to around 55 thousand individuals; church-going retired folk who's height of excitement is a wander in the countryside and tea and scones at Bumbles Coffee Lounge. I sat in the corner of Bumbles scanning the creased faces trying to piece together how this place came to the misfortune of hosting a 72-hour fuck-fest on its prize racecourse. Did they have any idea that in a matter of days this town would be taken over by hordes of unhinged, drug-addled dope-fiends?

How would the locals welcome their morning dog-walks being interrupted by a cage full of stumbling ketamine freaks? Smiling inanely and timidly pawing at the fences while dribbling over their filthy, hippie clothes. They would assume this was some kind of brewing zombie apocalypse. That this docile town was birth to a neurological flesh-eating virus? No, this couldn't get out in the open; pen the buggers in. Rule number one, protect the straights. Or the fuckers would gas the field right where we stood.

I arrived with the crew on the Monday and already felt preying eyes. The ground still stank of the decadence and depravity from equestrian parties and trouble hung heavily in the air. A scream raged overhead as military jet-fighters passed over the racecourse. I broke out. Too soon. We hadn't even done anything yet and they were already twitching at the fingers.

No time for that. There was much work to be done, but not before slugs of whisky and marijuana pipes. Nothing like stoking the paranoia before a few days of daunting manual labour in the afternoon heat.

For several days we fortified the site and prepared to engage in diplomatic war with the council over common sense. We were raising the barracks for a multi-coloured army and the screws were getting hot under their collars. Daily there were visits from the Council and last-minute remissions to the original plan, which had already been hammered out and paid for months ago. But the bastards wanted us to know exactly who was in charge.

"So, this marquee you've got for the main stage, it's going here right? Well I'm afraid you're going to have to move it 3 feet to the left, it's blocking fire lines. Violation of Health and Safety. And is this a fire pit? Well I'm sorry but this is going to need to be fenced off and you'll need a sign declaring it's a fire pit and it needs to be supervised constantly by a nominated person wearing a high-vis jacket. All your staff are appropriately fire safety trained I assume?"

"Well of course officer, we'll get that marquee moved right away, and yes all of our marshals are fire trained to industry standards. The fire pit will be safe as burning houses" The officer leered over his glasses before readdressing his clipboard.

"Oh and one more thing" he squinted. "You have to turn the music off for the Queen's Jubilee on Sunday. Make sure the music is off between 6 and 8pm so we can ring the church bells." The Council Officer grunted, tapped his clipboard and marched off to scrutinise the rest of the site.

Luckily the council couldn't find enough evidence to shut us down. Disappointed, the screws left us with the final green light for the festival. We had won this round. But it was late Thursday and there was a partially naked festival to dress before midday on Friday.

2.

Friday. 12 noon. Kick off. The pigpen was finally flung open and all the little piggies were set free to plant snout into powder. The punters already had a taste of precedent as they corralled through the gates and had their 'excess' amounts of alcohol confiscated. One case of beer, or one bottle of wine or spirits was the limit. This was partly a ploy to drive more revenue to the bar but had already upset some of the punters who took the warning on the website as lip-service to the Council. The confiscated booze would then be fed back to the bar for sale-for-profit back to the punters, much a like an in-house dealer, will sell you back your drugs after you get fleeced at the door.

The pen had only been open a few hours and there was a growing stench of revolt. A few crooked stiff's would look the other way for a bribe, especially if you talked in their currency; cocaine or amphetamine. Others simply loved the power trip as they watched the hippie's crumble and wilt as they told them their stash was most definitely illegal and they would be detained until the police arrived to deal with them. No second chances, no get-out-of-jail-free card.

The masses that made it through the gates wandered into a festival still putting its face on. A lacklustre attitude amongst the higher organisation trickled down through the ranks. A crowd had started gathering by the silent main stage and amongst the watch-glaring, foot-tapping, gawkers, a few heads were rallying around the background trying to get her to sing.

By mid-afternoon the music started and you could feel the site exhale. From here on in you could be fooled that there was really a festival happening. That this wasn't some elaborate rouse to get a load of hippies into a field for chemical experimentation. Most of them had now shrugged off the airport security and had started to get groovy.

Our crew had even started to relax. It had been relentless and most of us were exhausted. The thought of getting bent on psychedelic drugs with an already fatigued mind seemed reckless, but when a stunning Italian girl wearing little other than 'caution' barrier tape wandered into our campsite, all reasonable thought stepped to one side.

"Elooo trippah's! I 'ave some really tasty Offman's for sale". She was writhing to the faint bassline in the distance, her face beaming in the telling Cheshire way that only a healthy dose of LSD can give you.

It was exuding from every pore in her being and I was getting high just standing next to her. The sight was too much. Hypnotised, we all plunged our hands into our pockets and gathered round.

Time to get knee deep in this thing. We had clocked-off for the weekend and could disappear amongst the other punters until we had to fix up Monday morning. Three days. By the end of this they would have to spatula us off the side of the marquee.

No sooner had I tasted that damn tab, Ham and Eggs, the festival coordinators, snuck up on black BMX bikes.

"Hey boys, glad I found you." Ham's Formica smile retracted, revealing more gold than teeth. A move that could crack even the most hardened, poker face. "You guys need to put the bins out, now! Pipe's at the front gate with the trailer, go meet him there". He snorted as they both turned tail, cawing sadistically into the distance.

We chewed the cud blankly at each other. By now it was too late to go back. The acid had already dissolved and it would only be a matter of time before the background melted and the all the defining lines became blurred. Josh straightened up.

"Come on guys, let's get this job done I'm sure we can have it finished before we all turn into party casualties. We can do all this all in under say, 30 minutes, right?"

30 minutes. It was going to be tough.

3.

We scrambled to the top of the field where The Pipe's truck was parked. Plumes of smoke and Aretha Franklin bellowed out of steamed up windows. Only way we knew he was actually in the vehicle was the hand waving a beer bottle outside the driver's side.

"Alright boys! You come up here to help me put out some bins ave ya?" The Pipe's eyes were candy-floss, no doubt from hot-boxing his truck all morning. I grabbed The Pipe by his protruding arm and leaned my panic-stricken face towards the fog.

"Damnit Pipe, we've all just dropped a serious amount of acid and now we've been asked to haul fucking bins around! In about twenty-five minutes this crew will be about as useful to you as laminated tea bags!" The Pipe hacked a chuckle, then tapped his pipe ash on the side of the driver's door.

"Alright boys, lets fucking do this shit!"

He started his truck, slammed his hands on the steering wheel and we jumped in the trailer, Aretha still wailing full blast. I couldn't escape the swell of anxiety in the pit of my stomach as I felt the first tingling waves of the acid shaking hands with my spinal cord.

We touched down and gingerly stepped off the truck. I told The Pipe that we were done until Monday. Collectively our pupils were a nebula of burrowing black holes and we needed to escape to the relative anonymity of the dance floor. We were sitting ducks in open season and at any point with the crack of a gunshot, we could be called back into the firing line.

We pelted towards the main stage and I began to notice the music wasn't getting any louder the closer we got. I put this down to some kind of psychedelic trickery, but when I saw groups of disgruntled punters; the same foot-tapping individuals from earlier, arms folded, shaking their heads, I wasn't so sure.

It was as loud as your grandma's living room and no one was dancing.

What kind of mean-spirited bastard would do this to us when we're balls deep into an acid trip? We were stood on the edge of a dark mass snarling and writhing in agitation. These animals were wildly snorting chemicals and howling at the tepid entertainment. How long would it be until this mob turned nasty? Until the leash broke and it was let loose?

I started to get the fear. I turned to the crew, it wasn't safe. We would have to find solitude somewhere else. Hide until this madness was over. Let the bastards duke it out themselves and come back when this horrid thing was settled. No place for any kind of psychedelic on this dance floor.

We retreated to the chillout stage. It wasn't any louder but at least we could blend in among the straights, away from the savage orgy at the main stage. It was time to sit and stare at the horizon for a few hours and get a fucking grip. Josh and Seth had gone to the cafe for medicinal rounds of calming chai tea, but along the way they were accosted by a local powder trader.

Ketamine is a fiendish drug. It has the ability to turn the most capable person into a dribbling mess, reducing them to a hybrid between a victim of severe brain-damage and a two-year old child. Consuming it is a fine line between being slightly anaesthetised and rendered completely useless; a stumbling, babbling, incoherent wreck. It also has the added bonus of completely messing with any psychedelics that may already be in your bloodstream. One line of the stuff whilst on LSD can drive your mind into a terrible, dank, confused, pit, which you only emerge from when you come down. Not that we knew any of that at the time of course.

Last thing I remember was being sat in a circle with the crew, calmly, responsibly, drinking chai tea. Then Josh pulled the devil's wrap from his pocket. The next hours were lost. When I came to, I was back in the centre of the main stage, gripping onto one of the tent poles for dear life. As my eyes adjusted, I surveyed the room; the floor had cleared and there was this strange serenity.

I propped myself up, and with the last of my dignity, tried to exit in a straight line. I got a few knowing smiles as I wobbled towards the back of the main stage. This wretched thing was still inside me and since I checked out, whoever checked in after me had taken up position of Court Jester. I stepped outside, it was night. How long had I been away for?

As I wandered back to the campsite to regroup, serenity turned to eerie quiet, there was no music playing. Outside the chillout tent a security guard was debating with a group of teenagers. He was fumbling at his radio as he tried to answer the relentless questioning.

“The flyer said it would be twenty-four hour music, look at it!” Stabbing his finger at the colourful piece of paper.

“The festival licensing requires the music to be off between 4am and 9am, there’s nothing I can do about it mate”.

“I paid a hundred pound for this ticket. This is bullshit! And what about the sound level? I could be listening to music louder at home! What am I paying money for to be at a fucking festival?” The guard was backing off slightly, still clutching at his radio.

“Look mate.” His eyes narrowed as he planted his feet. “If you’ve got a problem with it, tomorrow when the production office is open, go and have a word with them, alright?”

The guy shrugged his shoulders and left, muttering under his breath. The guard immediately radioed in to the other grunts, probably to make sure they give him some shit later on in the festival; raiding his tent a few times would do it. Watching him squirm as they violently shook him down demanding his stash. These sick fuckers would love any opportunity to mace one of these young punks.

4.

I crawled into my tent and tried to rest. After a while of staring at the geometric patterns fluttering behind my eyelids I decided to reach for the blue’s I kept aside for emergencies. I popped two and lay back, wondering.

Blissful sleep took me and I fell into an unconscious well. After countless hours something started to tap gently on my consciousness. It was voices and the distinct waft of bacon. I dragged myself together and fell out of my tent, still fazed. It was the crew. They were fresh-faced and colourful, cooking breakfast on a small, open fire inside a Calor gas canister.

“Wow, what happened to you? Josh said. “We all thought you’d got chucked out or something.” Josh had luminous war paint on both cheeks and everyone else was sporting felt-tipped, curly moustaches.

“I could ask you swine’s the same question! Last thing I remember was burying my snout in that damn wrap and the next thing I know I’m blind, holding up the main stage”.

“Yeah I think everyone kinda checked-out for a while. But hey, we haven’t seen you since Friday! Where the hell you been man?” I drifted across their bemused faces.

“What do you mean Friday, what day is it?”

Turns out I had missed Saturday, thanks to the coma-inducing pills. It was now Jubilee day and most of the punters had shown their vitriolic support with relentless amounts of veteran's bunting and haunting masks of Elizabeth II, with Rowntree's Polo's glued to her nostrils. The whole festival had turned into a patriotic nightmare. It was impossible to move anywhere without Lizzie's grin in your face telling you to have a 'good Jubilee!'

Stone, dead eyes, Fear and Loathing all over the racecourse. Something had changed while I was away. These free-loving hippies had turned nasty and everywhere I looked I saw hissing malice. The ongoing fight between festival liberties and the oppressive grip of the council had caused tension on the ground and the complaints department had barricaded its doors. The only way to express yourself now was on the festival itself, and they were going to take this beast apart, bolt by bolt.

Then I remembered the bells.

A cold washed over me as my eyes shifted to the mousetrap that was the racecourse. They had engineered our fate and we walked blindly in. It explains the military presence. Pass over and glass the remains if we couldn't do it ourselves. Blame the whole incident on a faulty trigger for the fighter's missile deployment system; a routine exercise that ended in a tragic, technical error, no blame.

The music stopped and silence exploded. In the wake, the faint chime of our demise mingled amongst the growling rumblings from disgruntled punters. At first there were sounds of confusion, then anger as people began grouping together to exchange their disdain for the weekend's injustices.

In the deafening confusion someone began chanting 'bring it down, bring it down!' Fifty or so hippies charged towards the Heras fencing and began shaking it, drooling over themselves in a savage frenzy. A few of the security had tried to step in but had backed off to radio in for more help.

In amongst the flurry of chaos, something emerged that wasn't shouting. It was music, it was, fucking Love Shack! Jesus fucking Christ! I turned around and haring towards us was The Pipes's truck. He had converted his trailer into a mobile disco, complete with lights, mini-bar and sexy barmaid.

We all turned like Meer cats as the truck pulled into the crowd. I could see The Pipe's grinning face as he squirmed in his seat from excitement.

People stopped and began cheering and laughing. Every now and then the DJ would turn the music down and shout 'cans of Red Bull a pound' and people cheered harder. People peeled off from the mob and jumped on the back of the trailer. Before long everyone had dropped their pitch-forks and joined the party. The riot was over and people danced around to 80's pop classics like nothing had ever happened. The Pipe jumped out the van and came rushing over, excited like a school-girl.

“Wha’dya think?” He was beaming. They were playing all the tunes Pipe was blaring on the radio days beforehand. “We had this idea a few days ago, I’m so glad we could actually make this happen. It’s no fun when there’s no music about, so we thought we’d do something about it.”

“Good God man! You may have just saved this festival”. I threw my arms around him and kissed the bastard. Anxiety started to drain but before I could draw a breath, The Pipe saw something that wiped his smile. Out of the crowd of sated punters came Ham and Eggs, riddled with confusion and disgrace.

“We’ve just had a noise complaint from the council!” The knot in my gut tightened. “It’s quite funny actually. This woman complained, but she said ‘I’m not sure it’s you guys, it doesn’t sound like ‘your’ kind of music’. I guess she was wrong though, wasn’t she lads?”

We were fucked. The Council had done us on all fronts and we would end up tearing ourselves apart regardless of our efforts. Eggs was silent for a moment while he glanced over the blissful crowd that had gathered around the trailer. He snorted, and then surprisingly, cracked a small, awkward, smile.

“Well, I guess if the council don’t know it’s us, then the council can’t shut us down.” He spat and turned to ride away. “Just make sure that thing goes off as soon as the council get on site. Remember we’re not licensed for this shit and it’s the last thing we need right now.”

The knot slackened. The fucking prick was magnanimous. We had actually won. Civil war was averted and if the military were going to lay waste to the site, then dammit we would go down smiling. We had won the Freak Power vote on the ground and it had gained enough momentum to turn the tide. I leaped on the back of the trailer, defiantly pumping my fist in the air to beautiful Aretha just in time to hear the familiar, harrowing scream of fighter jets passing overhead.