

The Art of the Pitch

Writing as a Career (HPEN6042) Portfolio

Richard Temple

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Documentary Pitch

[Covering e-mail to James Nicholls at Fire Films]

Subject: Music doc: 'From 'Gales to Pink, Pink, Sunshine'

Dear Mr. Nicholls,

Please find attached a PDF pitch for a one-hour documentary, targeting an evening slot on Sky Arts. Following your work with Stewart Lee and Michael Cumming on *King Rocker*, Fire Films would be the ideal home for this project, since it provides a background and context for the previous film, as well as filling the gap where Rob Lloyd temporarily 'retired'.

What independent bands emerged from Birmingham between 1985-95? Lee described this period of the city's musical heritage as the 'Un-Scene' – an influential decade largely overlooked by the media. *From 'Gales to Pink, Pink, Sunshine* explores how the city council's gentrification programme worked in direct opposition to independent musicians, unifying artists across genres and producing a fiercely independent DIY scene. While the waves of this creative maelstrom can still be felt, it remains largely unknown to most of the population.

The film will be driven by presenter John Robb, who is well established as the leading authority on punk and post punk music in the UK. While John hails from Blackpool, his band, Membranes, were deeply involved and influential on the Birmingham scene. So, much like his proven record on Punk, Goth, the Manchester scene, The Stone Roses, etc., this will be a personal passion project for him.

The film will include interviews with Rob Lloyd and Fliss Kitson (The Nightingales), Nik Napalm (Napalm Death), Vix Fuzzbox (Fuzzbox), and pivotal promoters and archivists. It will be shot on location in Birmingham and framed as a walking tour of lost and surviving venues, intercut with archive footage from the time, and 'talking heads' reactions from people who were

involved and have subsequently gained some profile. There is also a pre-recorded contribution from Sharon and Ozzy Osbourne, [shot for the Birmingham Music Archive](#).

The piece will cover a musical legacy that few viewers will be familiar with, but for which the groundwork has been laid by *King Rocker* and the recent BBC drama *This Town*. It will also highlight heritage campaigns such as *Save Station Street* and the fight to have the Crown pub recognised by Historic Britain. I am passionate about this project since I was submerged in this culture over the period in question, as a music promoter and journalist for local publications, and as a member of several bands including *The Belfast Cowboys*, *The Rain Devils*, *Dog Food* and *Three Dead Crows*. I am personally acquainted with all the guests apart from Frank Skinner (who never turns down an opportunity to recall his brief time in The Prefects), and still deeply invested in the legacy.

Best wishes

Richard Temple

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From 'Gales to Pink, Pink, Sunshine: The Forgotten Musical Sub-Culture of Birmingham 1985-1995



If a musical counterculture appears in a city and there are no journalists around to hear it, does it make a sound?

What bands can you name from Birmingham in the late 1980s or early '90s? After Duran Duran and Dexy's Midnight Runners it was ... well, Fine Young Cannibals?

Having birthed Heavy Rock in the late 1960s, England's second city appeared to rest on its laurels. Long considered an industrial wasteland, interest in the 'missing' years of Birmingham's youth culture has only recently begun to surface. Surely *something* must have happened between UB40 and Ocean Colour Scene?

In this hour-long retrospective, John Robb — Musician, journalist, author, social historian, and TV pundit — takes a deep dive into the hidden underground of a forgotten musical heritage, talking to the survivors and furtive heroes of what comedian Stewart Lee has called Birmingham's 'Un-Scene'.

John visits the Birmingham Music Archives and tours the sites of the city's many lost venues, with rare live footage from the time. He lends support to the BMA's battle to

have The Crown pub listed with Historic Britain and showcases their Blue Plaque success stories. Redemption is found at gigs by Pram and Church of Elvis, still carrying the torch to this day.

That this fertile and shockingly original body of work is finally being unearthed, a



quarter of a century later, is not symptomatic of any sudden mainstream desire to find lost treasure. Rather, it is the natural conclusion of a fiercely inward-looking DIY fundamentalism, still embracing a complete refusal to assimilate. Whether it's Stewart Lee's unflinching standard waving, photographer Dave Travis, Jez Collins' dedicated archiving at BMA, Vix Fuzzbox (singer of We've

Got a Fuzzbox and We're Gonna Use It!!) evangelising on Virgin radio, Adam Harper's *The Noise Made by People* documentary, or Steven Knight's new *This Town* series for the BBC, these are insiders defending the artistic legacy of their own scene, on their own terms.

How Does a Music Scene Disappear?

In the absence of a media saviour akin to Paul Morley or Tony Wilson, and in open conflict with the city council, Birmingham's post-punk music scene battened down the hatches, revelling in a self-imposed DIY isolationism and consciously anti-commercial counterculture. This high-pressure melting-pot of repressed expression created a surprisingly cohesive and co-operative, yet wildly eclectic and experimental scene. Genre boundaries dissolved, and industry expectations held no sway. Obviously, this resulted in almost complete media invisibility, but that only served to ignite a fire of unrestrained independence and belligerent non-conformity.

Prior to 1985, a small coterie of New Romantics inhabiting the Rum Runner and Romulus club nights had thrived in the shadow of London's Blitz Kids, and the city had spawned influential acts in response to Coventry's Two-Tone revolution, but the post-punk spark which ignited creativity and experimentation in cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Sheffield, seemed buried under the sheer tonnage of Birmingham's Heavy Rock legacy.



Growing up in post-punk Birmingham, the alternative music scene felt more like a resistance movement, bearing little resemblance to its depiction in mainstream media. In the face of Dick Knowles' campaign to re-invent the city as a slick, modern cosmopolitan metropolis, the Labour council drew battlelines, declaring all-out war on independent music. Music venues were shut down en masse — local music, flyposting, and weirdly dressed youth stood in the way of the council's vision of a new centre for

international business. Even landmark clubs like the Rum Runner and Barbarella's were bulldozed to make way for business hotels.

As is often the case with cultural suppression, this only served to embolden young performers in the wake of punk's DIY innovations. Mirroring the explosion of creativity that had arisen from similar circumstances in Manchester a few years earlier, the act of excluding young artists from the mainstream produced fertile ground for self-sustained artistic rebellion. Why follow fashions when the venues, fanzines, labels, and shops are all being run by the artists themselves, and no club can survive longer than it takes for the council to revoke a license? Who cares what the music press says when they're never going to cover your band anyway? Why worry about what is in the charts when you can only afford to press 300 singles?

Part One: Starting From Scratch

John talks to singer Rob Lloyd of The Nightingales — subject of Stewart Lee’s documentary *King Rocker* — about his time fronting The Prefects, and how The ‘Gales became central to Birmingham’s alternative and experimental scene in the mid-1980s, not only as musical survivors, but also by propagating the movement with a slew of ex-members who became a crucial skeleton for the rapidly evolving scene — in turn forming their own bands, collaborating with others, discovering new talent, and driving forward the rapid expansion of cross-fertilizing acts.



Together, they informally discuss materials from the BMA with archivist Jez Collins at The Custard Factory arts centre. John provides perspective as an ‘outsider’ from Blackpool, who’s band Membranes were deeply involved and influential. He presents memories of the fanzine culture from his 2009 book *Death to Trad Rock*, and anecdotes of the unilateral support enjoyed from BBC DJ, John Peel.

This conversation will be intercut with brief ‘talking heads’ responses from ex-



Nightingales and rare archive footage of their subsequent projects — Pete Byrchmore (Gorgeous, Goldblade and Membranes), Maria Smith (Kit-Form Colossus, and Gorgeous), Legz Akimbo (Noseflutes), Paul Appleby (Box ‘em Domies), Joe Crow, Nick Beales (Pigbros and Church of Elvis), Howard Jenner (Bumbites), and Fuzz Townshend (Pigbros, Pop Will Eat Itself, and Bentley Rhythm Ace).

John then meets long-suffering promoter Arthur Tapp, founder of the nomadic Catapult Club and lifelong champion of the 'Un-Scene', for a walking tour of lost music venues, featuring archive footage where available. They discuss the political pressures that resulted from Knowles' gentrification of the city, and its attempts to erase Birmingham's 'problematic' post-industrial landscape, as well as the recent successes in terms of protection of heritage sites.

The tour begins at the site of Barbarella's (now demolished and replaced with a commercial block for banks and offices), and the recent blue plaque on the site of the Rum Runner (currently sandwiched between a Wetherspoons pub and a Walkabout sports bar). This section is



accompanied by brief 'talking head' insights from comedian Frank Skinner, including his peripheral involvement with the Prefects.

They move on to the original home of the Click Club at Burberries (now the city's tallest block of 'luxury' flats). Arthur explains the significance of this unlikely home for the alternative scene, with archive footage of The Atom Spies and Pigbros. These points are accompanied by 'talking heads' from Steve Chandra Savale (Asian Dub Foundation and documentarian), Dave Travis, Nick Beales and Vix Fuzzbox.

Arthur then takes John to the site of the Catapult Club's longest surviving venue, the Jug of Ale, in Moseley (now an Indian restaurant), to explain how he leveraged out of town acts to empower local artists, providing a gateway for the up and coming Oasis, Blur, The Verve, Ocean Colour Scene, and Kasabian amongst many others, listing them



alongside local acts like The Davidsons, Misty's Big Adventure, The Burning, The Man Upstairs, Pram and more (interspersed with archive footage of several acts). Finally, they retire to the Flapper — current

home of the Catapult Club — to discuss how the Un-Scene years influenced the current musical culture.

Part Two: Born Again in Birmingham

Leaving Arthur at the Flapper, John heads to the site of the Mermaid in Sparkhill (now a chain grill restaurant), where he meets up with Nik Napalm (Napalm Death, Scorn). They discuss how the dearth of viable venue options led to punk and extreme metal bands sharing wildly eclectic bills with acid jazz, alternative pop, and experimental acts, as well as his part in the birth of Grindcore music. Napalm Death represent one of the scene's rare success stories, but the current line-up no longer contains any members of the original Birmingham band.



The final stop takes John to the Dubliner pub (formerly the Barrel Organ) where he meets Vix Fuzzbox to discuss how the scene became so incredibly eclectic and genre adverse. They discuss her experience of playing alongside bands like Ausgang,



Anorexia, Napalm Death and anti-music experimental noise collectives like Family Patrol Group and The Burning Buddhists (interspersed with early footage of We've Got a Fuzzbox and We're

Gonna Use It!!). The scene had been massive, with hundreds of bands co-operating cross-genre over scraps of opportunity which they were forced to create and finance themselves.

This section ends with an accelerating collage of images showing the many other lost venues, and what is now in their place (offices, chain pubs, luxury flats, hotels etc.)



over a soundtrack of 'Legs in Sync' by The Davidsons. Images include Club Cedar, The Golden Eagle, The Rainbow, Mega's Wine Bar, Muthers, The Sensateria, The Fighting Cocks, The Punchbowl, Peacocks, The Old Railway, The Tin Can Club, Edwards No.8, Kaleidoscope, The Powerhouse, The Hummingbird, Exile, The Irish Centre, The Star Club, The

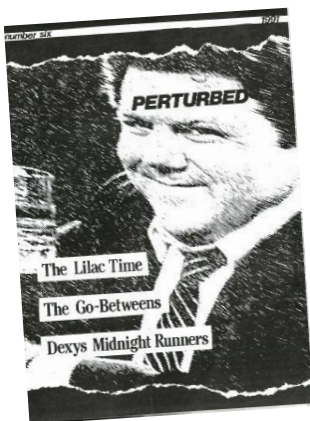
Junction, The Turk's Head, Piranhas, Goldwyn's, Synatra's, The Finn & Firkin, The Top Rank Suite, The Breedon Bar, The Triangle, Subway City, The Mercat Cross, The Fiddle & Bone, and, of course, The Crown.

Part Three: What a Carry On

The final part opens with a short statement from Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne in support of the campaign to have The Crown listed as an historic site. John and Vix speak with Jez Collins and Fliss Kitson (Nightingales) about the victory of listing the Crown as a Grade II building and the hopes that it may eventually re-open.

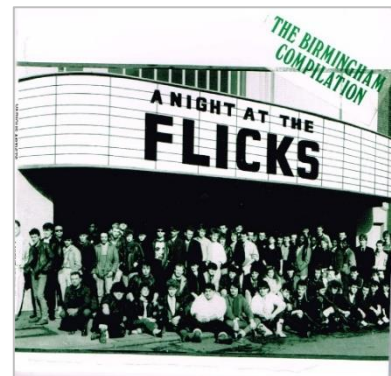
At the Hare & Hounds, in King's Heath, they talk to promoter Matt Beck to discover how the venue has not only survived but thrived to become the single remaining bastion of the 80s/90s scene.

It would be easy to assume that the 1985-95 scene faded away with little real

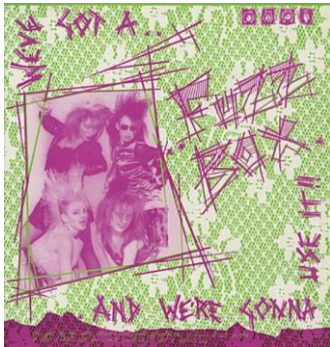


impact, but despite the lack of media acknowledgement there are many important ripples in music history that can still be felt today. The scene produced a thriving fanzine and independent publishing scene, an equally insular and experimental comedy scene (who in the absence of comedy venues shared bills with the bands), and small independent record shops.

Records were released throughout the decade by labels funded either by the record shops themselves (Big Bear, Swordfish, Bearos), by fanzines (Glottal Stop, Ugly), or by the musicians (Cake, Ron Johnson Records, Vindaloo, Iron Man). For the most part, radio play was non-existent outside of the John Peel show, and despite Peel offering sessions to many of the acts, they saw limited success outside of the city, but even in the darkest times there were breakout successes.



Vix will explain how Rob Lloyds' Vindaloo label picked up We've Got a Fuzzbox



and We're Gonna Use It!! for the release of the *Rules and Regulations EP*. This would lead to the first real recognition of the scene, reaching No.41 in the UK charts, and No.1 in the Indie Chart in 1986. The discussion is intercut with live performances on the *Old Grey Whistle Test*, and *Razzamatazz*

(with Ted Chippington and the Nightingales). By the end of that year WGAFWGUI had hit the top 40 with *Love Is the Slug* reaching No.31.

Any hope that this would break the scene nationally were quashed when this initial success led Warner Brothers to buy out Vindaloo, promptly dropping Chippington and hiring stylists and music tutors to knock the Birmingham out of WGAFWGUI!!.

Three years later, they would re-emerge as the slick pop band Fuzzbox with an album called *Big Bang*, and a seriously toned-down image. This worked for a while, reaching No.5 in the album chart, and bagging two top 20 hits with *International Rescue* and *Pink Sunshine*. However, plans for a second album were scrapped when the subsequent singles



didn't break the top 40, and they were promptly dropped by WEA. Their status on the Un-Scene was never in question, and their loyalty to the acts they had left standing admirable, but WEA had so divorced their sound and image from their roots that it would be hard to imagine this incarnation on the same bill as Napalm Death or Terry & Jerry.

Other bands also broke out, with Mighty Mighty bagging a bunch of Top 20 hits in



86-8 then promptly splitting up. Napalm Death stormed the Indie charts with albums of songs timed by the second rather than minutes. Unfortunately, the briefness of their music was mirrored in their staying power, with most of the initial line-up gone by the second album, and the last Birmingham native leaving in 1992. By this time, they had

relocated to Florida, and since then the band has been wholly comprised of American members.

As the decade progressed, younger acts who had grown up in this environment succeeded in making some impact of their own, with Delta (previously The Sea Urchins), Misty's Big Adventure, and Pram (previously Hole) gaining some national renown. With Dick Knowles clutching his CBE in the rear-view mirror, things would gradually turn around as new incarnations like Broadcast, Ocean Colour Scene, Bentley Rhythm Ace, and Asian Dub Foundation clawed their way into the media spotlight.

As this new dawn arose, only the Hare & Hounds and the Jug of Ale survived. The artists, however, battle on, and while the new generations of Birmingham musicians may have settled once more into the mainstream, those who weathered the storm will be forever changed.

The film ends with a triumphant live performance from Pram at the Hare and Hounds, complete with *Sensateria* light shows and Church of Elvis in support. Credits roll over the applause.

Filming

The film is shot entirely on location in Birmingham, with extensive archive footage and imagery included from the BMA with permission from Jez Collins. ‘Talking heads’ segments are recorded as reaction pieces and intercut. We will show how the musicians and artists in Birmingham refused to be cowed by media exclusion and hostile authorities, and formed an unsung cross-genre melting pot that would deeply influence the younger generations and independent music going forward.

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Word Count: 2788

Photo credits:

Page 3 (L-R): *The Blubberhouses* by Pigbros (©Vinyl Drip Records, 1985), *John Robb* (©John Robb, 2023), *Girth by The Noseflutes* (©Reflex Records, 1985)

Page 4: *Vultures* poster (©Paul Hughes, 1985)

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Page 7 (top-bottom): *Robert Lloyd* (©Schorle, 2016, Creative Commons), *Badges* (©Pete Byrchmore, 2020)

Page 8: *Rum Runner Plaque* (©Birmingham Civic Society, 2023)

Page 9: *The Jug of Ale* (@Birmingham Live, 2012)

Page 10 (top-bottom): *FPG* poster (public domain), *The Barrel Organ* (Jim Simpson/Big Bear Records, 1980)

Page 11: *Chaos UK* poster (public domain)

Page 12 (top-bottom): *Perturbed* fanzine (©Peter Perturbed, 1991), *A Night at the Flicks* (©N.R.O. Records, 1985)

Page 13 (top-bottom): *Rules and Regulations EP* (©Vindaloo Records, 1986), *Fuzzbox* badges (©Pete Byrchmore, 2020)

Page 14: *Mighty Mighty* poster (public domain)

Application for Penguin's WriteNow Programme 2024

How I meet WriteNow's Eligibility Criteria

(up to 250 words)

I am an Englishman, living in Wales, and a UK citizen. I am 55 years old, and do not have representation or a publishing contract. I have never published a book.

I believe I meet the criteria in several ways, being neuro-atypical (autistic, ADHD, dyspraxic, Pathological Demand Avoidance), working class and disabled (COPD, arthritis, depressive anxiety disorders/GAD, PTSD).

I feel that I can leverage these differences to present ideas from a unique perspective, and although my book does not approach these circumstances directly, it deals with themes of exclusion, social displacement, and counter-cultural worldviews as central themes.

Synopsis of SpineTrack

(up to 250 words)

Science Fiction (adult)

In 2160, youth counsellor **Sigrid Vang** is transhuman, along with 20% of the global population, kept alive by the mysterious Super-Generative Negentropic Force (S-GNF) energy. When her international commute is obstructed by a terrorist bombing, her world is turned upside down, leaving her at the mercy of a Russian Orthodox rebel cell.

Discovering that they are funded by a respected scientist, **Sigrid** is forced to re-evaluate her utopic worldview. Confronted with inconsistencies which challenge the scientific reality of S-GNF, she flies to Chongqing to meet a hacker who has identified a hidden source feeding the Network.

At the base of Chongqing's 'accumulator' tower, an unlikely foursome of Sigrid, the Orthodox rebel, the hacker, and the scientist uncover the physical location of a covert lab supplying the world's energy. They learn that the accumulator towers are a facade, being fed with the concentrated life-force of an imprisoned intelligent being of light and fire.

Apprehended by the cyborg **Professor Reich**, they are sealed within the lab, pitting their diverse, but equally viable, worldviews against each other — contrasting scientific, religious, social, and political perspectives. Should the truth remain hidden, or should they free the being, killing two billion S-GNF reliant transhumans, including **Sigrid**, in the process? Is the being alien, artificial or even angelic? Can they defend maintaining the bondage and exploitation of a superior being, in an ostensibly utopic

society? Finally concluding that they have no right to decide, **Sigrid** exposes the lab on the global network, leaving judgement to humanity itself.

Sample of SpineTrak

(approx. 1000 words)

[While the actual submission will include the first 1000 words, I have used Chapter 4 onwards for the purposes of this assessment, since an early draft of the opening chapters has been previously submitted to Turnitin. As a result, some points require the reader to have read the first chapters, but this will not be the case for the real-world submission]

Leaving the heated expanse of the mall is a shock. It shouldn't be. This late in the year, back home, the Oslofjord is likely frozen, the archipelago of the city peeping above a treacherous white sheet. Sigrid's father would recount romantic tales of ice-skating with her mother at Christmas, in Spikersuppa, but that was before the strait rose to burst the rivers. The frozen waterways that now fill those old squares and streets, briny from the Skagerrak, can no longer safely support a person's weight. A 22nd century Winter in Oslo offers only transport complications, despite community efforts to maintain ferry-ways.

She'd always imagined that Moscow, being further south and inland, would be much milder. Perhaps it is. Sigrid rarely goes out during Winter. Why would she? Her rooms enjoy perpetual, virtual Summer. She spends most of the year in the Triangle anyway. Maybe she just forgot. Either way, she immediately regrets the tights and thin-soled boots. Yanking up her hood, fingers instantly aching from the freezing wind, she fumbles with zips as they hurry across to a turn-of-the-century faux-military personnel-carrier, in the taxi bay. It's well maintained, but looks shockingly archaic, and more than a little threatening in the modern world.

The man who jumps down from the control seat to give Albert a perfunctory hug, is barely more than a boy; maybe early 20s. His black bomber jacket has wide yellow stripes down each arm, and a yellow windbreaker collar, presenting an odd uniformity with Albert's outfit. Albert speaks urgently in rapid-fire Russian, to the younger man, who glares at Sigrid

as she catches up.

Turning to her, Albert reverts to English: 'This my friend, Timur. Timur, this... umm...'

'Siri Vang'. Sigrid holds out her hand to shake, but the young man ignores it. She suddenly feels horribly self-conscious once more, painfully aware of the mismatched body and the large pink dressing on her brow. 'Umm, thank you for picking us up.'

Timur maintains an uncomfortable eye-contact. 'Yes.'

He turns back to Albert, and speaks briefly in Russian, then waves her to the back of the carrier. 'Get in. We'll head to mine while Albert fetches the doc. They can meet us there. There's hot *schii*, and vodka.'

Sigrid briefly wonders whether this is the little boy in Albert's profile picture, grown up — but no, the photograph looked recent. Any likeness is attributable only to their similar dress. The younger man's accent is different, his English much more practiced. He's taller, paler, his features finer. His close-cropped dark hair gives him a studied sense of menace, betrayed by his youthful fresh-faced good looks and slender build. Travelling alone with this stranger isn't ideal, but she can hardly climb back into Albert's trunk now that she has a body. Though unsure whether his manner is hostile or just disinterested, it's hard to be intimidated by someone who looks like they've barely left school.

Not wanting to seem ungrateful, and keen to be out of the wind, Sigrid thanks Albert again, then climbs into the back of the carrier. True to the faux-military aesthetic, the interior is utilitarian. Foam padded aluminium benches line each side with luggage racking overhead. LED panels beneath the seating provide a soft white up-light, giving the cabin a slightly eerie appearance. Horizontal shaded windows admit a little muted daylight, but not

enough to offset the strange shadows. Sigrid slides up a bench to the front, where a small, ventilated window allows communication with the control cabin. She watches Timur tap a destination on the console, and hears the high-pitched whir of an electric motor, likely as old as herself, gear the tracks into motion.

Uncomfortable, Sigrid struggles to find suitable small talk:

‘How far is it?’

‘30 minutes; not far’.

Timur hits the control panel and music fills the compartment. Not loud enough to be rude, but Sigrid gets the message. A vibrato bass drone that she can feel through the seat underpins the track, with rhythmic whoomping surges and tinkling electronic sparkles, picking out a catchy vocal, low in the mix. Some kind of Russian folk-dub. Inoffensive enough, and a suitable soundtrack for her first proper visit to Moscow.

While it’s the closest mega-city to home, Sigrid always thinks of Moscow as a gateway to Delhi and the Triangle, the start of the mainline SpineTrak. She shifts around to peer through the window slit as the carrier rolls onto the outer ringway. Her first real glimpse of Russia is iced green. It’s like a Winter version of her apartment scenery: large groups of bare deciduous trees, artfully arranged in an expansive frost-painted grassland, but for the occasional square ten-story housing block. However, before long the ringway is enclosed, first by brightly coloured charging compounds which give way to steep grassy banks, then a long stretch of high solid metal fencing, painted in grey and yellow squares.

She watches anyway. It’s been a long time since she travelled by road. She should really write her crash statement, but the hunger is too distracting, and the pain in her head

is thumping. Once they get inside the ringway there should be something to see.

The fencing ends abruptly. The view is still rural. She'd assumed they were heading for the mega-city, but perhaps not. They speed over a bridge spanning the broad frozen expanse of the Moskva River. That doesn't help with orientation; there are many bridges.

Beyond the river, the view becomes more industrial, though still crowded with skeletal trees and scrubby grass. Towering skeletons of rusted ironwork, cranes, and warehouses, emerge from the tangle of bracken and branches, but it's not until she sees gargantuan chimney stacks, that Sigrid realises what she's looking at — a colossal museum piece. 21st century ruins from a time before the oceans rose and the Moskva burst her banks; fossils of the industrial age, neglected and crumbling, succumbing to nature's slow unrelenting advance. She sees a cooling stack twice the size of the housing blocks they left behind. A gaping crack splinters its precipitous shell, trees bursting the courses of brickwork, more effectively than any wrecking ball.

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Word Count: 1365