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Opening extract from

Blade: Enemies

Written by

Tim Bowler

Published by

Oxford University Press

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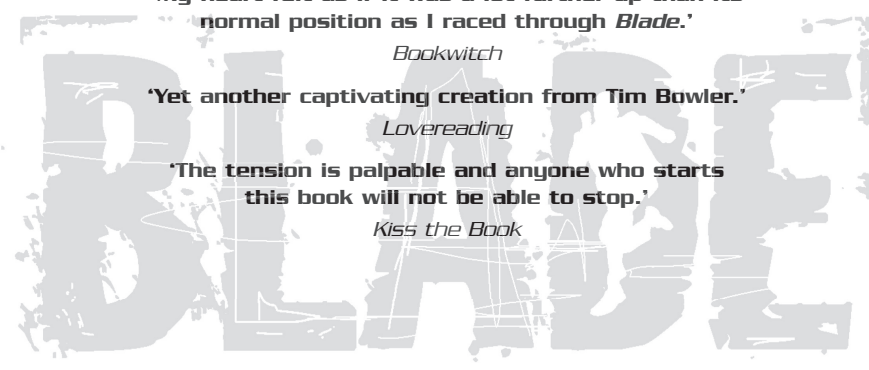

BLADE

ENEMIES

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BLADE

ENEMIES

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
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First published as *Playing Dead* and *Closing In* 2008
First published in this edition 2012

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

ISBN: 978-0-19-276360-0

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain

Paper used in the production of this book is a natural,
recyclable product made from wood grown in sustainable forests.
The manufacturing process conforms to the environmental
regulations of the country of origin.

For Rachel

with my love

1

SO HE'S LOOKING at me with his puggy face, this big jerk of a policeman, and I'm thinking, take him out or let him live?

Big question.

I don't like questions. Questions are about choices and choices are a pain. I like certainties. Got to do this, got to do that, no debate. Take him out, let him live. Know what you got to do. Certainty.

Only I'm not certain here. I'm pretty sure I want to take him out. I hate the sight of him and I hate being back at the police station.

The knife feels good hidden inside my sock. Pugface didn't even feel it when he frisked me. But he'll feel it pretty quick if he doesn't treat me right. It's only a small blade but I know how to use it.

He's still watching me with those pig-eyes.

'Right, young man,' he says.

'I'm not your young man.'

He takes no notice. He's too busy smirking.

'In your own words,' he goes on.

'In your own words what?'

'In your own words—what happened?'

'What happened where?'

He gives this heavy, exaggerated sigh. I hate that. Move my fingers slowly down my thigh.

He can't see with the desk in the way. That bosomy policewoman over by the door's watching but she can't see anything either. I can tell from her face.

Anyway, she's too far away. I can have my knife out and into Pugface before she's covered half the ground between us. Probably time to stick her too.

He goes on in that patronizing voice.

'What happened at the pedestrian crossing?'

My fingers are close to the knife now. I stop my hand. No need to move it any further. I'm safe enough. All that's needed is a lunge and a thrust. Maybe a bit more if Bosoms gets involved.

'What happened at the crossing?' says Pugface.

'Nothing.'

'You stood in the road after the lights had turned to green and refused to move and let the traffic pass.'

'Did I?'

'You shouted abuse at the drivers waiting to move on.'

'Can't remember.'

'Especially the man in the nearest car.'

'Can't remember.'

'The man in the green estate. He asked you to move aside so that he and everybody else could drive on. You swore back at him and made obscene gestures.'

'He was rude to me.'

'You don't think maybe you were the one being rude?'

I shrug. I'm starting to enjoy this now.

'Eh?' says Pugface.

'Don't know.'

'It was dangerous.'

'No, it wasn't. He was never going to run me over.'

'Because unlike you, he had some sense of responsibility. Though it would have shaken you up quite a bit if he had put his foot down and driven at you. I don't doubt you'd have moved aside pretty quickly if he'd done that.'

'He wouldn't have had the guts.'

'Is that what you think stopped him? Lack of guts?'

'Yeah.'

'That's what you'd have done, is it? If you'd been the driver and you'd seen some rude little kid standing on the crossing and refusing to move? Jeering and swearing at you, and daring you to drive on? You'd have put your foot down and run him over, would you?'

'Too right.'

He leans back in the chair, glances at Bosoms. I'm really having fun now. They're both out of their depth. They don't know what to do with me. They know they can't prosecute or anything. It's just not that big a deal. I'll get a warning, nothing more.

Then Pugface stands up.

'Seems like we've got a problem, then.'

He moves round the desk towards me. I don't like the look of him suddenly. Don't know why. He sits on the edge of the desk.

Too close. Don't like people that close. Makes me remember things. I think of the knife, squeeze my hands into a ball. He glances at Bosoms again, then back at me.

'The driver's told us he doesn't wish to take things further. He just wanted to report the incident.'

Say nothing.

'He was a bit worried we might not be able to trace the boy who held up the traffic for five minutes, swore at all the drivers, then ran off.' Pugface sniffs. 'He clearly wasn't aware just how well we know you round here.'

He leans closer. I'm hating this now. It's not the police station. It's this face leering down at me. He's got to pull back. He's got to do it now, right now.

But he doesn't. He just smirks again—then leans even closer.

'Do you really think,' he whispers, 'that we haven't noticed you've got something hidden inside your sock?'

I lunge for the knife—in vain. The man's hands are tight round my arms. I don't even see the woman move. One minute she's over by the door, the next she's behind me, pulling me back against the chair. I spit at 'em, snarl at 'em, try to break free. Doesn't do any good.

'Bastards!' I'm rocking about, screaming my head off. 'Bloody bastards!'

'Yeah, yeah,' says Pugface. 'Bloody bastards.'

'Got a nice tongue on him,' says the woman.

'Bastards!' I scream.

'Look inside his sock,' mutters the policeman.

The woman pulls out the knife, fumbles with the other sock.

'There's nothing in there,' I yell.

She checks anyway, then straightens up, holding the knife. The man lets go of me and takes it from her. I duck under their arms and make a dash for the door.

I'm not fast—no point pretending—but being small sometimes helps, and somehow I've taken 'em by surprise. I'm at the door before 'em. I can see Pugface's hands clutching at me, and the woman's, but they're kind of falling over each other.

Then I'm out in the corridor.

Shouts from inside the room. Some constable running towards me from the desk. That's when fire extinguishers come in handy. A squirt over the guy and he slips. Jump over him and out the door.

Nothing to it.

2

AND THAT WAS when I was seven.

Now that I've turned fourteen, I look back and you know what's weird? It's like nothing's changed. I still don't like the police and I still don't like people getting close.

And that includes you, Bigeyes.

Not quite sure why I'm talking to you at all. I don't even know you. Maybe it's something Becky said to me. You got to make sense of your life. You got to think about what you're doing. You got to think before you act. And if you ever want to talk, I'm here for you.

Except Becky's dead.

So maybe that's why I'm dumping on you.

Not that I feel obliged to tell you the truth, mind. Don't get any ideas. I mean, I might tell you the truth but I might not. Just so you know.

I call the shots here. I choose what I say and what I don't. You can choose whether to stay or wig it somewhere

else. And if you choose to wig it, that's fine with me. I don't need you. Remember that.

I don't need anyone.

Thing about lying—we're all told it's wrong. Tell the truth, tell the truth, tell the truth. But where's that ever got anyone? I've been lying since as long as I can remember. Why? Cos everyone I've ever known has lied to me.

So what am I going to tell you? Not much, so don't get excited. You probably want to know my name. Well, that's a bit of a problem. I got loads.

There's the name I was given as a baby but that's a dronky name so I never use it. Then there's the names I make up. I got binbags of those. Different names for different people. Depends on where I am and who I'm with.

But there is one name I like.

It's the name Becky gave me. A name from the past. Everybody called me it in the old days. No one does now cos no one in this city knows it. And that's fine. I don't like to remember. But I do like the name. You can use it if you want.

BLADE.

That's what they used to call me. And I liked it. Bit of style, bit of clash. But remember—it's a secret. Don't be a claphead and spew it. If I find out you've blotched on me, then you'll find out why Becky called me Blade.

As for the rest of the world, I don't give two bells what people call me. Why fuss about a name when you can make 'em up so easy? And you know what? Life's a bit like that too.

Easy, simple, no sweat.

What you shaking your head for? Don't believe me? Well, I don't care. Believe what you like. It's true anyway. Life's a whack. It's no big deal coping with stuff. Other people—they make a horse trough out of it, get stressed out. Me, I'm different.

It's like I'm on top of this mountain, this great big mountain, higher than all the others, higher than—what's it called?—Everest. Miles higher. I'm all on my own with my head way up above everybody else, and I'm fine about it. There's no one'll ever conquer me, cos no one'll ever get near me.

You listening to this, Bigeyes?

That's what it's about. It's about seeing things from a higher place than everybody else. Seeing things no one else can.

Like that guy in Café Blue Sox. I can see things about him no one else can. I can see things about him even he can't see. Got him? Table by the window. Not the guy with the vomity hair. He'll be leaving in a minute. Don't ask me how I know.

The other guy, the one with the mobile phone. Brown hair, about twenty, bit smooth. Got him?

There's loads like him round here. Big head, small brain. This city breeds 'em. Very easy meat. He'll finish his phone call in a minute, drape his coat over the back of that empty chair next to him, and forget about it.

Why? Cos all his attention'll be taken up with that blonde girl behind the bar.

There you go. What did I tell you? Vomity's leaving. Now—watch Dogbrain. There he goes, see? Mobile down, sip of coffee, coat over the chair.

Walk over, stand outside, wander in. Busy place, lots of yak. Even better.

No one notices me. I'm good at that. No one notices me when I don't want 'em to. I might be invisible. Only the red-lipped girl behind the bar sees me, and that's just cos I want a coffee.

Blondie's already over by the window talking to Dogbrain.

'Can I help you?' says Redlips.

'Latte, please. Medium.'

She fixes me the latte. Take it over to the window. Blondie's still there, leaning over the guy's chair. They're talking about nothing. Murmurs, giggles.

Sit down at the next table. They don't notice. Move the chair closer to his. More murmurs, giggles. They're talking about a guy he knows, some dungpot called Kenny.

Check round me, check the guy, check the girl.

Nobody even knows I'm here. I might be a dream, a spirit. I love doing this. I know where the wallet is. I can see the shape of it from here. Inside pocket of the jacket, closed with a zip.

Another check round—stop. Blondie's straightened up. She's looking me over. But she's not noticing me. She's thinking of Dogbrain even as she looks at me.

The guy hasn't even turned. He's drinking her up with

his eyes like she's some kind of cocktail. She looks back at him, leans down again, puts a hand on his shoulder.

Two minutes later I've drunk my latte and gone. And I've got a nice fat wallet.

I've also got a problem.

I'm being followed.