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The Outlaws

CONTROLS

Forward	 up arrow
Backward	 down arrow
Left	 left arrow
Right	 right arrow
Enter/Exit vehicle	 enter
Attack	 ctrl

Grim city. Aerial view. A man in black runs along a river as a red sports car chases after him. Suddenly, a white convertible peels up in his path. "Over here, Jack!" shouts a beautiful young British woman behind the wheel. Jack leaps into her car, and she floors it. She has long auburn hair and stylish silver-framed shades. "You didn't know you had a fairy godmother, did you?" she asks, coyly.

"So where are we going, Princess?" Jack asks.

"To the demon king's castle, of course." She shifts into high gear, speeding through a parking garage to safety.

In 1971, there was no cooler getaway driver than Geraldine Moffat, the actress in this scene from *Get Carter*, a British crime film released that year. Critics dismissed it, saying, "One would rather wash one's mouth out with soap than recommend it." Yet as is often the case with anything new and controversial, the fans won out in the end.

The scene of Moffat lounging nude in bed with Michael Caine—a Rolling Stones album propped on the nightstand beside them—epitomized how hip movies could be. *Get Carter* became a cult classic, and Moffat, one of London's most fashionable stars. She married Walter Houser, a musician who ran the hottest jazz club in England, Ronnie Scott's.

Shortly after *Get Carter*'s release, Moffat and Houser welcomed their first child, Sam. The boy's brown eyes sparkled with possibility. Every kid determines to be cooler than his parents, but when your mom's in gangster flicks and your dad's hanging with Roy Ayers, that's no easy game. Sam found inspiration in movies like his mom's. He became fascinated by gangs, the grittier the better. He'd trudge down to the local library, checking out videotapes of crime films: *The Getaway, The French Connection, The Wild Bunch, The Warriors.*

One day at Ronnie Scott's, the great jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie asked young Sam what he wanted to be when he grew up. The boy resembled his mother—the heart-shaped face, the wide flat bushy black eyebrows. "A bank robber," Sam replied.

WAVES CRASHED the sands of Brighton, the beach town south of London, but Sam wasn't interested in the shore. His parents had taken him and his stocky brother Dan, two years younger, here to play outside, breathe the fresh air, and listen to the gulls. Instead, Moffat found Sam banging at a tall, psychedelically illustrated cabinet. Sam had discovered video games.

At this time in the early 1980s, games were in their family-friendly golden age. Innovations in technology and design brought a hypnotic new breed of machines into arcades and corner shops, from *Space*

Invaders to *Asteroids.* The graphics were simple and blocky, the themes (zap the aliens, gobble the dots), hokey. One of Sam's favorites was *Mr. Do!* a surreal game in which he played a circus clown, burrowing underground for magic cherries as he was being chased by monsters. The news shop near his house had a *Mr. Do!* and Sam would eagerly fetch cigarettes there for his mom just so he could play.

Sam's parents bought him every new game machine for home, from the Atari to the Omega and the Spectrum ZX, a popular computer coming out of Dundee, Scotland. Dan, more interested in literary things, didn't take to games, but Sam always shoved a controller into his hands anyway. "I don't know the buttons!" Dan would protest.

"It doesn't matter!" Sam replied, "You have to play!"

When Dan didn't comply, he suffered big brother's wrath. Sam later joked of having once fed Dan poison berries, sending him to the hospital. The terror subsided when Dan outgrew him. Dan proved his power by leaping onto Sam below from a balcony of their house, which resulted in a fistfight—and Sam's broken hand. One of Sam's favorite games didn't require an opponent at all. It was a single-player game called *Elite*, and it was his world alone to explore. *Elite* cast the player as the commander of a spaceship. The goal was to trick out your ship however you could—mining asteroids or looting. Sam reveled in the pixilated rebellion, being what he called a "space mugger." Video games, perhaps because they were still so new, had long been seen as a second-class medium, and gamers, as a result, felt a bit like outlaws, too. Now Elite was letting them live out their bad boy dreams, if only on screen.

The game wasn't the prettiest or most realistic, but it offered something tantalizing: freedom. At the time, most titles kept players in a box—sort of like moving through a scripted shooting gallery—but *Elite* felt radically open. Players could chose from an array of galaxies, each with its own planets, to explore. It had become a phenomenon around England, selling hundreds of thousands of copies and earning its collegiate creators a following. *Elite* was so immersive, so transporting, it

epitomized the essence of what a game, for Sam, could do: transport you to another world.

ONE BY ONE, the boys inched uniformly down the line—taking their plates of, say, shepherd's pie, or steamed jam sponge and custard. They looked as neat and orderly as their trays. The dark blazers with the badges. The crisp white button-down shirts and dark ties. The charcoal pants and dark socks. The black leather dress shoes. All of the boys identical, almost, except the one seen around school with the Doc Martens boots poking out from under his slacks: Sam.

If Sam wanted to escape the real world, he would have to start here at St. Paul's, the storied prep school on the River Thames. Since the 1500s, St. Paul's had weaned some of the brightest young minds in the country, from Milton to Samuel Johnson. Now Sam and Dan, like many of the privileged young sons of London, had come to learn the finer things across forty-five leafy acres in Hammersmith: playing cricket on the lawns, studying Russian history, listening to the orchestra perform.

Yet as Sam's unconventional choice of footwear proved, he had little interest in playing by the rules. Brash and iconoclastic, he was already living the rock-star lifestyle. He wore his hair long, let his shoes scuff, and was occasionally seen leaving school in a Rolls-Royce. By their teens, he and his brother dispensed of their dad's music for something more vital: hip-hop.

Specifically, they dug Def Jam Recordings, an American music label already become legendary among hip kids in the know. Founded by a punk rocker named Rick Rubin in his New York University dorm room, the company had become the coolest and shrewdest start-up for the burgeoning East Coast rap scene. Rubin, along with his partner, club promoter Russell Simmons, began putting out singles from the freshest acts in the five boroughs. As a white Jewish kid from Long Island and a black guy from Queens, they were a unique and potent

mix. They fused their love of rap and rock into acts with a decidedly mainstream flair, from a cocky kid named LL Cool J to a trio of bratty white rappers, the Beastie Boys.

They had more than great taste, though. Def Jam pioneered a new generation of guerrilla marketing. Simmons and Rubin had come from the urban underworld of street promotions—do-it-yourself campaigns used in both punk rock and rap to create word-of-mouth buzz. Simmons called it "running the track," promoting each artist in as many ways as possible. They slapped stickers—bearing the iconic Def Jam logo, with its big letters D and J—on lampposts and buildings. They threw parties around New York, producing elaborate concerts with over-the-top props—such as the huge inflatable penises at the Beasties show.

Devout fans like Sam consumed not only Def Jam records, but the lifestyle. When Rubin's single "Reign in Blood," for the heavy metal band Slayer, came out, Sam hungrily bought it—slipping out the Def Jam patch that he wore like a badge of honor. Sam had taken on a way of ranting about his fixations. His mouth would motor, words firing like *Missile Command* bullets, hands gesturing, head swaying, as though he couldn't contain the sheer awesomeness of his pop culture love.

"For me, a guy like Rick Rubin is such a fucking hero," started one of his breathless rants, "to go from pioneering in that world to doing hip-hop and to doing the Cult. When he did that album *Electric*! When you can hear Rick Rubin and his sharp hip-hop street production coming out of these rockers from Newcastle! For me, seeing someone like him suddenly being in rock and the hardest form of rock—Slayer!—I was, like, 'These guys don't get any better, it doesn't get cooler than that.' And he kept on delivering . . . People like that inspire me so massively."

Even better, Def Jam hailed from New York. Sam deeply admired the city, the fashion and culture and music. By day, he wore the stiff uniform of St. Paul's, by night he fashioned the uniform of NYC. He sat in his room, piled with vinyl records and videotapes, weaving chunky shoelaces as the rappers in New York did. It wasn't just a

superficial love of fashion, it was about underdogs on the fringes who revolutionized a culture.

For Sam's eighteenth birthday, his dad took him to New York. On arrival, Sam bought a leather jacket and Air Jordan Mach 4 sneakers, as he'd seen on MTV. He roamed the open world downtown, soaking in the sights and the sounds. The yellow taxis. The rising buildings. The surly pedestrians. The hookers in Times Square. "From that point I was chronically in love with the place," he later recalled.

For lunch one afternoon, Sam's dad took him out with his friend Heinz Henn, a marketing executive for BMG, the music label for the German company Bertelsmann. BMG, Henn explained, was struggling to cash in on youth culture. As Sam sat there listening, he couldn't contain himself for long. "Why is everyone in the record business so old?" he asked. "Why don't you have young people working in this business?"

Henn eyeballed this rich white kid dressed like Run DMC, then spoke to Sam's dad. Who was this hot-tempered but very self-assured boy? "Your son is an utter lunatic," Heinz told him, "but he has some good ideas."

Sam had just scored himself a job.