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Opening extract from

Blade 3: Firestorm

Written by

Tim Bowler

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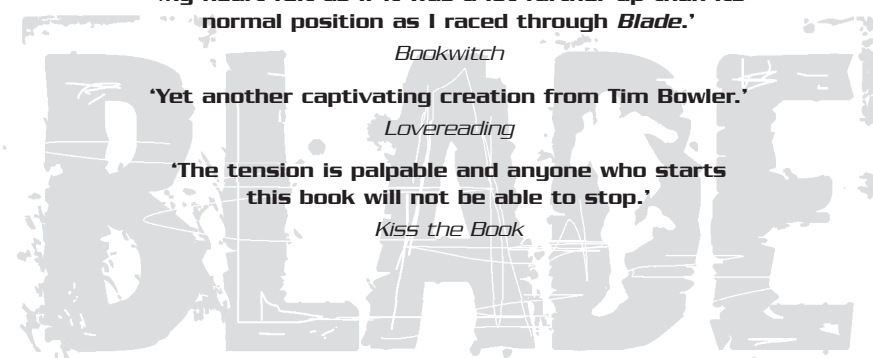
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For Rachel

with my love





1

WELCOME TO THE Big Beast. Welcome to Hell.

Check around you, Bigeyes. Early morning, November sun. Cute little street, cute little school, cute little kiddies trigging through the gate. The great capital waking up around us. Plum place, yeah?

Think again.

Cos it's all wrong. It's zipping you over. Everything you see, everything you feel. Come closer, Bigeyes, and listen good. This is big new grime. It's not like the old city, the one we just escaped from.

This is the Beast.

And I'll tell you something about him.

Something you got to know.

Makes no difference how much sun there is, how many dinky kids or spiced up people you can see waking and shaking their lives into gear. The Beast's not what you think. Not what anyone thinks.

I know what I'm talking about. I was born here. I grew up here. If you can call it growing up. But never mind that. I know the Beast, right? I know him like I know my own body. If you think I was brained up on the old city, that's nothing to what I know about the Beast.

You probably heard about the taxi drivers. How they know every single street in the city. They learn it, road by road, and they get tested on it. Like it's a qualification. Yeah, right. Is that meant to impress me?

Well, it doesn't. I knew all that gump by the time I was seven. Every lane, every street, every dronky little mews. All the places too. Hotels, clubs, theatres, cinemas, brothels, you name it. All the bollocky monuments. I got so bored knowing everything about the Beast I made up my own names for all the different places.

I got that kind of memory. I remember everything I want to remember. People, places, stories, numbers, whatever. You wouldn't believe the stuff I can remember. That's one of the things that's got me in trouble. But here's what's weird about the Beast.

I learnt all these things about him, then I found I was wrong. I didn't really know the Beast at all. Not like I thought I did. I just knew the names, and the places to hide. I know him better now. You bet I do. And you got to get cracked on him too, Bigeyes.

Cos there's stuff about the Beast you got to learn fast.

First up, he's not like the old city. The one we just left. She was big, yeah, but she's nothing to this guy. Second,

the Beast's not even a city, not even a capital. Yeah, yeah, he's called both. In the tourist books.

He's got all the bung they blab about. Stations, parks, banks, businesses, stores, sights, all that shit. But he's got something else too. Something you won't find in the tourist books.

Another city.

And another, and another, and another.

Cos here's what most nebs don't know. We're not in a city. We're in ten cities rolled into one. More than ten. The Beast's a country all his own. And I'm not just talking about size, Bigeyes, how far he spreads out. I'm talking about layers. Cities within cities, lives within lives.

That's where the darkness comes from.

The cities you don't see.

The lives you don't see.

Trust me. I know.

But never mind that now. Cop a glint over the kids. Most of 'em in the playground but some still ripping in through the gate. Keep back, well back, and watch cute. Stay behind this van and peep round the edge.

OK, Bigeyes, got the kids? Got the main gate? Right, now check out the car parked down on the left, the flash grey one. And the guy sitting at the wheel. Smooth gobbo, shiny suit, sharp eyes.

See 'em moving? Can't, can you? That's cos he's cute and you're a dimp. Look again, Bigeyes. Look better. Got 'em now? The eyes? Still missing 'em, aren't you?Dungpot.

Never mind. Take it from me. They're moving. I know.

How do I know? Cos he's like me. He knows how to watch. So we got to stay fizzed. For one very good reason.

The bastards know I'm here.

Back at the Beast, I mean. I'm not talking about this little street, or this gobbo. Jesus, if he knew what's going on, I might as well flip over now. But he doesn't. He's smart and he watches good, but he hasn't slammed me. And he won't, unless I dunk it big time.

He's like all the other grinks. Does what he's told, gets paid, goes home. Asks no questions. No, I'm not talking about him. I'm talking about the scumbos who tell him what to do, and the slimeheads above them. They're the ones who'll know I'm back at the Beast.

It's a simple equation.

They got Jaz and they know I'll come for her. Cos they know I care. Xennie slung that one when she blotched on me and Bex. So they'll know I won't wig it out of here and all they got to do is wait till I show.

And they're right. I've come back for Jaz. She's all I want. I don't give two bells what happens to me long as she gets away safe. But I'll tell you something, Bigeyes. If she's dead, there's something else I'll have.

My revenge.

That's right, Bigeyes.

I'm fighting back.

Only problem is what to do about Bex. I can't leave her and she's clogged onto me. She's still mad at me. When the police turned up at the old prof's house, she was splitting my ear so bad we nearly didn't get away.

But I got her down the stairs and out the back door, and we made it over the fields to the motorway. Don't ask me how we didn't get caught. It's been a day and a night of hitching and hiding.

But here we are.

Still together. She's locked onto me, Bigeyes, and I can't drop her. She wants Jaz back as bad as I do. Problem is, I work better on my own. If Bex chokes up—which she could do easy—she'll shunt us both.

Check over my shoulder.

No sign of her, thank Christ. Been blamming my head over the thought of her standing in the middle of the road, tramping my gig for everyone to see. Took all my licky to persuade her to stay out of sight while I sniff out this patch.

But she's done it. Can't say she hasn't. Just hope she's where I left her. Cos there's no betting she will be. OK, we better shift before those gobbos clap us.

Yeah, Bigeyes, you heard right. I said gobbos. Didn't see the second guy, did you? Over to the right, further down. Got him now? Beefcake, grey suit, leaning against the outside wall of the playground.

Let's get out of here.