



“Publicity, according to those who know, balances either side of a pivot. What you don't want is for the publicity to be level, swinging in the middle.” Theo Rand claimed to be a friend of Scavinio back in New York. Scavinio knew the brand management company Rand worked for, but not Theo Rand personally. “Flat publicity is like flat beer, yeah guys?”

“Nothing goes up your nose,” said Dee.

Rand clicked his fingers and carried on illustrating a publicity pivot. “Exactly. However, one swing too far either way and you have on the one hand,” (his left hand), “apathy, or on the other hand,” (his right hand), “outrage. And I'm not talking about the kind of eye rolling outrage, I mean the stuff that damages your reputation. Affects the bottom line.”

Susan tried to keep up. “What bottom line?”

“Support, loyalty, brand respect. Once it's gone it's a pig to get back.”

The pilot's landing instructions interrupted Rand's agricultural exposition and the Totenbranded 767 fell another five thousand feet in the direction of Rio. The flight, unnecessary for the band, had been arranged for Rand's benefit, a one hour window to explain how the events in Managua could be minimised. If concert cancellation continued, South America and Rio would be the last time for a long time Toten Herzen would play live on the Malandanti tour. Susan was bothered to a degree, but lesser irritations bothered her more than the end of her career as a live artist. Only Scavinio recognised the implications of an entire world tour being called off. He wanted Rand's help not to save the Toten Herzen brand, but to reassure the authorities in Europe and Asia and North America that their towns and communities would not be layed waste, that Managua was a one-off.

When the plane landed Rand was only half way through his strategy. With great reluctance the band joined the convoy of vehicles to give him another hour between airport and hotel. “What are people really afraid of?” he asked.

“Regarding what?” said Susan. The SUV shook on its axle, battered from the outside by crowds trying to get to the inside.

“You, the tour. What do they think's gonna happen?”

Dee said, “That's a rhetorical question, isn't it?”

“No.”

Susan said, “They're frightened of having their venue burned down and the crowds turning on the town and burning that down aswell. Toten Herzen fans have form, you know.”

Rand scoffed. The SUV ran over something large. “Cities all over the world want to promote themselves, want to appear to be world players. Why do you think they bankrupt themselves bidding to host the Olympics? The economic fallout is far more damaging than a few fires. You need to let people know that hosting Toten Herzen is good for business, good for prestige, puts you on the map. It should be a badge of honour.”

“Very few cities have been pillaged,” said Dee. “Managua joins a privileged list. Rome, Constantinople, Carthage. . . .”

“Dresden, Hamburg. . . .” Rene stopped when Susan elbowed him. “Rotterdam . . . twice.”

“I don't see it that way,” Susan said. “Personally, I think people are getting fed up with all the trouble that follows us.”

The SUV accelerated ahead of a sonic wave of car horns. Rand didn't need the sudden

velocity to force him back into his seat. “Are you the fucking Osmonds? Do you, do you want to be all goody goody like some fucking Disney act? I mean who are you, Susan Bekker? You want to stand alongside all those drippy nice performing artists who are loved by the moms and pops, who feel safe to know their little Johnnies and Sarahs are going to see someone who'll throw them bits of apple pie and red ribbons. You're a fucking rock band, for Christ's sake. You're not supposed to be nice.”

“He's right,” said Dee. “Motley Crue weren't nice. And they had an umlaut in their name.”

“We're not still going on about fucking umlauts.” The spacious interior of the SUV wasn't spacious enough for Susan's long legs which kicked Rand every time the SUV ran over another unidentifiable lump. “People might well remember the sacking of Constantinople, but no one welcomes the people who did the sacking. And can we not use the word sacking.”

“No one's used the word,” said Dee. “You used it, we didn't.”

Rand continued his theory on damage limitation by emphasising why cities benefited from being ransacked, but Susan couldn't be unconvinced. She stormed out of the SUV when it finally came to a halt outside the Alves Hotel on the outskirts of Rio. The driver lay on his side examining the vehicle, picking bits of clothing from the drive shaft. Susan stepped over him and entered the hotel without acknowledging the crowds behind a reinforced security fence.

After midnight and a chance to calm down and escape the Message According to Rand, Susan and the others joined Scavinio and Hank to explore the eery calm of the Rock in Rio venue. From the sound desk the empty field extended half a kilometre in every direction with sound towers sprouting like alien beanstalks, a perimeter ring of catering stalls, merchandise stalls, thousands of portable toilets, and ahead of them the sacrificial altar. The stage. In the exterior vacuum of a field in Rio the stage overwhelmed. No venue was too big for it, or too empty, or too accommodating; this stage grabbed attention wherever it went. In its passive form it faced the world with all the malevolence of a sleeping monster, but awake it had the capacity to inspire dark thoughts, to separate mind from body, to induce mass hysteria. From the second Mexico City concert conspiracy theorists said this stage was brimming with subliminal messages, that the lighting effects were designed to alter the pattern of brain waves, that it was a giant machine programming thousands of human beings and sending them off to undermine authority.

Theo Rand didn't include any of that in his strategy: mind control. He couldn't. The arsonists in Managua burned down the shopping mall before anyone had played a note.

There Will Be Blood. Release date April 30th 2017