

DAN RABARTS
LEE MURRAY

Teeth of the
WOLF
THE PATH OF RA BOOK TWO

**RAW DOG
SCREAMING
PRESS**



Excerpt from Chapter 2

- Penny -

Matiu sighs. "You're such a try-hard, Penny, you know that?"

"Shuddup." She swats him with the back of her hand. "And don't change the subject. What's going on? Why are we going this way?" she asks as Matiu ducks down a side street.

"We're being followed." He tilts his head, indicating the rear.

"We are not."

"Dark grey Mustang, rolled-down windows."

"Oh for crying out loud, Matiu, we are not being followed. You can't help yourself, can you? So I'm the lead scientific consult on a case: it's my *job*. Quit making out like I'm some B-list crime show detective. Didn't you hear Dad use words like 'emergency' and 'Mārama'? Stop dicking around. We need to get to the hospital."

"Check the side mirror, sis. About a block back. I think you'll find the guy in the passenger seat is a Simon Kingi. Prize badass. One of Hanson's lot."

Penny closes her eyes. Opens them again. "*Pleeease* tell me there is no gangster tailing us. I don't believe it. You promised us that was all over. No wonder Erica's on your case. Come on, out with it. What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything," Matiu splutters. "Why assume it's anything to do with me? He's following us. Both of us. This car!"

Penny shakes her head. "He can't be."

Matiu snorts. "Well, he is, and he's been on our arses ever since the cops tipped your John Doe into a body bag."

"Don't be crass. That was a person."

"A person of some interest to Kingi from the looks of it."

Penny folds her arms. "That's ridiculous. I don't even know why we're having this conversation. The person in that car looks like someone you know —"

"And drives the exact same car."

"Drives a *similar* car."

"Exactly the same car. I ought to know, I helped the bastard rebuild the engine block, back in the day."

Aargh. He is *so* annoying. Then again, his Mārama was rushed to hospital this morning and Matiu has never been great at expressing himself. She softens her

voice. "Look, it's a coincidence, OK? He just happens to be going the same direction as us."

Turning the Commodore into a side street, Matiu arches an eyebrow.

"It's *possible*," she insists.

Matiu shakes his head.

Well, there's a way to find out.

Leaning to her left, Penny puckers up, making showy fish-kisses at herself in the wing mirror.

"What are you doing?"

"Shhh." She snaps off a photo, then feeds the image into the facial recognition app on her phone. "I'm going to prove to you that the person in the car behind us is just a regular citizen going about his business. Someone who happens to look like your King-pin fellow. Then we'll know for sure, won't we?" She taps the screen. "It's a bit grainy, but it shouldn't take long...it's searching now..."

The results appear. Penny purses her lips.

"Well?" Matiu demands.

"I guess the photo was too grainy."

"Let me look."

"No, it's fine. It was a long shot, anyway. The accuracy of these things is marginal at best. Relies on the acuity of the image..."

"Penny, give me the damn phone!"

She tilts her shoulders away from him, but he leans over and yanks it from her hand. He checks the screen. "What do you know? Simon Kingi," he says wryly.

"It might not be him. There's a margin of error —"

"In his prison uniform. I'd know those dreadlocks anywhere."

Penny wishes she could stop the tremor in her knees.

#

- Matiu -

What the bleeding hell? Why would Kingi suddenly be following him? To be honest, Matiu can think of any number of reasons, but none of them make any sense. Not since he got away from that crowd. He's got nothing to offer them, owes them nothing. Didn't steal from them. Sure as shit can't sell them anything. Therefore, whatever Kingi wants, it probably has to do with the stiff in the park. Which is disturbing. "He was waiting, in the car park. It's a shakedown."

"Matiu. No more drama. Let's just get to the hospital." She can't conceal the quiver in her voice.

“You’re a civilian, a weak point. There’s something about this case they want, and you’re the way in.” He’s not sure about that, but it’s the sort of reasoning that’ll make Penny zip up and let him do what he needs to do. He swings around another suburban corner and hits the gas. Damn it! Now he needs to be on the motorway. Needs the open road, space to put between himself and the Mustang. He throws the Commodore into a hard turn, tyres screeching as the back end fishtails.

“Matiu!” Penny shouts, as she holds on for all she’s worth.

“What? You’ve got your seatbelt on.” Another hard corner, and Matiu smirks in triumph as he checks the mirror. Clear, so far. Still, he doesn’t slow down. Two more screeching corners, the car thrumming under his palms as it tears up the streets like the performance vehicle it is. Even on biofuel, the engine still growls like a trooper. Despite the comparable power of the Mustang on his tail, Kingi will probably be running a poorer quality fuel than the good stuff Dad sources for the fleet.

Hurtling around another corner, Matiu lines up the onramp. He races towards the motorway, the suspension creaking as he hits the ramp and enters the southbound lanes.

“Matiu!” Penny says, her eyes wide as she looks in the side mirror. “Behind us!”

He glances back. The Mustang fishtails around the last corner, a cloud of black smoke billowing off its tyres as it straightens up and races towards the onramp. “Damn,” he mutters. “Damn and fuck and damn.”

The Commodore climbs the arching ramp and swoops down onto an open curve of motorway, the harbour muddy green to the left, and Matiu lets the car roar. A horrific waste of fuel, he knows, but letting Simon Kingi catch up is not an option.

There’s hardly any traffic on the motorway, as is typical. Matiu swerves around a smoky delivery truck and speeds towards the bridge. All four southbound lanes are clear up ahead, with a row of reflective barriers running down the centre where the additional two lanes were clipped onto the bridge in the 1960s, hanging off the side of the towering arches which run red with corrosion and neglect. The Commodore gathers speed, the safety rails blurring. Matiu glances back. Kingi’s undertaking the lorry, then he swerves right. Crap. In a dead run downhill, neither car will have an advantage. Matiu won’t be able to shake Kingi unless something on the Mustang breaks, which you’d expect under normal circumstances because it’s a Ford, but in this instance, when it really matters, probably not.

“Matiu! What are we going to do?”

“In the dash there’s an old tablet I was going to reprogramme for music. Grab it out.” He veers the car to the left, and winds his window down. Wind howls through. Kingi stays in the right lane, trying to come alongside.

“A tablet? Why?”

“Questions later. Right now, help me get this homicidal maniac off our tail!”

“We don’t know he’s homicidal,” Penny mutters, but rummages around until she finds the tablet, its black touchscreen dark. “Now what?” She puts it in his outstretched right hand. “Are you going to video this for the police? Why not just ask me to do it?”

One shot. Matiu has to balance pulling this off without Penny screeching in alarm and trying to stop him. He weighs the tablet in his palm, flat and sleek; remembers times gone by, years ago, down by the sea, skipping stones. Weighing the good stones, the smooth and flat, those that would hit the water and just keep bouncing. Rushing air is a lot like water, right? Just up ahead, the soft reflective barriers end and the rusted arches rise up between the second and third lanes.

He eases off the gas suddenly, watches Kingi swell in the wing mirror. Then he yanks the wheel to the right, and for a second he’s got a view of the Mustang’s grill alongside, and the tablet leaves his hand, spinning. The Commodore slices between the barriers, clipping one which bends and snaps back into place as he passes. Cerberus skids off the back seat and into the footwell, yelping. Matiu whips back to the left before he hits the concrete centre rail, tyres screeching as he finds the car’s centre of gravity and accelerates away. The arches scroll skyward, in between the Commodore and the Mustang.

“Matiu! You...”

He checks the mirror. The Mustang swerves, weaving like a drunk, the windscreen shattered into an opaque spiderweb of fine cracks. He smirks. There’s an offramp on the far side of the bridge, which will lead them into the maze of central Auckland. He can lose him down there.

Penny glares at him. “Matiu, that was very dangerous! You might’ve caused an accident. You’re going to get us killed!”

Matiu groans. “Seriously, sister? Look, I—” But when he checks the mirror again, the words die on his lips. Looks like someone’s kicking out the smashed windscreen, and the Mustang is closing the gap. “Fuck’s sake.” Matiu hits the gas, one eye on the broken asphalt ahead and one on the car screaming up behind. He hadn’t seen anyone else in the car. How can Kingi be holding down the gas and kicking out the window at the same time? “Hold on,” he mutters, and drops a gear. The engine shrieks, pulling revs the delicate biofuel was never intended to create.

Matiu ignores the climbing temperature gauge. Organic oil, not designed for this sort of shit. Still, it gives him a momentary boost, and he veers around a rusty orange sedan. The Mustang drops back, the windscreen spilling out onto the motorway in a rain of shattered glass. In the mirror, Matiu sees something misshapen writhe, twist, though it's hard to get a good view inside the Mustang with the steel framework of the arches blurring past between them.

Then the arches are gone, sinking back into the bridge. In both directions, Waitemata Harbour spreads out in a hot, hazy murk. Matiu slams the gearstick back up. The offramp is close, closer.

There's a bang, followed by a horrible flapping noise. The steering wheel jumps in his hands, and the car slews uncontrollably left, back through the reflective barriers which snap and clatter along the car's belly. Grunting with the effort, Matiu corrects towards the centre of the road, but the car is grinding along on a shredded tyre, most steering gone, his speed evaporating.

"Fuck. Fuck!" Matiu would slam the steering wheel, if he could afford to let go of it. Sparks flying from the front left wheel rim, the car careens across the left lane and into the safety rail. Penny covers her face, right as the passenger airbag bursts and she vanishes behind it. Cerberus howls.

Matiu hits the brakes, and the car has barely stopped before he's out the door.

Kingi skids across the lanes around in a cloud of black smoke, back end sweeping around, coming to rest facing the crippled Commodore. The orange sedan swerves around the Mustang, horn blaring.

Matiu wrenches the boot open, hunting for what's buried in the bottom. Maybe not as good as a shotgun but for someone like Kingi, good enough. A crowbar will still break bones if he needs it to.

The Mustang's door opens and Kingi steps out, but it's not Kingi, it's...something else. Something with more limbs, more appendages than there should be. Matiu flashes back on Hanson, all sinuous shadows in the dark of the room that smelled of death, but this is broad daylight, the middle of Auckland Harbour Bridge, and there's Simon Kingi striding towards him, with two, maybe four, maybe more tentacles twisting out of his back. And his eyes, black pits. Grinning.

Cerberus barrels across the road, charging straight at him, a snarl curling from between bared teeth. Kingi swings a boot and sends the dog skittering over the asphalt.

"Cerberus!" Matiu shouts, but then all thought of the dog is stripped away. The smoky delivery truck tries to swerve, but it's going too fast. Matiu flinches,

ducks, as the lorry collects both Kingi and the front end of the Mustang. Kingi hurtles backwards, up and over the safety rail, a smashed tangle of limbs, and vanishes over the side of the bridge, while the Mustang spins around twice, a whirlwind of shattered metal and glass. The truck screeches to a stop in a haze of diesel fumes and hot brakes.

Matiu breathes. Dimly he hears Penny, yelling something incoherent as she practically falls out of the car. The Commodore's a mess. Hell of a time they're going to have explaining this to the depot, aren't they? No matter. Matiu knows some people who can sort it out. Polish it up good as new. Never mind that someone was trying to kill them. That Simon Kingi is probably dead. That Simon Kingi was *not* Simon Kingi.

Never mind that it's not over.

#

Teeth of the Wolf, the second book in the Path of Ra series, releases October 4th 2018 from Raw Dog Screaming Press.

<https://www.amazon.com/Teeth-Wolf-Dan-Rabarts/dp/1947879073>

Book 1, *Hounds of the Underworld*, won the Sir Julius Vogel Award for Best Novel in 2017, and is available in paperback and ebook formats:

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1935738968/>

Dan Rabarts is an award-winning short fiction author and editor and podcast narrator, recipient of New Zealand's Sir Julius Vogel Award for Best New Talent in 2014. His vocal talents have been heard on such podcasts as *StarShipSofa*, *Tales to Terrify*, *Crime City Central* and *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*. His science fiction, dark fantasy and horror short stories have been published in numerous venues around the world, including *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *StarShipSofa* and *The Mammoth Book of Dieselpunk*. Together with Lee Murray, he co-edited the anthologies *Baby Teeth - Bite-sized Tales of Terror*, winner of the 2014 SJV for Best Collected Work and the 2014 Australian Shadows Award for Best Edited Work, and *At The Edge*, in 2016, a collection of

Antipodean dark fiction. He also received the Australian Shadows Award for long fiction in 2016 for his novella, *Tipuna Tapu*. With Lee Murray, he co-authors the crime/horror series The Path of Ra, which starts with *Hounds of the Underworld* and continues in 2018 with *Teeth of the Wolf* (Raw Dog Screaming Press). His grimdark-yet-madcap fantasy series Children of Bane kicks off shortly with the first book, *Brothers of the Knife* (Omnium Gatherum). Find out more at dan.rabarts.com.

Lee Murray is a multi-award-winning writer and editor of fantasy, science fiction, and horror (Australian Shadows, Sir Julius Vogel). Her titles for adults include the acclaimed Taine McKenna series of military thrillers (Severed Press) and supernatural crime-noir series The Path of Ra co-authored with Dan Rabarts (Raw Dog Screaming Press). Among her titles for children are YA novel *Misplaced*, and best-loved middle grade adventure *Battle of the Birds*, listed in the Best Books of the Year 2011 by New Zealand's Dominion Post. The first book in a series of speculative middle grade adventures, *Dawn of the Zombie Apocalypse*, will be published by IFWG Australia in 2019. Lee is a regular speaker at workshops, conferences and schools. Lee is proud to have co-edited nine volumes of speculative fiction, including six by New Zealand school students. She lives with her family in New Zealand where she conjures up stories for readers of all ages from her office overlooking a cow paddock. Find her at leemurray.info