

SOME SECRETS SHOULD  
REMAIN BURIED

# THIRD SHIFT

HUGH  
HOWEY



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## About the Book

**The incredible third part of *Shift*, the follow up to bestseller *Wool*.**

Donald has woken again. Because this time the impossible has happened. Someone has fled one of the silos. And she is still alive.

Jimmy is a sixteen-year-old boy, and his home is being destroyed. A betrayal has led to one of the worst uprisings in history. Jimmy's descent into 'Solo' is about to begin.

With Jules about to meet Solo, Donald's world is about to change for one final time. Will he obey the Order? Or will he risk everything to discover the truth?

## About the Author

Hugh Howey spent eight years living on boats and working as a yacht captain for the rich and famous. It wasn't until the love of his life carried him away from these vagabond ways that he began to pursue literary adventures, rather than literal ones.

Hugh wrote and self-published his first young adult novel, *Molly Fyde and the Parsona Rescue*. The Molly Fyde series won rave reviews and praise from readers but it was the release of *Wool* that made his career take off. Within 6 months, *Wool* had sold over 150,000 copies, garnering over 1,000 five-star reviews on Amazon.com, and film rights had been optioned by Ridley Scott.

Hugh lives in Jupiter, Florida with his wife Amber and their dog Bella.

# **Third Shift: Pact**

by Hugh Howey



For those who find themselves well and truly alone.



# **Silo 17**

*Hour One*

The Loud came before the quiet. That was a Rule of the World, for the bangs and shouts need somewhere to echo, just as bodies need space in which to fall.

Jimmy Parker was in class when the last of the great Louds began. It was the day before a cleaning. Tomorrow, they would be off from school. For the death of a man, Jimmy and his friends would receive a few extra hours of sleep. His father would work overtime down in IT. And tomorrow afternoon, his mother would insist they go up with his aunt and cousins to watch the bright clouds drift over the clear view of the hills until the sky turned dark as sleep.

Cleaning days were for staying in bed and for seeing family. They were for silencing unrest and quieting the Louds. That's what Mrs. Pearson said anyway, as she wrote rules from the Pact up on the blackboard. Her chalk clacked and squeaked and left dusty trails of all the whys for which a man could be put to death. Civics lessons on a day before a banishment. Warnings on the eve of graver warnings. Jimmy and his friends fidgeted in their seats and learned rules. Rules that very soon would no longer apply.

Jimmy was sixteen. Many of his friends would move off and shadow soon, but he would need another year of study to follow in his father's footsteps. Mrs. Pearson marked the chalkboard and moved on to the seriousness of choosing a life partner, of registering relationships according to the Pact. Sarah Jenkins turned in her seat and smiled back at Jimmy. Civics lessons and biology lessons intermingled,

hormones spoken of alongside the laws that governed their excesses. Sarah Jenkins was cute. Jimmy hadn't thought so at the beginning of the year, but now he was seeing it. Sarah Jenkins was cute and would be dead in just a few hours.

Mrs. Pearson asked for a volunteer to read from the Pact, and that's when Jimmy's mother came for him. She burst in unannounced. An embarrassment. The end of Jimmy's world began with an embarrassment, with hot cheeks and a burning collar and everyone watching. His mom didn't say anything to Mrs. Pearson, didn't excuse herself. She just stormed through the door and hurried among the desks the way she walked when she was angry. She pulled Jimmy from his desk and led him out with his arm in her fist, causing him to wonder what he'd done this time.

Mrs. Pearson didn't know what to say. Jimmy looked back at his best friend Paul, caught him smiling behind his palm, and wondered why Paul wasn't in trouble, too. They rarely got in or out of a fix alone, he or Paul. The only person to utter a word was Sarah Jenkins. "Your backpack!" she cried out, just before the classroom door slammed shut. Her voice was swallowed by the quiet.

There were no other mothers pulling their children down the hallway. If they came, it would be much later. Jimmy's father worked among the computers, and the computers were fast. Jimmy's father knew things before anyone else. This time, it was only moments before. There were others scrambling on the stairwell already. The noise was frightening. The landing outside the school level thrummed with the vibrations of distant and heavy traffic. A bolt in one of the railing's stanchions rattled as it worked its way loose. It felt like the silo would simply shake itself apart. Jimmy's mom took him by the sleeve and pulled him toward the spiral staircase like

he was still twelve. She started down, even though home was up.

Jimmy pulled against her for a moment, confused. In the past year, he had grown bigger than his mom, as big as his father, and it was strange to be reminded that he had this power, that he was nearly a man. He had left his backpack and his friends behind. Where were they going? The banging from below seemed to be getting louder.

His mother turned as he gave resistance. Her eyes, he saw, were not full of anger. There was no glare, no furrowed brow, her eyes like tiny slits that tried to see less of him when he was bad. They were wide and wet, shiny like the times Grandma and Grandpa had passed. The noise below was frightful, but it was the look in his mother's eyes that put the start of a very long fear into Jimmy's bones.

"What is it?" he whispered. He hated to see his mother upset. Something dark and empty—like that stray and tailless cat that nobody could catch in the upper apartments—clawed at his insides.

His mother didn't say. She turned and pulled him down the stairs, toward the thundering approach of something awful, and Jimmy realized at once that he wasn't in trouble at all.

They all were.

Jimmy had never felt the stairs tremble so. The entire spiral staircase seemed to sway. It turned to rubber the way a length of charcoal appeared to bend between jiggled fingers, a parlor trick he'd learned in class. Though his feet rarely touched the steps—racing as he did to keep up with his mother—they tingled and felt numb from vibrations transmitted straight from steel to bone. He could barely feel the rail with his hand as it shook him to his elbow, and Jimmy tasted fear in his mouth like a dry spoon on his tongue.

There were angry screams from below. Jimmy's mother shouted her encouragement, told him to hurry, and down the staircase they spiraled. They raced toward whatever bad thing was marching upward. "Hurry," she cried again, and Jimmy was more scared of the tremor in her voice than the shuddering of a hundred levels of steel. He hurried.

They passed twenty-nine. Thirty. People ran by in the opposite direction. A lot of people in coveralls the color of his father's. On the landing of thirty-one, Jimmy saw his first dead body since his grandpa's funeral. It looked like a tomato had been smashed on the back of the man's head. Jimmy had to skip over the man's arms, sticking out into the stairwell. He hurried after his mother while some of the red dripped through the landing and splattered and slicked the steps below.

At thirty-two, the shake of the stairs was so great that he could feel it in his teeth. His mother grew frantic as the two



of them bumped past more and more people hurrying upward. Nobody seemed to see anyone else, even though all eyes were surely wide enough.

The stampede could be heard. There were loud voices among the ringing footfalls. Jimmy stopped and peered over the railing. Below, as the staircase augured into the depths, he could see the elbows and hands of a jostling crowd jutting out. He turned as someone thundered by. His mother called for him to hurry, for the crowd was already upon them, the traffic growing. Jimmy felt the fear and anger in the people racing past, and it made him want to flee upward with them. But there was his mom yelling for him to come along, and her voice cut through his fear and to the center of his being.

Jimmy shuffled down and took her hand. The embarrassment of earlier was gone. Now, he wanted her clutching him. The people who ran past shouted for them to go the other way. Several held pipes and lengths of steel. There were some who were bruised and cut; blood covered the mouth and chin of one man. A fight somewhere. Jimmy thought that only happened in the Deep. Others seemed to be simply caught up in it all. They were without weapons and looked over their shoulders as if a sinister thing were coming. It was a mob scared of a mob. Jimmy wondered what caused it. What was there to be afraid of?

Loud bangs rang out among the footfalls. A large man knocked into Jimmy's mom and sent her roughly against the railing. Jimmy held her arm, and the two of them stuck to the inner post as they made their way down to thirty-three. "One more to go," she told him, which meant it was his father they were after.

The growing throngs became a crush a few turns above thirty-two. People pressed four wide where there was comfortable room for two. Jimmy's wrist banged against the inner rail. He wedged himself between the post and those forcing their way up. Moving a few inches at a time—those beside him shoving, jostling, and grunting with effort—he felt certain they would all become stuck like that. People crowded in and he lost his grip on her arm. She surged forward while he remained pinned in place. He could hear her yelling his name below.

A large man, dripping with sweat, jaw slack with fear, was trying to force his way up the downbound side. "Move!" he yelled at Jimmy, as if there were anywhere to go. There was nowhere to go but up. He flattened himself against the center post as the man brushed past. There was a scream by the outer rail, a jolt through the crowd, a series of gasps, someone yelling "Hold on!" another yelling to let them go, and then a shriek that plummeted away and grew faint.

The wedge of bodies loosened a little. Jimmy felt sick to his stomach at the thought of someone falling so near to him. He wiggled free and climbed up onto the inner rail. Jimmy hugged the central post and balanced there, careful not to let his feet slip into the six inches of space between the rail and the post, that gap that kids liked to spit into.

Someone in the crowd immediately took his place on the steps. Shoulders and elbows knocked into his ankles. He remained crouched there, the undersides of the steps above him transmitting the scrapes of shuffling boots from those overhead. He slid his feet along the narrow bar of steel made slick by the rubbing of thousands of palms and worked his way down the railing after his mom. His foot slipped into the gap by the center post. It seemed eager to swallow his leg. Jimmy righted himself, fearful as well of

falling onto the lurching crowd, imagining how he could be tossed across their frenzied arms and shot out into space.

He was half a circuit around the inner post before he found his mom. She had been forced toward the outside by the crowds. “Mom!” he yelled. Jimmy held the edge of the steps above his head and reached out over the crowd for her. A woman in the middle of the steps screamed and disappeared, her head sinking below those who took her place. As they trampled her, the woman’s screams disappeared. The crowd surged upward. They carried Jimmy’s mom a few steps with them.

“Get to your father!” she screamed, cupping her hands around her mouth. “Jimmy!”

“Mom!”

Someone knocked into his shins, and he lost his grip on the stairs overhead. Jimmy waved his arms once, twice, in little circles, trying to keep his balance. He fell inward on the sea of heads and rolled. Someone punched him in the ribs as they protected themselves from his fall.

Another man threw Jimmy aside. He tumbled outward across an undulating platform of sharp elbows and hard skulls, and time slowed to a crawl. There was nothing but empty space beyond the crowd, now packed five wide. Jimmy tried to grab one of the hands pushing and shoving at him. His stomach lurched as the space grew nearer. The rail was below the screaming heads. The rail was invisible. He heard his mother’s voice, a screech recognizable above all the others, as she watched, helpless. Someone screamed to help that boy as he slid down the spiral of heads, rolling and grasping, and that boy they were screaming after was him.

Jimmy went into open space. He was thrown aside by those trying to protect themselves. He slid between two people—a shoulder catching him in the chin—and he saw the railing at last. He clutched for it, got one hand wrapped around the bar. As his feet tumbled over his head, he was twisted around, his shoulder wrenched painfully, but he kept his grip. He hung there, clutching the railing with one hand and one of the vertical stanchions with the other, his feet dangling in the open air.

Someone's hip pinched his fingers against the rail, and Jimmy cried out. Hands scrambled at his arms to help, but these people and their concerns were pushed upward by the madness below.

Jimmy tried to pull himself up. He looked down past his kicking feet at the crowds jostling beyond the rail below him. Two turns below was the landing to thirty-four. Again he tried to hoist himself, but there was a fire in his wrenched shoulder. Someone scratched his forearm as they tried to help, and then they too were gone, surging upward.

Peering down his chest, between his feet, Jimmy saw that the landing to thirty-four was packed. The crowd spilled out of the crowded stairs and tried to shove their way back in again. Someone barged out of the doors to the IT level with a cleaning suit on, helmet and everything. They threw themselves into the crowd, silvery arms swimming amid the flesh, everyone trying to get up, more of the bangs and shouts from down below, a sudden pop like the balloons from the bazaar but much, much louder.

Jimmy lost his grip on the railing—his shoulder was too injured to bear the weight any longer. He clutched the stanchion with his other hand as he slid down, sweaty palm on steel adding one more squeal to the mob. He was left

clutching the edge of the steps at the base of the stanchion. With his feet, he tried to feel for the railing one turn below, but all he felt were angry arms knocking his boots aside. His busted shoulder was alive with pain. He swung down on one hand, dangling for an instant.

Jimmy cried out in alarm. He cried out for his mother, remembering what she'd told him.

*Get to your father.*

There was no way he was getting back up on the stairwell. He didn't have the strength. There was no room. Nobody was going to help him. A surging crowd, and yet he hung there all alone.

Jimmy took a deep breath. He dangled for a moment longer, glanced down at the packed landing below him, and let go.



Two turns of the spiral staircase flew by. Two turns of wide eyes among the packed and crushing crowd. Jimmy felt the swoosh of wind on his neck grow and grow. His stomach flew up into his throat, and there was a glimpse of a face turning in alarm to watch him plummet past.

Slamming into the crowd on the landing below, he hit with a sickening thud. Grunts escaped him and those he landed on. The man in the silver suit, faceless behind his small visor, was pinned beneath him.

People yelled at him. Others crawled out from underneath him. Jimmy rolled away, an electric shock in his ribs where he'd hit someone, a throbbing pain in one knee, his shoulder burning. Limping, he hurried toward the double doors as another person barged out, a bundle in their arms. They pulled to a halt at the sight of the crowd on the stairs. Someone yelled about the forbidden Outside, and nobody seemed to care. Tomorrow, there was to be a cleaning. Maybe it was too late. Jimmy thought of the extra hours his dad had been putting in. He wondered how many more people would be sent out for all this violence.

He turned back to the stairs and searched for his mom. The screams and shouts for people to move, to get out of the way, made it impossible to hear. But her voice still rang in his ears. He remembered her last command, the plaintive look on her face, and hurried inside to find his father.

It was chaos beyond the doors, people running back and forth in the halls, loud voices arguing. Yani stood by the security gate, the large officer's hair matted with sweat. Jimmy ran toward him. He clutched his elbow to pin his arm to his chest and keep his shoulder from swinging. The sting in his ribs made it difficult to take in a full breath. His heart was still pounding from the rush of the long fall.

"Yani—" Jimmy leaned against the security gate and gasped for air. It seemed to take a moment for the guard to register his existence. Yani's eyes were wide; they darted back and forth. Jimmy noticed something in his hand, a pistol like the sheriff wore. "I need to get through," Jimmy said. "I need to find Dad."

The officer's wild eyes settled on Jimmy. Yani was a good man, a friend of his father's. His daughter was just two years younger than Jimmy. Their family came over for dinner around the holidays sometimes. But this was not that Yani. Some sort of terror seemed to have him by the throat.

"Yes," he said, bobbing his head. "Your father. Won't let me in. Won't let any of us in. But you—" It seemed impossible, but Yani's eyes grew wilder.

"Can you buzz me—?" Jimmy started to ask, nudging the turnstile.

Yani grabbed Jimmy by his collar. Jimmy was no small boy, was growing into his adult frame, but the massive guard practically lifted him over the turnstile like a sack of dirty laundry.

Jimmy struggled in the man's fierce grip. Yani pressed the end of the pistol against Jimmy's chest and dragged him down the hall. "I've got his boy!" he yelled. To whom, it wasn't clear. Jimmy tried to twist free. He was hauled past

offices in disarray. The entire level looked cleared out. He thought of the prevailing color on the stairway early on, all the coveralls in silver and gray, and feared for a moment that his father had been among those he'd passed. The crowd had been littered with people from this level, as though they'd been leading the charge—or were the ones being chased.

"I can't breathe—" he tried to tell Yani. He got his feet beneath him, clutched the powerful man's forearm, anything to take the pinch off his collar.

"Where'd you assholes go?" Yani screamed, glancing up and down the halls. "I need a hand with this—"

There was a clap like a thousand balloons popping at once, a deafening roar. Jimmy felt Yani lurch sideways as if kicked. The guard's grip relaxed, allowing the blood to rush back to Jimmy's head. Jimmy danced sideways as the large man tumbled over like a lush with too much gin in him. He crashed to the floor, gurgling and wheezing, the black pistol skittering across the tile.

"Jimmy!"

His father was at the end of the hall, half around a corner, a long black object under his armpit, a crutch that didn't quite reach the floor. The end of this too-short crutch smoked as if it were on fire.

"Hurry, son!"

Jimmy cried out in relief. He stumbled away from Yani, who was writhing on the floor and making awful, inhuman sounds, and ran to his father, limping and clutching his arm.

“Where’s your mother?” his dad asked, peering down the hall.

“The stairs—” Jimmy fought for a breath. His pulse had blurred into a steady thrum. “Dad, what’s going on?”

“Inside. Inside.” He pulled Jimmy down the hall toward a large door of stainless steel. There were shouts from around the corner. His father was on full alert; Jimmy could see the veins standing out in his dad’s forehead, trickles of sweat beading beneath his thinning hair. His father keyed a code into the panel by the massive door. There was a whirring and a series of clunks before it opened a crack. His dad leaned into the door until there was room for the two of them to squeeze through. “C’mon, son. Move.”

Down the hall, someone yelled at them to stop. Boots clomped their way. Jimmy squeezed through the crack, was worried his dad might close him up in there, all alone, but his old man worked his way through as well, then leaned on the inside of the door.

“Push!” he said.

Jimmy pushed. He didn’t know why they were pushing, but he’d never seen his dad frightened before. It made his insides feel like jelly. The boots outside stomped closer. Someone yelled his father’s name. Someone yelled for Yani.

As the steel door slammed shut, a slap of hands hit the other side. There was a whir and a clunk once more. His dad keyed something into the pad, then hesitated. “A number,” he said, gasping for breath. “Four digits. Quick, son, a number you’ll remember.”

“One two one eight,” Jimmy said. Level twelve and level eighteen. Where he lived and where he went to school. His

father keyed in the digits. There were muffled yells from the other side, soft ringing sounds from palms slapping futilely against the thick steel.

“Come with me,” his father said. “We’ve got to keep an eye on the cameras, find your mother.” He slung the black machine over his back, which Jimmy saw was a bigger version of the pistol. The end was no longer smoking. His father hadn’t kicked Yani from a distance; he had shot him.

Jimmy stood motionless while his father set off through the room of large black boxes. It dawned on him that he’d heard of the room. This was where his father had shadowed. The server room. The machines seemed to watch him as he stood there by the door. They were black sentries, quietly humming, standing guard.

Jimmy left the wall of stainless steel with its muffled slaps and muted shouts and hurried after his father. He had seen his dad’s office before, back down the hall and around a bend, but never this place. The room was huge. He favored one leg as he ran the full length of it, trying to pick his way through the servers and keep track of where his dad had gone. At the far wall, he rounded the last black box and found his dad kneeling on the floor as if in prayer. Bringing his hands up around his neck, his dad dug inside his coveralls and came out with a thin black cord. Something silver danced on the end of it.

“What about Mom?” Jimmy asked. He wondered how they would let her in with the rest of those guys outside. He wondered why his father was kneeling on the floor like that.

“Listen carefully,” his dad said. “This is the key to the silo. There are only two of these. Do not ever lose sight of it, okay?”



Jimmy watched as his father inserted the key into the back of one of the machines. "This is the comm hub," his dad said. Jimmy had no idea what a comm hub was, only that they were going to hide inside of one. That was the plan. Get inside one of the black boxes until the noise went away. His dad turned the key as if unlocking something, did this three more times in three more slots, then pulled the panel away. Jimmy peered inside and watched his dad pull a lever. There was a grinding noise in the floor nearby.

"Go on. You first," his father said. He waved at the hole in the ground and began unslinging the long pistol from his back. Jimmy shuffled forward a little and peered down. There were handholds on one wall. It was like a ladder, but much taller than any he'd ever seen.

"Keep this safe," his father said. He squeezed Jimmy's shoulder and handed him the lanyard with the key. Jimmy accepted it and studied the jagged piece of silver amid the coil of black cord. One side of the key formed a circle with three wedges inside, the symbol of the silo. He teased the lanyard into a hoop and pulled it down over his head, then watched his dad dig his fingers into the grating by their feet. A rectangle of flooring was lifted out to reveal darkness underneath.

"C'mon, son. We don't have much time."

Sitting on the edge of the grating, his feet hanging in the void, Jimmy reached for the steel rungs below and began the long descent.

The air beneath the floor was cool, the light dim. The horror and noise of the stairwell seemed to fade, and Jimmy was left with a sense of foreboding, of dread. Why was he being

given this key? What was this place? He favored his injured arm and made slow but steady progress.

At the bottom of the ladder, he found a narrow passageway. There was a dim pulse of light at the far end. Looking up, he could see the outline of his father making his way down. The light above pulsed as well, a red throbbing, an unpleasant sight.

“Through there,” his father said, indicating the slender hallway. He left the long pistol leaned up against the ladder.

“Shouldn’t we cover the—?” Jimmy pointed up.

“I’ll get it on my way out. Let’s go, son.”

Jimmy turned and worked his way through the passage. There were wires and pipes running in parallel across the ceiling. A light ahead beat crimson. After twenty paces or so, the passage opened on a space that reminded him of the school stockroom. There were shelves along two walls. Two desks as well—one with a computer, the other with an open book. His dad went straight for the computer. “You were with your mother?” he asked.

Jimmy nodded. “She pulled me out of class. We got separated on the stairs.” He rubbed his sore shoulder while his father collapsed heavily into the chair in front of the desk. The computer screen was divided into four squares.

“Where did you lose her? How far up?”

“Two turns above thirty-four,” he said, remembering the fall.

Rather than reach for the mouse or keyboard, his father grabbed a black box studded with knobs and switches. There was a wire attached to the box that trailed off toward

the back of the monitor. In one corner of the screen, Jimmy saw a moving picture of three men standing over someone lying still on the floor. It was real. It was an image, a window, like the cafeteria wallscreen. He was seeing a view of the hallway they'd just left.

"Fucking Yani," his father muttered.

Jimmy's eyes fell from the screen to stare at the back of his dad's head. He'd heard his old man curse before, but never that word. His father's shoulders were rising and falling as he took deep breaths. Jimmy returned his attention to the screen.

The four windows had become twelve. No, sixteen. His father leaned forward, his nose just inches from the monitor, and peered from one square to the next. His old hands worked the black box, which clicked as the knobs and dials were adjusted. Jimmy saw in every square the turmoil he'd witnessed on the stairway. From rail to post, the treads were packed with people. They surged upward. His father traced the squares with a finger, searching.

"Dad—"

"Shhh."

"—what's going on?"

"We've had a breach," he said. "They're trying to shut us down. You said it was two turns above the landing?"

"Yeah. But she was being carried up. It was hard to move. I went over the rail—"

The chair squeaked as his father turned and sized him up. His eyes fell to Jimmy's arm, pinned against his chest. "You