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Brasyl

Ian McDonald

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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 car 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 multichanger 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? No, 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 Epitácio 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

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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 Producão, 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 looking pityingly at her. On the car cams the boys looked as if a bomb had gone off under their Knight 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 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 told 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.

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'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 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 is 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 into 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 their cars.'

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

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'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 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, a 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 Canoas, maybe. Whoa.'

Marcelina looked up from her monitor, where she was already planning her edit. Something in 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 big 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.

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'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 curlier, 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 . . . (All 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?'

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'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's 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 un-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 Kuat 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-hosed 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

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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 cry. 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 then 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 copiously 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.

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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 berimbaus. So seemingly unsubtle an instrument, the berimbau, its origins as a war-bow apparent in the curve of the wooden 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 foro, 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 malicia. It was a guy 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 S-dobrado that began with a feint kick from the floor – only ever hands and feet to touch the earth – that wheeled into a single-handstand and a sweeping blow

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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 Rio-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 did ever impressed him. You're not Yoda. Then a chapeu-de-couro had come wheeling in, Jair wholly 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 sessions 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. Costa 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-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 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 an armada spin-kick. Marcelina ducked under Jair's bare foot easily and while he was still off-

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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, walked out of the roda shaking his head.

Mestre Ginga was waiting in the yellow streetlight as Marcelina waited for her taxi. Some drive, 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 patúa 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 wouldn't end it. I offered, he refused. Like you say, the street has no rules.'

As she come 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 box 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 Zen, 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, respectably 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 into Canal Quatro as a junior researcher, dazzled by the lights, the cameras, the action. Marcelina could still hear her voice

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over the table, the beer, the assurance: a declaration of war on her married older sisters, their men, the eggs in their ovaries.

'I don't want to go the Copa,' she ordered, celular out, thumb dancing its own ginga over the text 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 Niteroí across the bay – thudded to an über-deep bass line. In 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 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 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 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 at reception, but he still had his own reserved chair at the end of the runway of glass tables, and nicely 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. 'NTK 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 emailed to you,

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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 against 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 much morning. This was not a show to play against the telenovela. Anything that tried to take on Ana Paulo 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 networks 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 drops hints for things like Blackberries or pink Razrs and they would appear on her desk in the morning through the tech-fairy. 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 that 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.

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