

NECK OF THE WOODS

by

Gary Kohatsu

FADE IN:

EXT. NILE CANYON FOREST - NIGHT

A blast of stars in the north sky. To the south hangs a moon, like a cut tooth.

Down on earth, along a winding forest road, strolls a solitary soul. A woman.

CRACK - something breaks in the woods. The woman stops. Scans the area and listens. Nothing there, so she walks on.

Meet DAWN MACHADO, 21.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Driver unseen. Listening to opera music. The hypnotic canyon road ahead.

A small CROSS swings from the rear-view mirror.

Opera music concludes. The CD ejects and is frisbee'd out the side window.

In the same motion, the driver's HAND pushes radio buttons. Pauses on a news station, to the voice of a woman NEWSCASTER.

NEWSCASTER (RADIO)
-- partially nude body of a woman was discovered this afternoon in a ravine, east of Rivermont University, near the Nile Forest.

Radio volume is turned up.

NEWSCASTER (RADIO)
A police source close to the investigation told KWOA News that the victim's throat was severely slashed.

DRIVER (O.S.)
God NO!

Volume pumped LOUDER.

NEWSCASTER (RADIO)
The victim's identity is being withheld pending notification of family.
(MORE)

NEWSCASTER (RADIO) (CONT'D)

The woman appears to be the latest victim of the serial killer known as the the Phantom Nile Slayer.

Radio drifts in, drifts out. A FIST pounds the dashboard.

EXT. NILE CANYON FOREST - NIGHT

The Dead of Night.

A lighter sparks a cigarette, revealing Dawn's pretty face.

She takes a heavenly drag. Exhales smoke. Lighter flame is extinguished and her face returns to shadows.

HEADLIGHTS

rounding a bend. Heading her way. Dawn squints.

DAWN

About time.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Ghostly headlights settle 50 feet ahead. On Dawn.

Her features now revealed: dark hair, frail body, dressed in jeans and a Rivermont U. T-shirt.

Dawn waves.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

The dark pickup truck rolls to a stop. Engine still rumbling. Dawn steps forward.

She peers into a dark truck cab. A lone figure peers back.

DAWN

You here to do the job?

A pause.

DRIVER/RUDY

Rudy Saxon at your service.

DAWN

You're late.

Rudy chuckles.

RUDY

Don't you know hitchhiking can
be hazardous to your health?

Dawn shines a mini-Maglight into the cab, on RUDY SAXON. He shields his eyes. Early 20s, unshaven, in need of a comb.

Wearing a soiled mechanics shirt, Levi's and dusty boots. Dawn's eyes zero on a Crucifix tattoo on Rudy's forearm.

She bounces the light back to his face.

RUDY

(squinting)

Didn't your mom tell you it's
not polite to blind people.

Dawn clicks off her flashlight. She grounds her smoke.

DAWN

Can't be too careful, know
what I mean? I'm Dawn
Machado.

RUDY

Apology accepted.

Dawn gives Rudy's truck the once over.

She shines her light on the truck bed. Spacious. She sniffs the air. Nothing back there but a folded blanket. And rope.

DAWN

Sweet.

Her eyes skate back to Rudy.

DAWN

Don't take this the wrong way,
but I need to see some ID.

RUDY

Oh? I am of drinking age.

DAWN

I ain't kidding.

Rudy lets out a breath in mock annoyance.

RUDY

You see mine, I see yours.

He removes his wallet, flips it open for display.

DAWN
Hand it over. Please.

They exchange University ID cards.

RUDY
What are you, the forest
police?

Dawn studies Rudy's card like it's a lottery ticket.

Rudy wipes food wrappers from the passenger seat. Slips the duffel bag behind his seat backrest. Drops the baseball bat on top of the duffel bag.

Dawn doesn't notice. A cocky grin on Rudy's mug. He winds the cross and chain around the rear-view mirror.

He then checks out Dawn's card against the dashboard light.

DAWN
Yo, boy.

Rudy turns and takes another flashlight beam to the face. His eyes slam shut.

Dawn stares at Rudy. Checks his ID.

DAWN
You're uglier in person.

Rudy shrugs. Dawn's flashlight clicks off.

RUDY
I get better looking as the
night grows.

DAWN
This is how it's goin' down.
I keep your card till the job
gets done. You bail on me
like a certain asshole did and
your ID card is toast.

Out comes Dawn's lighter. She fires it up, then dangles Rudy's ID card inches above the flame.

DAWN
I ain't kidding.

RUDY
I just knew you'd be trouble.

DAWN

From my experience, most guys
are total assholes.

RUDY

Look, I'm here to do the job.
Okay? Now fair is fair. You
keep my card, I keep yours.

DAWN

Whatever.

Rudy pockets Dawn's card.

RUDY

Get in and shut the door
before I go serial on you.

Dawn flips Rudy the finger, then climbs into his truck.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

She locks the door.

DAWN

Hang a U-Wee. It's back a
half mile.

RUDY

What's back a half mile?

DAWN

Your pay day, boy.

Rudy swings a U-turn and away they go.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Rudy checks out Dawn with intermittent glances. She returns
a look, missing his glances.

DAWN

I'm in Professor Lockwood's
night class.

RUDY

His day class.

He continues to study her. She looks uneasy. He smiles.

RUDY

Refresh my memory. Why are we doing the job at this hour?

DAWN

Cuz Lockwood's exhibit got bumped to the A.M. tomorrow.

RUDY

Bummer. I'm a night person myself. You?

DAWN

Don't get bent, but Lockwood put me in charge of the pick up. You answer to me. We straight?

RUDY

Yes, Ma'am.

Rudy eyes the road, while Dawn watches the woods.

RUDY

So, where's the boyfriend?

DAWN

None of your business.

RUDY

That's a fair question. I wouldn't let my lady within ten miles of this forest, especially at this ungodly hour.

Dawn looks annoyed. Rudy grins.

RUDY

What? No boyfriend?

She glares. He snickers.

RUDY

Oops. Not into guys, eh?

DAWN

My boyfriend's dead and fuck you for asking.

RUDY

Seriously? Dead?

DAWN
Seriously dead when I nail his
bitch ass for dumping me.

Rudy nods.

RUDY
Ah. No wonder you were
hitchhiking.

DAWN
I wasn't hitchhiking.

RUDY
Lucky thing I came along.
(smiles)
You do know there's a serial
killer on the loose.

DAWN
Whatever.

Rudy chuckles and shakes his head.

RUDY
Would that devastating
personality of yours have
anything to do with you
being... stranded?

Dawns flips Rudy a stare -- if looks could kick ass.

DAWN
My boyfriend dumped me cuz
he's a total asshole. End of
story. I mean, so what if me
and Lockwood got this
arrangement.

RUDY
... arrangement?

DAWN
I ain't saying shit, so don't
go there.

RUDY
Hey, I'm cool. Perfectly
happy with my arrangement,
thank you.

DAWN
Go right.

Rudy hangs a right up a dusty side road.

DAWN

Here.

EXT. NILE CANYON SIDE ROAD - SAME

The pickup truck brakes to a stop. Dust rising in the blazing headlight beams.

Dawn gets out first. The melody of crickets in the woods -- suddenly stop. Her eyes scout the forest edge.

Rudy steps out of the truck. Looks up at the night sky. Dead tree tops reach for the moon like skeleton fingers.

Quiet now. Rudy clicks on his flashlight.

Dawn saunters to a pile of branches. A silky smile graces her face. She brushes away branch leaves, revealing a

POLISHED WOOD CASKET.

DAWN

Come to mama.

Rudy strolls around to Dawn's side. Stops and stares.

RUDY

What the -- a COFFIN?

DAWN

No it ain't. It's a crate.

Rudy approaches, his flashlight on the coffin. Eyeing every inch of the box. Tries to lift the lid, but it's shut tight.

RUDY

Crate my Christian ass. This is a burial box.

Dawn looks exasperated.

DAWN

Look, it's late, I'm hungry and I got PMS like the Wicked Witch of the fucking West. Can we move on? Please.

RUDY

A very expensive coffin. I don't know about this job...

DAWN

It's gonna get done. You hear me? Cuz no fuckin' way am I giving back the five hundred.

RUDY

He paid you five-hundred bucks?

DAWN

(rolls her eyes)
Aw shit, here it comes.

RUDY

Forget the money. Explain to me where this coffin-crate thing came from?

DAWN

Duhh.

He runs a hand along the old but varnished, oily-smooth wood.

RUDY

It's engraved.
(aims his flashlight)
A name... Dragos Ungureanu.
Hmm. Russian you think?

DAWN

How should I know? We got it out of Lockwood's estate.

Rudy's smile is distant, remote. He's absorbed in thought.

RUDY

This is what they buried European aristocrats in.

He tries to lift the lid again. Won't budge.

RUDY

What's inside?

DAWN

Exhibit stuff. Shit, boy, weren't you payin' attention in class?

RUDY

Like I said, I am of drinking age.

DAWN

Masks, weapons, medallions ...
you know, historical shit.
But don't get no ideas about
stealing something and putting
it on ebay.

Rudy raps on the casket. Not convinced. Looks at Dawn.

RUDY

This casket's got to be
heavier than the Dead Sea.
The professor wouldn't be so
stupid to put real artifacts
in here. Would he?

DAWN

Fuck. I need an aspirin.

Dawn turns and walks away. Rudy steps back and drinks in the casket.

Then he strides to the truck and slides behind the wheel.
The engine starts and the truck backs up to the casket.
Engine turned off. Rudy gets out.

Walks around back. Drops the tailgate and locks it. Troops
back to Dawn and the casket.

He and Dawn then grab a side handle. Lift -- GRUNT -- and
haul the box -- STRAIN --- from the bushes to the truck lip.

They set the casket down, near the tailgate and blow wind.

RUDY

How many pall bearers does it
take to carry the average,
loaded casket?

DAWN

Too many.

RUDY

Thankfully you're stronger
than you look.

DAWN

I can take care of myself.

RUDY

But can you take care of it
all by yourself? You're
getting the big bucks, not me.

DAWN

Ha ha, you should be a
comedian. But if you was,
boy, you'd be so broke.

RUDY

Not if I could scare up five
hundred from the professor.

Dawn shoves both middle fingers in his face. Rudy chuckles.

RUDY

Just makin' conversation,
girlfriend. Loosen up.

A moment of quiet. Then both re-grip the coffin handles.

RUDY

Set the top end on the
tailgate. On three, ready ...
one ... two ... three.

UHHH. Lift. They rest the top half of the casket on the
truck tailgate. With that done, Rudy backs off.

RUDY

Time out, girlfriend.

DAWN

What? You're such a pussy.
And don't call me girlfriend.
I ain't your girlfriend.

A quick smile on Rudy's face. Enjoying the barbs. They both
sit casually on the tailgate. Kick up their heels.

Dawn taps out a cigarette. Slips it between parched lips.
Throws Rudy a glance.

DAWN

Does little Rudy got a problem
with second-hand smoke?

RUDY

No, Big Rudy does not.

He pulls out matches and lights Dawn's cigarette.

RUDY

(bad French accent)
How 'bout we French smoke?
And maybe, how you say, share
some body-to-body fluids.

DAWN

Shit no. I don't do guys with
Hepatitis B.

Rudy's smile falls like a guillotine.

He glances down at his arm, inside left elbow. Runs a finger
over old needle marks.

Bounces his gaze back to Dawn and locks on her eyes.

He sits motionless like a snake. Wearing a twisted smile.

RUDY

Why did you say what you just
said?

DAWN

I dunno, it just came out.

RUDY

I haven't touched a needle in
three months.

He leans in. She turns away, exposing a delicate neck.

RUDY

You think you know me?

DAWN

I think you're overreacting.

Luckily the casket is crocked between her and Rudy.

RUDY

I bet you're sitting there
thinking 'this guy's the
freakin' serial killer.' Like
you got me all figured. Am I
lying? But if I were you, I'd
watch that poison mouth of
yours. Could be hazardous to
your health. We straight?

DAWN

Okay. Whatever.

Rudy's eyes remain still like razors, then he retracts.

He eases back on the tailgate. The cloud in his expression
lifts and a smile creeps back.

RUDY
C'mon, I'm playin'. I'm not
such a bad guy. Really. Go
back to being buds.

Rudy pulls his own cigarette from a pack and lights up.

DAWN
... so weird.

Dawn takes a cautious puff on her smoke. Keeps a wary eye on Rudy. He grins at her like fox.

RUDY
Not big on human contact, are
we, Dawn?

She turns away.

DAWN
(softly)
Not with you.

Rudy's eyes drift from Dawn to the forest ahead. He sits and stares. Blinks. Stares some more.

Without warning, he bolts upright in his seat. Eyes fixed on something in the distance.

RUDY
Did you see it?

DAWN
See what?

He hops off the truck.

RUDY
Lights. In the forest.

DAWN
I don't see nothing.

RUDY
UFO-type lights.

Dawn casts a suspicious eye on Rudy. He sighs.

RUDY
Gone now.

DAWN
Don't fuck with me, Rudy.

RUDY

A funny thing crossed my mind.

DAWN

I said don't fuck with me.

RUDY

Let's say somebody comes by
and sees us with this coffin.
Won't they suspect we're doing
something weird? Or illegal?

DAWN

Lockwood will vouch for us.

RUDY

Lockwood isn't here. And what
if... What if the professor is
the serial killer?

DAWN

Ha ha. That's why man
invented guns.

Rudy's eyes hold on Dawn.

RUDY

You sayin' you got a gun?

She flicks away her smoke. Swings her eyes to him.

DAWN

I'm saying if I tell you, I
gotta shoot you. Blow your
bullshit all to hell.

(softly)

But... I'll spare you.

Rudy gives an easy nod.

RUDY

Thank you. And if I ask
polite, will you tell me about
this gun?

DAWN

It's got six bullets.

She lifts her T-shirt. Pulls the gun from her waistband for
Rudy to glimpse. Slides the gun back and drops her T-shirt.

RUDY

Whoa. A .38 snubby?

DAWN
And it's real, too.

RUDY
You got a permit to carry a
concealed weapon?

Dawn's face is a blank slate.

RUDY
Didn't think so.

Rudy glances around. Drops his cigarette and mashes it.

RUDY
Getting late. Let's finish up
and head back to town.
(smiles)
I feel like a beer. You feel
like beer?

DAWN
I pretty much hate beer and
people who drink that shit.

He gives her a look and shakes his head.

Rudy bends down and grabs the back handle of the crate. Dawn
does likewise on the opposite side.

HEADLIGHTS

shimmer, coming their way.

Rudy releases his grip. He scrambles to the side of the
truck and snatches the blanket. Hurries back to the
tailgate.

Unfurls the blanket and throws it over the casket in one
gliding motion.

RUDY
Send forth thy light and thy
truth... See, what'd I tell
you? My UFO.

Dawn and Rudy stand nonchalantly near the truck.

Fortunately, the vehicle zooms by.

DAWN
Hurry up. They might come
back.

RUDY
I'm asking for a raise.
Nobody said anything about all
this heavy lifting.

DAWN
Gee, do all the girls know
little Rudy can't get it up?

Rudy looks at Dawn, then at the crate. Looks at Dawn, then
at the crate. Bling, a thought...

RUDY
What'dyu say to killing two
stiffs with one shot?

Her eyes sharpen.

DAWN
Depends ...

Off her look.

RUDY
Let's drain the contents.

He nods at the coffin. She frowns, thinks.

DAWN
You wanna open up the crate?

RUDY
Why not? See what's inside to
satisfy our curiosity.

DAWN
No way.

RUDY
... then remove whatever's
inside to lighten the load.

DAWN
No way.

RUDY
... then slide the empty
coffin into the truck.
Replace the contents. Reseal
it. Save our backs. And
Voila! Am I a rocket
scientist or am I a frickin'
genius?

Dawn plants a fresh cigarette in her mouth, doesn't light it.

DAWN

First off, the crate is sealed for a reason, Rudy. Just like your empty head. Second, Lockwood made it clear. Do not open the crate under any circumstance. End of story.

RUDY

Come on, Dawn. Where's your spirit of adventure?

DAWN

In my wallet.

Dawn bends over her side of the casket. Rudy does likewise on the opposite side. They take a firm grip of the handles. Rudy sucks in a deep breath.

RUDY

Ready, set ...

Dawn sucks in a breath and nods.

DAWN

... go.

OOMP. They lift the back end of the crate. Then give the box a healthy push into the truck.

The crate slides part way. Hits a snag. Rudy hops into the truck bed and pulls, as Dawn pushes. The crate slides rough and catches --

Dawn YELPS. She shakes her jammed pinky finger.

DAWN

This night is fucked up beyond belief.

RUDY

Know what they say, don't you? No belief, no faith. No faith, no forgiveness. No forgiveness, no salvation.

Dawn smirks.

DAWN

Save it for somebody who gives a prayer.

RUDY

Know what else I heard? Heard
when the world ends, each of
us will experience our own
private Armageddon.

DAWN

More Rudy bullshit.

RUDY

Then allow me to present your
demise, Dear Dawn.

Dawn closes her eyes and drops her head. She's had it with Rudy for one night.

RUDY

Dawn's Armageddon will find
her on a lonely road. In a
forest crawling with disease
and temptation. She took a
wrong turn and got lost. Soon
she will pay a high price for
her evil misstep. Amen.

She lifts her eyes. Swings a lethal gaze at Rudy.

DAWN

If stupid Rudy is stuck in the
forest and nobody hears him
scream, is stupid Rudy really
alive? Amen.

She lights her smoke, then strides around to the passenger-side of the truck. Opens the door and gets in. Rudy watches.

RUDY

Touche. How about we make up
with a little French smoking?

She slams shut the door. Rudy shrugs and hops off the truck.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - LATER

Dawn has nodded off. Rudy driving. He nubs the radio button and the frequency cuts in and out. He pounds the dash.

Radio cuts in -- A POLICE CAPTAIN is being interviewed.

POLICE CAPTAIN (RADIO)
-- we believe the attacker
killed his last victim in one
area, then dumped the body in
the ravine near the forest.

Rudy perks up and whacks Dawn's shoulder. Sets her off.

DAWN
Ow, you piece o' shit.

RUDY
Listen ...

He nods to the radio. Dawn rubs her shoulder.

NEWSCASTER (RADIO)
Can you elaborate more on your
findings, captain?

POLICE CAPTAIN (RADIO)
Not at this time. But I would
urge all citizens to be wary
of remote, isolated areas near
the University. This would
include Nile Drive, Nile
Canyon, Lookout Point and
especially, Nile Forest.

NEWSCASTER (RADIO)
Thank you, Capt. Ross
Mircovich of the Nile West
Police Department. We will
keep KWOA listeners updated as
news comes in on the recent
student slaying.

Rudy shuts off the radio. Dawn throws him a concerned look.

DAWN
Did he mean this forest?

Rudy nods, calm as an ice berg. Poor Dawn looks stricken.

He smiles and places a comforting hand on Dawn's thigh. She
knocks his hand away.

RUDY
You've got a thirty-eight
revolver in your pants and
you've got me practically on
your lap. How safe can it
get? Relax.

She turns to Rudy and says nothing. She swallows hard.

RUDY

Wow. You are spooked.

DAWN

Do you know when was the last time I got this freaked out?

RUDY

I dunno... when you found a hole in a condom?

She socks Rudy in the arm.

DAWN

Shut up and listen to me.

He rubs his shoulder.

DAWN

One time I was gonna scare the shit outta my big sister, so I hide under her bed. In the dark, okay. Anyway, I hear somebody come into the room, but they don't turn on the fuckin' lights. Then in the dark, I see this thing on the floor crawling toward me. Like, like something out of Night of the Living Dead. I'm like, what the shit? I couldn't take it no more. I pissed my pants and started screaming. Then she jumps up and flings on the light. Stupid bitch sister.

RUDY

That's just plain evil.

Shakes his head and clucks his tongue.

RUDY

My jerk step-father told me this hellacious story. In a little fishing village in Costa Rica, this ten-year-old kid was at home one night, lookin' after his baby brother.

(MORE)

RUDY (CONT'D)

So this kid is in kitchen,
playing XBox while his baby
brother is in the bedroom,
wailing like a banshee.

Rudy pauses for effect and stares at Dawn.

DAWN

What then?

RUDY

So this dude yells at his baby
brother to amp off. But the
baby keeps crying. Whaaa
whaaaa. The dude screams SHUT
THE HELL UP! All the lights
in the house suddenly go off.
Pitch black. The baby keeps
hollering like he's on fire.
Just as the dude is lighting
up a candle in the kitchen, he
hears this WHACK ... THUMP.
And his baby brother isn't
crying anymore. So this ten-
year-old kid is sitting in the
kitchen, holding a candle and
going 'what the heck?' He
listens. Hears nothing but
dead silence. Dude finally
gets up the nerve and walks
across the dark house. To the
bedroom. He peeks in with his
little candle and...

Rudy's eyes widen. A scary look on his face. Dawn swallows.

DAWN

Finish the damn story.

RUDY

Dude sees his brother's
decapitated head on the floor.
In a pool of blood. And the
body is still in the crib.
Blood every which way. Then
the kid's eye look up and
suspended above the crib is
this HATCHET. I'm talking no
hands, no strings, no nothing.
Just this bloody little axe
hanging in space.

Dawn looks like she has just witnessed a slaughter.

DAWN

That is way screwed up.

RUDY

Yessir, my step-dad wasn't worth a pillar of salt, but he sure could tell a mean story.

DAWN

My old man sucked big time, too.

RUDY

Know what the moral is?

DAWN

There's a moral?

RUDY

Don't believe everything you hear. Or see.

Dawn stares at Rudy. He's trying to suppress a laugh -- can't. Laughter pours forth like a bursting dam.

She scowls.

DAWN

That's it, asshole. I can't take it no more.

RUDY

Dawn, dawn. You are --

Rudy spins his sights back to the road.

RUDY

-- so, uh-oh.

His smile crashes.

RUDY

Isn't that the car that passed us earlier?

Dawn turns her gaze ahead. Her eyes bulge.

DAWN

Oh shit.

EXT. NILE WEST CANYON ROAD - NIGHT

The silhouette of a man standing at the side of the road. Front-lit by Rudy's headlights. The man flags both arms.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Rudy decelerates his truck.

DAWN

Are you stupid? Don't stop.

RUDY

We gotta find out what happened.

DAWN

OhmyGod. He's the KILLER.

RUDY

We don't know that, so chill. Now if we ignore him and he winds up dead, you want that on your conscience?

DAWN

Okay, okay. We ask what's wrong, then we call Triple A. Okay, Rudy? Rudy? Say okay.

RUDY

Yeah, but he doesn't look like a serial killer. Look at him.

IAN, 50s, shuffles toward the truck. He's a pasty bookworm type, with thinning hair, a rumpled suit and a sad-sap face.

Dawn's left hand hooks Rudy's arm. Her eyes frantic. Her right hand slides to the handle of her .38.

The truck slows to a stop.

Dawn's automatic window slides down to greet Ian's smiling, doughboy face. Dawn inches closer to Rudy.

RUDY

Car troubles, dude?

IAN

I'll say. Got a blown tire and no way outta here.

DAWN
We'll call you Triple A.

Rudy pulls out his cell phone. Hands it to Dawn.

RUDY
Check for a pulse.

IAN
Good luck.

Dawn tries the cell phone. Shakes it. No luck.

DAWN
Shit, Rudy. Your battery's
dead.

RUDY
You sure?

DAWN
Like I fuckin' don't know a
dead battery when I see one.

IAN
Doesn't matter. Can't get a
signal out here to save a
life. So, how 'bout a ride?

Rudy stares at Ian. Dawn stares at Rudy. She's shaking her
head "NO."

IAN
By the way, name's Ian.

RUDY
I'm Rudy.

Ian stretches his paw into the truck and shakes Rudy's hand.
Then Ian offers his hand to Dawn, who ignores him.

RUDY
(to Ian)
This here's Frigidaire. She
thinks you're Hannibal
Lechter. You aren't, are you?

DAWN
(to Rudy)
Don't tell him!

IAN
Hilarious. The family'll love
that one.

RUDY
(to Ian)
You do know about the Phantom
Slayer?

IAN
Sure do. I fancy myself as
kind of a media junkie.
Dateline, CNN, COPS.
(to Dawn)
Would it help if I showed you
a picture of the wife and
girls? Probably worried sick.

RUDY
Aw hell. Just hop in the
truck.

IAN
Much obliged, friend.

Ian opens the passenger-side door. But Dawn grabs the door
and slams it shut.

DAWN
No way you're sittin' by me.

IAN
But... ?

RUDY
Sorry, dude. She's in charge.
You gotta ride in back with
the cargo.

Ian nods. His shoulders droop. He trudges to the back of
the truck.

Rudy and Dawn watch Ian. He stops cold when he sees the
casket.

IAN
You guys with the mortuary or
something?

DAWN
No, leather-dick, we joy ride
with dead people.

Rudy laughs and Dawn can't contain a guilty smile.

IAN (O.S.)
Yeah, hilarious. I'm back
here busting a stitch.

They see poor Ian climb in back of the truck and settle down beside the crate. Rudy and Dawn chuckle.

RUDY
(whispers)
Told you it's a coffin.

DAWN
(mocking)
'Told ya it's a coffin.'
Pussy.

RUDY
Frigidaire.

EXT. LONGBED OF PICKUP - NIGHT

The steady DRONE of the truck in motion.

Ian sits uncomfortably next to the wooden box.

He reaches into his jacket. Withdraws a handgun. A snub-nosed .38. Similar to Dawn's. He cracks open the cylinder.

Fully loaded. Then a BUMP in the road and Ian's butt jumps.

Two bullets tumble from the gun chamber. They hit the cargo bed and bounce out of sight.

IAN
Aw shit on rye.

Ian gropes for and retrieves one bullet. Reloads it. Then he freezes. His eyes snap to the wooden box.

Ian closes the gun cylinder. He tries to lift the lid of the crate, but it won't budge.

He turns and taps on the truck's back window. Rudy slides open the center window.

IAN
What's in the casket?

Dawn shouts from the cab.

DAWN

It's for an exhibit, so don't
shit your drawers. And don't
go touching nothing or your
ass is fertilizer.

RUDY

Better listen to her, Ian.
She's as serious as a straight-
jacket.

IAN

You two aren't snuffing feral
cats, are you? Think I heard
something bizarre in the box.

He attempts to lift the lid again.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Rudy smiles at Dawn.

RUDY

Did that bizarre sound go
knock, knock, knock?

IAN (O.S.)

No, it went uuuuhhh-uhhh.

RUDY

That's my truck, dude. It
always makes funky sounds.

Rudy cracks up. Dawn keeps a suspicious eye on Ian.

EXT. TRUCK BED - NIGHT

Ian sits. Raps on the crate again. Listens. No response.

He goes back to searching the truck bed for his remaining
lost bullet. He dips his fingers into something WET ...

Brings his fingers to eye level. Sets down his gun and pulls
a small flashlight from his pocket. Shines the light on his
fingers...

BLOOD.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - SAME

In no time, Ian presses his HANDGUN through the open rear window and thumps the back of Rudy's head. Rudy freezes.

IAN
Pull over.

RUDY
What the heck.

Gun hammer SNAPS back.

Rudy guides the truck to the side of the road and stops.

DAWN
Don't just sit there all
stupid, Rudy, do somethin'.

RUDY
Shut up.

Rudy's breathing quickens.

RUDY
(to Ian)
Just take our money and go.

DAWN
You can take Rudy's shit
truck, too, if you want.

RUDY
Didn't I say to shut your
filthy hole? Demon whore.

Dawn glares at Rudy and holds that look.

Rudy hyperventilates and begins shaking. He closes his eyes.

RUDY
I'm fine, okay? I'm cool.
Just gimme my space.

IAN
(flashing a badge)
Detective Ian Hunter, Nile
West police. You two are
under arrest.

RUDY
For what?

IAN
Suspicion of murder. You got
a coffin here, fresh blood
there, and some pretty goddamn
suspicious circumstances.

RUDY
No no no. I did everything by
the good book.

IAN
Well, kid, I did the math and
guess who flunked?

DAWN
Look at what you got us into,
stupid Rudy.

Rudy turns to Dawn. Stares at her like a crocodile eyes a gazelle. Gnashing his teeth.

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Ian stands up in the truck bed, his gun poised for duty.

IAN
(to Rudy)
Get out.

Rudy pops open the door and exits the truck. Stands by the side of the truck, hands raised in the air. Eyes still locked on Dawn.

IAN
You too, Gidget. Out the same
side.

DAWN
-- the fuck you call me?

IAN
The fuck I ain't saying it
twice. Get your ass outside.

With a gun in her face, Dawn slides out on the driver's side. Assumes her place beside Rudy.

Ian stands tall in the back of the truck. He stares down at Rudy and Dawn. Trains his gun on them. He pulls a police Walkie Talkie to his mouth.

IAN

Ten-Charlie, thirty-two. This is Hunter. We just bagged the psycho slayer. Make that plural. It's a Mickey-and-Mallory tag-team. You copy?... Gatlin? You there?

No response, just a little static.

IAN

(to Rudy and Dawn)
Keep those hands high and happy. Now with one hand, I want your weapons on the road.

RUDY

I'm clean.

Rudy lifts his shirt, does a rotisserie 360. Dawn watches.

RUDY

I never met this Heretic before tonight. My right hand on the Good Book. Ian, she's the embodiment of evil.
(nods at Dawn)
And she's packing, too.

Dawn is incensed.

DAWN

You bitch and a half. I'm not with you either. Shoot his stupid ass, Ian.

IAN

Both of you, shut up.
(to Dawn)
You, drop your weapon.

Without hesitation, Dawn eases the .38 out of her waistband and let's the gun fall, THUNK on the road.

Ian lifts the Walkie Talkie to his mouth again.

IAN

Gatlin, this is Hunter. Where the hell are you?

More STATIC. And then a strange thing ...

A soft STATIC behind Ian. Coming from THE CASKET.

Ian looks behind him. He steps on the other side of the casket. Keeping his attention on Rudy and Dawn, as well as the wooden box.

With his free hand, Ian tugs at the box lid. Still stuck -- then WHOOMP -- the lid flies open.

Ian rears back. Almost falls out of the truck. He stares at the crate's contents.

IAN
Gatlin ... dear God.

Det. Gatlin lies in the casket, bleeding from a neck wound. He reaches up with one bloody paw and grabs Ian's pant cuff.

Trying to say something. But can't. Gurgles blood. Then his grip goes -- DEAD.

Ian casts hateful eyes at Rudy and Dawn.

IAN
Monsters!

Dawn stumbles sideways -- into Rudy's spidery clutches. He throws his arm around her neck and pulls her off balance.

Rudy's behind her now, whips out a knife. WHISS-SNAP.

The SWITCH-BLADE suddenly at her throat. Dawn freezes.

RUDY
Give up your gun, Ian. Now.

Ian drops the gun to the truck bed.

RUDY
This isn't what you think.

IAN
Okay. What am I thinking?
Huh? I'll tell you. I'm
thinking we need to calm down.
Put the knife away.

RUDY
Not till this one's dead.

Rudy keeps the blade taugt against Dawn's throat. They squat as Rudy retrieves Dawn's .38 from the road.

IAN

For the love of God, kid,
nobody else needs to die.

Rudy trains the gun on Ian. With the left hand, he keeps the knife in slicing position at Dawn's throat.

RUDY

You were right when you said
'monster.' Dawn is Satan's
child, the poison apple. Work
with me here, Ian. We gotta
end this thing. Now.

DAWN

Shit, he's crazy.

GATLIN

is suddenly CATAPULTED out of the casket.

Everybody watches Gatlin's airborne body smack the earth some 20 feet from the truck.

PROFESSOR LOCKWOOD

lies uncomfortable in the casket. In fact, he was lying under Gatlin all this time.

Professor Lockwood's yellow-smoke eyes snap open and lock on Ian. The professor rises to a sitting position.

He's a brute of a man, middle-aged, with porcelain skin, a barrel chest and dead-on, slaughterhouse fangs. Dressed in a tailored, European funeral suit.

IAN

Sonofabit --

Ian goes for his gun. Picks it up -- at the same time, Lockwood snatches him by the throat. Pulls Ian in close.

The professor's fangs extend from his jaw -- like a ravaged bull shark.

He takes a mouthful of Ian's head. CRACK -- fangs puncture two holes in Ian's skull. Ian SCREAMS his last breath.

Blood spills and the monster slurps up globin and brain.

ON THE ROAD

Dawn tries to slip away from Rudy's grip. SLITTTTTT.

Rudy's switchblade lays open Dawn's neck. Cuts a bloody smile across from ear to ear. She buckles and collapses.

Lockwood pitches Ian's lifeless body over the side of the truck. Rudy looks up and ducks.

Rudy ducks a second time to avoid Ian's flying handgun.

The Professor wipes his mouth with bloody, good cheer. Rises to his feet.

He stands erect. A towering figure.

King Vampire. A brute; 250 pounds of raw muscle and mortar.

Very coolly, he steps out of his wooden quarters.

Rudy drops his switchblade. Holds Dawn's .38 in a two-fisted grip. His eyes climbing to the monster's upper torso.

The gun shaking. Rudy takes aim despite his jangled nerves.

RUDY

I AM... an agent of God.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM — CLICK. Smoke curls from the gun.

Six bullets fired and Lockwood is still standing. He looks pissed if anything, as he dusts his wrinkled, black suit.

Rudy stares at the gun in his fists. Drops the weapon. His mind racing, he turns quickly to escape and

-- SPEAK OF THE DEVIL --

runs smack into the waiting arms of Dawn, lovely

QUEEN VAMPIRE

that she is. She wraps Rudy in a deadly embrace. Blood whistling from her slit throat, spraying Rudy bright red.

Dawn hurls Rudy against his truck, as if he were sock doll. He BONGS off the truck and crumples to the road.

Just then CHIRP-CHIRP, CHIRP-CHIRP. Dawn looks at her watch.

DAWN

Two hours to sunrise. Party's over, Rudy. It's been so bomb.

She turns off the alarm.

DAWN

Vampires live by a code: Never
eat from our own backyard.

A dazed Rudy crawls to his knees, gathers himself.

DAWN

And then a sorry serial killer
like yourself comes along.
Murdering university students.
Drawing all this attention ...

Rudy glances up. His eyes glassy.

RUDY

I work under the Lord's
umbrella. Not a serial
killer.

DAWN

Sure you ain't.

RUDY

What I destroyed was not
human. They were DEMONS --
like you!

Rudy struggles to his feet.

Dawn sniffs the air. Savors it for a moment.

DAWN

Right from the start, I could
smell the human blood in your
truck. Mmm-mmm. All that
rich hemoglobin. All those
human lives. And you call me
a monster?

Rudy looks to the heavens.

RUDY

As God is my shepherd. Though
I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death ...

DAWN

Oh, please.

RUDY

I will fear no evil, for thou
art with me ...

DAWN

We had to draw you out, Rudy.
Cuz you brought the police,
the FBI, the media. Shit, you
fuckin' polluted the whole
neighborhood.

RUDY

Thy rod and thy staff. They
comfort me ...

DAWN

And nothing draws out a serial
killer better than a good
copycat kill. Right down to
the way I slit that girl's
throat.

Lockwood hops off the truck. Down to the road. He picks up
Rudy's switchblade from the asphalt. Examines it.

DAWN

Oh, before we cut out, say hi
and bye to the Professor...
actually Prince Ungureanu.
Romanian, not Russian.

She flashes an admiring smile.

DAWN

Pretty dope, huh? He's
Lucifer's prototype: the
Nuclear-Age Vampire. A
CarniVipe. Immune to
sunshine, radiation, wooden
stakes, poison gas, holy
water, garlic cloves, silver
bullets, kryptonite, whatever.
And he obeys like a show dog.

Lockwood licks Dawn's blood from the knife. Unconcerned that
he has just sliced his own tongue in the process.

DAWN

We're saving his kind for the
big dance. You know,
Armageddon.

A recovered Rudy looks at Dawn, looks at the professor.

WHOOSH. Rudy SPRINTS to the truck. Flings open the driver-
side door and from behind the seat, he pulls out a weapon.

A BASEBALL BAT. White ash, Louisville Slugger.

RUDY

James 4:7 -- resist the devil
and he will flee from you.

Rudy cocks the bat behind his right ear.

RUDY

Lord, bless thy rod and send
this demon back to hell.

He comes forward on Lockwood. Swings the bat against the
side of the Professor's head -- CRAAAACK.

The bat explodes into chop sticks.

Rudy stares at Lockwood, then at the bat handle in his grip.
A jagged shaft of wood.

Lockwood stands. Spins his dead eyes to Rudy.

Rudy lowers his gaze. Helpless. His knees tremble.

Lockwood drools Ian's blood. Waiting for Dawn's command to
destroy. But it doesn't come.

Rudy lets the bat handle fall. He closes his eyes.

DAWN

You want this forest, slayer?
Take it. It's all yours. Cuz
me and the professor are so
outta here.

Rudy wilts and drops to his knees. Dawn sashays past him to
the truck, its door swung wide. Slides inside. Whistles.

DAWN

Yo, Professor. Let's roll.

Professor Lockwood backs off. He lumbers to the truck and
climbs into the truck bed. Disappears back into the coffin.

VR-ROOOOM, the truck engine kicks to life. Radio BLASTS.

NEWSCASTER (RADIO)

[...] latest update on the
Phantom Slayer killings.

(MORE)

NEWSCASTER (RADIO) (CONT'D)

Police have identified the female victim found this afternoon in the ravine as Dawn Machado, a twenty-one-year-old anthropology student...

Radio cuts out. The pickup truck drives, then stops.

DAWN

In case you was wondering, Rudy, vampires don't have fingerprints. So, it's like we was never here.

Dawn flings Rudy's ID card out the window. Rudy's cross and chain follow. As well as Dawn's penlight.

DAWN

I fucked up, Rudy. You don't got Hepatitis B. You got Hepatitis C. Oh well, ciao.

Pickup truck drives away, down the road. Tail lights fade. The night moves on. Long SILENCE.

Beneath the dust of stars, Rudy stirs.

RUDY

I'm ALIVE. Alive I say.

Carrying on like a madman. He thrusts his arms skyward.

RUDY

You couldn't kill me. That's it. Ha ha. You couldn't kill me because I'm immortal.

He pumps his chest. Beats it with a fist.

RUDY

Resistant to all evil. I hereby decree this forest demon-free. And I -- huh?

His laughter quits.

RUDY

Somebody out there? Ian? What in Kingdom's name are you doing still alive? Tell me you're not... possessed.

Rudy gropes around on the ground, under the gray moonlight, locates Dawn's penlight. Clicks it on.

Flashlight finds Ian's GUN. Rudy grabs the gun. Leaves the penlight shining on the ground. Takes aim in the dark.

BAM - BAM - BAM. Sound of gunshots ricochets off the trees.

RUDY

Gotcha.

A news broadcast 6 HOURS FROM NOW.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Police this morning arrested a man in connection with the Phantom Nile slayings. Tony Ray Harper, 22, of Soldier City, was taken into custody just past four a.m. in the Nile Forest. Harper had assumed the identity of Rudy Saxon, twenty-one, a Rivermont University student, who is believed to be his first victim. Police found Harper wandering the forest in a state of delirium, not far from the bodies of two slain undercover detectives.

BACK TO REAL TIME

Rudy paces in a circle. Clicking the flashlight on and off.

RUDY

For surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

Down the road, headlights approach. Sirens SCREAM and a spinning light FLASHES. Rudy pauses and waves.

RUDY

Thank you, Lord, for sending backup in my hour of need.

Police car brakes to a stop. Its doors open cautiously.

Rudy drops the gun. He stands before the car. Bathed in police car headlights. And Dawn's blood.

RADIO KWOA 6 hours from now ...

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Court records confirm that Harper has been in and out of sanitariums since the age of ten, and has a history of schizophrenia and delusions of grandeur. A self-appointed 'Heaven's Helper,' Harper has shown a tendency toward extreme and irrational violence.

BACK TO REAL TIME

His arms are outstretched in a sacrificial, Christ-like pose. Rudy hangs his head to one side. Closes his eyes.

RUDY

I tried. Lord knows I've tried to absolve the world of its sins. But those godforsaken vampires.

He lifts his head. Eyes break open. He squints. Brings an arm up to block the bright headlights. His jaw tightens.

RUDY

Can't be.

He blinks hard.

RUDY

What the hey. You guys aren't cops. You're...

Rudy swallows.

RUDY

... more of them.

FADE OUT.