

Black Book

By

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Establishing shot: A city skyline.

Angle on: A MAN walking down a sidewalk, approaching an ALLEY. He is DAMIEN STROUD, a business man on his way home from work. He looks worried about something, wrapped up in his own internal world.

As he walks by the alley, Damien's attention is attracted by the sound of a man begging for his life.

MARK

No! Please! I'll give you anything!

No!

Damien pauses to look down the alley, where he sees his co-worker MARK BRADLEY being menaced by a DARK-CLOTHED MAN holding a small BOOK open in his left hand. As Damien watches, the threatening figure reveals the shining SWORD in his right hand.

The sword bursts in to flames, and MARK'S pleas are choked off by his abject panic.

DAMIEN

Hey! Stop!

Damien starts to run down the alley. His shouts startle the dark figure, causing it to drop the book. The swordsman turns, revealing glowing red eyes, and a face that the light does not seem to touch. He turns back to Mark, and the sword bursts into flames. The swordsman slashes Mark across the chest with the flaming sword, the cuts creating gouts of flame that burst from Mark's chest.

Mark falls to the ground, the book landing nearby, and the dark swordsman runs away from Damien, who wisely chooses not to pursue it and instead kneels by Mark's body, calling 911 on his PHONE as he does.

OPERATOR

(V.O.)

911. What is the nature of your emergency?

DAMIEN

There's been a murder. He was attacked by a guy with a... um, with a sword.

As Damien examines the corpse, he realizes that there aren't any visible wounds. The fire did not even scorch his clothing.

(CONTINUED)

OPERATOR

What is your location, sir?

DAMIEN

Uh... I'm in an alley near 16th and Fern. East of 16th.

OPERATOR

Is the assailant still in the area?

Damien picks up the book and opens it to the marked page. A burning line appears, marking through the name "Mark Bradley." All of the names above Mark's are already marked through. All the names beneath it are not.

DAMIEN

The assailant... No, he's... What the heck?

OPERATOR

Sir? Are you in danger? The police and paramedics are on their way. Please stay...

Damien hangs up the phone, and looks from the book to the corpse in consternation. There is the distant sound of sirens. Damien tucks the book into his pocket.

Fade to black.

2

INT. MORNING. DAMIEN'S APARTMENT

2

DAMIEN is preparing OATMEAL for breakfast. His hands shake as he tears open the package over the sink. The BLACK BOOK is next to the sink. He tears the packet a little too violently, and flakes scatter into the sink. He throws the paper packet into the sink after them, annoyed. The kitchen is cluttered with dirty dishes and evidence that most of his meals seem to be of the TV dinner variety.

The PHONE rings, and Damien answers.

DAMIEN

Hello?

GREG

(V.O. throughout)

Damien? I heard about Mark. You OK?

DAMIEN

Yeah, yeah, I'm fine, Greg. How are you?

(CONTINUED)

GREG

What, are you kidding me? Mark didn't die in *my* arms! Look, I just called to tell you that Terrance wants us all to take the day off. I didn't figure you were planning to come in, anyway, right?

DAMIEN

No, I'm feeling pretty worn out. The police had me 'till near midnight.

Damien picks up the book and turns it to the page of names, his finger underlining the first name that isn't struck out: Chris Ronson.

DAMIEN

I have something I need to do, anyway.

GREG

OK. I'll see you next week, then. Take it easy.

DAMIEN

Yeah, OK. Bye.

Damien grabs a phone book and looks up the name. He circles it and tears out the page. He leaves the oatmeal in the sink and goes to the closet, where he puts on his coat. The phone book page and black book go into a pocket. He takes a case from the shelf and sets it on the counter to open it. Inside is a HANDGUN, which he loads and puts in the other coat pocket.

With a determined expression on his face, he leaves the apartment.

3 EXT. MORNING. RESIDENTIAL STREET.

3

Damien is sitting in his car, watching a nearby house and eating a donut. He occasionally checks the gun in his pocket unconsciously. The phone book page is draped over the steering wheel.

Faintly, the sound of shouting is heard. It gets louder as a door across the street opens and CHRIS RONSON steps out of his house. He is red-faced and shouting at his wife inside. She has a huge purple bruise on the side of her face and is crying.

Damien's PHONE rings, and he answers.

(CONTINUED)

DAMIEN

(Distracted by what's going on
across the street)

Yeah?

During this conversation, Damien watches as Mrs. Ronson slams the door on her husband. He responds by picking up a clay planter from the porch and slamming down on the sidewalk. He shouts something else at the closed door and walks to the curb where his car is parked.

GREG

(V.O. throughout)

Damien? Hey, get this: So Mark doesn't have any family in town to take care of his things, so Terrance sent Julie over to his place to get the laptop they gave him, you know, so nobody else gets whatever secret information he had, or whatever. So Julie gets there, and the computer's on, and, I kid you not, it's got kiddie porn all over it.

DAMIEN

(Drawn into the conversation
in spite of himself.)

Wait, what? What secrets? I thought Mark was in Sales?

GREG

Dude, where are your priorities? I'm telling you Mark was into little girls, and you get hung up on whether Mark knew trade secrets. I'm just sayin', maybe he got what was coming to him, right?

DAMIEN

Right, sure. Hey, I'm kinda in the middle of something. I'll call you back, OK?

He hangs up before Greg can say anything else.

DAMIEN

Kiddie porn? Sheesh.

By this time, Chris has started his car and peels out down the street. Damien starts up his own car and follows.

4

EXT. MORNING. PARKING LOT

4

Damien follows Chris to his workplace. As soon as Ronson parks, Damien pulls his car up behind him. As Ronson gets out of his car, Damien rolls down the window and shouts to him.

DAMIEN

Hey, are you Chris Ronson?

CHRIS

Yeah, who're you?

DAMIEN

(Gets out of car)

I know how crazy this is going to sound, but your life is in danger. I...

CHRIS

(interrupting)

What? Are you threatening me!?

DAMIEN

(Pulls book out of his pocket)

What? No, but your name is in this book, and I just...

CHRIS

My wife put you up to this? You sleeping with her? I'll kill her!

Chris starts coming toward Damien, murder in his eyes. Damien pulls the gun from his pocket.

DAMIEN

Stop right there!

Chris pulls up short, uncertainty on his face. Suddenly, he turns and runs.

5

EXT. MORNING. CHASE

5

DAMIEN hesitates for a moment, a little bit confused, but he remembers the bruise on Mrs. Ronson's face, and that angers him enough to give chase.

CHRIS has a good headstart, but he isn't in great shape, so Damien runs him down and corners him in a construction site, gun in one hand and book in the other.

CHRIS, too tired to climb the chain-link fence that bars his way, turns to face DAMIEN.

CHRIS

(puffing)

Look, buddy, I'm real sorry, OK? I mean, yeah, sometimes I lose my temper, but that's no reason to kill a guy, is it?

DAMIEN

What are you talking about? I'm here to save you, not kill you!

CHRIS

Then what's with the gun?

DAMIEN

(looks at the weapon in his hand)

I think there's someone coming to kill you. The gun's for him.

Chris' face turns to an expression of panic as a shadow falls across Damien. Damien turns just in time to receive a blow to the face from HAROLD.

Harold is not nearly so menacing in the daylight, although his eyes still glow red, muted somewhat by the sunlight. His sheathed sword hangs from his belt, mostly concealed by his long coat.

As Damien recoils, Harold lunges forward and catches Chris by the collar. Harold slams him into a fence post, knocking him out, before turning back to Damien, who has recovered and is pointing his gun at Harold.

HAROLD

You can't kill me with that, you know. Or him, for that matter. You need *this*.

Harold draws his sword, prompting Damien to renew his vigilance with the gun.

HAROLD

You heard him confess. You saw what he did this morning. He is guilty of far worse, I assure you. They all are. Every name on that list comes with a litany of sins to make the Devil himself blush.

(CONTINUED)

DAMIEN

What are you?

HAROLD

(chuckling)

I'm a man, same as you. Or I was, until I picked up that book. I know what you felt, when you touched it. The need to hunt those people down, to uncover their secrets, make them pay.

DAMIEN

What? No! No, I came here to save him. Save him from you!

HAROLD

If you say so. Here, take it.

Harold reverses his grip on the sword and offers it to Damien, who takes a step back.

HAROLD

Take it. There's no other option for you now. You've been chosen.

DAMIEN

Chosen? Chosen by *who*?

HAROLD

I think you mean "by whom." God? The Devil? I dunno. Maybe the book itself chooses. But once it has you, there is no going back, not until it moves on to someone else. Take the blade; it goes with the book.

Damien fights the impulse, but reaches out for the sword, still pointing the gun at Harold with his other hand.

HAROLD

Good. Now kill this man. You know he deserves it.

DAMIEN

I don't want to.

HAROLD

(suddenly enraged)

Want has nothing to do with it!
Kill him now!

The sword bursts into flames, startling Damien.

(CONTINUED)

DAMIEN

No!

He empties the gun's magazine into Harold's chest, who is completely unfazed.

HAROLD

(tightly controlling his
anger)

You will kill this man. Right now.
Refusal is death and worse.

DAMIEN

(lowering the gun)

Worse? What's worse than death?

HAROLD

What they get. (pause) That's what
the sword is for. But for you,
there's this.

Harold draws a long knife, which also lights on fire as he holds it up.

HAROLD

He's an evil man. He deserves
death, and you don't.

Damien moves over to stand over Chris, who starts to come around. He puts the gun back in his pocket and transfers the sword to his right hand.

Chris opens his eyes to see Damien standing over him, flaming sword poised to strike. Suddenly, Damien whirls, whipping the sword toward Harold instead.

Harold is ready for the attack. He blocks it and disarms Damien. There is a brief fight, and it ends with Damien stabbing Harold in the stomach with the knife.

The red in Harold's eyes fades away.

HAROLD

It won't save you. You're just as
damned as I am.

Harold slumps to the ground as the camera pulls back from the scene. Chris still cowers on the ground, and Damien holds the flaming knife, contemplating his future.

Fade.