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Last night's TV: Dispatches: Terror in Mumbai

The Mumbai killers were trained assassins. Dispatches showed they were also just boys



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One of the gunman involved in the Mumbai attacks is caught on CCTV. Photograph: Sebastian D'souza/AP

Sometimes a terrible news event is so hard to get your head around, the only way to get some kind of grip on it, and what it means, is to zoom in on the detail. **Dispatches: Terror in Mumbai** (Channel 4) did this to extraordinary effect. Using interviews, news coverage, amateur and CCTV footage, plus - most powerfully of all - recordings of phone calls between the terrorists on the ground and the guys pulling the strings in Pakistan, it pieced together the unfolding of events last November, when shooting and bombing attacks rocked India's largest city.

At VT railway station, it is the police who are caught on CCTV and found guilty, if only of a lack of courage. They cower behind pillars or run away, confused and frightened. The bravest tries to fire his ancient bolt-action rifle at the terrorists, but it jams, so he picks up a plastic chair instead and throws it in frustration. The war on terror, fought with plastic furniture. Fifty-two people were killed at the station.

A Turkish businessman and his wife who were staying at the Trident Oberoi hotel tell of

how they were spared because of their faith, while the bodies of those less lucky pile up around - and on top of - them. Meanwhile, cameras at the Taj Palace hotel across town show two young backpackers walking into the lobby, their rucksacks filled with assault rifles, pistols, grenades, hundreds of bullets and enough dried fruit and nuts to last a couple of days of killing.

One of the most heart-wrenching images from the film is of a two-year-old Jewish boy, filmed through a window. He is clearly agitated, walking in circles, looking down at the bodies of his dead parents. But perhaps most poignant of all are the recordings, taped by the Indian secret services, of the instructions delivered over the phone to the terrorists by their controllers: they tell us so much about indoctrination. "Throw some grenades, my brother, there's no harm in throwing a few grenades. How hard can it be to throw a grenade? Just pull the pin and throw it. For your mission to end successfully, you must be killed. God is waiting for you in heaven."

And the boys - because they are only boys - say "God willing" and do as they are told. But they haven't been turned into killing machines to the exclusion of everything else. The pair at the Taj Palace, Mumbai's grandest hotel, are mesmerised by the splendour they find there, opulence they never knew existed.

"There are computers with 30-inch screens," one tells his boss down the phone in wonder.

"Computers? Haven't you set fire to them?" asks the commander, getting irritated.

The boy continues: "It's amazing. The windows are huge. It's got two kitchens, a bath and a little shop ... "

There's something almost touching about it. For a second, he is not a brainwashed, trained assassin; he's a kid in a sweet shop. In this terrifying, moving, human story it

shows there is humanity everywhere, even where you may not expect it.

Imagine ... David Hockney: A Bigger Picture (BBC1) should have been brilliant. The film-maker had three years of amazing access to the usually media-shy painter, at home in California, at home in Yorkshire, and peeks - more than peeks, takes long looks - over the painter's shoulder at work. But, structurally, it is a bit of a mess, wishy-washy perhaps, which isn't something you should be saying about anything to do with Hockney. We jump backwards and forwards across the Atlantic, from summer to winter, from watercolours to oils, to photography being over to it beginning again, to another winter, or is it the same winter again - who knows? I lost my way a bit, to be honest, as did the film.

The subject just about saves it. There's a twinkliness about Hockney, a witty knowingness, a Yorkshireness that has survived 30 years in LA (he went, he says, because both the shadows of the trees and the boys' bodies are better defined over there). Even when you have no idea what he's talking about, he makes perfect sense. He paints quite good pictures, too. Bloody big, some of them.

Art Against the Odds (Channel 4), this week's series of Three Minute Wonder films after the news, is about the opposite end of the art world spectrum. While acres of Tate wall space are being handed to Hockney on a plate, these are nice little portraits - thumbnail sketches, really - of artists fighting to get a tiny corner of the summer exhibition at the National Gallery. Alice Tait, a young illustrator, is worried her work will be looked down upon among the fine artists' pieces. She needn't have worried, because her work is turned down. It won't be looked upon at all.

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