

THE
MODERN
PRIMITIVES

JS WATERS

DRAECONIS

SEATTLE

CHAPTER ONE

“Murder is a way of life in Salinas.”

Stephen Wilson peered across the park from behind the wheel of the police car. The headlights of the black and white Ford Crown Victoria penetrated the darkness of Towt Street. Filthy trash strewn pavement rushed out from beneath shot out streetlights. The patrol car rolled deeper into the heart of East Salinas. The driverside spotlight shined across the concrete. Illuminating the graffiti ravaged basketball courts of Closter Park. The nets ripped from their hoops hung barren in the night. Backboards tagged in blue. M B L. The paint drawn in detailed Gothic script.

“Shit’s about to break off around here.” Stephen flashed a smile at his younger brother. The green interior light of the dash reflected off the silver Salinas Police Department badge pinned to his dark navy blue uniform. “You watch and see. This shit’s getting’ outta control.”

The wipers squeaked across the glass, pushing away the build up collected on the windshield. The smell of fried tortillas and rotting garbage lay heavy in the moist air, mixed with the occasional trace of marijuana. Wet tires sloshed in the background. The night air was chilled for spring; the rain had broken the two week wave of heat that had driven up the recent outbreak of violence.

“What’s with all those M B L tags?” Scott Wilson asked from the passenger side, wearing a white Palma High Chieftains football jersey, number 54. “When did they move in to Closter?”

SURENOS stretched diagonally across the back of the park’s maintenance building, outlined in white. The lettering thin but bold. Maderos Batos Locos displayed out across the front. The letters S U R was scrawled out in black paint marker across the face of the stop sign on the corner. X3 and M B L littered the playground, drawn on poles, fences, curbs, walls, street signs and benches. Random. Without method. Lacking uniformity or reason. Simply random acts of visual terrorism. Marking the world with their brand of violence.

Red graffiti crossed out in blue stood like spray painted tombstones on broken fences, marking the ever changing border of rival territory. NORTE. XIV. X4. NORTENOS. The words either completely painted over or crossed through. Old street names of gang members in red lined the street throughout the neighborhood, displayed in bravado on the walls and fences to spread their word fame. Lil AK. SPIDER. \$i\$KO. SxUxRxKiLLa. Crossed out in blue by their rivals. An act of defiance. Insult. A sentence of death. Stark reminders of the violence

that ruled these streets. A demonstration of power that marked the park as occupied territory.

“Sureños have been putting in work all year.” Stephen pointed to the blue MBL paint on the side of an abandoned building. “They’re crossing out all the Norteños tags to show their force. This place is turning into a fuckin’ war zone and we’re rolling through ground zero.”

East Salinas swelled with seasonal farm workers, bringing with them the violent strife of Northern and Southern Mexican gangs, preying on their own people, ignored until the violence spilled over into suburbia. Violence was a daily part of life. Broken and dirty.

The Eastside looks more like a ghetto every year. It's like Tijuana or El Centro. A third world country more than a city in America.

Buildings crumbled in disrepair on every street, scarred with bullet holes and broken windows. Abandoned vehicles burned out and left for dead on dirty streets choked East Salinas. Spray painted circles marked the sidewalk with prior shell casing locations; the cement stained black in places from dried blood. Broken glass carpeted the edge of the street.

“So what’s XIV stand for?”

“Fourteen. N is the fourteenth letter. It stands for Norteño and for Nuestra Familia. It all starts with the prison gangs and then spills out on the street. It’s complicated shit.”

The radio squawked suddenly, “Adam twelve to dispatch.” Her monotone voice cracked.

“Adam Twelve.”, responded a disinterested male voice.

“What’s your ten-twenty?”

“John and Alisal street.”

The patrol car rolled deeper into the heart of the Eastside.

“Adam twelve, I have a possible two-eleven in progress at twenty-one fifteen North Hebbroon Avenue. Suspects are outside the CP’s home with a crow bar.”

“Ten-four. Adam twelve in route. Over.”

Four Sureños stood defiantly on the sidewalk. The group stared the two brothers down as they rolled past. Emboldened by the police presence, the gangsters pulled their Budweiser tallboys from their brown paper bags. Throwing up their hands. Flashing gang signs at the patrol car. Flying their colors. Blue rags, Blue hats, or Blue shoes. There was no uniformity, but a definite underlying theme. Shaved heads and tattoos marked the street soldiers. Ink on their chests, others on their necks, but all represented their hood on their bodies like indigenous warriors from a National Geographic special. White t-shirts and Ben Davis khakis, cut off or straight legged with a crease in the cuff, with white knee high tube socks pulled all the way up.

“Dude, they don't even trip when you drive up?” Scott stared out the window in awe.

“At least they're not shooting at us.”

“They don't really shoot at cops, do they?” Scott stammered, looking back in fear.

“Bang...” Stephen laughed, shooting his brother in the back of the head with his index finger and thumb.

“That's not cool.” Scott looked back and forth between his brother and the gang members.

"I'm just screwin' with you." Stephen laughed. "What did ya' expect?"

"This place's so different now."

"You have no idea. Remember when we were kids? We used to go to the train at Central Park and climb on top? I remember we'd walk there every year from Sacred Heart for the school picnic, now you can't even go there durin' the day. A little kid got shot there last week. A couple of asses were playin' basketball when a car pulled up and two black guys got out and started blastin' the fuckin' court with AK's. The kid was like five or six years old, just playin' on the train. They had to amputate his leg. It was never like this when we were kids. No fuckin' drive by shootings. No bullshit little gang bangers punkin' people down on the strip. You can't even go to the mall now without some vato trying to stare you down cause he thinks he's hard. Now it's even worse."

"Is it because of the Rodney King thing?"

"Fuck Rodney King. That guy should have laid his ass down on the concrete and quit moving, like the other two in his car did."

"What the hell are you talking about? The guy was totally getting his ass beat. Did you even watch the video?"

"Yeah and you could still see him keep getting up on his knees and rolling around. What part of 'Don't fuckin' move.' do you think he didn't get?"

"Did you expect him to just lay there? I didn't see him do anything wrong.", *King had been on the ground, prone, moving slowly and putting his hands up in front of him in self defense.*

“You don’t think resisting arrest is wrong?”, said Stephen sharply.

“Yeah, it’s wrong, but dude, it was excessive force.”

“Unless you’ve ever been in this shit you have no idea what you’re talkin’ ‘bout. Your flyin’ down the street a hundred n’ twenty, chasin’ some piece of shit who won’t stop and all you can think is God damn don’t let anyone get in the way. Your heart’s racin’ as you swing open that door not havin’ a fuckin’ clue what that asshole plans on doin’. Does he have a knife? Does he have a gun? Who else is in the car? Why didn’t he stop? Why’s he runnin’? Where the fuck’s my backup?”

“There were like five guys standing around him.”, Scott interrupted.

Why didn’t they just all jump on him at once and tackle him. Held King down and handcuffed him without beating him so many times.

“First of all, all you saw was a minute and a half of tape.”, scolded Stephen, holding up his right index finger as he emphasized his point. “What about the thirty seconds before that? I heard he threw the four of them off when they tried to cuff him. Why do you think they thought he was on PCP? But that wasn’t on the tape, so everyone just thinks police brutality and cover up. Second, this guy was on parole for assaulting a convenience clerk with a tire iron, so they already knew he was violent and that he probably didn’t wanna get rolled back to the pen. And third, who the fuck are you to judge whether or not he was a danger to them or not. You’ve never done this job. You have no idea the shit we deal with on a daily basis. You’ve never had to watch

your back while someone's tryin' to kill you for doin' your job."

"Mom said it was disgusting the way they beat him." Scott turned away defeated, looking out the passenger window. His mother Marilyn, a recovering activist and part time political radical, had discussed the King headlines as he polished off two bowls of Frosted Flakes that morning.

"Why don't you ask dad what he thinks."

"He's the last person I want to talk to right now."

Why the hell would you even say that? I don't want to listen to his bullshit speech about the Academy again. Maybe I can avoid him until next August.

"So when you gonna tell him?," said Stephen.

Scott stared down at the floor.

"I don't know how to tell him I'm leaving." Scott whispered. Anguished.

"Tell him about the scholarship."

"He doesn't care. You know how he is. He won't be happy until I'm riding around in a uniform like you."

"You say it like it's something dirty."

"You know what I mean. The whole five generations thing. Grandpa. Uncle Joe. Robert. Our whole fucking family is full of cops. I just want something different for my life."

"You gotta do what's gonna make you happy, Scott. Some people aren't meant to live their whole life in Mayberry. You have a talent none of us ever had. He'll understand...and if he doesn't, then maybe it's time for you to say fuck him."

A black Mercedes suddenly flew through the intersection in front of them, its lights blacked out, a

lowered four door 420 SEL sedan with limo tint windows and custom low profile chrome rims, running the red light at Market Street.

“Shit.” Stephen slammed the brakes. “Hold on.”

The police cruiser veered left to avoid the collision, thrusting into the intersection. It fishtailed onto Market. They made the corner, lights and siren blaring, accelerating to overtake the sedan. Stephen pulled behind the black car, flooding the back of the vehicle with its spotlights, exposing the missing rear license plate.

The black Mercedes slowed, pulling over to the curb beneath the highway overpass. The cruiser followed. The heavy tint of the rear window veiled the occupants. The high sheen of the flashing lights reflected back from the rain water. Heavy bass echoed off the walls of the overpass from within the sedan, passing through into the cruiser, shaking Scott as he struggled to peer inside the vehicle.

The driver side window rolled down slowly. The D.O.C bellowed ‘It’s Funky Enough’ from the car, thundering through the concrete ravine of the underpass. The driver put his left hand out the window and adjusted the mirror.

Stephen opened the door and stepped out, leaning to pull the night stick from the side of his door.

“Hey.” Scott leaned over, grabbing Stephen by the arm. “Why don’t you just wait for backup?”

“Don’t worry about me little brother, it’s cool. You just worry about how you’re gonna tell Dad about Fresno State.” Stephen shut the door with a smile.

The street was dimly lit beneath the overpass. Stephen walked up the back of the black Mercedes, slowly approaching from the driver side, his right

hand poised cautiously on his holstered 9mm Glock. He shined his flashlight with his left hand through the rear driver side window, straining to see through the dark tint.

The stereo volume slowly decreased. He moved closer to the vehicle. The low rumble of motorcycle exhaust approached gradually from the street behind him.

Stephen stopped at the rear door and looked inside at the front dash, shinning his flashlight through the driver side window.

“License and registration, please?” Stephen shouted with authority, moving behind the driver side window. The motorcycle exhaust bellowed even louder. It grew closer and closer.

Scott turned around in his seat to find the source of the deafening rumble. A custom chopper flew past the police cruiser. The rider dressed in a black leather jacket and leather pants. The face disguised beneath a black ski mask. A chromed .357 revolver in hand pointed towards Stephen.

Stephen turned back with his hand still on his pistol as the rider fired three shots. The first round exploded through his exposed ribcage, just under the armpit, spinning Stephen around. The second and third rounds impacted on his vest, knocking him to the ground near the Mercedes, breaking the ribs on his right side and bruising his sternum. He gasped. Unable to breathe. Holding his chest. He struggled to remain conscious, his right side bleeding profusely.

“Stephen..” Scott watched, gripped with fear. Tears streamed down his face, struggling to release the seat belt.

The bike pulled to a stop at the far end of the overpass, its red tail lights illuminating the darkness. The rider lowered the custom chrome iron cross kickstand with a black tanker boot. The exhaust thumped while the bike idled. He stepped off. Stalking Stephen on the ground. Pistol raised to strike.

Scott reached for the police radio. Pressing so hard on the button he felt like his fingers would break. He screamed in panic into the microphone, "Somebody help me. Officer down. Officer Down. Market and Kern. Market and Kern. Under the 101 overpass. Can anybody hear me?"

"Unit requesting help, identify yourself? The dispatcher asked in an emotionless voice.

"Scott Wilson. My dad's Lt. Wilson. They shot Stephen." Scott dropped the mic. Sobbing.

"All units code three to the corner of Market and Kern, officer down... the officer needs help immediately. Unknown number of assailants."

The driver side window raised on the black Mercedes and sped off into the darkness around the gunman.

Stephen lay in a pool of blood, his mouth and nose bleeding from the punctured lung, forcing him to gasp with gurgled breath. He struggled to pull his pistol from his holster.

"You should've stayed home tonight, son." The rider stalked forward. Lowering the pistol into Stephen's chest.

"No..." Scott watched in horror. Reaching to open the door.

"You were just in the wrong place." He squeezed the trigger. The barrel thundered in the dark.

Flashing. His wrist kicked back. Bucking in his hand. Stephen's chest tore open just above the armor. Fragments of blood and bone exploded across pavement.

The revolver bucked again with a bright explosion. Penetrating the armor. Opening a large cavity in his chest beneath the vest. He lowered the pistol. Squeezing the trigger one last time into Stephen's stomach. The bullet impacting on Kevlar.

He reached down and ripped the badge from Stephen's gasping chest.

"At the wrong time." The rider turned, walking toward his chopper holding the blood soaked silver star trophy in hand.

Scott rushed to Stephen. Falling to his knees. He pulled him into his lap.

"No. No. No. No. No. Oh God, please nooo." Scott wailed. Cradling his brother's head in his arms. Sobbing uncontrollably.

Stephen choked. Spitting up blood. Dying. The blood continued to pump from his chest. Soaking Scott's clothes. Scott rocked back and forth. Embracing his best friend since birth.

There's so much blood. What do I do? What do I do?

The rider turned around. Hearing Scott's cries. He walked towards him. Raising the revolver at the teenager. Their eyes meeting. Locked in hatred. The shooter stood just a few feet away. Scott stared in terror at the chrome barrel of the Smith & Wesson pointed at his face. Moving up past the black rubber gripped handle to the swastika wrapped in a circle of fire. The letters NLR tattooed in Old English script around his forearm. He squeezed the trigger

of the revolver. The hammer moved backward slowly. Suddenly the hammer snapped forward. Striking the spent cartridge with a loud click that echoed in the darkness. Scott shuttered in panic. CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

“Must be your lucky night kid.”, said the rider, slowly backing away towards the motorcycle. The biker opened the cylinder of the revolver, dumping the cartridges into his hand, clutching the badge.

Scott looked down at Stephen's service pistol in the holster, his hands shaking uncontrollably.

Pick it up. Pick it up. Pick it up. He's gonna kill me. I don't want to die. I don't want to die. Please don't let me die.

He continued to sob, wanting to grab the pistol and shoot the son of a bitch, but paralyzed with fear.

“It's terrible what those fuckin' beaners did to your brother, here tonight.” The rider reached into his pocket, continuing to back away. He dumped the empty cartridges inside and pulled up new ones as he began to reload.

Approaching sirens echoed in the distance.

“A couple a Mexicans did this shit, you comprende?” He rolled the cylinder shut with a snap of his wrist, looking at the boy.

“I know who you are superstar.” The rider screamed, holding the badge like a trophy. “We'll be watching you. You understand what I'm sayin'? You didn't see shit, you hear me? Nothin' more than brown on white hate crime, ya hear?” He turned and threw his leg over the motorcycle. Looking back over his shoulder. “You keep your fuckin' mouth

shut 'bout me or you'll end up in a hole right next to him."

The chopper thundered out from the underpass. Tires smoking on the wet pavement. Echoed in the dark. Quickly drowned by approaching sirens.

Scott closed his eyes and rocked back and forth, covered in blood. He gripped his brother tight. The sirens grew louder and louder, drowning out the noise of overhead traffic. The black and white units approached, lighting the street in flashing red and blue lights. The sirens wailed. He looked around in desperation. Stephen gasped his last breath. "No. No. No. No. No." Scott sobbed, clenching his hands and teeth before releasing a guttural scream.

"No.", gasped Scott, bolting forward in his bed.

STEPHEN

His tattooed chest heaved.

HELP

Sheets clutched.

Help me...

Eyes wide open.

Somebody, please.

Terrified.

He's dead.

Searching the darkness half awake through his scraggly black hair.

He's dead.

Thrashing.

They killed him.

Unable to breathe.

I don't want to die.

Tears streamed down his face. The alarm clock shrieked in an unyielding pitch next to an empty cereal bowl. 5:43 am blazed in red. Scott collapsed

into bed, rolling on his back. He rubbed his chest. His hand moving across the tattoo photo portrait of Stephen in his police academy dress uniform. The inscription beneath it inked, In Loving Memory Jan. 27, 1970 – May 8, 1992. The image swept up his left side from the middle of his ribs over his heart, ending just below his collar bone.

Oh fuck. It's a dream.

He dragged both hands down his face, wiping the sweat from his skin.

Jesus. I can't breathe.

Pushing his fingers into his eyelids to remove the tears.

It's just a dream. Oh shit.

He stared at the stark textured ceiling of the cramped studio apartment, its white paint tinged blue from the blank television that had gone off tone once the movie in the VCR had ended sometime the night before. A framed Pulp Fiction movie poster hung on the wall between two photos. The first was an 8x10 photo of Scott and Stephen laughing after the 1992 D-III State Football Championship game. Scott standing in his Chieftains uniform holding up his yellow helmet while Stephen feigned tackling him from behind. The second a team photo. FRESNO STATE FOOTBALL 1993. GO BULLDOGS.

My chest's on fire.

The monotonous alarm tone continued.

Another fucking dream.

He reached for the bridge of his nose and pulled the snot down with the squeeze of his thumb and index finger, closing his grip gently around the 10 gauge blue anodized steel septum ring that dangled

above his lip, expelling the mucus with a quick snort before wiping the remnants on the sheets.

Why didn't you just stay in the fucking car? Jesus Christ.

Scott dropped his legs down over the side of the bed, twisting himself across the sheets. The hardwood floor was cold. The alarm clock continued to sound off on the edge of the handcrafted walnut night stand, the bedroom set his mother had purchased from Standard Furniture fifteen years earlier when the boys were still in grade school at Sacred Heart.

Why did it have to be you?

He pulled himself slowly to a seated position, rubbing his face. He stroked his hair back out of his face, pinning it behind his ears.

Why wasn't it me?

He turned the alarm off and stood tall, stretching to touch the ceiling with his palms. At 6' 4" he was an imposing figure. Broad and muscular, with the infant stages of a paunch, he possessed the makings of a respectable beer belly from the last four years of neglect.

Why did you always have to be a hero? You could of just waited for back up.

He trudged through the mixed piles of clothes strewn across the floor, dropped where they were removed days before. He switched off the television, ducking under the doorjamb on his way into the bathroom, avoiding the frame out of habit. He flicked on the light switch and stood in front of the toilet, pulling down his boxer briefs to urinate.

Why didn't you just wait? You left me. You fucking left ME. Why the fuck did you leave me here?

Scott flushed the toilet and pulled up his underwear, turning back towards the sink. He leaned against the countertop, peering into the mirror. The water pounded out of the faucet, cold at first when he ran his hands through it, but then eventually steaming hot.

I feel like shit.

He ran the toothbrush beneath the scalding water and applied a dab of Crest, tonguing the L-shaped barbell in his lip out of habit before brushing his teeth.

I look like shit.

He looked at the lines of thick, black tribal artwork that ran up both sides of his arms from the elbow up. Conservative half sleeves so no one could see his art but him. Somber themed tattoos stretched across his chest. Death and mourning. He spit, rinsing down the excess toothpaste with his hand.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. My life wasn't supposed to be like this.

Scott ran his hand across his stomach, slapping it. It made the noise of a ripe melon. Like a bass drum. He glared at himself in the mirror.

I fucking hate you sometimes.

He pulled a Gillete razor from the drawer and splashed hot water on his face, followed by a handful of shaving cream. He held the razor to his neck, sculpting around the thick, bushy goatee that framed his mouth.

I miss you so much.

He stared at the mirrored image of Stephen on his chest. His eyes welled up with tears. He touched the face with gentle fingers.

I wish you were here.

He flicked off the light and turned, disappearing into the darkness.