

SOLOMON'S BANE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE - NIGHT

Ruins in the heart of an old city. So ancient it's mostly just dirt. Lights nearby... a party tent. Caterers and elegant guests. Press.

SUPER: "TEMPLE MOUNT, JERUSALEM."

A CNN correspondent speaks to the camera:

CNN CORRESPONDENT

... Thanks, Mike. Everything is ready here tonight for the public unveiling of what some have called the greatest archeological discovery at Temple Mount. Tombs underneath what is believed to have been king Solomon's temple, dating back approximately 2500 years...

In the distance... a figure in shadows watches the tent, then the entrance to the tomb.

EXT. STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Valets park guests' cars. Further down, catering vans.

INT. CATERING VAN - CONTINUOUS

A dozen screens. Surveillance shots of the archeological site, the party tent -- party in full swing. KENNY, a tall dark African monitors all the images. Turns to one of the bottom screens, the image on it -- pitch black.

KENNY

Time.

On the pitch black screen, light, shapes appear. The image is moving. The entrance to the tomb coming into focus.

EXT. ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE - CONTINUOUS

Heading down a narrow trench that leads to the entrance of the tomb, a red carpet laid down its length. At the iron-gated door of the tomb, two SECURITY GUARDS react.

TOMB SECURITY ONE

Sorry, sir, site's not open yet.  
You have to wait for the ceremony.  
Go back to the party. Sir?

The man approaching, dashing in a tux, in his 30s, handsome, and... drunk as a skunk. This is GRAHAM SHANKS.

SHANKS

I just fancy a look, chaps. One  
peek and I'll leave you --

TOMB SECURITY ONE

-- You can't, sir, go back.

Shanks downs the glass of champagne in his hand.

SHANKS

They pay you to be this arrogant?

TOMB SECURITY TWO

Sir, please...

The guard observes him -- oh no. Shanks looks suddenly very  
sick and... he pukes. All over the red carpet. Guard one  
catches the splash on his shoes, cursing in Hebrew.

SHANKS

I need to sit. I really, really...

Guard two takes him by the arm. Guard one still cursing.

TOMB SECURITY TWO

Go get someone to clean this up.  
Quick!

Guard one, shoes stained, races out of the trench. Guard  
two helps Shanks down to the floor. Shanks looks at him.

SHANKS

I thank you. And I am truly, truly  
sorry. So, So...

TOMB SECURITY TWO

(impatient)

Sure. Think you can go back now?

Shanks smiles at him, nods, gets ready to stand.

The guard takes his hand to pull him up, but Shanks suddenly  
springs, pulls the guard closer, maneuvers himself behind  
him, grabbing him in a chokehold.

The guard struggles but Shanks holds him in place,  
comfortable. Confident. Cold. And the guard is out. Shanks  
lowers him to the floor. And he slips into the tomb.

INT. CATERING VAN - CONTINUOUS

Kenny watches as Shanks closes the tomb door behind him.

KENNY

Maybe next time we skip the damn  
theatrics, yes?

SHANKS

Where's the bloody magic in that?

INT. TOMB - CONTINUOUS

Shanks leans against the iron door, pulls a bolt gun. Fires bolts into the wall on either side of the door. Pulls out a steel cable, attaches it to the bolts, bracing the door.

He moves off, heading down the length of the tomb...

EXT. TOMB - CONTINUOUS

Guard one arrives with the cleaning crew, sees guard two passed out at the entrance. The tomb door closed. He rushes to it, tries to open it. Can't. Gets on his radio.

INT. INNER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shanks reaches the burial chamber. He observes the ancient skeletons laid out in their niches. Approaches... meticulous. He touches the bones filled with respect.

SHANKS

... Sorry, mate.

And he starts tossing them, clearing the niche. He crawls in. Reaches the deep end of the niche to see a few carvings on the wall. Ancient hand script.

SHANKS

Hmm. Wrong bloody side.

He crawls out. Rushes to the other side. Another niche. Starts tossing the bones out. Crawls in.

On the end of the niche he finds... A SYMBOL. A hexagram with a circle in its center, spider legs stretching out of the circle. Bizarre. He smiles.

INT. CATERING VAN - CONTINUOUS

Kenny sees the symbol on the screen. Lights up.

On another monitor, he sees a shot of the party, the attention of the people in charge being raised. On another one, security personnel moving. On another one, police.

KENNY

Hurry up, Shanks.

INT. INNER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shanks struggles to move inside the tight niche, but he pulls out... a hammer and bashes the symbol. Again and again. The strikes resonate in the tomb. The wall breaking apart.

EXT. TOMB - CONTINUOUS

Police, security personnel gather at the door, trying to open it. Door won't budge.

POLICEMAN  
Bring the battering ram. NOW!

INT. INNER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Shanks crawls into the hole he just made...

INT. SECRET TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

... And he emerges on the other side, looks around. A bare tunnel. If the tomb is ancient, this section is prehistoric.

Shanks moves carefully now. A look in his face we haven't seen before. More than excitement... burning passion. He reaches the end of the secret tunnel to see...

A small cave with a giant black ball inside it. A magnificent object. Crystal. Perfectly polished, shining in the light despite being locked in a tomb for millennia.

Extensive carvings on its surface including -- the hexagram.

Shanks approaches the ball. It makes him look small. The tunnel he just crossed was cramped. Making us wonder, not only what is it, but how the hell did this get in here?

Shanks touches the text and begins reading out loud. The words in ancient Aramaic are like a chant that reverberate in the ancient place.

EXT. TOMB - CONTINUOUS

As the police ram the door of the tomb, over and over.

INT. SECRET TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Shanks continues reading...

INT. CATERING VAN - CONTINUOUS

Kenny watches the police making progress.

KENNY  
Damn it! Read faster!

INT. TOMB - CONTINUOUS

The police ram the door, bowing the cable with each strike, the bolts slowly coming out of the wall.

INT. SECRET TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Shanks finishes the section of text. Watches, silent. As if waiting. Nothing.

INT. CATERING VAN - CONTINUOUS

Kenny leans into the monitor watching the ball. Also as if waiting. Face falling.

KENNY

What the hell happened?

INT. SECRET TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Shanks stares at the ball, frozen, worried... when a spark!

A thunder of sparks arc out of the ball like the spider legs on the symbol. Excitement again. Shanks observes, but flames erupt! Engulf him. Shanks SCREAMS as he burns.

INT. CATERING VAN - CONTINUOUS

As Kenny sees the flames, eyes wide, hearing the screams.

KENNY

Shanks!

Kenny jumps out of the chair, out of the van.

INT. TOMB - CONTINUOUS

And the police ram the door. The bolts yanked out, the door bursts open. Policemen and security plow in.

INT. SECRET TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Shanks thrashes about the cave in flames, in agony, as his skin burns, changing shape, color... the ball begins changing as well, contorted shapes protruding out...

EXT. STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Kenny runs toward the site as fast as his legs can take him.

INT. INNER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The police storm the burial chamber, see the bones on the floor. Perplexed to find no one. Then hear the muffled screams coming from inside the niche.

A few policemen look inside. See the hole, hearing the screams and something else... a GUTTURAL CRACKLE. And the flames erupt from the hole. The whole chamber burns.

EXT. ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny reaches the fence of the site, jumps over it, runs toward the entrance of the tomb when the earth rises like a mountain being born in a split second in front of him. KABOOOOMMM!!! An explosion under the earth, inside the tomb.

Kenny gets thrown back against the fence. Dirt, debris burying him alive. The shock wave sweeping over the site.

The party tent, guests, reporters, blown away by the shock wave. Knocked around. Chaos and panic.

By the fence, Kenny moves, crawls out of the dirt. Coughing. Hurting. He forces himself to his feet. Scrambles toward the tomb, but all he finds is a massive crater.

He stands at the edge. Looking inside. As the dust settles, he sees a shape at the bottom of the crater...

The black ball. With long contorted limbs all around the round body. Mouth open, filled with teeth, CRACKLING A SNARL. Still made out of crystal, covered in carvings, but alive? The thing burrows into the earth. Disappears.

Kenny stares in shock. SIRENS BLARING in the distance. Then... another shape in the crater. A person.

EXT. NORTH AFRICA - DAY

The desert sun bakes the old buildings of an arabic city.

SUPER: "RABAT, MOROCCO. TWO YEARS LATER."

From its busy market streets and beaches to a secluded avenue of expensive mansions, settle on a lavish Moroccan palace.

SUPER: "RESIDENCE OF THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR."

INT. AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mosaic tile walls. Open arches, curtains flutter calmly with the breeze letting in streaks of sun. A maid meticulously lays out breakfast for one over a small table.

MAID

It's served, sir.

A THUD... THUD... THUD echoes. Buried in a corner is SANTIAGO BALTI, a handsome 17 year-old, bouncing a ball against the mosaics. The maid watches him.

MAID  
Blueberry pancakes.

THUD... THUD... THUD.

MAID  
Extra blueberries. Extra whip cream.  
And for later, I believe there's  
cake. Chocolate, I --

SANTIAGO  
-- Did he say when he'd be back?

Santiago holds the ball in his hand, waiting for the answer.

MAID  
Early tomorrow.

SANTIAGO  
(under his breath)  
Of course. One day is all he needs.

MAID  
He did leave this for you.

The maid pulls out a present, beautifully wrapped, shows him. THUD... THUD... THUD... THUD... THUD.

She tears a corner of the wrapping, teasing.

No effect. She sighs, worried. She pulls out a candle from her apron, sticks it in the pancake. Lights it.

MAID  
Okay. We'll sing happy birthday  
right now and --

SANTIAGO  
-- Don't.

Santiago jumps up, the ball bounces the wrong way and hits a table. A lamp falls and breaks. Startled, he rushes over, gathering the broken shards, ashamed.

The maid rushes, picking up the pieces herself. And Santiago cuts his hand with a shard. Looks at the cut.

SANTIAGO  
(quiet)  
I'm so stupid.

MAID  
Just let me do this. Please.

The maid takes the pieces from him. Santiago looks at her.



MAID

And you're not stupid for wanting... things. For wanting him here. He's your father... but today is yours. Celebrate no matter who's here. One day there will be others who won't want to miss this day for anything.

She smiles at him. Goes for the door with the broken pieces of lamp. Before she exits she turns...

MAID

Happy 17th birthday, Santiago.

Santiago looks at her as she goes, looks at his breakfast, the candle lit on the pancake.

He opens the drawer on his nightstand, finds -- an ornate figurine of a knight on a horse, brandishing a spear.

He stares at it, absorbed. Places the little knight next to the pancake.

A FAINT VOICE ECHOES, indiscernible... then...

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

... Blow them, blow them!

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Endless olive fields outside the windows.

At the table, FIVE-YEAR-OLD SANTIAGO gathers air, blows the candles on a gorgeous cake with more spit than air.

His MOTHER, holding him on her lap, claps, kisses him.

His FATHER watches them, a camera in his hands, smiles, pleased. He approaches and sits with them.

FATHER

(in Spanish; subtitled)

And how old are you today? I forgot.

YOUNG SANTIAGO

(in English)

No, you didn't.

Father and mother share a glance, laugh. He shakes his head.

FATHER

(in English)

This is what I get for marrying an American -- a son who refuses to speak Spanish in Spain.

MOTHER

You love the foreign diplomacy.

He kisses her, then turns to young Santiago again.

FATHER

(in Spanish; subtitled)

So then tell me, how old are you?

YOUNG SANTIAGO

(in English)

Five.

And he lifts a hand full of digits. They laugh, so happy.

PRESENT DAY SANTIAGO

Blows the candle on the pancake. Looks at the little knight.

SANTIAGO

... Birthday.

INT. AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - LATER

Santiago wanders the halls, desolate. When -- PSST!

He turns -- ELIAS, a Moroccan boy, the same age as him, peeps from an adjacent corridor. Beckons him. Santiago looks, making sure no one is watching. Follows Elias.

INT. STAFF QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

In the unassuming corridor, Santiago follows Elias until he stops at a door. Elias turns to him.

ELIAS

(accented)

I have your stuff. Have the money?

Santiago pulls out a ball of crumpled bills from his pocket. Fumbles with the foreign currency. Elias claws it all.

ELIAS

That's good. My mom's busy in the kitchen. Want to try it now?

INT. STAFF APARTMENT - LATER

SHOTS, SCREAMS and EXPLOSIONS -- a video game on screen. Santiago and Elias on a couch, playing.

ELIAS

... You serious, every birthday?

SANTIAGO

Since I was five.

ELIAS

Shit, misses your birthdays, doesn't let you play games... does he pull your nails out too? Mate, secret video games isn't what you need.

Elias pauses the game. Jumps over to a backpack, rummaging. He turns back to the couch... lighting a joint. Santiago stares... shakes his head, uneasy. Before he can say a thing, Elias drops on the couch next to him.

ELIAS

Trust me.

Hands Santiago the joint. Santiago holds it, hesitant. Elias resumes the game.

ELIAS

Man! That son of a bitch really hates you!

Santiago is cut deep. Stares at Elias, muted. Elias notices the sudden desolate look on his face and he laughs. Shakes his head, finger pointing to the screen...

ELIAS

No, mate, that demon... is eating your head. Again.

Santiago turns to the TV but too late, game over. Over like his comfort is. Quiet befalls them. Elias considers him.

ELIAS

Really piss him off, mate.

Santiago looks at Elias, intrigued.

ELIAS

That's what you have to do. That'll get his attention. And I know just how... this game, you know it doesn't come out for a month, right? The guy who gets them, my friend, he gets all sorts of things. Games...  
(gestures to the joint)  
... Yeah, this too. And he's crazy about parties, never stops. Your father hates games. Always with a stick up his ass... I think you should come, meet my friend.

Santiago is afraid to even consider it... looks at the joint... unsure... he gives it a tentative try. Coughs out the smoke. Elias chuckles watching him.

Elias encourages him for another try when the door rattles! Someone trying to enter but it's bolted. Then a KNOCK. A woman's voice in Arabic.

ELIAS  
Shit! That's my mom.

Elias springs from the couch. Santiago follows suit.

ELIAS  
She can't catch us.

SANTIAGO  
Yeah. I -- I really don't want to "piss off" my dad, Elias.

ELIAS  
You got that right! Not involving my mom you're not. The window! The window! Hurry!

Santiago opens it. Trying to clear the smoke from the room.

ELIAS  
No! Climb out.

Santiago's eyes bug out, looks -- they're on the second floor.

ELIAS  
I've done it a million times. Through the gutter. Go. Go!

And he shouts to his mom in Arabic, urging Santiago to go as he hesitates. Santiago climbs out the window. Scared. Clumsy. He grabs onto the rain gutter...

EXT. AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

His foot scrapes the wall searching for a foothold. Finds the thin edge of the brace that holds the gutter to the wall. Elias watches, listening to his mother on the door.

ELIAS  
Comeoncomeoncomeon, mate, hurry up!

Santiago transfers his weight to the gutter, letting go of the window and loses his grip, falls. Hits the floor. THWACK. The back of his head smacks against the tiles...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY - DREAM

A house surrounded by endless fields of olive trees. LAUGHTER coming from inside...

INT. HOUSE - DAY - DREAM

Five-year-old Santiago, mother, and father laugh, so happy. Then... darkness. An empty corridor. A piercing SCREAM...

INT. ROOM - NIGHT - DREAM

Cold artificial light. His mother's face in tears.

MOTHER

Do you know who this is?

PRESENT DAY SANTIAGO

Lies on the floor, head bleeding. Security rushing to him.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Running. Hectic. A woman. A professional camera crisscrossed on her body. A gun tucked in the back of her jeans. A trace of blood on her face. Shots ring in the distance. This is CATHERINE GARDNER, late 20s.

SUPER: "CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC/CONGO BORDER."

Suddenly armed men appear in front of her -- militias.

Catherine skids to a stop. Slips in the mud and hits the ground. Before she can get the gun, a jeep arrives. More militias jump out of it. Catherine is surrounded.

They grab her, take her gun, her camera...

CATHERINE

No! Careful with that!

They toss Catherine into the jeep. The jeep drives to...

... An encampment -- a warlord sits under a palm shelter watching as his workers dig for diamonds, this is HONDO.

The armed men drag Catherine to him. Toss her at his feet. He watches her, displeased...

HONDO

As usual... you're late, Gardner.

CATHERINE

Nice manners your men have, Hondo.  
Shoot first, ask when exactly?!

She stands up. Wiping off the dirt.

HONDO

I apologize. One can never be too careful around these parts. Now come. To business.

She takes back her camera and gun, checks to see if the camera is okay, glowering at the men who took it. They walk through the humble diamond mine towards a shed. Now we see...

The workers look healthy, strong. There are women washing clothes by the river in perfect harmony.

A couple of children run with a ball -- Hondo takes it off their feet, juggles it with his own, kicks it back. The children smile at him. This is no warlord but a good leader to these people. They enter the shed.

INT. HONDO'S SHED - CONTINUOUS

Catherine watches as Hondo pours out the contents of a small bag over his table -- magnificent black crystal stones like something we've seen before.

CATHERINE

These really it? Red Enterprise's diamonds?

HONDO

I had to hand over all the diamonds we had dug or Red Enterprise would kill all my people, even the children. These were my payment to keep the mine going. These diamonds are one of a kind. They're a true beauty. Black diamonds do not sparkle like clear diamonds do because --

CATHERINE

-- Black absorbs light, doesn't refract it. Skip the 101, Hondo.

HONDO

Well, these somehow do. And they do it even in the rough.

Catherine grabs one of the diamonds, lifts it to the sunlight that filters into the shed, observes the magnificent glimmer. An array of colors, almost unnaturally intense.

CATHERINE

These will fetch an exorbitant price. Why would Red Enterprise want regular clear diamonds when they have these?

HONDO

I do not know. All I know is that these diamonds... they're completely unnatural.

CATHERINE

But they're not forgeries.

HONDO

No. Do you know what the experts say about regular black diamonds? That they're not from this Earth. They were created by some great cosmic event, then found their way here. That's why they're so rare.

CATHERINE

(smirks)

The aliens brought them?

HONDO

Mock me, Gardner, but imagine what they'll say about these.

Catherine grabs her camera, snaps pictures of the diamonds.

CATHERINE

So where is R.E. getting them?

HONDO

No one knows. You won't find the source. The Boss claims this place is... special. Cannot be found by normal means. A key of sorts is needed. And my man inside Red Enterprise tells me there is something far more sinister behind them than any other conflict diamond.

A completely serious look on his face. Catherine frowns.

CATHERINE

I wanna talk to your contact.

HONDO

He would never talk to a journalist. Much less a woman.

(off her look)

His beliefs, not mine. Either way he does not know where the mine is. The only way you may be able to find it is by tracing the diamonds forward, not back -- the shipper. He might know something and he won't be as deadly as the rest of R.E.