

FOOTLIGHTS. The yellow glowing up through the pinholes and cracks of the gutters of Fool's Hip are footlights, the waxed wood of the lanes a stage, the rest fading off into velvet. Enter LP Deal, in his monochromatic jumpsuit, eyes red from the arcade. He's reading a pale green flyer, shaking his head. As he passes the scoring table he leaves the flyer half on the glass and clicks the power on. The warming bulb projects the green of the flyer onto the scrim of the back wall and it's large, too large; perfect.

At the end of one of the lanes a pin falls, no reason. LP watches it, the sound, as if waiting, then smooths his hair back, breathes. It's still morning. There's only him. He says something into his wrist, holding it steady with his other hand, and then reaches deep into the ball return, comes out with a notebook, 7/8 stamped on it in goldletter. These two lanes.

LP rolls the rubberband off the notebook and studies the green wall, the flyer not yet in focus but getting there.

He shakes his head again, smiles this time.

From somewhere behind him a video game calls but he pretends not to hear.

'No,' he says, and the rubberband snaps off, disappears.

LP casts around for it—the rubberband—doesn't see its dark shape on the flyer, pressing the letters closer to the glass for us. They're sideways. *Moon of the Popp* is all that comes through. *-ing bud* or *-ing wood* though, something like that. A date: today.

By now LP has the notebook open on the foul line, held open with the scraper he uses for gum. He's on his knees with a cloth tape measure, going back and forth with his eyes from the notations in the book to the lane markers. It's a logbook, a history of deceit. Once the tape is in place, LP carefully peels off an arrowhead, places it a finger to the side then looks along it downlane, tracking a ball that isn't there.

'Chhh-,' he says softly, the sound of pins crashing, then laughs, holds his arms up in mock victory, comes down to rub the belly he doesn't have, turns sideways to appreciate his leaned-back silhouette, stark black against all that green. He holds rabbit ears up behind his head but they look like feathers and he knows it, drops them. Says something private into his wrist, an apology maybe.

The video game calls to him again and this time he looks to it, makes like it's drawing him in, over. He has to hold onto the ball return until the feeling passes, until he can return to the arrowheads at his canvas feet. He sighs, measures carefully, no longer using the logbook but that first lane marker.

When he stands from lane 7, another pin falls behind the scrim. LP pushes his hair out of his eyes, watches again, waiting, but there's still just the green of the flyer, the yellow of the floodlights, blue for as long as they touch.

LP hums something vaguely tribal and bends to lane 8, lining it up as well, marker by marker. Halfway through he peels his jumpsuit down to his waist, the right side of his body still inflamed, shiny slick and wrinkled. The lead for his wrist mic is wrapped four times around his left arm, then along the depression between two of his lower ribs, off into the belt of his jumpsuit. From above it's almost a bandolier, drawing tight and going slack as he measures, his face close enough to the floor that he doesn't catch the score projection when the blue at its lower edge seeps up over the green doubletime, making a sky of it. Something chrome flashes in the distance for a moment though and LP feels it, spins around too late.

The scrim is green again. But he heard it.

He steps cleanly over the foul line into the alley, his head still cocked. The letters of the flyer are almost in focus now—sideways, smudged at the edges—but LP's shadow is large against them, the words running up and down his bare back.

His shoulders shudder with laughter, apprehension. He turns back to the scoring table for a moment, his face bathed in pale green, and then drops silently to fingertips and toes, places his right ear delicately to the narrow boards running downlane to some unseen reduction point. Unseen but felt. Fool's Hip is trembling with whatever's coming—headlights. The flash in the distance passes over the scrim again and it's headlights, bearing down on LP, thundering.

A lone pin rolls out, stops.

LP stands, regards it; nods.

'They're coming,' he says aloud, as if announcing it, and then steps out of the flyer's light. It's in focus now and holding. As LP passes it on the way to the arcade—already swinging his holy quarter on its braided sinew, letting it wrap around his finger—he stops to straighten it too, the flyer, as if he wasn't supposed to have left it sideways.

The tribal beat he was following earlier picks up now—many voices together—and the flyer isn't so much smudged as in *advance* of Smudge. He rises impossibly from one of the gutters in halogen white feathers and a mock coyote head and stands there until a drum joins the singers, the lights lowering on cue,

his complicated outline dancing and rattling over the lanes then multiplying fluidly until the shadows all merge and the stage is black again, empty; clean.

They're coming.

Scuffling moments later a harsh spotlight stands straight up and down, pooled hot around LP and Mary Boy at a table, Mary Boy smoking hard, LP a few months younger, his jumpsuit still a rich orange, like jail. His application for employment is between them.

‘So he was just like laying there?’ Mary Boy asks, and touches his stomach. Owen 82.

LP nods. Tries to sign his name but the pencil jerks across the line, nervous.

Mary Boy blows out a thin line of smoke, tilts his head back. When he comes back to LP he's finally looking at him, at the application.

‘Where were you before?’

‘I’m a good worker,’ LP says.

‘You’re Indian,’ Mary Boy says back, scrolling the application.

LP shrugs, taps a cigarette out for himself from Mary Boy’s pack.

‘One and five-sixteenths Indian,’ Mary Boy corrects, smiling at the application.

LP smiles with him, holds the smoke in.

‘But you don’t know where you were before?’

LP nods outside, behind him. ‘In the ditch with that guy.’

‘Owen 82. His name was Owen 82.’

‘He was just lying there,’ and to show how, LP pushes the cherry of his cigarette against the gut of his jumpsuit, blows away the ashes, holds up the new hole.

Mary Boy blows through his nose about it.

‘You knew him, yeah?’ LP asks.

‘Owen 82?’ Mary Boy asks, leaning across the table.

Yes.

‘Used to park his ass right over there,’ Mary Boy says, angling his chin up to the bar, glowing with attention, the stool by Nickel Eye empty but worn. Suddenly pins crash in the darkness, the scrim humming and cracking in response, green lines crossing it back and forth until there’s ten frames, one name: *CAT*.

‘That goddamn six pin,’ Nickel Eye says into his coffee without looking up, and Cat Stand narrows her eyes at him, across the space where LP and Mary boy just were. Back Iron, crossing the pit in silver pumps and eyeliner, makes a show of staying out of Cat’s line of vision. Cat smiles, nods to the glow of the arcade. Naitche trails out, weaves his way past Courtney’s table to the foul line. Cat nods to the scrim for him and he takes it in in a glance—the three missed spares.

Cat walks to the table LP was just at, lifts Mary Boy’s cigarette from the ashtray. She inhales it the rest of the way down then nods to the lane markers for Naitche. He follows them uplane, shrugs. Is about to leave again when Cat takes him by the arm, nearly lifting him to his toes.

Fool’s Hip goes quiet but she doesn’t notice, just shakes Naitche’s hair into his face, pushes it out for him when he’s too limp to do it himself.

‘Hey,’ Courtney says to Cat, finally.

Cat looks to her.

‘Councilmen,’ Courtney says simply, about the lane markers. ‘It’s their lane today. The middle ones, y’know?’

Behind the bar Mary Boy pretends not to hear any of this. His sunglasses don’t give anything away, anyway, but projected on the scrim for a few private moments is his tattoo, Jesus’ face seeping blood. Mary Boy is the only one to see it, maybe, but Nickel eye is watching—not the scrim, but Mary Boy himself, suddenly rubbing his shoulder with the rag he just had in a coffee cup.

‘So we getting a bus today?’ Nickel Eye asks him.

Mary Boy runs the rag into the cup again, directs his shades to the far corner, by the high lanes: a platinum blonde woman with dark skin. ‘Your tourist is listening,’ Mary Boy says, a warning, then fills the cup with coffee, walks it over to her.

She nods thanks to him, blows the steam off and drinks. ‘When’s he coming in?’ she asks, lane 15 pulsing red for an instant in the lower left of the scrim, Denim Horse’s lane.

‘Soon,’ Mary Boy says, watching the glass doors, 15 pulsing back on again but trembling, moving, becoming one of the pixelated characters on the burnt screen of Naitche’s video game. His mother’s name is center-top, *CAT*.

Fool’s Hip goes dark around it.

‘She doesn’t mean it,’ LP says, just a voice until the spotlight heats back up, off-center, on him and Naitche huddled in the arcade. Pins crash in the distant background and Naitche runs his fingers lightly over the burned skin showing on LP’s forearm. LP touches it too and the hardwood of Fool’s Hip thunders again, either with Cat’s ball or with that chrome on the scrim LP never can see. As the spotlight fades the footlights glow a little, as if the spotlight has been filling the [understage] with light the whole time, and outlined for a moment between two video games is Smudge, already fading. The white of his feathers is the last thing to go.