

THERE WILL BE BLOOD - sample chapter

Sore losers

The fourth Gwando Awards began at seven-thirty in the evening and like the previous three Gwando Awards rumbled on for two hours in front of a grumbling collection of drunks and hysterics high on drugs, flushed by booze, bloated on corporate generosity. They sat and stood and squatted and squirmed, agitated and fidgety in their chairs and other people's chairs. (Leave your chair for a moment and it wouldn't be there when you came back. Or the table, for that matter.) No, they were here for one thing and it wasn't James Corden.

Best Album.

At nine forty-one, Hatti Goldmann slithered up to the microphone and tranquillised the mob. "Nominations for Best Album are . . . Fisheyes, Veronica Jug. Upside Down and Inside Out by the Wee Ramseys. Jack's Been a Good Boy, Jack Sac. Ratcatcher, There Will Be Blood." The mob hissed, cheered, hissed again, cheered. . . . "Malandanti, Toten Herzen." The cheering and hissing expanded into verbal warfare supported by uncollected knives and forks, (one or two spoons in there too) looping deadly arcs above unprotected heads.

Hatti, deliberately unaware of the shortness of her dress or the lack of material it contained, struggled to open the envelope.

"Don't you think in the twenty-first century they'd use some electronic gadgetry instead of a paper envelope?" said Susan.

"Ssh." Dee stepped up and down, the only excited member of the band gathered invisibly at the back of the venue. "Here it comes. . . ." They were ready to receive the award. Not in person, they were too anti-social for all that, but through a pre-recorded message filmed in the smog of Rotterdam: the proud band, Susan holding the solid gold bottle of Gwando Spunk.

"She's opened the envelope," said Rene, "but we still don't know if she can read."

Hatti squealed. "Oh my god. The winner is Ratcatcher. There Will Be Blood."

And there they were. The winners, the glorious victors bounding and tumbling towards the stage to collect the prize. Dodging the cutlery, they reached Hatti Goldmann and tore her dress off. Lead singer lifted the same solid gold bottle of Gwando Spunk Susan had fleetingly gripped in her vampiric talons. The drummer hoisted a semi-naked Hatti over his shoulder and swung her round to let the audience laugh at the black Y emerging from the cleft of her buttocks; he bit her arse and drew blood. Bass guitarist kicked over the microphone stand and serenaded the front three rows with the yeasty contents of his bladder, and all through the acceptance speech, the incomprehensible gurning and yodelling of four sour-faced clowns, Susan stood combusting at the back of the venue.

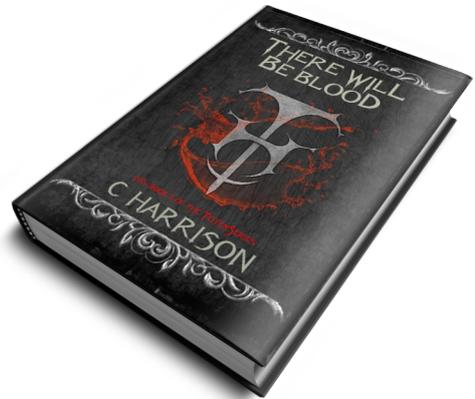
"That's my fucking award."

"Our award," said Wallet.

"Our award. That's our fucking award."

Down below, barely audible in the drunken din, There Will Be Blood's spokesman, Lev the Singer, the only member of the band with a grasp of English, taunted the losers. "Where are you Toten Fucking Herzen? Where are you now, runner-uppers? Where is all your publicity now, shit vampire band? See this. . . ." the award, "see how it is in my hand and not in your hand." He sucked the top of the bottle. "I come all over it for you, Totenlosers. I wank it for you all Totenloserwankers. . . ."

He had more to say, but couldn't say it after Hatti's flailing feet whacked him across the side of the head. The award broke from its base and rolled off the stage into a forest of legs, kicked



around by the press pack crawling over each other to grab the iconic shots of There Will Be Blood's foul-mouthed triumph. Not that it was unexpected.

Dee made direct eye contact with Elaine. "All right, which one of you tossers had two thousand pounds with Paddy Power on this lot winning?"

"Four to one. Pretty good odds."

"Time for Plan B?" Susan headed for the steps.

Toten Herzen descended towards the pandemonium, passing through it all like dark neutrinos, unseen, unknown, unmoved by the energy. Susan ignored the chatter: "The other lot'll be feeling sick now." "Someone's for the jump tomorrow." But one exchange pulled her back.

"You know why they lost, don't you?"

"Go on."

"Didn't have an umlaut over the O in Toten."

Susan reacted. "A fucking umlaut over the O. We don't need an umlaut over the O."

Wallet pulled her away. "They can't hear you."

"What the fuck have umlauts got to do with it?"

"Calm down. Stick to the plan."

"I'm calm. I'm fucking calm."

After the rags of damaged dress were cleared away and the broken bits of award recovered, James Corden took advantage of the peace and moved on. His joke about Hatti Goldmann being dressed for the weather rose and fell in a slow Doppler effect, as if the stage itself couldn't avoid mocking Toten Herzen passing by, filtering through the backstage chaos and along noisy corridors to the green rooms and There Will Be Blood's post-award sanctuary.

Behind the clamour and cackle of a stressed-out gang of venue stewards Susan heard a raised Russian voice. Trouble in the camp. Two men with flat heads guarded the locked green room door closed to the outside world, including the venue stewards trying to kick it open. Hatti Goldmann had made a complaint.

"The dress cost twenty grand and wasn't insured." But the door remained locked; orders of the management, whatever the cost.

"Tell her get second dress," said one of the flat heads. "Fucking English midgets."

A champagne cork popped. Susan's eyes glowed as red as her lip gloss and when Dee shoved her in the back they moved on. All four of them and Wallet at the rear, stepped through the solid door without a shimmer of awareness from the group surrounding it.

Inside the sullen green room, the band's manager Mikhael Pushkin, champagne bottle in left hand, glass in right, presented a fascinating analysis of what had just happened: it was good, but could have been better.

"You, you had her in your hands, you fucking halfwit. Why didn't you go all the way?"

"But. . . ." The drummer shrank in his chair.

"Butt. Yes, in your face, swinging around the stage and you leave her knickers on. I told you to pull them off."

"But. . . ."

"Shut the fuck up. Pull her knickers off and they'd still be talking about it in the next century. Talking about you, this band, *that moment*. Don't you see that, you fucking prick?"

"But. . . ."

"Why didn't you do it? I told you to do it. He did what he was told." Pushkin pointed at the bass player replenishing his empty bladder. "He gave them a real fucking shower, but you, all you had to do was remove the knickers and you couldn't even do that. You have a girlfriend?"

"Yeah, I—"

"Does she leave her knickers on when you fuck her?"

Elaine made herself visible behind the bass player. The cue for the others to appear.

"We came to offer our congratulations," Susan said. "And pick up our award."

Pushkin's right arm remained cantilevered in the direction of his bass player who mumbled, "What are you all staring at?"

Susan plucked the award out of the guitarist's hand and remembered the weight and the fluting down the side of the golden bottle. "Look at you. You bunch of fakes." The base was missing. "We're not fakes, we really are fucking dangerous."

She launched at the guitarist, snapping his neck, the sound cracking like a fresh carrot. The others followed, landing on their opposite number teeth first (Wallet went for Pushkin), and in a frenzied sixty seconds turned the air blue and the carpet tiles crimson. Lev the Singer was yanked off his feet and bitten through the neck until the naked vein hosed blood across Elaine busy re-attaching the bass player's head to a coat hook.

Wallet forced Pushkin up the door to give him an elevated view of the carnage. "There we were thinking you lot were a lively bunch. Ooh, give 'em hell, Ygor. Bit of the old hair dryer treatment, eh? Still, you're a lucky man. You join a select club of human beings to witness the truth and live. Good luck explaining it."

"What?"

When they were done and Rene had reseated the drummer's corpse, Susan inspected Pushkin's boggling eyes. "Is he dead?"

Wallet patted the manager's face. "No."

"No?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Wallet dropped Pushkin and led the band back out into the corridor. "It puts him in an awkward situation."

"What do you mean? The plan was to kill them all. You remember the headlines. The risks connected to winning Toten Herzen's award."

"It was a shit headline. My plan's better."

Alerted by the silence, the Russian guards pushed their flat heads to the door, shouted to the occupants, held back the wiry venue stewards waiting to kick the frame away from the walls, and all the time Toten Herzen walked amongst them, cross-examining Wallet and asking why he had veered from the plan. Susan's Plan.

"Think about it," Wallet said, "He'll be found alive in a room full of dead bodies. How did this happen, Ygor, the police will ask. It was them, officer. The vampires did it. You're coming with me, my lad, the police will say. And Ygor will have the unenviable job of explaining why he survived when everyone else died. If we killed them all you'd have a simple multiple murder on your hands. This way, he has a right old conundrum to get out of."

Susan licked her lips and considered the variation. "Makes sense." Back in the auditorium, James Corden continued to struggle with the audience oblivious to the backstage celebration getting out of hand. "Why did you let him live again?"

"I just told you."

"Sorry, yes, you did."

"I've got the strangest feeling," said Dee. "I only get it on very rare occasions, but I think Rob's plan might just be a stroke of genius."

James Corden raised his eyebrows and finally the audience laughed.

Toten Herzen left the building.