

3 FEET DOWN

/ ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SIEBEN

THIS ONE NIGHT, sort of aimless after dinner with friends, I went home pretty early and thought, "I'll rent a movie. Take it easy, not stay up too late, keep it mellow." At the video place I right away found *Salvador*—a film I'd wanted to see for a long time, dating back to an intense James Woods fascination in the mid- to late-1980s when, during the early VCR age, I hunted down all his movies: *The Boost*, *Best Seller*, *The Onion Fields*, *Cop*, *True Believer*, *Once Upon a Time in America*, and *Videodrome*. James Woods really had a run there for a while as the sleazy asshole who was also a compelling and intelligent scumbag, intensely magnetic and eminently fascinating in a way few actors can be, and also I remember something about him reading *The Paris Review* on set, which is kind of ridiculous and pretentious but also cool.

Salvador got avoided because of the Oliver Stone connection. Just couldn't handle his brand of overly-literal bombast, at all—but I decided to let that lie after 15 years. And I did, for about 20 minutes, but was all twitchy for whatever reason and couldn't really pay attention. "OK, just give in, go out and have a couple of drinks, and then come back to watch the rest." The great James Woods (and he really is at his finest in *Salvador*) will have to wait." Not wanting to drink anywhere in the neighborhood where an unwanted run-in might occur, I decided to seek a bar deep in the cut, three stops further out on the subway line, in still-uncharted and not-yet-overrun territory. The bike had a fat, so I took the pink girl's bike with the wire basket instead, and headed east across Grand Avenue towards the projects. Clinking and clanking on this old bike, past the homies sitting on the benches. "What's up, guys?"

About 1:00 am now, totally off track and lost. Even asked a cop at one point if he knew where Morgan Avenue was but he proved clueless. After 20 or so minutes going this way and that, I got situated and entered a warehouse zone that wasn't completely deserted. Locked up the bike near some people hanging out smoking by a door with a red light, and went in there to this bar that was completely packed. It was like, "Who the fuck are these people, so far out here?" The urban pioneers—not trendy types—more self-righteous and smug in their contrived "We're so on the frontier" attitude. Way too self-satisfied. Got a beer and a whiskey and a stool in the corner and watched them for a while, and then got another beer and a whiskey and possibly a third, and observed. That could only go so far, and by that time I was kind of drunk since I hadn't been drinking much at all lately, so I finally slid off the stool and out into the crisp, Fall air to the bicycle and started pedaling homeward. Desolate streets, cement plants,

massive buildings full of trash, no cars at all, and then turned up McKibben, where suddenly the noises of revelry wafted down from windows on both sides of the street. The pull of voices and fun, but I was going to ignore it and go right past...until this very particular sound overrode all the others: The whoosh back and forth and clatter of someone skateboarding on a wooden halfpipe coming from above. Stopped and saw shadows gyrating back and forth on the third floor and immediately decided I had to check it out. Locked up the bike, took a piss behind a car, and then went to the door of the warehouse/now lofts-for-urban-pioneers building, where a young guy and his girl were sitting on the stoop and told me, "Yeah dude, there's a ramp up there. They're getting kicked out. It's the last blowout." A liverly car came and they left, wishing me luck. After five minutes somebody exited, so I went in up the stairs to



WHAT'S UP GUYS?

another locked door, where I cooled my heels for a while until someone else tumbled by. Then I proceeded down the hallway towards a bunch of crusty-but-not-quite-gutter-punks who were hanging out, and blew right past them into the raw loft where, by the window, somebody was skating this very jacked ramp. The prize, this fucked-up ramp with tight transitions. Right as I walked in some guy slammed and sent his board through the window and out into the street, accompanied by yells of "Shit, the cops are out there!" A motley crew, all drinking 40 oz Budweisers, those sort of modern-day anarchy

punks or whoever they are that always seem to have dogs and Amebix patches and Flux of Pink Indians written on their jackets, stuck on the truly astounding Crass records roster of 25 years ago, who were all pretty amazing—Amebix and Flux in particular—but it's a little strange to be so focused on a bunch of squatter-anarcho bands that broke up the year you were born. Odd that their heyday so closely preceded James Woods' finest work, though doubtful there's a connection except for a shared time in history. The Subhumans or something like that was blasting, people were dancing and pushing each other around, and some drunk, fat guy sitting up on a loft bed was hacking away at the wall with a machete. This fellow who seemed to live there asked who I was, and with complete assurance that he couldn't deny me, I said, "I heard the ramp, I thought I'd try it out." He answered "Alright," so I asked one of the guys if I could borrow a board, grabbed it, ran up to the foot-wide "deck" and waited for whoever was drunkenly barely getting from side to side to finish or fall down. That they did soon enough, and

I rolled the wheels over the coping, dropped in, and immediately slammed on the flat, three-feet-down, harder than I had in a long time. I'd run over some hole in the top layer that had gone unnoticed. Got up, a little dazed, hopped up to the deck and gasped something like "Thanks for letting me know about that hole!" to the other guy standing there. He just grinned and dropped in, and after he was done I went for it and slammed again—total pile—this time just because the transitions were so tight it was like the shallow end of a backyard pool. BAM. I lay there laughing and thought, "Shit, I'm really drunk." But I got up, and when my turn came this time I managed and wobbled a few kicktums, because damn this thing would have been hard to skate totally sober—let alone on someone else's board—due to three whiskeys and three beers after not drinking much for a couple months. Took a few more "runs," wildly flailing, barely missing the window.

God knows that would have been a bloody disaster. Boards flying everywhere, the party seemed to be imploding all around, screaming, yelling, running, skating amidst the chaos, that one dude still going at it with the machete, and after about 15 minutes the guy whose board I was borrowing said "Hey, I've got to leave."

I laughed. "That's a sign, I better leave too." Handed him back his board, went through the assembled punk rockers like Moses parting the Red Sea, out the door, down the stairs, back onto the bike, and 10 minutes later on the couch fell asleep rather sore, as James Woods got into some deep shit down in *Salvador*. ♠



Grant Taylor, way more than three feet out