

THE DEVIL'S TEETH

"PILOT"

By

Christopher Dominguez Abeel

PRELAP: The DRONE of highway traffic. Muffled GRUNGE ROCK.

FADE IN:

EXT. THE TREASURE CHEST GENTLEMEN'S CLUB - DAY

Noonday sun hangs above a windowless building. Busty pirates, airbrushed on brick stucco, flirt with a pitiable parking lot. A Ford Taurus parked by the door, and a --

MOTORHOME

-- old and ugly enough to give this roadside eyesore pinkeye, takes up three spots at the far-end.

SUPER: SOMEWHERE IN DELAWARE, 1995

INT. THE TREASURE CHEST GENTLEMEN'S CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Stale smoke swirls before blown-out speakers.

A STRIPPER dances for the near empty club. She doesn't care. She only has eyes for the --

TELEVISION

-- Beaming *The Jerry Springer Show* over the bar. Perched on a stool beneath the boob-tube sits --

JEFF SHOCKEY

-- a hard lived mid-40's. Rough edges, smooth smile. His bruised knuckles grip a Bic pen, etches letters into the New York Times Crossword. He glances up from the puzzle to watch--

BUSINESSMEN

-- in expensive suits at the table near the stage. So drunk they use boarding passes as coasters. Jeff glances at the LARGEST businessman, then back to the crossword.

FLYNN (O.S.)

Shockey!

FLYNN, the club's owner, marches to Jeff. A package in hand.

FLYNN

I said no more personal mail sent to my club. People will think a scumbag's taken up residence.

JEFF

What's one more scumbag when you're around, boss?

Jeff doesn't look up from the paper. Flynn isn't amused. The owner tosses the slim package on the bar-top.

FLYNN

I get so much as a Super Saver with your name on it, you're on your ass. And that four-wheeled shit house I let you park here? I'll sell it for scrap. Got me?

Flynn's threats bounce off Jeff as he inspects the package.

ON PACKAGE: Thick brown paper, tightly sealed. No return address. Only a postmark reading *Sept 30, 1995: Mincey, NJ.*

Jeff's eyes the postmark, apprehensive.

FLYNN

Hey! You get me or what?

JEFF

Yeah. Yeah, I get you.

FLYNN

Good. Put down the paper and get back to work.

Flynn stomps back to his back office, slams the door shut. Jeff begins to open the --

STRIPPER (O.S.)

Git! Off!

Glass SHATTERS behind Jeff. He whips his head around to see --

THE STRIPPER

-- standing on the edge of the stage, chewing out the --

LARGE BUSINESSMAN

-- On his back and nursing his eye. Broken glass beneath him.

Jeff pushes himself from the bar, takes his newspaper with him. He glances back at the package as he walks over to...

THE STAGE

... CREAKS as Jeff approaches the stripper.

JEFF
You alright, MARCY?

MARCY
This perv tried to check my oil,
Jeff! Nail his ass!

Jeff turns to see the other businessmen helping the larger one to his feet. A shiner forming beneath his eye.

JEFF
Think you beat me to it.

Jeff climbs down from the stage, approaches the trio.

LARGE BUSINESSMAN
That bitch hit me! I oughta sue!

MARCY
You made me miss Jerry's Final
Thoughts, you prick!

LARGE BUSINESSMAN
You can't hear shit in this place!

MARCY
I read lips!

JEFF
Gentlemen! I think it's time for
some fresh air. Why don't we --

LARGE BUSINESSMAN
I want that bitch fired! Get me the
manager of this dump!

Jeff is unappreciative of the businessman's demeanor.

JEFF
Yeah... I don't see either of those
things happening, Mr. Strayer.

The large businessman looks at Jeff apprehensively.

JEFF
DON Strayer. Denver, Colorado.
Right? And your partners Hank
Dublinski and John Lobdell. You
boys have fun last night? Hope
y'didn't treat any of those ladies
as poorly as Marcy. Karma's got a
hard-on for shitty people, y'know?

The three are dumbfounded. -- *Who the hell is this guy?*

JEFF

I see you got questions. Well, if you step outside I'll explain how you boys get damned loud after a couple of shooters. Hard not to get pulled into your conversation. Especially the line about ...

Jeff opens up his paper and reads from NOTES etched in the crossword. -- *Strayer, Dublinski, Lobdel, and a litany of incriminating words and phrases*

JEFF

"Taking those whores to The Motor Inn and charging the company card."

Jeff looks up from his notes, grinning.

JEFF

Donny-boy. You may have a hard time explaining that black eye to the missus but it'll be cake compared to telling your boss what you're up to with the company AmEx.

Confusion and panic meet on Don's face, he takes a swing at Jeff. Jeff side-steps. Don's momentum is too much given his drunken state, he topples to the floor.

Jeff pulls a butterfly knife from his back pocket. It dances in his hand. The other businessmen stare, terrified. Jeff keeps the knife in motion as he kneels beside Don.

JEFF

You're full of poor choices, pal.

Jeff grips Don's wrist, presses his arm against the wood floor. Don stares, wide-eyed, as Jeff raises the blade. Don shuts his eyes, grimaces. *CHOCK!*

THE BLADE

Stands upright before Don's eyes -- pinning his sleeve, and by extension him, to the floor. Don reaches for the knife, Jeff presses his boot heel onto Don's free hand.

JEFF

Gentlemen. We got two options. I call the cops and I hand today's paper over to my buddies on the force. Or, second option, the three of you's take a flying f--

SMASH TO:

EXT. THE TREASURE CHEST GENTLEMEN'S CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Tires SQUEAL as a Ford Taurus speeds out of the lot. Jeff watches from the door, package in-hand. Marcy beside him.

MARCY

Since when're you friends with cops?

JEFF

I aint.

Marcy playfully punches Jeff's shoulder, walks back inside.

JEFF

You okay without me?

Marcy gives Jeff a thumbs up without breaking her stride for the television.

INT. JEFF'S MOTORHOME - DAY

The messy cabin rocks as Jeff steps inside. The opened package in one hand, he pulls from it a typed note. Jeff takes reading glasses off the book shelf, squints.

ON NOTE: "01:01:40 -- I am ashamed. Please watch alone."

Jeff pulls out the package's contents: A VHS tape, an aged sticker on the side labels it as --

ON VHS LABEL: FEVER'S SACRED SONG

INT. VCR - LATER

The tape slides into the cold chamber of a VCR. Drums and rollers flip the top, stretches the tape inside. Chrome spindles rotate.

INT. JEFF'S MOTORHOME - SAME TIME

The blue glow of the screen washes over Jeff's face. Nothing plays, he furrows his brow. Then recalls the note...

Jeff groans as he rises from his seat, his old joints CREAK as he reaches for the VCR's console.

ON VCR DISPLAY: 00:59:01 flits to 01:01:37. Resumes normal play speed. 01:01:38... 39...

SHRIEKING explodes from the television.

Jeff scrambles to stop the video. He reaches the panel... but something on screen has him transfixed.

And then it's quiet. Seven seconds of hell over. The screen once again bathing the room blue.

Jeff sits silent. His eyes well with tears from what he saw -- what he heard.

EXT. THE TREASURE CHEST GENTLEMEN'S CLUB - SAME TIME

Flynn stomps across the parking lot.

INT. JEFF'S MOTORHOME - SECONDS LATER

Jeff is on his knees. Shoulders trembling, face buried in his hands. BANGING at the door does nothing to move him.

FLYNN (O.S.)
Shockey! The hell you doing in
there!?! Get out and tell me what
the hell you did to my club!

Jeff looks skyward, his anguished face wet with tears.

JEFF
(sotto)
Why? Why, God?

More BANGING. Jeff's head drops, still weeping.

FLYNN (O.S.)
Hey! Get out here! Now or I swear
to god I'll make your life hell!

Jeff turns to the door. He wipes his tears, and...

EXT. JEFF'S MOTORHOME - SAME TIME

... The cabin rocks. Movement inside. Flynn grins.

FLYNN
Attaboy.

The motorhome's engine RUMBLES. Flynn backs away, stunned.

Tires SQUEEL as the motorhome peels out of the parking lot.

EXT. ONE BEDROOM HOME - DAY

SUPER: "SHEFFIELD COUNTY, NEW JERSEY"

Sycamore trees rain autumn leaves onto unkempt home and lawn. The door to the home is open, a gaping void until...

PAMELA DOYLE

... Mid 20's, a lean black woman in police uniform. Fighting fit and moving from the home with the determined gait of a serious officer of the law.

Until she staggers to a stop, VOMITS on the grass.

INT. PAMELA'S SQUAD CAR - DAY

Pamela's cruiser rocks as she climbs in, eyes shut tight -- heart pounding. Pamela wills herself to calm. She takes one deep breath. Then another.

Pamela finally takes the hand-set. Adopts a cool demeanor.

PAMELA (INTO HAND-SET)
Come in dispatch, this is car
fifteen. Over.

No response.

PAMELA (INTO HAND-SET)
Come in dis --

The radio channel CRACKLES to life. Pamela flinches, quickly adjusts the volume.

RADIO DISPATCH
Dispatch. Come in, fifteen. Over.

Pamela coughs, clears her throat.

PAMELA (INTO HAND-SET)
I have a ten-eighty-four -- male,
mid-fifties. Requesting a ten-one-
hundred. Over.

RADIO DISPATCH
Car fifteen, ten-eight-four is
uh... a request for gasoline. The
hell are you trying to say? Over.

Pamela is speechless, thinking of what to say.

PAMELA (INTO HAND-SET)
 Dispatch, I don't mean to
 disrespect but that's incorrect. A
 ten-eighty-four-is --

RADIO DISPATCH
 I'm fucking with you, rook! Sending
 availables. Over.

LAUGHTER scratches through from the radio. Pamela hangs up,
 embarrassed.

WYDELL (V.O.)
 Gotta admit. Wouldn't expect this
 "Oh-woe-is-me" shit from a Stein.

CUT TO:

INT. ONE BEDROOM HOME - DAY

Flies make a meal of a carcass lying face down in a living
 room furnished in religious iconography. A silver-dollar-
 sized hole yawns from the top of the deceased's head.

WYDELL (O.S.)
 Unfair. No hope. Blah, blah, blah.
 Swear it's the same guy that writes
 these things.

Pamela stands next to CAPTAIN WYDELL, 30's with the stiff
 posture of a former athlete, reading from a sheaf of notebook
 paper -- *A suicide note.*

PAMELA
 Joseph was the Stein's black sheep.

WYDELL
 Black sheep for being a lamb of
 god?

PAMELA
 Could say that.

The paramedics roll the corpse on its back, the means of
 suicide is revealed: a snub-nosed .38 Special.

PAMELA
 Exit wound is huge for a thirty-
 eight.

WYDELL
 Looks right to me.

PARAMEDIC

Window's open. Raccoon could've gotten in, gnawed the wound.

WYDELL

There you go. Coon chewed him up.

Pamela kneels, takes a closer look. Something catches her interest. She carefully picks from Joseph's shirt pocket a --

DIABLERIE;

-- A postcard-sized picture done in stereoscope. Framed inside its aged, gilded edges is an illustration -- as if from a children's book. Pamela holds it up to the light.

PAMELA'S POV: An aged photo of papier-mache skeletons dancing over corpses. A green devil playing a trumpet. -- *A diorama staged with whimsy and horror.*

WYDELL (O.S.)

Th'hell is that?

Wydell snatches the diablerie from Pamela, squints at it.

WYDELL

Good god. Get it out of here.

Wydell pushes the diablerie back to Pamela -- she reigns in her annoyance as she rises.

PAMELA

I can take it into evidence.

WYDELL

Evidence? Evidence of what?

PAMELA

That gun didn't make that hole.

Wydell glances at the paramedics, pulls Pamela aside.

WYDELL

How close were you with this one?

PAMELA

Joseph? Not very.

WYDELL

Yeah? The puddle of upchuck out front tells me different. I know this aint your first body.

Pamela looks away, embarrassed.

WYDELL

Listen, if I found someone that had a hand in raising me with a hole in their head I'd be upset, too. But we've got a note and a gun. Thinkin' this isn't suicide is chasin' a ghost. Understand?

PAMELA

Yes, sir.

WYDELL

Good. An' don't worry, I won't tell the boys you threw up.

CUT TO:

EXT. ONE BEDROOM HOME - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Pamela walks toward her squad car, but stops at the RUMBLE of an approaching '77 Chevy pick-up. The truck stops, Pamela approaches the --

DRIVER SIDE

-- and sees PETE Stein, 50's, a grizzled tree stump of a man. Annoyance peering out from beneath the brim of a trucker hat.

PETE

Th'hell you doing here?

PAMELA

Mr. Stein, I'm going to have to ask you to leave. There's been an incident.

PETE

"Mr Stein." Why's there always trouble when you're around?

Pamela meets his glare with professionalism. Sympathy, even.

PAMELA

Joseph's dead. I'm sorry.

Pete rubs at his beard, his expression largely unchanged.

PETE

How'd he do it?

PAMELA

How'd you know he did it?