

IAN McDONALD

# BRASYL



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ALSO BY IAN McDONALD

# RIVER OF GODS

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IAN McDONALD

# BRASYL



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# OUR LADY OF PRODUCTION VALUES



MAY 17-19, 2006

Marcelina watched them take the car on Rua Sacopã. It was a C-Class Mercedes, a drug dealer's car done up to the tits by the Pimp My Ride: Brasileiro design crew with wheel trim and tail and blue lighting that ran up and down the subframe. Subwoofers the size of suitcases. The design boys had done a good job; it looked a fistful more than the four thousand reis Marcelina had paid at the city pound.

One time they passed it: three guys in basketball shorts and vests and caps. The first time the looking time. A second time, this time the checking time, pretending to be interested in the trim and the rosary and Flamengo key-fob hanging from the mirror (sweet touch) and was it CD multichange or a hardpoint for MP3?

Go, my sons, you know you want it, thought Marcelina in the back of the chase car in a driveway two hundred meters up hill. It's all there for you, I made it that way, how can you resist?

The third time, that is the taking time. They gave it ten minutes' safety, ten minutes in which Marcelina sat over the monitor fearing would they come back would someone else get there first? Now here they were swinging down the hill, big pretty boys long-limbed and loose, and they were good, very good. She hardly saw them try the door, but there was no mistaking the look of surprise on their faces when it swung open. Yes, it is unlocked. And yes, the keys are in it. And they were in: door closed, engine started, lights on.

"We're on!" Marcelina Hoffman shouted to her driver and was immediately flung against the monitor as the SUV took off. God and Mary they were hard on it, screaming the engine as they ripped

out onto the Avenida Epiácio Pessoa. “All cars all cars!” Marcelina shouted into her talkback as the Cherokee swayed into the traffic. “We have a lift we have a lift! Heading north for the Rebouças Tunnel.” She poked the driver, an AP who had confessed a love for car rallying, hard in the shoulder. “Keep him in sight, but don't scare him.” The monitor was blank. She banged it. “What is wrong with this thing?” The screen filled with pictures, feed from the Mercedes' lipstick-cams. “I need real-time time-code up on this.” *Don't let them find the cameras*, Marcelina prayed to Nossa Senhora da Valiosa Produção, her divine patroness. Three guys, the one in the black and gold driving, the one in the Nike vest, and the one with no shirt at all and a patchy little knot of wiry hair right between his nipples. Sirens dopplered past; Marcelina looked up from her monitor to see a police car turn across four lanes of traffic on the lagoon avenue and accelerate past her. “Get me audio.”

João-Batista the soundman waggled his head like an Indian, the gesture made the more cartoonish by his headphones. He fiddled with the mixer slung around his neck and gave a tentative thumbs-up. Marcelina had rehearsed this—rehearsed this and rehearsed this and rehearsed this—and now she could not remember a single word. João-Batista looked at her: *Go on, it's your show*.

“You like this car? You like it?” She was shrieking like a shoutygirl-presenter. João-Batista was looking pityingly at her. On the car cams the boys looked as if a bomb had gone off under their *Knights of the Rider* LEDs. *Don't bail, Lady Lady Lady, don't bail*. “It's yours! It's your big star prize. It's all right, you're on a TV game show!”

“It's a shit old Merc with a cheap pimp from graphics,” Souza the driver muttered. “And they all know that.”

Marcelina knocked off the talkback.

“Are you the director here? Are you? Are you? It'll do for the pilot.”

The SUV veered abruptly, sending Marcelina reeling across the backseat. Tires squealed. God she loved this.

“They decided against the tunnel. They're taking a trip to Jardim Botânica instead.”

Marcelina glanced at the satnav. The police cars were orange flags, their careful formation across Rio's Zona Sul breaking up and reordering as the chase car refused to drive into their trap. *That's what it's about*, Marcelina said to herself. *That's what makes it great TV*. Back on the talkback again.

“You're on *Getaway*. It's a new reality show for Canal Quatro, and you're on it! Hey, you're going to be big stars!” That got them looking at each other. Attention culture. It never failed to seduce the vain Carioca. Best reality show participants on the planet, cariocas. “That car is yours, absolutely guaranteed, *legal*. All you have to do is not get arrested by the cops for half an hour, and we've got them you're out there. You want to play?” That might even do for the strapline: *Getaway: You Want to Play?*

Nike vest boy's mouth was moving.

“I need audio out,” Marcelina shouted. João-Batista turned another knob. Baile funk shook the SUV.

“I said, for this heap of shit?” Nike vest shouted over the booty beat. Souza took another corner at tire-shredding speed. The orange flags of the police were flocking together, route by route cutting off every possible escape. For the first time Marcelina believed she might have a program here. She thumbed the talkback off. “Where are we going?”

“It could be Rocinha or up through Tijuca on the Estrada Dona Castorina.” The SUV slid across another junction, scattering jugglers, their balls cascading around them, and windshield-washers with buckets and squeegees. “No, it's Rocinha.”

“Are we getting anything usable?” Marcelina asked João-Batista. He shook his head. She had never had a soundman who wasn't a laconic bastard, and that went for soundwomen too.

“Hey hey hey, could you turn the music down a little?”



DJ Furação's baile beat dropped to thumbs-up levels from João-Batista.

"What's your name?" Marcelina shouted at Nike vest.

"You think I'm going to tell you, in a stolen car with half Zona Sul up my ass? This entrapment."

"We have to call you something," Marcelina wheedled.

"Well, Canal Quatro, you can call me Malhação, and this América"—the driver took his hands off the wheel and waved—"and O Clono." Chest-hair pushed his mouth up to the driver's headrest. minicam in the classic MTV rock-shot.

"Is this going to be like *Bus 174*?" he asked.

"Do you want to end up like the guy on *Bus 174*?" Souza murmured. "If they try and take that in Rocinha, it'll make *Bus 174* look like a First Communion party."

"Am I going to be like a big celebrity then?" O Clono asked, still kissing the camera.

"You'll be in *Contigo*. We know people there, we can set something up."

"Can I get to meet Gisele Bundchen?"

"We can get you on a shoot with Gisele Bundchen, all of you, and the car. Getaway stars and the cars."

"I like that Ana Beatriz Barros," América said.

"Hear that? Gisele Bundchen!" O Clono had his head between the seats, bellowing in Malhação's ear.

"Man, there is going to be no Gisele Bundchen, or Ana Beatriz Barros," Malhação said. "This is reality TV; they'll say anything to keep the show going. Hey Canal Quatro, what happens if we get caught? We didn't ask to be in this show."

"You took the car."

"You wanted us to take the car. You left the doors open and the keys in."

"Ethics is good," João-Batista said. "We don't get a lot of ethics in reality TV."

Sirens on all sides, growing closer, coming into phase. Police cars knifed past on each side, siren blast, a blur of sound and flashing light. Marcelina felt her heart kick in her chest, that moment of beauty when it all works together, perfect, automatic, divine. Souza slid the SUV into top gear as he accelerated past the shuttered-up construction gear where the new favela wall was going up.

"And it's not Rocinha," Souza said, pulling out past a tanker-train. "What else is down there? Vila Rica, Canoas, maybe. Whoa."

Marcelina looked up from her monitor, where she was already planning her edit. Something about Souza's voice.

"You're scaring me, man."

"They just threw a three-sixty right across the road."

"Where are they?"

"Coming right at us."

"Hey, Canal Quatro." Malhação was grinning into the sun-visor cam. He had very good, white biceps and teeth. "I think there's a flaw in your format. You see, there's no motivation for me to risk jail just for a shit secondhand Merc. On the other hand, something with a bit of retail potential..."

The Mercedes came sliding across the central strip, shedding graphics' loving pimp job all over the highway. Souza stood on the antilocks. The SUV stopped a spit from the Mercedes. Malhação, América, and O Clono were already out, guns held sideways in that way that had become fashionable since *City of God*.

"Out out out out out." Marcelina and crew piled onto the road, traffic blaring past.

"I need the hard drive. If I haven't got the hard drive I haven't got a show, at least leave me that."

América was already behind the wheel.

“This is sweet,” he declared.

“Okay, take it,” Malhação said, handing monitor and terabyte LaCie to Marcelina.

“You know, you kinda have hair like Gisele Bundchen,” O Clono called from the rear seat. “But curlyer, and you're a lot smaller.”

Engine cries, tires smoked, América handbraked the SUV around Marcelina and burned out west. Seconds later police cars flashed.

“Now that,” said João-Batista, “is what I call great TV.”



The Black Plumed Bird smoked in the edit suite. Marcelina hated that. She hated most things about the Black Plumed Bird, starting with the 1950s clothes she wore unironically in defiance of trend and fashion (there is no fashion without personal style, querida) and that nevertheless looked fantastic from the real nylon stockings, with seams—never pantyhose, bad bad thrush—to the Coco Chanel jacket. If she could have worn sunglasses and a headscarf in the edit suite, she would have. She hated a woman so manifestly confident in her mode, and so correct in it. She hated that the Black Plumed Bird could exist on a diet of import vodka and Hollywood cigarettes, had never been seen taking a single stroke of exercise and yet would have emerged from an all-night edit radiating Grace Kelly charm and not skull-fucked on full-sugar guaraná. Most of all she hated that, for all her studious retro and grace the Black Plumed Bird had graduated from media school one year ahead of Marcelina Hoffman and was her senior commissioning editor. Marcelina had bored so many researchers and development producers over Friday cocktails at Café Barbosa about the stunts and deviations the Black Plumed Bird had pulled to get head of Factual Entertainment at Canal Quatro that they could recite them now like Mass. *She didn't know the mike was still live and the guys in the scanner heard her say...(A together) Fuck me till I fart...*

“The soundtrack is a key USP; we're going for Grand Theft Auto/Eighties retro. That's that English new romantic band who did that song about Rio but the video was shot in Sri Lanka.”

“I thought that one was ‘Save a Prayer,’” said Leandro, moving a terracotta ashtray with an inverted flowerpot for a lid toward the Black Plumed Bird. He was the only editor in the building not to have banned Marcelina from his suite and was considered as imperturbable as the Dalai Lama, even after an all-nighter. “‘Rio’ was shot in Rio. Stands to reason.”

“Are you like some ninja master of early eighties English new romantic music?” Marcelina sniped. “Were you even born in 1984?”

“I think you'll find that particular Duran Duran track was 1982,” the Black Plumed Bird said carefully stubbing her cigarette out in the proffered ashtray and replacing the lid. “And the video was shot in Antigua, actually. Marcelina, what happened to the crew car?”

“The police found it stripped to the subframe on the edge of Mangueira. The insurance will cover it. But it shows it works; I mean, the format needs a little tweaking, but the premise is strong. It's good TV.”

The Black Plumed Bird lit another cigarette. Marcelina fretted around the door to the edit suite. *Give me it give me it give it just give me the series.*

“It is good TV. I'm interested in this.” That was as good as you ever got from the Black Plumed Bird. Marcelina's heart misfired, but that was likely the stimulants. Come down slowly, all say, and then a normal night's bed; that, in her experience, was the best descent path out of an all-nighter. Of course if it was a commission, she might just go straight down to Café Barbosa, bang on Augusto's door with the special Masonic Knock, and spend the rest of the day on the champagne watching roller boys with peachlike asses blade past. “It's clever and it's sharp and it hits all our demographics, but it

not going to happen.” The Black Plumed Bird held up a lace-gloved hand to forestall Marcelina’s protests. “We can’t do it.” She tapped at the wireless control pad and called up the Quatro news channel. Ausiria Menendes was on the morning shift. Heitor would probably call her midday for a little lunch hour. The scuttling fears and anxieties of a middle-aged news anchor were the very thing she needed this day. A fragment seemed to have fallen out of her brain onto the screen: Police cars pulled in around a vehicle on the side of a big highway. *São Paulo*, said the caption. Cut to a helicopter shot of military cruisers and riot-control vehicles parked up outside the gate of Guarulhos Main Penitentiary. Smoke spiraled up from inside the compound; figures occupied the half-stripped roof with a bedsheet banner, words sprayed in red.

“The PCC has declared war with the police,” said the Black Plumed Bird. “There are at least a dozen cops dead already. They’ve got hostages in the jail. Benfica will start next and then...No, we can’t do it.”

Marcelina hung by the door, blinking softly as the television screen receded into a tiny jiggling mote at the end of a long, dim tunnel buzzing with cans of Kuar and amphetamines, Leandro and the Black Plumed Bird strange limousines playing bumper-tag with her. She heard her voice say, as if from a fold-back speaker, “We’re supposed to be edgy and noisy.”

“There’s edgy and noisy and there’s not getting our broadcast license renewed.” The Black Plumed Bird stood up, dusted cigarette ash from her lovely gloves. “Sorry, Marcelina.” Her nylon-hose calves brushed electrically as she opened the edit suite door. The light was blinding, the Black Plumed Bird an amorphous umbra in the center of the radiance, as if she had stepped into the heart of the sun.

“It’ll blow over, it always does....” But Marcelina had contravened her own law: Never protest, never question, never plead. You must love it enough to make it but not so much you cannot let it fall. Her chosen genre—factual entertainment—had a hit rate of a bends-inducing 2 percent, and she had grown the skin, she had learned the kung-fu: never trust it until the ink was on the contract, and even then the scheduler giveth and the scheduler taketh away. But each knock-back robbed of a little energy and impetus, like stopping a supertanker by kicking footballs at it. She could not remember when she had last loved it.

Leandro was closing down the pilot and archiving the edit-decision list.

“Don’t want to rush you, but I’ve got Lisandra in on *Lunch-Hour Plastic Surgery*.”

Marcelina scooped up her files and hard drive and thought that it might be very very good to crash. Not here, never here, not in front of Lisandra.

“Oh, hey, Marcelina, say, sorry about *Getaway*. You know, that’s such bad timing....”

Lisandra settled herself into Marcelina’s chair and set her shot-logs and water bottle precisely on the desk. Leandro clicked up bins.

“Isn’t that always the business?”

“You know, you take it so philosophically. If it was me, I’d probably just go and get really really drunk somewhere.”

*Well, that was an option, but now that you’ve mentioned it, I would sooner wear shit for lipstick than get wrecked at Café Barbosa.*

Marcelina imagined slowly pouring the acid from an uncapped car battery onto Lisandra’s face, drawing Jackson Pollock drip-patterns over her ice-cream peach-soft skin. *Lunch-Hour Plastic Surgery* this, bitch.



Gunga spoke the rhythm, the bass chug, the pulse of the city and the mountain. Médio was the chatterer, the loose and cheeky gossip of the street and the bar, the celebrity news. Violinha was the

singer, high over bass and rhythm, hymn over all, dropping onto the rhythm of gunga and médio the cartwheeling away, like the spirit of capoeira itself, into rhythmic flights and plays, feints and improvisations, shaking its ass all over the place.

Marcelina stood barefoot in a circle of music, chest heaving, arm upheld. Sweat ran copious from her chin and elbow onto the floor. Tricks there, deceivings to be used in the play of the roda. She beckoned with her upraised hand, suitably insolent. Her opponent danced in the ginga, ready to attack and be attacked, every sense open. To so insolently summon an opponent to the dance had jeito, was malicioso.

*É, I went walking, the capoeiristas chanted.*

*In the cool morning*

*I met Great São Bento*

*Playing cards with the Dog.*

The roda clapped in counterpoint to the urgent, ringing rhythms of the berimbau. So seeming unsubtle an instrument, the berimbau, its origins as a war-bow apparent in the curve of the wood, the verga, the taut cord. So homespun: a gourd, a piece of wire from the inside of a car tire, a bottle cap pressed against the string, a stick to beat it with, and only two notes in its round belly. A favela instrument. When she began to play capoeira, Marcelina had scorned the berimbau; she was here for the fight, secondarily for the dance aspect of the jogo; but there is no dance without music, and as she learned the sequences, she had come to appreciate their twanging, slangy voices, then to understand the rhythmic subtleties that lay within a trio of instruments that spoke only six notes. Mestre Ginga never tired of telling her she would never attain the corda vermelha if she neglected the berimbau. Capoeira was more than fighting. Marcelina had ordered a médio from the Fundação Mestre Bimba in Salvador, the spiritual home of the classical Capoeira Angola. It lay beside her sofa unopened in its padded instrument bag. For Marcelina in her red-and-white striped Capris and crop top, this day with her defeat at work lying still like sick in her throat, fighting was very good indeed.

*Mestre Bimba, Mestre Nestor,*

*Mestres Ezequiel and Canjiquinha*

*These are the world-famous men*

*Who taught us how to play and sing, the roda chanted, ringed three deep inside the humid, verdant concrete quadrangle painted with Umbanda saints and legendary mestres of history caught in leaps of kung-fu-wire-ballet grace. Again Marcelina beckoned, smiling. The rhythm had dropped from the fighting São Bento Grande to the canto de entrada, a formality of the Angolan School Mestre Ginga retained for his own Senzala Carioca, praising famous and lost mestres. Jair stepped across the roda and locked his upraised hand with Marcelina's. Face-to-face they stepped slowly, formal as a forerunner around the circle of hands and voices and beating berimbaus. He was a cocky boy with ten years on Marcelina, tall and black and good-looking, if in an obvious and preening way, poised, assured to a point of cockiness. He didn't fight women and whites. White people moved like trees, like truckloads of pigs on the way to the abattoir. Women were incapable of ever understanding malícia. It was a given thing. Little white women with German names and German skins were most ridiculous of all. They shouldn't even waste their time trying to play capoeira.*

This little white German woman had surprised him twice already, the first with a lyrical Samba dobrado that began with a feint kick from the floor—only ever hands and feet to touch the earth—then she wheeled into a single-handstand and a sweeping blow from the right leg that Jair evaded by dropping into an immediate defensive negativa, arm raised to defend the face. Marcelina had easily foreseen and evaded his meia lua sweeping kick. *É! É!* the spectators had chanted. The second time they had gasped and clapped aloud as she dived into a meia lua pulada, the hand-spin kick that was Raimundo Senzala's great gift to the game of capoeira. She had caught Mestre Ginga in her peripheral vision; he

squatted with his carved stick like an old Angolan king, his face stone. Old bastard. Nothing she'd ever impressed him. *You're not Yoda*. Then a *chapeu-de-couro* had come wheeling in, Jair whole and airborne, and Marcelina barely dropped back into a *queda de quarto*, hands and feet planted on the dance floor, watching the fighting foot sweep over her face.

At first capoeira had been another wave on the *zeitgeist* upon which Marcelina Hoffman surfed, driven by the perpetual, vampiric hunger for fresh cool. At Canal Quatro lunch was for losers, unless spent in a valid pursuit. For a while power walking had been the thing, Marcelina the first to venture out onto the searing Praia de Botafogo in the shoes, the spandex, the spider-eye shade and pedometer to tick off those iconic ten thousand footsteps. Within a week her few friends and many rivals were out on the streets, and then she had heard over the traffic the twang of *berimbaus*, the cheerful clatter of the *agogô*, the chanting from the green spaces of Flamengo Park. The next day she was with them, clapping in her Germanic, *loira-girl* way while wiry guys with their shirts off wheeled and reeled and kicked in the *roda*. It was a simple recruitment demonstration by Mestre Ginga for his school, but for Marcelina it was the New Cool Thing. For a season it ruled; every other pitch at the weekly session was capoeira-related, and then the Next Cool Thing blew in from the bay. By then Marcelina had donated the spandex and so-last-season shades to a charity store, given the pedometer to Mrs. Cosentino from downstairs, who was haunted by a fear that her husband was a somnambulist who walked the streets kilometer after kilometer at night, stealing little things, bought herself the classic rig of red and white striped Capri pants and stretchy little top, and was taxiing twice a week up the hairpin road up the breast of Corcovado, upon which Christ himself stood, an erect nipple, to Mestre Ginga's *Silvestre de Azevedo* fundação. She was a convert to the battle-dance. Cool would come around again; it always did.

Hands locked, the capoeiristas circled. A damp night, clouds hung low over the Tijuca. The warm humidity held and amplified smells; the fruity, blousy sickliness of the bougainvilleas that overhung the fundação's fighting yard, the rank smokiness of the oil from the lamps that defined the *roda*, the honey-salt sweetness of the sweat that ran down Marcelina's upraised arm, the fecund, nurturing sourness of her armpit. She released her grip and sprang back from Jair. In a breath the *berimbaus* and *agogô* leaped into São Bento Grande; in the same breath Marcelina dropped to a squat, grabbed the cuffs of Jair's skull-and-crossbone-patterned pants, stood up, and sent him onto his back.

The *roda* roared with delight; the *berimbau* players drew mocking laughter from their strings. Mestre Ginga suppressed a smile. *Boca de calça*; a move so simple, so silly that you would never think it could work, but that was the only way it did work. And now, the finishing blow. Marcelina held out her hand. When the hand is offered, the game is over. But Jair came out of his defensive *negativa* in a *armada* spin-kick. Marcelina ducked under Jair's bare foot easily and, while he was still off-balance, stepped under his guard and roundly boxed both ears in a clapping double *galopante*. Jair went down with a bellow, the laughter stopped, the *berimbaus* fell silent. A bird croaked; Mestre Ginga was not any kind of smiling now. Again Marcelina extended the hand. Jair shook his head, picked himself up, and walked out of the *roda* shaking his head.

Mestre Ginga was waiting in the yellow streetlight as Marcelina waited for her taxi. Some drives, some are driven in this life. Low-bowing tree branches and scrambling ficus cast a fractured, shifting light on him as he leaned on his stick. The *patúia* amulets he wore around his neck to defeat spirits swung.

*You're not fucking Yoda*, Marcelina thought. *Or Gandalf the Grey*.

"That was good. I liked that. The *boca de calça*, that's a real *malandro's* move." Mestre Ginga's voice was an eighty-a-day nicotine rasp. As far as Marcelina knew, he had never smoked, never done *maconha* let alone anything more powdery, and drank only on saints' days and national holidays. Nodules on the vocal cords was the prevailing theory; whatever the biology, it was very *Karate Kid*. "I thought maybe, maybe, at last you might be learning something about real *jeito*, and then..."

“I apologized to him, he's cool about it. His ears'll be ringing for a day or two, but he was the one who wouldn't end it. I offered, he refused. Like you say, the street has no rules.”

As she came up dancing out of her defensive crouch, she had seen not Jair's face but the Black Plumed Bird in all her grace and makeup, and her fists had at once known what they needed to do: the slap on the ears, the most humiliating attack in the jogo. A slap on the face, doubled.

“You were angry. Angry is stupid. Don't I teach you that? The laughing man can always beat the angry man because the angry man is stupid, acts from his anger, not his malicia.”

“Yeah yeah whatever,” Marcelina said throwing her kit bag into the back of the taxi. She had hoped that the dance-fight would burn away the anger, turn it, as in Mestre Ginga's homespun Zé, into the mocking laughter of the true malandro, carefree, loved by a world that looked after him like a mother. The music, the chants, the sly jig-step of the preparatory ginga had only driven it deeper until it pierced a dark reservoir of rage: anger so old, so buried it had transformed into a black, volatile oil. There were years of anger down there. Anger at family of course, at her mother delicately, respectfully, turning herself into a drunk in her Leblon apartment; at her sisters and their husbands and their babies. Anger at friends who were rivals and sycophants she kept in line-of-sight. But mostly anger at herself that at thirty-four she had walked too far down a road, in such special shoes, to be able to return. “I can't see children compensating for the career gain I stand to make.” The family Hoffman had been gathered in the Leopold Restaurant for her mother's sixtieth birthday, and she, twenty-three, fresh in Canal Quatro as a junior researcher, dazzled by the lights, the cameras, the action. Marcelina could still hear her voice over the table, the beer, the assurance: a declaration of war on her married old sisters, their men, the eggs in their ovaries.

“I don't want to go the Copa,” she ordered, cellular out, thumb dancing its own ginga over the telephone keys. “Take me to Rua Tabatingüera.”

“Good,” the driver said. “The Copa's crawling with cops and militaries. It's really kicking off down at Morro do Pavão.”



It was not the first weekly briefing she had attended hungover. Canal Quatro's boardroom—the communication-facilitating sofas and low coffee tables, the curving glass wall and the bold and blue of Botafogo with the smog low over Niterói across the bay—thudded to an über-deep bass line. Keeping with the station's policy of freshness and kidulthood, the boardroom's walls were giant photomurals of Star Wars collectibles. Marcelina felt Boba Fett oppressing her. She would be all right as long as she didn't have to say anything; as long as Lisandra did not work out by her bitch-queen spider-sense that Marcelina was coming from two-thirds of a bottle of Gray Goose, and then much cold Bavaria from Heitor's chiller. Another day, another chemical romance.

She did wish she could stop crying every time she went to Heitor's.

Genre heads, commissioners, execs, and line producers. The Black Plumed Bird in shades and a headscarf as if she'd just stepped windswept and sun-kissed off the back of a Moto Guzzi. Rosa the scheduler put the overnights up on the projector. Minimalist leather sofas creaked as bodies sagged into them. Rede Globo's new telenovela *Nu Brasil* had averaged 40 percent audience share over its first four sampling periods, critically 44 percent in the eighteen-to-thirty-four grouping. Canal Quatro's *Ninja School* in the same timeslot had taken 8.5, skewing heavily toward the intended male audience, but a full point and a half behind SBT's *Beauty School Drop-Outs* and equal to the peak segment for Globo Sport. And Adriano Russo was coming in now for a quick word.

Canal Quatro's director of programming took care to look as if he had just parked his surfboard in the reception, but he still had his own reserved chair at the end of the runway of glass tables, and nice

manicured hands busy busy with folders and Blackberries.

~~“First of all, IMHO, in this room are the most creative, imaginative, hardworking, and hard playing people I have ever met. NQA.”~~ The etiquette was to nod along with Adriano's chat-room speak, even when he used English acronyms or, as was commonly believed, made them up. “We've had a bad night; okay, let's not have a bad season.” He straightened the folder on the glass table. “NT senior production and genre heads only. I've come into information about Rede Globo's winter schedule.” Even the Black Plumed Bird was jolted. “PDFs have been e-mailed to you, but the linchpin of the season is a new telenovela. Before you begin groaning about boring unimaginative programming, I'll give you a couple of details. It's called *A World Somewhere*, it's written by Alejandro and Cosquim, but USP: it marks the return of Ana Paula Arósio. She's playing again with Rodrigo Santoro. They've got them both back in Brazil, and on television. The whole thing was shot on a secret closed set in Brasilia, which is why no one heard a word about it. The big press launch is next Wednesday. The first ep TXs on June fifteenth; we need something big, noisy, look-at-me. Water cooler TV, rude and edgy, ‘How dare those Canal Quatro bastards’ the usual sort of thing. We want the television reviewers’ EPOOTH.”

Eyes Popping Out of Their Heads, Marcelina surmised through the thud thud of too many feet on the morning. This was not a show to play against the telenovela. Anything that tried to take on Ana Paula Arósio and Rodrigo Santoro would go down with ten bullets in its head. But Globo was calculating that *A World Somewhere* would generate a huge inheritance audience inert in front of the television and ripe for whatever came after, almost certainly, in Marcelina's experience, a cheap and cheerful “...*Revealed*” puff-doc with lots of behind-the-scenes and actor interviews, teasers but no actual plot spoilers. That was the audience Adriano Russo wanted to steal. For the first time in months arousal flickered at the base of Marcelina Hoffman's heart. Her hangover evaporated in a puff of adrenaline. Blond ambition. Blond promotion. The commissioning merry-go-round between the main network and Globo was spinning again. Factual entertainment would prance round again. Her own little glass cubicle. People would have to knock to come in. Her own PA. She could drop hints for things like Blackberries or pink Razrs and they would appear on her desk in the morning through the tech-fairies. The first thing a new commissioning editor does is decommission all her enemies’ shows. She fantasized shooting down all Lisandra's proposals at the Friday Blue Sky sessions. She could get the apartment in Leblon, maybe even a beach view. That would please her mother. She could cease temporizing with her lunchtime shots of Botox and declare full plastic assault on those thirty-something anxiety lines. Thank you, Our Lady of Production.

“We have six weeks to turn it round. Pitches to genre heads on Blue Sky Friday.” Adriano Russo squared his papers and stood up. “Thank you all.”

*Bye Adriano thanks Adriano see you Friday Adriano hugs Adriano.*

“BTW,” he flicked back from the boardroom door. “Even though we haven't. IMBWR it's World Cup year.”

*Thanks Adriano legal Adriano we'll remember that Adriano.*

Boba Fett still held Marcelina menacingly under his gun, but Yoda seemed to be smiling.



SEPTEMBER 22, 2032

The ball hangs motionless at the top of its arc. It frames Cidade de Luz, fifty hillside streets, its heart adorned with the thorny crown of the favela, at its knees the rodovia heat-crazy with windows and wing mirrors. Beyond the highway the gated enclaves begin: red-roofed, blue-pooled, green-shaded. Through the sun-shiver the endless towers of São Paulo recede into half-believed spirits of architecture, their summits orbited by advertisements. Helicopters itch and fidget between rooftop landing pads; there are people up there who have never touched the ground. But higher still are the Angels of Perpetual Surveillance. On any clear-sky day you may catch them, a flicker on the very edge of vision, like stray cells floating in the jelly of the eye, as they turn in their orbits and their vast gossamer wings catch the light. Sixteen sky-drones, frail as prayers, circle constantly on the borders of the troposphere. Like angels, the robot planes fly endlessly; they need, and can, never touch the ground again; like angels, they see into the hearts and intentions of man. They monitor and track the two billion arfids—radio frequency identity chips—seeded through the cars, clothes, consumer electronics, cash, and cards of the City of Saint Paul's twenty-two million inhabitants. Twenty kilometers above the Angels of Perpetual Surveillance, balloons the size of city blocks maneuver in the tropopause, holding position over their ground data-transfer stations. Exabits of information chatter between them, the seamless weave of communication that clothes not just Brazil but the planet. Higher still, beyond all sense and thought, and global positioning satellites tumble along their prescribed orbits, tracking movements down to a single footstep, logging every transaction, every real and centavo. Highest of all, God on his stool, looking on Brazil and its three hundred million souls nostalgic for the days when his was the only omniscience.

All for an instant, frozen by the parabola of a World Cup 2030 soccer ball. And the ball falls. It drops onto the right foot of a girl in a tight little pair of spandex shorts with her name across her ass: *Milena*, yellow on green. She holds the ball on the flat upper surface of her Nike Raptor, then flips it up into the air again. The girl spins round to volley the ball from her left foot, spins under it and traps it on her chest. She wears her name there too, blue on the sun-gold of the belly-cropped futebol shirt: *Castro*. Blue and green and gold.

"She could be a bit bigger up top," Edson Jesus Oliveira de Freitas says, sucking morning through his teeth. "But at least she's blonde. I mean, she is blonde?"

"What are you saying? This is my cousin." Two-Fags is a scraggy enxofrada with no style and little jeito, and if that girl out there turning pirouettes under the looping ball in her hot pants and belly-top is his cousin, then Edson is not the sixth son of a sixth son. They sit on folding military sling chairs at the edge of the futsal court, a dog-turd-infested concrete bunker in the overlooked space behind the Assembly of God. Milena Castro, Keepie-Uppie Queen of Cidade de Luz, heads the ball now one two three four five six seven. All good girls they go to heaven. Especially back of the Assembly of God. The ball makes a fine plastic thwack against her upturned forehead. Seventeen eighteen nineteen twenty. Like the rich and the angels, the ball never touches the ground.

"How long can she keep it up for?"

"As long as you like."

Heading and smiling. A grin and wink in Edson's direction and Milena volleys the ball from knee to knee. She wears knee socks, in patriotic colors. Knee socks work for Edson.

"I'll take her on." Edson almost sees the reis tumble in Two-Fags' eyes, like something from the cartoon channel. "Come round my office; we'll talk." It's a shotgun shack at the side of Dorcas Hortense's house that smells of dog piss and mold, but it's where De Freitas Global Talent does its business. Milena Keepie-Uppie Queen spins, strikes a pose, and the ball drops right sweet into the crook of her arm. "I'm impressed with what I see." Her lily skin isn't even moist with sweat. "I think you have talent. Unfortunately, talent isn't enough these days. This is where I can help. You need USP. You know what that is? Unique Selling Point. So, the pants are cute, but they have to go."



“Ey! This is my cousin you're talking about,” shouts Two-Fags. Edson ignores him. Local kids are arriving by threes and fours at the futsal court, bouncing their small, heavy ball impatiently. —

“Futebol is a thong thing. At some point you will need a boob job as well. It doesn't affect the ac anything like that?”

The Keepie-Uppie Queen shakes her head. The futsal boys are staring at her. *Get used to it*, Edson thinks. It will be forty thousand of them watching you at halftime at the Parque São Jorge keeping up up up.

“Good good good. Now, what I will do is try you on one of the Série C teams first. Atlético Sorocaba, Rio Branco, something like that. Build you up, get you a rep. Then we move on. But first all, you have to come round to my office and make it all official.”

Marcelina nods matter-of-factly, slips on a silky Timão blouson, and pulls up team color legwarmers. At least she understands business, unlike Two-Fags, who is so dense Edson wonders how he made it to twenty-eight. But he is onto something with this one. De Freitas Global Talent's first major signing—not counting the women's foot-volley team and Petty Cash the pod-warrior, who we just practice. Edson slaps the military chairs just so, and they umbrella down into slender canes a man can sling across his back. Clever stuff, this new smart plastic. Two-Fags has his arm around the Keepie-Uppie Queen's bare waist in a way that is not seemly for any blood relative. Pay him a finder fee and slip him out the back door.

“I'll be in after nine!” Edson shouts after Two-Fags and Milena. The futsal kids push past, eager for their territory, stringing up their net, slipping off their Havaianas.

An ugly face flashes in the middle of Edson's Chillibeau I-shades: Gerson, fifth son of a sixth son and less favored in every way than Edson. Edson dabs a finger to the frame to take the call.

“Hey, unfortunate brother, I have to tell you, I just signed the sweetest deal....”

Edson can name a thousand stupidities Gerson has committed, but today he has excelled himself. The reason he's calling is because he has forty minutes before Brooklin Bandeira's private security track him down and kill him.



A shower of cards coins keys tampons lippy makeup compact mag from an upturned handbag. Coins and keys bounce on the pavement, tampons roll and blow on the hot wind. The gossip mag—handbag sized edition—falls like a broken-backed bird. The compact hits the concrete edge-on and explodes into clamshells, pressed powder, pad, mirror. The mirror wheels a little way.

Gerson João Oliveira de Freitas jumped the girl blindside of the enclave security systems. He picked her up outside Hugo Boss on Avenida Paulista: tailed the taxi back to Mummy and Daddy's lower-middle-class enclave of colonial-style pseudo-fazendas with cool cool pools, tucked away behind the Vila Mariana Cemetery. *Take her as she's fiddling with her bags*. He pulled the strip on the one-shot plastic gun. She just needed one look. Gerson tipped out the bag, threw away the gun—began to decompose immediately—spun the little moto on its back wheel. In and out before she could even scream.

His back wheel shatters the mirror as he guns the engine. Bad luck for someone. He pulls the bandana with which he had covered his face down over his neck. Even a glimpse of one is stop'n'search offense these days. Antisocial clothing. Her I-shades, her watch, her shirt, the taxi; someone's eye somewhere will have photographed him. He has the moto's license plates in his backpack. When he gets to the chipperia, they'll go back on. Twenty seconds with a screwdriver. The cards will already be blank. The key codes change every eight hours. The coin-tokens are worth less than the plastic they're pressed from. Makeup, tampons, girlie mags are not for a man. But the street value of a ne

season 2032 Giorelli Habbajabba (which is beyond *must have into by any means necessary*) is three thousand réis. For a bag. Yes. Prize hooked over his arm, Gerson accelerates down the on-ramp into the great howl of Avenida Dr. Francisco Mesquita.

Senhora Ana Luisa Montenegro de Coelho taps her big ochre I-shades and sends an assalto report and photo through to Austral Insurance and Security. Bandana over face. For sure. No plates. Of course. But ten kilometers over São Paulo an Angel of Perpetual Surveillance turns on the back-logs of its eternal holding pattern and logs a stolen handbag. From the snow of ever-moving arfid signatures it identifies and locates the radio frequency identification chips that uniquely tagged the Anton Giorelli Habbajabba handbag recently registered to Senhora Ana Luisa Montenegro de Coelho. It calls up its neural-net map of São Paulo's two thousand square kilometers and twenty-two million souls; searches through every burb, bairro, downtown, favela, mall, alley, park, soccer stadium, racetrack, and highway; and finds it swinging purple-and-pinkly from the elbow of Gerson João Oliveira de Freitas, hunched over the handlebars of his hand-me-down moped, buzzing like a needle through the home-run along Ibirapuera. A contract goes out. Automated bid systems in the dozen private security companies that can reach the target on budget submit tenders. Fifteen seconds later the contract is issued from Austral Insurance to Brooklin Bandeira Securities. It's a well-established medium-size company that's been losing recently to younger, meaner, more vicious competitors. After comprehensive retraining and financial restructuring, it's back, with a new attitude.

This for a bag? With purple and pink flowers? Ana Luisa Montenegro de Coelho can have another one before sunset. But there's a crackdown on. There's always a crackdown on somewhere: tough on crime, tough on the perpetrators of crime. Usually around the time for insurance policy renewal Brooklin Bandeira Securities has a corporate reputation to restore, and its seguranças are dangerously bored watching O Globo Futebol 1. In the garage two Suzukis rev up. The riders fix location on the helmet HUDs. The pillion riders check weapons and buckle on. Game on.

In the gutter outside Ana Luisa's nice little enclave, the discarded one-shot gun turns to black putrid liquid and drips from the rungs of the grating into the sewer. Over the next few days deliriously poisoned rats will stagger and die across the lawns of Vila Mariana, causing short-lived consternation among the residents.



Edson touches the first two fingers of his left hand gently to his temple in a gesture he has evolved to show his older brother how exasperated he is with him, even when Gerson cannot see him. He sighs.

“What is it you're trying to tell me? They can't blank the arfid?”

“It's some new thing they call an NP-chip.”

Gerson had been sipping coffee and enjoying the good sweet morning rolls, still warm from the oven, at Hamilcar and Mr. Smiles' Chipperia. It was parked round the back of a bakery, which made good sweet morning rolls and pão de queijo for the chipperia's clients while they made stolen things disappear from the sight of the Angels of Perpetual Surveillance. Hamilcar and Mr. Smiles worked out of a thirdhand campervan so full of computers they lived outside in tents and awnings. As all training ended at the chipperia, mobility was paramount. As Gerson understood it, it was all timing. It took ten minutes average, twenty minutes tops to erase an arfid; the closest the seguranças could get in that time was a five-kilometer circle of confusion, and it would blow their budget to search that large area. Most turned around and headed home as soon as they lost the signal from the arfid.

“How much are you looking for that bag?” Hamilcar was half reading the paper, half peeling the flakes of eczema from his cracked feet.

“Three thousand reis.”

“No, I mean seriously.”

~~“That's what they're going for. You cannot get these bags for love nor money nor bribery. I'm telling you.”~~

“Give you eight hundred, and that's including what you owe us for the dechipping.”

“Two thousand five.”

Hamilcar grimaced as he tore a particularly salty piece of dead white skin a little too far, baring raw flesh.

“You are a man of no education. I was thinking maybe my girlfriend might like it as a present—she likes that sort of thing, all the names and that. Not at that price, though.”

Then the door had opened. Mr. Smiles stepped out of the stinky camper. He was an IT graduate from the University of São Paulo, the hacker of the outfit. He was a big skinny Cabo Verde with great and well-tended Afro and dentition that made him look as if he was always smiling. The smile did not sit naturally with the pump-action shotgun in his hand.

“Hey hey hey...” cried Gerson, spluttering flakes of sweet roll.

“Gerson, nothing personal, but you have thirty seconds to get on your bike and depart.”

“What what what?” Gerson said, catching the Habbajabba as Mr. Smiles lobbed it to him.

“It's NP-chipped. I can't touch that.”

“NP what? What shit? You're the scientist; you should know about these things.”

“I'm an information technologist, majoring in database design. This is quantum physics. Get a physicist. Or just go to the river and throw the thing away. You choose, but I'm not facing off with the Brooklin Bandeirantes. And I will shoot you.”

And that was when Gerson called his smart kid brother. And Edson says, “Go and throw the thing in a river.”

“It's three thousand réis.”

“Brother, it's a handbag.”

“I need the money.”

“Do you owe someone again? Jesus and Mary...”

Edson shoos kids away from his bike. It's a Yam X-Cross 250 dirt bike, green and yellow, like a parrot, like a futebol shirt, and Edson loves it beyond everything except his mother and his business plan. It is all jeito, and you can ride it straight up a wall. “Let me talk to Smiles.”

“Okay,” says Mr. Smiles after Edson explains that he really can't let his dumb brother get killed even over a woman's handbag. “I think you're all dead, but you could try the quantumeiros.”

“Who are these? What-eiros?”

“Quantumeiros. You know, those new quantum computers? No? Codes you can't break? They can't. They're the physicists. I can give you their code; they move around even more than we do. Careful with them, though. Weird shit happens round these people.”

A map of the São Caetano rodovia network appears on Edson's Chillibean; a license plate is flagged, heading north on R118. Edson wonders how many chippers and crackers and quantumeiros are nomadic on the highways of great Sampa at any instant.

“I shall try them.”

“What did Gerson ever do he should have a brother like you?” says Mr. Smiles. “All the same, wouldn't hang around too long.”

The Yamaha starts to Edson's thumbprint. He slips a concentration enhancer from his travel pack, pops it, and as the world sharpens and clarifies around him, rides slow through the alleys back of the crente church. He doesn't want mud splashes from the lingering night's rain on his white flares.



The brothers de Freitas meet twenty-three minutes later on the on-ramp at Intersection 7. Twenty-three minutes for the Brooklin Bandeira to close in, to narrow the circle of possibility down machine-pistol range. Edson's been checking his custom-fit rearview cameras for oil-slick-black-segurança hunting bikes. He could get away from them on the Yam, take it places their big bulk machines could not, but not Gerson, flogging the alco engine on that shitty little putt-putt. Edson can hardly believe he once rode that thing. Gantry cameras read his license plate; hurtling satellites debit his account. They don't make it easy for legitimate men of business.

And there it is, looming out of the traffic, the barquentine of the quantumeiros: a big forty-tonner standing at a steady hundred in the outside lane. The cab is pimped with Fleshbeck Crew—stylish cherubim and a battery of airhorns on the roof chromed and sweet as the trumpets of archangels. *Cook/Chill Meal Solutions*, says the trail. Fine cover. No cop is ever going to stop and search barquentine cuisine. Edson weaves Gerson into the truck's slipstream. A touch on the I-shades calls up the address Mr. Smiles gave him. The truck flashes its hazard lights in acknowledgment and sways into the slow lane, drops to seventy sixty fifty forty. The back shutter rolls up, a middle-aged guy in a Black Metal muscle top swings from a chain and manages to smoke at the same time. He beckons them closer. The loading ramp extends, lowers. Steel hits road. Sparks shower around the brothers Oliveira. Black Metal beckons them again: *Come on, come on, on the ramp*. Sparks peel away round Edson as he lines up the run. He's a businessman, not a stunt-rider. Edson edges forward: the concentration gives him micro-accelerations and relative velocities. Wheel on wheel off wheel on wheel off, wheel on; then Edson throttles hard, surges forward, and brakes and declutches simultaneously.

Smoking metalhead applauds.

Thirty seconds later Gerson skids to a halt on the platform, pale and shaking. Edson tries to imagine what the commuters on the São Caetano rodovia make of a male with a pink handbag around his neck driving onto the back of a moving truck. Probably reckons it's the telenovelas and are looking round for the flittercams: *Hey! We're on A World Somewhere, we really are!*

Death Metal raises the ramp and pulls the shutter down with a clatter. Recessed mood-lights flood on. Edson feels his eyes widen behind his wrap-around I-shades. The rear of the container is docking space; the forward two-thirds is split-level business accommodation. The lower floor—reception—Karma Café kitsch, all shag rugs, leather beanbags, inflatable chairs, and zebra-skin sofas on spindly legs. There a battery of rollscreens tuned to sports and news channels, a complex coffee engine with attendant barista and low-laid bossa nova. Upstairs is the office, a transparent cube of plastic, harshly neon-lit to the downbeat downlighting of the club below. The cube is stacked ceiling-high with server farms, wiring alleys, and tanks conspicuously marked *liquid nitrogen*. Edson makes out a figure moving among the racked boxes, a glimpse of swinging red hair. Heaven and clubland are connected by a spiral staircase of glowing blue plastic.

A floppy-haired queen in a good suit and shiny shirt unfolds from a sofa. He has pointy piranha shoes, immaculately polished.

“So this is the handbag?” The bicha turns it over in his hands. “I suppose it was going to happen sooner or later as quantum technology gets cheaper. It would have been a lot simpler just to have thrown it away.”

“My brother can make money out of this.”

The truck accelerates; the seguranças have a fix on the arfid and are running them out of road.

“We can certainly blank this for you. It's not the most up-to-date model. Fia.”

You can fall in love with someone for their shoes. These are gold jacaré-skin wedge heels, strapped at the ankle. They descend the top turn of the spiral staircase. Above them, slim ankles, good calves, not too full, Capri-cut tapered pant-bottoms with a little dart in the side and white piping running up to a matching jacaré belt. The pants belong to a black jumpsuit, confrontationally retro in its cut.

shoulder pads, trim and kitschy tit-zips. All this detail gleams in Edson's edged perception. Then the head descends from the suite upstairs. Third-generation Japanese cheekbones and nose—she's had the eyes done, round *anime* doe-eyes. Hair that super-silky straightness that all aspire to but only the Japanese have the DNA to achieve. Bobbed so severely it might have been measured with a spirit level. Red is the color again, this year. She wears top-marque Blu Mann I-shades pushed up on it.

“Good bag,” she comments.

Edson opens his mouth and nothing comes out. It's not love. It's not even lust. The closest emotion to it he can recognize is *glamour*. If he had a religious cell in his body, he might know it as worship, that word's oldest, truest sense: *worth-ship*. She fascinates him. She is all the things he hopes to be. He wants to orbit in her gravity, circle her thrilling world and thrilling clothes and thrilling friends and thrilling places to go and do and be and see. She takes the jeito he thinks he has earned and spreads all over the road behind her like a mashed cat. She makes him feel like favela scum. That's all right. Compared to her he is, he is.

“They're about two minutes out,” chides the bicha.

“You want to give me that bag?”

“Um, can I watch?”

“There's nothing to see. You'll be disappointed.”

“I don't think I will. I'd like to see.”

“You will. Everybody is.”

“About a minute and a half,” says bicha-boy. Gerson is having a cafezinho.

She lets him carry the bag upstairs.

“Fia? Fia what?”

There's barely space for the two swivel chairs among the technology. The cubicle is swagged with enough cable to rig a suspension bridge.

“Kishida.” She says it fast, with Japanese emphases though her accent is pure Paulistana. Fia sees the Giorelli on an illuminated white plastic tray under a set of micromanipulator arms. She sweeps her Blu Manns down over her face. Her hands dance in air; the robot arms gavotte over the handbag seeking the arfid chip. Edson sees ghosts and circuitry in increasing magnifications flicker across Fia's shades.

“I know this tune, I really like it. Do you like baile?” Edson says, twitching his muscles to the house beat. “There's a gafieira on Friday; I've a client doing a set.”

“Could you just shut up for thirty seconds while I try and do some work?”

The arms locate and lock. Icons appear on Fia's glasses: her pupils dance across the display issuing commands. Edson finds his attention hooked by a glowing object beneath the glass surface of the desk. He cups his hands around his face and presses it to the desktop. The glass is cool enough for his breath to dew. Far below, seemingly farther than the architecture of the trailer allows—below the floor of the lab, below the club lounge, below the truck chassis and the surface of the road—is a shifting, morphing glow.

“What's that?” He lowers his brow until it touches the cool glass.

“Reality,” says Fia. “Quantum dots in superposition. The light is vacuum fluctuation photons leaking through from some of the parallel states in which the computation is being made.”

“Ah, you're the physicist,” Edson says, and bites his tongue: is it the pill that is making the muscle that has never let him down before speak only stupid? She looks at him as if he has shit on his glass desktop. She reaches across Edson to hit a key. The robot probes move in a fraction of a hair and then withdraw to their standby position.

“Okay, that's it. Safe and anonymous.”

“What, you mean, that quick?”

“I told you you would be disappointed.”

“But nothing happened.”

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“I ran through possible combinations in ten to the eight hundred universes. That's not exact nothing.”

“Of course,” says Edson unconvincingly.

“There's always an answer out there somewhere.”

Edson has heard a little about this—he makes it his business to know something about everything that occupies adjacent niches to him in the twilight economy—and he has seen with his own eyes not what it can achieve, but it still feels like witchcraft to him. Quantum dots in superwhateverposition. Ten to the eight hundred universes. That is not reality. Reality is Brooklin Bandejas running back to the office, out of funding and out of quarry. Reality is people stupid enough to pay three thousand reais for a handbag, and people stupid enough to steal one. Reality is the necessity of getting with the magnetic, strict creature.

“If you say,” says Edson. If she thinks he is ignorant, he might as well put it to work. “But you could explain it to me over lunch.”

“I'd rather you just paid me now.”

Down in the lounge, he throws the bag to Gerson while the bicha in the suit prints out an invoice. A movement distracts Edson, someone/thing among the quantum computers above. Impossible. No one could get past them on the neon staircase. *Weird shit happens around them*, Mr. Smiles had warned.

“We'd prefer cash,” the bicha says. Whatever preferred payment option, it's impossible.

“Don't be owing us,” advises the Black Metalista. Edson's money-sense cues him that he is the wealth behind the operation.

“I'll take the bag,” says Fia. Edson snatches it away from his brother.

“So, gafeira?” he chances as the truck pulls into a safe stop and the shutter clatters up. “José Garage, Cidade de Luz.”

“Don't push it,” says Fia quantumeira, but Edson can see deep down, at the quantum level, she's baile queen.



JUNE 19, 1732

The mule went mad on the cobbled pier of the Cidade Baixa. The insanity fell on it in an instant, one moment doggedly hauling the laden wagon with the tenacity of its breed, the next shying in its trace ears back, teeth bared, braying. It tore free from the barefoot slave who had been steering it half asleep, such was the stolid placidity of the mule, from the engenho to the dock where the low, slow carracks rolled on the swell of the Bahia de Todos os Santos, fat with sugar and Vila Rica gold. The slave snatched for the bridle; the mule shied away from the hand, eyes rolling. The mule reared and kicked. The wagon rocked, spilling white pillows of sugar that split on the cobbles. The dockside whores, come down for the arrival of *Cristo Redentor* in Salvador harbor—a ship from Portugal, navy ship—flew with cries and oaths. Soldiers in the buff and crimson of the imperial infantry under the command of a sword-carrying Teniente ran from the customhouse. The mule leaped and plunged; the slave danced around before it, trying to seize the lead rope, but the cry had already gone out across

the harbor: *The rage the rage.*

“Help me!” the slave cried. A hoof caught the carter a glancing blow; he reeled across the quay, blood starting from his smashed jaw. The mule bucked and plunged, trying to twist off the heavy cart. Yellow foam burst from its mouth. Its chest heaved, sweat stained its hide. Cries, shrieks from the ladies in their headscarves and petticoats. Slaves left their rail carts, their master and mistress encircled the insane mule, arms outstretched. The soldiers unshouldered their muskets. Eyes wide, the mule reared again and launched into a full gallop along the pier. Slaves and soldiers fled.

“The priest! For the love of God, Father!” the Teniente shouted.

Father Luis Quinn looked up from where he had been supervising the unshipping of his small trunk of possessions from *Cristo Redentor*. The mule and leaping cart bore down upon him like a blazing war chariot from the Fianna legends. Luis Quinn threw his arms up. He was a big man, large and more imposing yet in the simple black robe of his order, a piece of night fallen into day. The mule leaped straight up into the air in its traces, came down foursquare, and stopped dead, head bowed.

Every sailor, every officer, every soldier, every slave, every whore in her bright jollyboat, stopped to stare at Luis Quinn. Slowly he lowered his arms and stepped toward the twitching, foaming beast, clicking and shushing under his breath all the words for horses he knew in both his natal tongue, Portuguese and Irish.

“I advise you not to approach the creature, Father,” the Teniente called, a pale, European face among the caboclo faces of the Salvador Auxiliaries. “We will shoot the beast and burn its body; that way the rage will not spread.”

“Hush, hush there,” Luis Quinn said as he reached out for the rope halter. He could see the infant forming a line, taking aim. His fingers closed around the rope. With a cry more like a human scream than any right sound of a beast the mule reared, flashing out with its steel-shod hooves. Quinn twisted out of the path of the killing hoof; then the mule leaped. For a moment it seemed suspended; then the mule and wagon plunged into the green water of the bay. Whore-boats scattered. Luis Quinn saw the mule's head fight out of the chop, eyes wild with the knowledge of its certain destruction, the creature's foam at its mouth now bloodstained. The weight of the cart pulled it under. Luis Quinn saw its knees kicking against the dragging green water; then it was lost. Empty sugar sacks rose to the surface one by one as their contents dissolved like white, night-blooming water flowers.

“Ah, the creature the creature.” It had been but an animal, but Luis Quinn nevertheless murmured a prayer. The Teniente, now at Quinn's side, crossed himself.

“You are all right, Father.”

“I am unharmed.” Quinn noticed all across the dock the soldiers, the slaves, even the strumpets make the same blessing. He did not doubt it was as much for his habit as the sudden fatal madness of the mule. Thus had it been on the slow, calm-bound, scurvy-racked voyage of *Cristo Redentor* from the bar of the Tagus: mutterings, scratchings, charms, and prayers. A priest, a black Jesuit, aboard. No luck upon this ship. “I heard mention of a rage.”

“A madness of horses first, latterly of all beasts of burden, God between us and evil.” The Teniente signaled for one of his troopers to bear the father's trunk. As the young officer escorted him toward the Custom House, Quinn opened his senses to this place in which he had so freshly landed. He noted with a start that there was not one horse. No animal at all on this great stone apron beneath the sheer bluff of the Cidade Alta. No beast on the steep ladeira that wound up the steep cliff between low and high Salvador. Human muscle alone powered this city. The cobbled paths and quays teemed with slaves pushing laden barrows and gurneys on iron rails, bent under sacks slung from brow straps, carefully negotiating sedan chairs through the thronging black and red bodies and fat white sacks of king sugar. “As with all afflictions, rumors run wild,” the Teniente continued. The soldier, a ragged mameluco in half uniform of frock coat and loose duck breeches, unshod like a slave, followed s

paces behind. "The rage is a thing of the índios from out of the deep forest; it is the work of the Dutch or the Spanish; it is a punishment from God. Not last week angels were seen in Pelourinho, battling with knives of light, three nights in succession. It is attested to by some of the best in Salvador."

"We have not heard of this in Coimbra."

"There is much in Brazil never reaches the ears of Portugal." The Teniente halted short of the bustling portico of the Custom House. "Ah. As I feared. It is always so when a ship's arrival corresponds with the sailing of the sugar fleet. The Custom House is the most hopeless jam; I cannot see you getting clear for hours. As a crown officer, I am empowered to authorize your permissions of entry to the colony."

"For a small consideration," said Luis Quinn.

"A trifling impost, that's all."

"I am under the direct authority of the Provincial of Brazil." Luis Quinn retained the bones of his birth-accent; a linguist, a speaker in tongues, he was well aware of the advantage its air of the uncanny lent him. A big man, hands like spades, softly spoken as big men so often are.

"Indeed, Father, but Brazil is not like other places. You will find that little happens here without inducement."

Brazil is not like other places. So many had said that to him, from Father James his spiritual director, even as he ordered him on the task most difficult, to this cocky puppy of a soldiery in his wig and three-cornered hat gay with feathers.

"I do not think it would suit my cloth to be seen enjoying preferment over others. No, I shall wait my turn in the Custom House, Teniente. Sure when God made time He made plenty of it." The officer bowed, but his mouth was sour. He took his bearer with him.

*I ask only that I might be given a task most difficult.* In the studies and libraries of the College of Coimbra, Luis Quinn's request, made every year on the day of the patron of his native Ireland to his spiritual director, had sounded rich in zeal and honesty. Candlelight, cloisters work such deception. Every year for five years the same reply: *When the need and the man meet.* This year, Father James the mathematics instructor to the missionaries to China where that art commanded special admiration had said, *My room, after compline.*

"Brazil."

"Brazil, yes. Where all the sin in the world has washed up. A request from the provincial of the College at Salvador for an admonitory."

"To what purpose?"

"Our own provincial says only that he requires an admonitory from outside the colony." The Teniente with a wry smile: "That seems to me to imply a task most difficult."

Luis Quinn drew again in his memory Father James, a short laconic Ulsterman with his provincial flinty accent and humor. A fellow refugee from the penal laws swept down the sea-lanes to Portugal.

Luis Quinn hefted his small sea chest and joined the noisy crowd at the arcade. The ship had seemed like a prison, yet the world felt too expansive, the horizon too close, the sky too distant, the colors too bright and people too brash and clamorous. The sailors and the captains, the feitores and the senhores de engenhos moved away from him, touching their miraculous medals, bowing a nod: *Come through there, Father; after you, Father.*

Beyond the interminable questions and inspections and opening and resealings of the Custom House were the carriers, squatting around their feitor, a fat caboclo with ripped stockings and high-heeled shoes.

"Father Father, a carry a carry." The slave was an índio, bow back and bow legs, yet his muscles were like bands of iron. He wore a brow strap that hung to beneath his shoulder blades. A pair of rope stirrups dangled around his neck. He knelt on the cobbles before a worn wooden mounting block.



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