



STREETS

OF RAGE

BARE STRUGGLE

Streets of Rage: Bare Struggle – Level 1 – Diva

Wood Oak Grove had always had a problem with crime. Since its inception as a trading hub on the Atlantic Coast, it had served as a place for slavers, smugglers, treasure seekers, and worse to gather and sell their goods, keep their treasures secure, and make deals with one another. The wealth had only grown with time, the grove becoming a city, the crime putting on a suit and tie but never losing the edge, the danger.

It was a thrilling place to be if you were prepared to deal with the chaos.

Diva had found the city a thrill.

She grew up tall and right in Old Pier, watching as the vicious Gems held their turf from Donovans and Galsias and Signals. She'd wanted to be like them when she was a kid, turning tricks and ruling the docks, but as she grew older her long delicate fingers proved useful for a different sort of trick – confidence games, lock picking, stage magic.

“There's power in setting yourself apart from the crowd,” one of the Gems had told her. “Don't be like us. Be better.”

The schools were a joke. She ran three card monte games in classrooms, did illusions and fixed test scores to get the best scores. The police were a danger, never to be trusted, so she kept them confused and kept her distance. She got jobs working theaters and galleries, appraising art, learning who would pay for what. She played shows, rubbed elbows and more than elbows with the truly rich, the truly powerful.

“I could get you that portrait for a little less,” she told a gallery guest. The man asked her no questions, but he paid her when he brought her the stolen good without alerting the cops, the gangs, or even the owner.

It was just like magic, just another kind of show.

“Are you a witch?” one of her clients asked her.

She just laughed, pushed the man down, straddled him.

Her clients broke so easily.



The snake was malnourished, neglected. It was in one of the penthouse apartments that she was robbing, watching her. The bulb in its tank wasn't hot enough – she was warmer. When she offered her hand, the snake slithered onto her, settled. She liked the feel, the weight, so smooth and dry.

“I'm going to keep you,” she said.

She named the snake Clotho and added snake charming to her act.

The man she stole the snake from paid \$500 dollars for a front row ticket to see her do magic with the snake that he had neglected.

"That's looks like a snake I used to own," he told his friends.

No one cared.



"Can I help you?" the ancient man asked.

"I think so," Diva said. "Um. I have money?"

"I like you already," the man said, ushering her in to his laboratory.

She told him who she was, what she wanted – that she was looking to work some electrical tricks into a stage show, and that she also needed a way to defend herself and short out electrical security systems when she was working. She had some ideas and he nodded and looked over her work and helped her build the earliest version of her gear – insulated boots, tasers in her gloves, a way to make lightning dance from one metal service to another.

The two of them often met to discuss things, talking about the city and politics and science. He never judged her, never made her feel less. She regretted stealing the Rakushin and their relationship was strained after that, but he understood why she felt she had to do it.

Dr. Gilbert Zan would eventually forgive her, and she always made sure to keep him safe.



Mr. X came for her when she was in her late teens.

She'd grown up tall but she still had to crane her neck to look up at him, a monster of a man who carried a machine gun the way some men carried their wallets.

"You know who I am?" he said.

She nodded.

His eyes flashed with ruthless humor, a brutal intelligence. He ruled Wood Oak City. He brutalized the gangs into submission, corrupted the police, the church, even state senators. Mr. X dominated the entire east coast from Wood Oak City. He was a cruel god among cruel men, the devil in a suit.

She followed when he snapped at her, walked on stage as he sat on a throne. He wanted her to strip and she'd never done anything like this before but how was she supposed to say no?

She couldn't say no.

She couldn't say no.

He gave her music, a low thrumming base that drove into her hips, made her shoulders sway. He let her dance, let her prostrate herself before him. When she was naked he got up on the stage with her, unbuckling his pants with one hand, palming her head with the other.

"What are you doing?" she asked him.

"First strip," he said, **"Then fuck."**



He wrecked her.

As vicious as he was to the world, as brutal and dominating, he was so much worse as a lover.

He held her down and she scrambled and cried and moaned underneath him, everything sore, the wet needy hole between her legs filled, he slamming into her, pulling out, leaving her gaping and writhing before he did it again. He cared nothing for his or her pleasure, nothing so base. He was spanking her to amuse himself, slapping her because he thought she was pretty when she cried.

She came anyway, screaming.

It was her screams that brought him off as much as it was her tight little cunt.



"You'll work out of the Streets," he told her. "Antonio will answer your questions."

I'm not a whore, she wanted to say, but didn't. She kept her head down and tried to keep her breathing steady. Everything hurt. It hurt to move. It hurt to breath.

They were in his limo. He'd let her dress with trembling hands, thrown her to the floor of the vehicle, sat above her while drinking wine that cost more than she was worth. They were in the Streets, the core of the city, the most violent and dilapidated horror Wood Oak City had to offer.

The car stopped and there they were, the Galsias and the Donovans and the Signals, looking at her with curiosity. Mr. X palmed her head, threw her out of the limo, closed the door and left.

She looked up, broken and weak, not wanting this. She could feel her lip trembling, her body shaking. They were leering at her. She hugged herself.

"Fuck off, you lot."

Antonio pushed his way through the crowd, another massive man. The gangs parted and let him through, let him pick her up.

"You okay?"

"What does it look like?"

"Like you need coffee," he said.

He led her to a small Italian shop and he got her a cappuccino and had her sit and settle. He ordered her something to eat and got a drink for himself and sat with her.

"I'm not a whore," she said.

"No one said you were," Antonio told her. "Be a fucking waste of talent. You're the thief, right? The one that does tricks?"

"Illusions."

"Right, I get the need to be clear," he grinned. "Boss thinks you got talent. You got a warehouse and a loft to do whatever you want, rent taken care of."

"What?"

"That one, right there," he said, pointing across the street. "I told the guy that runs this place, I told him, you get whatever you want her, no charge. Boss thinks you're going to do great."

"I don't understand," she said, staring. The space was huge. The coffee was delicious and her brain was working. With a space like that she could store stolen art, go for bigger pieces, improve her act...

"He'll want you to do the occasional job for him, no questions asked, and he'll want a fifteen percent cut of whatever you steal going forward," Antonio said. "You need anything, you come to me."

"Is he... is he...?"

"Going to fuck you again?" Antonio was trying to stay jovial, she could see that, but there was an old wound there and she suspected they shared trauma. "No. No. He does that with anyone he thinks might be worth a damn, sets the tone right away, but it's one and done unless someone gets uppity. My advice? Don't."

She shivered, said nothing.

She didn't have to. He understood.



She started studying tae kwon do in her twenties, started training her snake to help keep her safe. She worked electrical power into her act, giving herself a sense of divinity – lightning reigning down on her enemies, destroying them.

"I'm not just a witch," she told those she wanted to frighten, "I'm the Crone."

She extended a hand, languid, and Clotho bit and pulled a Donovan close to her. She brushed the man's cheek with her hand, knocking the sunglasses away from his eyes as she smiled.

Lightning fell from the sky, crawled up the walls, a sea of electric waves dancing along the asphalt. The Donovan screamed, bones showing through his skin, his steaming corpse dropping from her fingers.

The gangs learned to fear her.



She met Beyo and Riha during the six years that Mr. X's Syndicate was dismantled.

Antonio was killed early on and the city fell into chaos. Diva made her payments directly but she could see that things were falling apart and started thinking about the future. She wanted to keep what she had, wanted to keep growing.

Beyo was a house assassin that suddenly had no house. Riha had been caught in the crossfire of corrupt police who had settled on arresting a woman of color rather than doing anything of value. She sat the two of them down and explained what she wanted.

"You know who I am?" she asked.

They nodded.

"The Syndicate is done, but I like the life I have for myself and could use some help maintaining it," she said.

"You're looking for minions, try the Gems or the Galsias," Beyo hissed.

"I'm not looking for minions, I'm looking for friends," she said, leaning back in her chair. Both of the other two women looked like her, were tall like her. "I've got some tricks I can show you, and we can sit back and rule these streets, haunt them."

They were intrigued. They listened.

And, in the end, they agreed.



Ten years later and they were all wealthy, all rich, all feared.

Diva held the Streets out of a sense of nostalgia, but her Crones held power all throughout the downtown core, throughout the galleries and trendy districts. They ruled through fear, rumor, innuendo, but the Galsias and the Donovans and Garnets all paid tribute, the Gems and the Troubles. Everyone knew their place.

A subway car had crashed through her warehouse in the dying days of Mr. X and that was where Diva held court, among the art she'd stolen for herself and the candles she kept lit to maintain an aura of fear. She knew when people were coming to see her and she made sure they knew who was in charge.

The two that were walking through the broken subway were not expected.

Diva thought they they looked like twins, brother and sister. The brother looked like an upscale idiot that was trying to be fashionable. The sister dressed younger than she looked, wearing a

simple oversized shirt that barely covered the tops of her thighs. On the cameras, Diva watched her hips sway, the fur-trimmed boots taking light steps.

"You don't know who we are," the brother said. His voice was nasally, but there was a casual cruelty to him that reminded her of something she could not name.

"I know she lost her apple-bottom jeans," Diva snarled, not bothering to keep the contempt out of her voice as she looked at the sister. "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, of course," the sister said. There was a rapier in her hand, she running a gloved hand along the sharp gleaming blade. "Ours."

Diva laughed a little and touched the ground, causing lightning to dance along the floor, the walls, but the twins kept just outside the range of her trickery.

"Dibs on the snake," the brother said.

He pushed off his feet, jumping over the fading electricity towards her. She extended a hand and Clotho leaped, biting, but he grabbed the snake and tore it from her, pushing a gun's barrel against its head.

"No!" Diva screamed, and then she screamed in pain. She looked down and saw her arm was bleeding, saw blood on the girl's sword. Her fingers twitched.

She reacted by instinct, kicking, but the girl danced around her, cutting her, shoving her down, letting her get up, shoving her down again. The sword lashed out, cutting her jacket, her pants, her halter. She was struggling to keep dressed and the girl was still coming, still cutting, pushing her when she fell, holding her down on her belly along a table that the brother cleared off.

The sister straddled her, pulled a butterfly knife out of her glove and swirled it open. Diva tried to reach around – there was a tazer worked into her glove – but the sister stabbed her glove, right through the fabric, through the circuitry, binding her hand to the table. Another knife swirled open, the blade licked, a sadistic gleam in the girl's eye.

"What are you doing?" Diva screamed, fought, kicked. Her answer made Diva whimper and lie still.

"Don't you remember?" Ms. Y teased. "*First strip, then fuck.*"



Dr. Zan didn't know why Diva was late for their monthly meal.

He understood that sometimes things came up, but she was typically good about letting him know when she would not be able to make it. Still, he understood. Things happened.

He'd given her a small token that allowed her to access his home when he was not there and he saw that she had been by earlier. He wondered if she had left him a note and began to search for it.

He found what the Y Twins left shortly before it exploded.

The laboratory was insulated, sound-proofed, isolated.

Only his assistant would ever know how much was lost.



Streets of Rage: Bare Struggle - Level 2 - Diva
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