

Portus Landis: new paradise

By

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Sat in Commercial Road, Portsmouth precinct, on a cold, grey  
day in March 2016

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EXT/COMMERCIAL ROAD PRECINCT/DAY

The set is empty apart from a bench and a wooden. At the back of the stage is a large screen showing the image of a busy shopping precinct on a cold, grey day.

A NARRATOR is sat on the bench and slightly behind, to one side, a PREACHER is stood on the box, clutching a small dark book.

PREACHER Darkness is coming. The hordes of the unnamed one gather like clouds before a storm, their minds as black as their hearts, full of wrong doing. They will blot out heaven's light and banish this world to darkness, unless you choose to repent!(Pause)God sent His only son into the pit to do battle with the beast. Not by force of arms, but with forgiveness and love. Jesus rose up out of that filthy hole to spread the word of God and shower light upon His innocent flock!

NARRATOR The rough, the unready. Broken and uncared for...

PREACHER But none shall be forgotten when the cold of night descends. None shall be abandoned on that stony path that scratches and tears at the human spirit...

NARRATOR ...like car crash victims limping away from the wreckage. Bruised, bloody and torn. Their bodies ripped open, their minds fragmented like the splintered like shards of a shattered windscreen, littered across the highway...

PREACHER ...Only those who choose the path of chaos, those who align themselves with the devil shall not be welcome into His house...

NARRATOR ...Stripped of anything that's salvageable, then abandoned like the carcass of a sheep...

NARRATOR ...They make seek refuge with the dark one but his powers  
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are on the wane and even these unfortunate souls will not be forsaken. For, in His mercy, He wishes to shepherd all his lambs towards the safety of His pasture. There, will they be kept safe from the teeth of ravaging beasts that roam unfettered...

NARRATOR ...Whatever's left will carry on as best it can, with the rest of the stuff that society empties of any value before turning its back.(Pause). Babes being pushed in prams across ancestral tracks that they'll follow in years to come. Paving slabs worn smooth by families marching to shops, the market place and fast food outlets. Embraced by grey marauding skies knelt against kerb stones, anointing each successive generation as they pass and paying homage to their fidelity.

Somewhere at the back of these shops, I grew up. These streets, were the arteries that carried me as a child to my youth. Now, they are rivers run dry, their onrushing tides stemmed and built over. The tarmacked estuaries of my youth are long since gone. My eyes are strangers to most of what is here now but somehow, this is still my Portus Landis, as it was for all the kids that flooded through its streets.

This precinct was once a road and before that, a beaten track that lead from the harbor in the south to the north of the Island.(pause). Horses that drew carriages along its tracks were eventually culled and boiled down when they were of no further use. An equine generation sold as dog meat and glue. The cars that replaced them were stopped and the petrol and diesel fumes that each one spewed was replaced by the fumes of

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barbecued ribs, kebabs, fries and burgers. But the people were never replaced. New ones were born when contraception embarrassed the stiffest of cocks and when the war was adjourned and the landscape resembled row after row of rotten teeth waiting to be pulled, the people hereabouts continued to have more people. The inhabitants of the town center have continued to swarm, lay its eggs and multiply as a monolithic shopping precinct was conceived, bloated, retracted, and produced its babe. The old market refused to go away even though it was forced to move and reduce in size. Can't have too many beaks pecking from the nest. Charlotte Street market became Commercial Road's fruit 'n' veg quarter and another generation offered the same wares from similar brown paper bags.

No city is paved with gold unless it's the disguarding wrappings from fast food and confectionery caught blinking in the light of the sun. The street adapts a newer skin to match its latest evolution. My town resembles that of beaten lead, occasionally, brushed aluminum, when the rains have come and washed the stains away, at least for a while. God spits on those who least deserve him.

PREACHER (*Has been listening and slowly shakes his head*). You may walk in the shadow of death but ye shall fear no evil. Turn ye your back on the light, the lighthouse that throws its beacon onto the jagged rocks and still, ye shall not be punished. For god's light is eternal. Not solely for good, but for the weak, the infirm and dispossessed who have strayed from the ocean's deepest channels. God will not allow his flock to stray forever...

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NARRATOR The preacher continues to preach. The dispossessed wander past wondering how God has overlooked their tired, beleaguered souls as they thread their way towards the light of the indoor shopping centre. There, shall they feel cleansed and baptised. There, shall they be given credit and encouraged to spend of their new wealth freely. There, in the neon light showering them from above shall they find the sustenance for their journey. God's temple comes in many forms and has many branches, each of its outlets giving praise to the consumer and not the consumed! (pause) Anointing the heads of those with the promise of 'now paradise' for a small monthly installment.

PREACHER Our Father who art in Heaven...

NARRATOR Our Father who art my maker...

PREACHER ...Thy kingdom shall come and thy holy will shall be thy mark...

NARRATOR ...distribute thy name that I may sign this credit form, for yours is the signature that is required. Only then, can I lay down my obsolete idol in exchange for a newer edition...

PREACHER ...Forever and ever...

NARRATOR ...as long as there is life in its lithium cell...

PREACHER ...amen.

NARRATOR ...its power shall be my glory, until the next generation riseth from the ashes of the old and replaceth that which has gone before but is now no longer wanted. For as long as I can remember, this is how it is and how it always shall be. Forever and ever, Amen.

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