

## **"Chitown Banger"**

By joshua bee alafia

### FILM TREATMENT

Florescent lights strobe along the ceiling in a rhythmic succession from DWAYNE'S (19) point of view while he rolls down the Cook County Hospital hallway. "You hear studs talk about catching a hot one, and they ain't kidding, that shit burns. I'm 19. Ain't lived enough to die yet." Dwayne's eyes close and he remembers his Uncle showing him how to shoot a basketball when he was seven years old.

"Trip, they used to call me 'Lucky' because I never be hit by bullets. Bullets just seem to find their way everywhere else but up into my body."

Downtown Chicago ornaments the skyline as Dwayne walks with BUTTER (19). Butter stops to speak to a young woman wearing daisy dukes, sitting on her bicycle and a car rolls by with a masked gunman blazing shots. Butter pushes the girl down and Dwayne turns and runs as bullets fly past him. Butter gets shot in the legs and lays down playing dead while the gunman chases Dwayne shooting and missing.

"They called me 'Lucky,' but I always thought I was blessed. Until now. I came up in the sticks, little town called Chenoa 'bout a hundred miles outside the Chi." Dwayne plays basketball on his high school team and drives to the basket and passes to his team-mate who throws up an air-ball.

"I came to Chitown to ball. Moved in with my Auntie so I could get scouted to play college ball and go pro. That was my plan but shit didn't go like I was hoping it would..." Dwayne lives with his Aunt PAMELA (45) in row housing projects. Alienated, Dwayne looks on as young gangsters wear nice clothes and have pretty girlfriends. After a close scoring basketball game, Dwayne and his teammate get into a car accident. Dwayne pulls himself from the wreckage and clutches his knee, writhing on the pavement covered with shattered glass. Dwayne suffers a compound fracture to his leg, and has to hobble around with a big cast, his basketball dreams are tossed out the window. Dwayne comes home from school one day to find Pamala crying in the kitchen. Pamela gets laid off from the corn syrup plant where she works and Dwayne gets a job a Pancake House restaurant as a dish-washer.

Dwayne's cousin SMOKE (22) has been gang banging since he was 11 years old and takes Dwayne to a Black Lords' barbecue. The massive number of gangbangers with their families impresses Dwayne and he experiences love at first sight seeing FATIMA (18) talking with her friends. Smoke and some of the older heads enrapture Dwayne with stories of the origins of the gangs in Chicago over dominoes.

BLACK & WHITE GRAINY PERIOD FOOTAGE. The gangs of the late 1950s still have fist fights and fight for territory with women holding shotguns under their dresses reminiscent of the Battle of Algiers. The Vice Lords were the first of the super gangs, consuming other street gangs and forcing them to flip over into being Vice Lords. In the 60s, DAVID BARKSDALE of the Disciple Nation and LARRY HOOVER of the Gangster Nation joined to create the Black Gangster Disciple Nation, known as "Folks" while JEFF FORT headed the Black P Stone Nation who along with the Vice Lords are known as "Peoples." The gangs began as grassroots community organizations operating legitimate businesses like gas stations and restaurants and organizing voters, holding strikes, feeding the children with free breakfast programs, the needy in free lunch programs, and marching with Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights Movement. "They call this the Windy City because of all this wind up in these politicians. Once politicians began dealing with the gangs, drugs and arms were made available to them in mass quantities and they fell into 'the man's' trap and the community development froze. Now it's just about getting this paper."

Dwayne is blessed into the Black Lords, and prayed over in a ritual ceremony. He meets his chief, MASE (27) who leads with an iron fist. Dwayne's name goes into the books as a member, and he has to pay his ten dollar a week dues. "We brothas now and we your family, Dwayne. When shit happens to you we ride for you and you got to serve the nation of the Black Lords with all that devotion you give your blood, dig." Dwayne learns the handshake and the Nation's laws. He's given a 9mm pistol and gets put on Security, watching the lobby of one of the last high-rise project buildings in the State Corridor with another more street seasoned recruit named MOTEP (16). It's 2003 and gentrification of downtown pushes the people in the projects out to the suburbs, and projects are getting torn down, leaving a wasteland of an empty lot. Fatima lives on the top floor of the building, and gives Dwayne something to strive toward.

Motep teases Dwayne, calling him "Hoopdreams" because he limps and had to foreclose his dreams of playing pro-ball. Motep tells the story of King High School's all time highest scorer, VINCE JACKSON, who got drafted by the San Antonio Spurs after high school. Vince couldn't leave Chicago, and came home to kidnap his ex-girlfriend. He eventually let her go and the police found him in his apartment dressed as a Native American, in head dress and face paint ranting, "I got to fight them cowboy crackers..." Motep recounts the story of CRUSHER YOUNG (20), one of the greatest street ballers to shoot hoops in the neighborhood. Crusher destroyed everyone in basket ball, and ran the books on the Board of Directors of the Gangster Disciples. A group of buildings are named, "Crusher Town" after him. Crusher escaped a heavy dragnet in the mid-nineties, and wasn't found until 2001, when he was playing on his company's softball world series for a cheese factory in Wisconsin. He just couldn't subdue his athletic ability.

"When you just starting off plugged in a street gang, you basically expendable," Dwayne realizes in hindsight. A car convoy leaves Chicago with Smoke escorting Dwayne, Motep and twenty- five other young recruits on a "Send Off" to Los Angeles to assist some Bloods. "

My trip was paid for but there was no guarantee we were coming back..." The Black Lords intimidate a set of Crips just by their presence and being recognizably out-of-towners. In turn, the Bloods keep the Black Lords supplied with the highest-grade cocaine available. As the Lords prepare to leave town, they're confronted at a car show and engage in a shoot out as the crowd scatters. Dwayne empties his gun and turns sideways as a Crip fires at him until Smoke shoots the Crip from his blind side. The Bloods have their own doctor who treats a few of the Lords' gun-wounds. Luckily, nobody is killed.

Dwayne and Smoke hang out in front of the corner grocer and talk to DHIA (17), the owner's son. Dhia explains, "We Palestinian, so Pops wasn't tryin' to feel my tattoo cause to him it's like repping Israel, and they the ones pushing our shit out our own country, Joe..." Smoke breaks down the origin of Peoples and Folks symbology going back to their Islamic roots. Fatima and her little sister come out of the store and Dwayne asks to carry their bags home.

"I had never been in love before Fatima, Dwayne recounts. Dwayne walks with Fatima along Lake Michigan at sunset. Fatima and Dwayne make love standing in a stairwell, with nowhere else to be alone. Fatima whispers, "I love you," in Dwayne's ear.

Smoke, Dwayne and Motep to rob a gun shop in Geary, Indiana. The owner fires at them as they get away with semi-automatic guns and pistols. Back in Chicago, they sell the arms and give Mase a nice cut, earning promotions in the ranks. Smoke drops Motep and Dwayne off at a deli and Motep steals a six-pack of beer. Police bust them as they're running down the street laughing. They end up doing six months in jail for shop lifting and possession of concealed weapons.

"They told me, 'We got you if anything happens.' It's true, we have Lords who are lawyers that got they school paid for by the nation and everything, but I still had to do some time. Something inside me died in jail. I guess you could call it innocence. I never got an ass whuppin' like that. I learned how to be ruthless in jail, and I wasn't comin' out no punk." Dwayne gets beat down in jail by three older inmates. DOOROD (40) teaches Dwayne how to make a knife out of a spoon and gives him some training in boxing.

"When I got out, everything was upside-down. All I was about was clocking my paper." Dwayne comes out of jail to find Fatima has gone orthodox Muslim, and won't have sex before marriage, no matter how hard Dwayne tries. She begs him to leave the gangster life, and he agrees. He looks for work at a few restaurants but nobody will hire him. Mase promotes him in rank and he starts selling drugs at a drive through spot on the West Side. Dwayne pays high taxes to Mase, who gets a kick out of how much weight Dwayne moves. Dwayne leaves his Aunt's place and moves into his cousin Smoke's apartment. Pamela expresses her concern for him but he head is hard and getting harder. She implores him, shaking him to try to get some sense into his head, but he just starts laughing, "I'm a grown ass man now, Auntie. It's too late, I got to get my hustle on."

Smoke educates Dwayne on how to identify other gangbangers by the way they wear their hat, their colors, tattoos. As the two of them sell drugs at the West Side drive through, a car with some rival youth cruises down the street. Some Future Black Lords, the young in-training adolescent branch, flash opposite gang signs to the car as it passes and the passenger reciprocates with the same sign. One of the Future Black Lords (12) rides his bicycle along side the car and throws the bike, shattering the back windshield. Other Future Lords throw bricks, damaging the car as it peels away. Ten minutes later a car comes by and shoots one of the Future Black Lords in the leg, leaving him crying in pain. Smoke and Dwayne fire at the car, riddling it with bullets. The ambulance doesn't come, so Smoke takes the youth to the hospital.

Dwayne sets up another dealing spot and employs Motep and Butter to man the operation. Dwayne's math teacher comes and cops some coke and doesn't recognize Dwayne at all, leaving him a little dumbfounded. Mase comes to their avenue and gets out of the car and shakes hands with Dwayne. Dwayne breaks eye-contact too soon, looking at a customer pulling his car up, and Mase slaps him for breaking code. Mase makes him shake hands again and gets angry that Dwayne is trying to cut him out of his obligation. "I started to realize that I was just getting pimped by Mase and he wasn't no kind of family but just exploiting on me."

Dwayne goes to Los Angeles with a stack of cash to run his own operation with RONE (30), a Blood that he had met in his first send off and they form a business union without Mase's involvement where Rone supplies Dwayne directly, sending the coke through truck drivers.

Dwayne, Butter and Motep set up shop in Chenoa, and Motep shoots the local two-bit drug dealer named ELROY (30). They recruit some high school students and form their own click called the C-Town Riders. The unemployment from the local soap factory closing creates a demand for drugs as well as disenfranchised workforce.

Fatima sees Dwayne with a new girlfriend, and Dwayne is rude to her. Dwayne's BASKETBALL COACH sees him and asks him to take a ride with him. He takes him on a ride telling him some of the histories of gangsters demise, trying to impress the point that he's on a dead end road with the gangbanging. He offers him a job assistant coaching and encourages him to enroll in City College. Dwayne is aloof and reserved. "I had all these points where I could have stepped back and got legit, but I didn't."

The story comes back to the point where Butter and Dwayne get shot by a masked gunman seen from a different angle. The gunman's mask comes off as he runs and Dwayne recognizes him. It's BALFOUR (22), a Black Lord who has since flipped to the Insane Gangsters. As the gunman peels away in his car, Dwayne comes and drags Butter into an alley. The young woman on the bicycle is safe. Smoke comes and the Police come and delay getting an ambulance, so Dwayne and Smoke put Butter in the car and take him to the hospital.

Dwayne and Smoke assemble soldiers from the Black Lords and they go into the gunman's neighborhood and kill eight of the opposing gang.

A car drives by Dwayne's drive through depot yelling, "Now what, for Elroy, bitch!" and shoots Motep. Bullets fly by and miss Dwayne, and Motep goes down. "Goddamn, Joe. Don't tell nobody I shit my pants, man," Motep says as he dies in Dwayne's arms. Motep's funeral is big and family poses with him in his open casket for photos, even bringing the video camera out and taping him lying in his coffin. Motep gets buried in a casket with a window so he can be seen with the casket closed. Police are present at the funeral and Smoke tells Dwayne it's because funerals get shot up all the time.

Mase's car pulls up to Dwayne and the Lord in the passenger's seat sticks a sawed off shotgun out the window. Dwayne starts running. The gun blasts. Mase yells, "C-Town Riders, Dwayne? What kind of gay ass name is that, anyway, punk?" Dwayne doesn't evade these bullets and falls to the pavement.

The paramedics park Dwayne's bed in the Emergency room and the Doctor looks at his wounds. The emergency room doors fly open and three unidentified men storm in with their guns drawn. "Get the fuck off him if you want to live!" one yells.

The doctors and paramedics back away from the bed. The bed's wheel illuminates with gun-flash and jerks with impact of the bullets that riddle Dwayne's body as blood trickles down the wheel and pools on the floor.

Smoke stands alone as his casket lowers into the ground.

"Damn. I couldn't even get that casket me and Jamallo picked out cause they shot me up so bad," Dwayne laments.

Dwayne and Jamallo walk past top of the line caskets at Brown's Mortuary. They stop at a transparent casket. "This is what I'm talkin' bout, straight iced out box, nigga, so they can see me, fool!" Jamallo exclaims. Three Gangster Disciples come in to shop for caskets as well. The two sets lock eyes.

"Who you is? What you be about!" a Gangster Disciple provokes.

"All Mighty Lawds, nigga!" Jamallo reps.

The two sets throw signs and exchange banter until a GD reaches behind his back and brandishes a Desert Eagle pistol. Jamallo and Dwayne both draw their guns.

"Y'all better keep it moving, the police are right around the corner," the Mortician interjects.

The Gangster Disciples back out the door and Jamallo and Dwayne run through the Mortuary passing a young corps on the table, Dwayne stops and looks at the dead man, recognizing him. The body on the Mortuary table is Dwayne. Dwayne's grandfather stands leaning on a cane. Jamallo pulls Dwayne out the back door.

"Probably should have never left Chenoa. I probably should have listened to all the signs. I probably should have lived a different life. If I had, I'd still be living. 'What you be about!' they always testing. Why didn't I think about what I'm really about. I'm about living. I didn't even mean to hurt nobody. I'm about being free. God, please let me do it over..."