

# Southern Evening Express

*by Anastasia*

A post-apocalyptic short.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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*AN: Many thanks to Ariadne for the usual beta goodness. It feels odd to not be thanking or apologizing to JKR as well, but I feel that I should, as it's her world that has led me here.*

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Sand-scratched linoleum lay dull under flat daylight filtered through dozens of broken skylights. A once ornamental tree had run wild, sending undulating roots out in a star, searching for a time before turning all at once to force their way up under a ticket booth, twisting it from its base. A string of tickets fluttered in a slow underground wind, twisting around in a solemn arc like a tattered war banner.

His hand reflexively took hold of the red paper chain as he passed, and he tore off several, folding them over, working them mindlessly into an accordion.

Something far down at the other end of the station was banging, rhythmically at first, then more fractured, rising in force. A motor roared to startled life, struck an impossibly high-pitched whine, and then collapsed into a liquid sputter. It caught again, racing even higher, and then rolled into view. A painter's platform was moving, slowly at first, and then it violently jerked forward, twisted around, and crashed into the wall, gouging and shattering tile as it went. Wires trailed along after it, sending sparks bouncing across the floor.

Laughter echoed, and he moved on.

As he rounded a corner, sparks of sunlight appeared on the ground, leading his eye upward barely in time to throw his hands over his head. The arched glass ceiling exploded downward in a blizzard of glass, raining down over tattered banners declaring events long past to the floor. Short bursts followed from the other side of the station, and the ceiling fell there in long slabs, their weight dragging beams inward before failure sent it all to crash down below.

He lowered his arms slowly.

It was beautiful, it was his, and they were destroying it.

His eye was drawn downward to a mound of cloth that was stirring. An old man was slowly climbing to his feet and looking hopefully in his direction, but he didn't stay. Jaw set, he ignored the crushed glass driving into his soles as he strode toward the faded yellow door, took hold of the cold, rusted handle, and jerked it open.

Stale air stole his breath away, yet he barely noticed. The sun had emerged, burning dust and warming the musty air in the booth. Spider webs joined every knob and lever into one tangled mass, dripping down to lie amongst the dirt covering the dashboard.

He reached out and rested his hand on the panel, the dust warm. Lights overhead flickered feverishly, flared to life, then held proudly, defiantly.

Sharp cracks brought him back from his thoughts.

Gunfire.

The same howling laughter echoing seemingly from every direction.

Listening over the sounds of the electricity so loud against years of silence, he found them on the edge of the shadows. Another round fired, and something heavy fell.

In his hand, his thumb worked over the string of tickets, running along the thin ridges. Looking down, he opened his hand, counted, and nodded.

Enough.

His fingers splayed out and found their position, known a lifetime ago and for the first time in years, a faint trace of a smile spreading across his face.

Their last shadows, their mocking laughter echoing as another round lit up the tunnel, disappeared into the darkness as his hand eased the handle forward slowly, evenly.

A dry laugh escaped him, then grew with force as a fierce light blazed to life and a great roar rose. Metal sliding home rattled the booth's windows loose, and a clacking sound joined the symphony, rising in tempo, quickening and the massive engine of the Southern Evening Express, still shining bright, thrust forward, rapidly gained speed, barreled through the station, and into the tunnel at full throttle.