

Pushing Glass
by Eric Cecil

My overnight bag in tow, I meet R. at a desolate intersection in his new city. He greets me with uncharacteristic warmth. Welcome, he says, clapping my shoulder. I thank him for his hospitality, then ask if I might stow my luggage in his apartment. He denies my request with the wave of his hand.

Let's get going, he says. If we hurry, we can watch them push glass.

Push glass. The phrase is unfamiliar to me, its meaning elusive. Nonetheless, I shoulder my bag and follow R.'s lead.

We enter a gauntlet of vacant warehouses. In between each, there are alleyways: narrow passages beset by pavement so fractured, so crooked that it appears unnavigable. Every crack and cleft flowers with thorny weeds. One of these verdant thoroughways extends for what seems like miles, opening onto a clear view of the horizon, where towering buildings fang a strange and kinetic sky.

These structures, I notice, are in perfect correspondence to the fronds that spring from the foreground. I suspect that the highrises may be a projection, mere shadows of the grass in the alleys below, and we may be the lights to which these silhouettes owe their lives. The idea is lofty, precious. When I mention it to R., he laughs.

It's something, though, isn't it? he says. But it doesn't explain the glowing. He extends his arms, heralding the soft, seething flares that pulse behind the distant buildings. Just as quickly, he turns and continues walking.

We encounter the spectacle of a wide boulevard. The shells of demolished cars litter its curb. Most are missing wheels and hoods, frames teething the jagged remains of busted windows. Beyond these immobile husks, the road blurs with the velocity of oncoming traffic. Oversized trucks, wide plows fixed to their bumpers, scrape and spark the uneven pavement, corralling piles of debris. A subtle chime sounds under the drag of ruin: something like a chorus of small bells, a persistent and delicate ringing.

Maybe, I consider, this is what it means to push glass. R. intuits this thought, shakes his head.

Not yet, he says. They're just chumming. He wags an open hand before him, mimicking the loose movements of someone slinging bait into open water. The real push, he explains, happens

up ahead, and he directs my attention to the span of a massive bridge. Its frame inclines over an obvious break in the skyline, then bows between the highrises, disappears.

Before I can ask R. about any of this, he's already crossing the distance, venturing toward the shadow of the overpass. I rush to follow him. We leave the curb and its cars and wander toward a crowd that's assembled near a meager plaza. Dozens of onlookers, hands hooding their brows, gather along the sidewalk, staring at the celestial displays above. Others walk in loose packs, mounting the steep ascent of the bridge.

The crowd swells as I catch up to R. He leads me to the edge of the plaza, where the pedestrians, no longer accorded a sidewalk, take to the street. The oversized trucks cleave their ranks, shoveling piles of debris that now dwarf their own gigantic frames. Large fragments of steel and glass roil the road. The sound is ugly, thunderous. None of the spectators seem to notice. They amble alongside the lumbering vehicles, many slapping the sides of the trucks as they pass, some hollering vulgar imprecations that are lost to the deafening roar. R. laughs, jogs ahead, joins them.

I lose sight of him when I lower myself onto the street. Though I try to keep the pace of the crowd, the scene is too dangerous: I'm afraid of colliding with traffic, scared of meeting my end at the blade of a plow. With some effort, I shoulder between a group of onlookers and move toward the outer railing of the bridge. The sky swirls and cascades to my side.

Its activity has intensified, and the visuals that hue its expanse now seem bright enough to burn my eyes. The effect is overwhelming. I grab the railing and peer into the drop below. I'm high above the city, suspended over what appears to be the sparkling lengths of a wide river. Its surface matches the colors overhead, feeds them back to the firmament in gasping and muted whorls. And the sky, in turn, recycles them, amplifies them. The loop is interminable, oppressive in its repetition.

It's easier just to look at the river. I watch it impassively until I notice something peculiar about its texture. Its sheen is metallic, and its movements are stodgy, the waves grinding rather than souging or slapping with the ease of water. I realize, now, that it's not water at all, but a massive junkyard: the floating debris of millions of wrecked and ruined cars. Literal tons of glass fill the spaces between, the finer particles misting in sprays of glittering dust, which dissolve in washes of spectacular color.

A cheer erupts up ahead. It's somewhere near the crest of the bridge. The crowd surges behind me, and I grip the railing tighter, looking on as the stream shudders with a sudden fury below. It's almost as if my discovery has unnerved the ruin, has spurred deeper and greater waves that stir from an unseen source, rippling toward the banks of the nearest shore.

I turn to look for R., but he's gone, or I can't see him. The crowd is too thick or too wild. The frenzy of the spectators seems to match the fervor of the metallic river, and I'm swept up in the throng as it clamors ahead.

To the crest of the bridge. The horde dissolves there, circles and surrounds a cordon of trucks. The hulking vehicles idle in a single-file line. Their red taillights lead to a break in the railing, an opening onto the sky itself. I arrive in time to watch as one large truck, appearing at the head of the queue, lurches toward the void. At once I understand that the vehicle will push its debris into the river of ruin, but it won't stop there: the truck itself will fly over the edge of the overpass, will sail into the air and fall to the wreckage below.

As the plow advances, I'm struck by another revelation: I've lost my bag.