

## RAM RAID AND THE VILLAGES

The villages are strange, violent places. Filled with bodies flat as dust and jewels everywhere; jewelled hands, jewelled faces. The buildings out here are made from slabs of white concrete and choked in dust. It comes off unsealed roads and over the lip of the overpass that cuts the projects off from the rest of the city. Dust that comes down in sheets, that blows across the municipal zone the way rain does in the tropics, in huge curtains that light up gold when the sun falls through them, that stretch out across the horizons. The country out here is very flat.

And the night. To deeper reds, to blood highlights and whole blood streets, mad and loud and mean, stained through. The men that move here street to street are hustlers, dangerous characters, honchos that carry barettas in their jackets, knives in the deeper pockets of their chinos and their cheap pressed slacks. We ignore them, we ignore their dumb and hostile eyes. The night here is scraped, it tastes of metal. It will play out in cold, bright rooms that smell of smoke, or underground where the air is too hot to breathe. We watch them come in from the night and piss and go out again, back out into the dust that is lit along the strip, coronas of red and green and white and blue flashing around the street signs. Toby told us weeks before we had to board the train out to the villages that the light would change. The sunsets, the huge, distant lighting storms out here, even the neons along the strip. When did the light begin to change?

And we thought that we were escaping by coming out here. As though our speed could save us, these vast horizontal movements. But there are whole sets of characters that move at speed. Even a partial inventory: government agents in their tunnelling and time travel machines, weaponised/reconnaissance drones, hungry spirits, demagogues, magi, whole hierarchies of demons from the desert or the air (or the darkness of the underground city), packs of familiars and nomads... A whole ecosystem of maniacs whose language is movement, is acceleration, is coming apart to heat and light and friction so that all that's left them are their voices (and they'll speak in hostility), the old pictures of their faces, always bleached out somehow, inaccessible, untrustworthy...

Where is it that we build? The new places, the new cities?

Weeks ago now. I can remember the first time we saw the camgirl, all sitting together in the apartment as the late sun knifed through the windows open to the trainline, the video in shitty low resolution, so convinced that she was more to us than a doll to be crushed and stuffed and maimed, another expendable body in a production line of millions. We watch her move. She is shy, coy. Her voice beneath her big eyes is soft, excited, naive, trying to be sexy somehow, trying somehow to draw out the shoot, enjoying herself, teasing... We could hear them even then, the pain machines that waited underground, each one oiled, ready, each reflecting the cold light from brushed steel machinery, each attended by a big man without a face, without dignity, all of them alike, dressed in suits that seem to reflect the flat light of that place. She was something then that we could use, like a spell, an image, a mess of limbs and flat, pale muscles, thin and fit, that we could keep between us and the men that we knew one day would come up to take us below the streets to the underground city.

And of course then we needed a crown for her, a crown, a sceptre, we needed to robe her, we needed to dress her, to protect her, make her a new skin out of diamonds and silk and all the things that we could bring down that would save her from the millions of eyes that already now would take her to wet, oiled pieces. That evening was the first time that we heard the words *ram raid*. The words came with an image, something violent sitting in our collective future, indistinct but still menacing. We sourced pistols and claw hammers and face masks and finally a jeep that we took into the garage and reinforced with steel rebar until we all agreed that we could probably take out a brick wall by driving at it fast enough. She never got fucked by anyone, always just her on screen, undressing, masturbating, eventually to orgasm. We imagine chokers on her, stones like fists at her neck and wrists and ankles, we imagine wrapping her in silk as we sit around the apartment learning how to clean revolvers. She could so easily be a boy that way, taken for a boy, a boy's coy face, a boy's voice...

Each day we wait for the violence. Every day we go down to the the diamond shop and take long videos, sometimes tens of hours long, on our phones.

We could all feel our star rising. Feel it somehow in the mouth, in the guts and under the skin. We were building ourselves a nice set of characters down there in that apartment, mapping out their traits, their powers, (like in a real heist film, a hard drinking, drugged out superteam of mystic specialists, the faces of Clooney and Pitt and probably Downey Junior etc) giving them their names like *Shooter DuPointe* and *BIG DICK*, different standardised faces so that each of us could be any of them as necessary. DuPointe would carry the pistol, would stamp down on the neck of the security guard while we explode out from the jeep. Shock and awe. BIG DICK carries a satchel bag and a claw hammer and will be the main diamond snatcher when the big day comes around finally and we drive the car through the front window of the diamond shop to steal the jewels. I wear DuPointe most often in the apartment, a whole complex face-painting procedure – dark eyes, dark lips, wet hair slicked back behind the ears like I'd just been soaked, caught out in a rainstorm, and tear drop pearls that hang from my lobes. I will burn that way, burn the apartment to light and sex and air. My body is like steel and glass those nights. You can see straight through me. Complete transparency – or reflective, mirrored, swellings of muscle and skin that hold the points of light in the communal dorm. Comes to the same thing.

We talk about camouflage, we go over and over the procedure, the right way to get in and out in thirty seconds, back into the jeep, boot off of the security guard's neck, everyone in, driving off, under thirty seconds, pared back to a whole science of movement and violence. Stash the jewels and head out to the villages where Toby knows somewhere where we can stay while things calm down.

No one knows us out there in the villages. They are places whose names we do not know.

And now I can feel myself in the drone state, watching other people treat each other better, worse; more or less brutally. And I couldn't tell you now if we're already in hell, already caught down there in the underground, the black place. The days pass in the apartment and we run the exercises and wear the faces and I can feel somewhere far above us the markets, the public spaces, the boulevards of Babel-city, where people talk a million languages... Somewhere far above us people are talking and selling and diligently translating. Not here though. This place is for we few behind our faces, covered in stones the size of fists, already burning again tonight under the arc lights, after dark, behind closed curtains, behind shuttered blinds. An entire regime down here of jewelled hands that would debase you – of jewelled faces that would watch you debase yourself. Of charismatic violence and slow, unstoppable movement. We watch the camgirl orgasm for the thousandth time. She wears no makeup in the video.

When did we fall? The apartment smells of shit and burnt plastic. We have become addicted to huge death, addicted to the perfect, ritual movements of our bodies when finally we hit the ram raid, addicted to huge explosions, to last stands and to desperate shootouts, to the images of

the streets and marble boulevards finally coming apart, chunks of marble blown to pieces in slow motion, all of it cinema, all of it coded language... Addicted to studying the weapons that will come down on us, we know, from above, always from the sky, tearing us from ourselves – the fuel air bombs that will drag our throats from our mouths while we struggle to breathe; the white phosphor that will burn in tiny particles, clinging to our skin, burrowing into our bodies, burning and burning and boiling skin and bone and marrow, pushed up into abstract meat reefs of red violence. Finally, the end of sickness behind curtains, of drills in dim rooms. Just a whole fury and noise and light, an obliteration mediated by weapons we always knew that they had pointed at us from the air, up there in orbit maybe or sitting mute in silos, pointed always, always at the apartment where we eat together, where we all shit together and fuck each other and cook our communal meals.

Our two rival programs, we with our built bodies and our jewels and our bodies of steel and them with their STARWARS, their fatal faith in increasingly baroque prosthesis. They are trapped behind flattened images. They are victims of a violence that is imprecise, unformed. See their eyes popped in fear, scrambling to punch coordinates, the nasty fear of broken bodies, of amputations, of chests and limbs pushed roughly to pieces...

Of asphalt gone liquid in the heat that sucks up now around the armoured body of the car...

Tonight Toby thought that he was BIG DICK but all I saw was the Lord of the Flies, cut glass for eyes, a thousand refractions that slice the apartment into a million tiny territories, all of them linked, a spastic map of proliferation and schizophrenia.

The ceiling is very bright in the mornings.