

"BLACK REIGN"

by

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FADE IN:

INT. REICH MINISTRY BUILDING - OFFICE - DAY

BEGINNING IS FILMED IN BLACK AND WHITE.

JOSEPH GOEBBELS, a little man in a crisp Nazi uniform, sits behind his big desk smokes and ponders.

SUPER: "Nazi Germany. Berlin, 1939."

Joe eyes the CAMERA hard with his black beady eyes.

SUPER: "JOE: Reich Minister of Propaganda."

GOEBBELS
The truth? Nein.

Joe crushes his cigarette into an ashtray.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)
We don't want that.

Joe pauses as he licks his lips. He grabs a fresh cigarette and lights it.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)
The truth is the greatest enemy of
the State.

Then, Joe blows a cloud of smoke directly at the CAMERA, as the screen becomes gritty and cloudy his image disappears.

CUT TO: FILM SET

EXT. ROMAN FAÇADE FILM SET - DAY

LENI RIEFENSTAHL, late 30s, stands in front of a tripod movie camera. She wears tan pants, tall brown leather riding boots, and a puffy white blouse. Her dark, unruly hair frames her determined face. She is in full control.

In the set's background, half-clad bronze muscular men pose like Roman gladiators in a white-columned garden.

SUPER: "LENI: Nazi Image Maker/ Director of Triumph of the Will & Olympia."

Leni eyes the CAMERA hard, examines us, and laughs.

RIEFENSTAHL
Reality doesn't interest me... never
has.

Leni turns and and cups her hand as she shouts.

RIEFENSTAHL (CONT'D)
Cue the smoke.

Smoke suddenly appears.

RIEFENSTAHL (CONT'D)
Perfect. Roll it!

Leni turns back to the CAMERA and whispers.

RIEFENSTAHL (CONT'D)
Reality. I prefer to invent mine.

CUT TO: BIERGARTEN

INT. GERMAN BIERGARTEN — DAY

HERMANN GÖRING, looks at the CAMERA too, and smiles broadly and leans in as he sets down his stein.

SUPER: "HERMANN: ace pilot and founder of the notorious and murderous Gestapo."

Hermann sits among friends.

GÖRING
My measures will not be crippled
by any bureaucracy.

Hermann takes a heavy sip from his stein. Beer foam appears on his upper lip. He sets down his beer.

GÖRING (CONT'D)
Ah!

Hermann wipes it away with the back of his sleeve.

GÖRING (CONT'D)
Here I don't have to worry about
Justice. My mission is only to
destroy and to exterminate...
nothing more.

Hermann pauses as he picks up his stein of beer.

Now plays the folk song, Germany Awake.

GÖRING (CONT'D)
(in German)
See you later.

CUT TO: STOCK
FOOTAGE

PLAYS NAZI GERMANY 1936 PROPAGANDA FOOTAGE

The screen of BLACK AND WHITE switches to COLOR.

Shows a MONTAGE OF 1936 BERLIN.

The announcer speaks as the documentary-like movie rolls.

Film starts with a broad shot of a long boulevard lined with tall, blood red Swastikas standards. Cars of various shapes and colors travel up and down the boulevard. A bus passes by, plastered with German advertisements. Then, we see a shot of the Victory Column of 1873.

ANNOUNCER V.O

Welcome to the Reich Capital of Berlin. Berlin's streets are lined with flags for the 1936 Olympics. All in the latest designs black swastika in a white circle in a red background. Brandenburg Gate the city's emblem greets the world's youth as they walk along the avenues.

EXT. OLYMPIC STADIUM — DAY

The MASSES reacts to the Games.

JONES V.O.

Have you ever peered into the eyes of a superior being? Or least a man who thought he was superior. I find much joy in seeing their pain and confusion, as they realize they are far weaker than they ever thought.

EXT. OLYMPIC STADIUM — DAY

The crowd responds to the arrival of De Führer's entourage of generals and henchmen: Hermann, Leni, and Joe. Drunk on hope frenzy mass reacts in a Nazi salute. One by one, right hands shoot up skywards to pay homage to the Supreme Commander, Herr Hitler as he arrives in his box.

GASP: DEAFENING SILENCE.

EXT. HITLER'S BOX — SAME

Hitler, in a brown starched uniform and peaked hat, returns the Nazi salute.

EXT. OLYMPIC STADIUM — SAME

The CROWD erupts in ecstasy.

CROWD
SEIG HEIL! SEIG HEIL! SEIG HEIL!

CUT BACK TO:

ECU: Hitler's black squared mustache.

Hitler gives the crowd a twisted smile.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. HOTEL ADLON — DAY

Outside, people crowd the sidewalk.

SUPER: "Berlin, 1936. Nazi Games. Opening day."

The CAMERA pans up the long Nazi standards that drape down the hotel's sides. Stops at a window that faces the Brandenburg Gate.

INT. HOTEL ALDON — BEDROOM SUITE — DAY

A naked woman's lifeless arm dangles unnaturally off a big bed. Her enormous diamond ring sparkles inches above the floor. Its sheer brilliance momentarily blinds us.

We pullback, as if clinging to the ceiling, embarrassed and alarmed. Her milky white body is fully exposed. She is young and fit. Though her facial features are cloaked under her heavy mound of wavy red hair.

She is freshly dead.

CUT TO: LENGTHY
HALLWAY

INT. HOTEL ADLON — LENGTHY HALLWAY — SAME

A set of worn brown leather shoes skips across the deep blue carpet.

SUPER: LARGE "MAX" IN BLOCK LETTERING COVERS SHOT.

MAX HAUSER V.O.

Hi. I'm a borrowed gun at the Hotel Adlon. Half-listening to the ramblings of a pimply-faced bellhop who is now two strides ahead of me.

ECU: HANS THE BELLHOP. ALL WE SEE IS HIS BACK AND HEAD.

Hans wears a smart powder blue uniform and a black circular porter's hat.

MAX HAUSER V.O. (CONT'D)

His velvety voice reeks of the all-knowing arrogance of a chatty adolescent at the brink of becoming a man. He's speaks smugly of the hotel's legendary status. I'm bored. If you don't believe me, you listen.

HANS

This is where royalty chooses to stay, together with millionaires, heads of state and stars from Hollywood's silver screen.

MAX V.O.

The boy's name is Hans. I never got a last name. I found the smooth-talking teen to be a wondrous oddity. He speaks continuously, as if silence is evil. Me, being in my forties, know otherwise.

Max stops for a moment to light a fresh cigarette.

Hans continues to walk and talk.

HANS

Do hurry up, Hauser. No time for dawdling.

MAX

Why?

(says in a cloud of smoke)

The girl is not going anywhere?

HANS

The girl?

Hans turns to see if Max was serious.

HANS (CONT'D)
Who cares about her? Herr Schlitz
is waiting for us.

MAX
Schlitz? Who?

Hans's neck twitches back and forth with the blasphemous
mentioning of his master's name.

MAX V.O.
Oh. You noticed the tic? Yeah, I
know. It freaks me out too.

HANS
Damn, Hauser. Didn't Claude tell
you anything?

MAX
He told me where he hid his
whiskey.

HANS
That figures.

Hans looks around the deserted floor, says in a near
whisper.

HANS (CONT'D)
Herr Schlitz is god almighty
around here. He knows everything,
and everyone.

MAX
How convenient... Maybe he knows who
killed the woman then.

HANS
I won't test him. You're part-time
help here. Remember that.

MAX
I shall keep that in mind.

MAX V.O.
This is what I get for doing a
favor for Claude. He warned me
Hans was not to be trusted.

They continued the next few strides in silence.

MAX
So, who discovered the body?

HANS
A chambermaid, of course.

MAX
Hmm.

Hans says over his shoulder.

HANS
What?

MAX
You told me the room was already
made up.

HANS
It was. The party who reserved the
room had yet to arrive.

MAX
Then, why did a chambermaid enter
the room?

Hans shrugs his narrow shoulders, in a matter that he did
not care.

HANS
Who knows? The girl is new. In the
beginning, all the rooms look the
same. What does it matter?

MAX
Murder should matter.

HANS
Murder?

Hans neck tic strikes again.

HANS (CONT'D)
No one has said anything about
murder.

MAX
There's a dead woman in a room
that's supposed to be vacant.

HANS
So?

MAX
Don't you find that rather
strange?

HANS
Nein. It's Berlin. Stranger things
happen here every day.

MAX
If she wasn't a guest, then how
did she get in?

HANS
I don't care. They find ways in.
Hotels are magnets to unhappy
people.

MAX
Even these hallowed halls of the
Hotel Adlon?

HANS
Ja. Especially here.

Finally, the two men come to the end of the thick carpeted
corridor. Before them is a tall door centered with an oval
brass placard. It reads Suite 313.

Hans searches out a key from the big ring he keeps at his
belt. With one white gloved hand he swings open the door.
Then, he nods for Max to enter the dim lit room first.

MAX V.O.
Pussy.

Max wanders in and brushes by the bellhop.

MAX V.O. (CONT'D)
At first glance, I knew I could
never afford to stay in such a
room: too big, the ceiling too
high, and the furniture too
fragile and old. This is where
money sleeps.

Max steps further in atop the glistening parquet floors. On
a nearby sofa sits a sniffling woman all busty and
beautiful in a maid's uniform.

MAX V.O. (CONT'D)
She has to be the maid who found
the body.

Hovering over her is an impeccably dressed long-nosed man
near fifty with slick-backed hair. He seems troubled,
though he hid his discomfort well. His outer appearance
embodied both refinement and taste.

As I enter the room, the man huffs and begins to pace.

MAX V.O. (CONT'D)
Herr Schlitz, I presume. The
Adlon's supreme-being.

Herr Schlitz stops pacing to extinguish his cigarette in a nearby ashtray.

SCHLITZ
Who are you?

The manager swipes at some stray ash on his lapel as his steely gaze moved from Max to Hans.

SCHLITZ (CONT'D)
I said Claude.

HANS
Claude has the day off. His two sons are performing this afternoon in the Olympic ceremonies. This is Herr Hauser. Claude said he told you.

SCHLITZ
(vague remembrance look
crosses his face)
So, he did. You're an ex-cop, right?

MAX
Detective Inspector. Homicide.

SCHLITZ
Oh yes, I remember now. Find me Claude.

Max laughs as he swaggers closer to where the mysterious dead woman remains.

SCHLITZ (CONT'D)
(barks)
What do you think you are doing? I said...

MAX
I heard ya. But first, I am going to have a look.

SCHLITZ
Why?

MAX
Maybe it's not a suicide.

SCHLITZ
What else could it be?

MAX
Murder.

SCHLITZ
Murder? No. No. No. The act was
self-done. I peeked in and saw a
mountain of pills. Mystery solved.
(pauses for effect)
You see, I have a hotel full of
guests from the most influential
families in the world, you
understand? Not to mention the
foreign press covering the Games.
They would love to fall off their
bar stools downstairs and stumble
upon a story like this.

Max reaches the closed bedroom door and gazes back to
Schlitz. His large frame filled the hallway:

Relax. If she took her own life, like you said, it should
be obvious.

Schlitz's jaw tightens but he waves for Max to proceed:

Be quick.

MAX
Claude, what have you gotten me
into?

INT. HOTEL ADLON BEDROOM — CONTINUOUS

Max Hauser takes in a shallow breath and pushes beyond the
red doors. Inside, the room is dark except for a shaft of
glistening light streaming in from a slight crack in the
curtains. A straight, slender beam cuts a path across the
middle of the room and lands on a four-post bed. Within
this visible space, a lifeless limb dangles off the bed,
towards the floor and the room's deeper darkness.

Still in the dark, Max moves slowly and deliberately.
Reaching the bed, he finds the body of a nude woman, faced
down on her belly, like she had just dozed off. She is
dead.

Hans stays back within the lit doorway, deciding it wasn't
necessary for him to enter the room.

MAX
(looks back to Hans)
Hit the lights.

Hans did what he was told. With a flip of the switch the entire room is illuminated in soft, warm light.

Max brushes aside a long red strand of her wavy hair to see if she has a pulse. There is none, though her skin is still warm to the touch. Then, Max checks around the bed, then under it.

Beside a lamp sits a brown potbellied bottle, lying on its side. White tablets pour out of its mouth.

HANS
(points to the bedside
table)
Mystery solved. Pills.

Alongside the brown bottle stands a half empty cup of water. The scene had all the trappings of a suicide.

HANS (CONT'D)
Like I said earlier, hotels are
magnets to people who want to end
their lives.
(looks straight at the
corpse)
Someone is going to miss that
body.

Max peeks into the bathroom. Then, he turns and walks toward an adjacent closet. He finds two white robes on hangers, nothing else.

HANS (CONT'D)
What are you looking for?

Max closes the closet doors.

MAX
Where are her clothes?

Hans shrugs his narrow shoulders.

HANS
Who knows? Maybe she tossed them
out the window. Or maybe, she
wandered through the halls nude.
(smiles)
She wouldn't have been the first
to do so.

Max walks past Hans to the windows to see if any clothing is dropped below.

MAX
Wow. The parade.

HANS
The city has caught Olympic fever.

MAX
For the next two weeks, Germany
hosts the world.

Hans peeks over Max's shoulder.

HANS
Heck. Most of the foreign
dignitaries, not to mention the
International Olympic Committee
are staying here for the next two
weeks.

MAX V.O.
I realize now why Schlitz is so
worried. Bad press. He must uphold
the hotel's image, at all costs.

Outside, the crowd cheers and screams in delight Seig Heil!
as a long column of fierce-looking soldiers, ten men thick
march under the Brandenburg Gate draped in Nazi flags.

MAX V.O. (CONT'D)
Oh, how we Germans love theatre.

Max turns his back to the view. Behind him, a red sea of
swastikas waves about.

MAX
Speaking of which. Hans, come over
here.

Both men move to the bed.

Max drops to one knee.

MAX (CONT'D)
Closer. Get besides me.

HANS
(hesitates)
Okay. Let's leave some of the
investigation for the thousands of
cops outside, huh?

MAX

They are not here now. I am.

Hans kneels by Max.

HANS

All right, I'm here.

MAX

Close your eyes. Breathe deeply.

HANS

Why?

MAX

Sight can deceive. So, do it.

Hans did, though he didn't hide the fact that he isn't happy as he inhales and exhales.

MAX (CONT'D)

Okay now. Breathe in. What do you smell? Tell me.

HANS

Perfume. Rich, and irresistible.

MAX

What else?

HANS

Hmm... lavender soap. And?

MAX

And what?

HANS

It's hard to describe. It's fainter than the rest. Chemical-like, like a weak paint thinner.

MAX

Close. Now open your eyes again. Good job. What you smell is ether.

HANS

But why?

MAX

The poor woman was murdered.

Hans rises up again, and dusts off his knees.

HANS
How can you be certain? The smell
is so faint. It could be the water
and the pills.

MAX
No.

Max V.O. moves to the doorway and reenacts the crime.

MAX (CONT'D)
She stood here near the doorway.
Perhaps, she was expecting to meet
someone in this room.

HANS
An affair gone wrong?

MAX
Who knows? She opens the door, and
as she enters the room she is
attacked. From the discoloration
on her neck, I am guessing from
behind.

Max acts like Hans is the one being assaulted.

MAX (CONT'D)
See. I have my arm around you,
like this. To cover your mouth if
you scream.

HANS
If she fought, why isn't she more
bruised up?

MAX
Ether. It works fast. The murderer
held a hand towel or rag soaked in
it over her face.

HANS
Why take the clothes?

MAX
We are not dealing with a pro. The
ether rag drips all over them. So,
they were taken along with her
purse.

HANS
Purse?

MAX
No woman travels without one.

HANS
So, mystery solved?

MAX
Not yet. The true mystery is who had the motive to want her dead. This is a statement kill. I'm guessing it is tied to an affair of the heart.

HANS
Jealous husband?

MAX
(nods)
Something like that. Murder on this small scale isn't complicated. It's rather straight forward, and predictable.

Hans breaks out a high, beaming smile he typically reserves only for his master. He is impressed.

Max moves back to the body and brushes away the remaining curls from the woman's face. Right then, Max sees Hans' eyes wince, as if the bellhop had seen her for the first time and recognizes her.

HANS
Shit. I know this woman. Her husband reserved half the hotel. I need to speak to Schlitz.

Hans attempts to flee to his boss.

Max grabs him by the shoulders and spins him around to face him.

MAX
What's the man's name? Tell me.

HANS
He's high up in the party.

MAX
Who? No one has the right to murder.

HANS
Max, I see now why you were fired. You are too much of an idealist.

MAX
Give me a name.

HANS

Fine. Baron von Eberwine. He owns half the country. Not to mention his refineries manufacture most of Der Führer's new toys.

Max eyes register the name. Acts stunned.

HANS (CONT'D)

His wife is...

Hans looks down to the corpse.

HANS (CONT'D)

Was Baroness Von...

MAX

(interrupts him)

I knew her simply as Sarah.

MAX V.O.

Fuck.

At that exact moment, the real police arrive.

INT. SITTING ROOM OF SUITE 313 -- CONTINUOUS

Max and Hans are greeted by KARL BECK, a handsome, well-respected-looking man whose age leans towards fifty. Dressed in all black, he roams the room. Pinned on his flawless suit is a Nazi lapel button.

His stroll possesses a youthful, athletic stride as he walks the room like royalty. He stops here and there. Picks up various objects of interest and briefly examines them until he grows bored. When he reaches Herr Schlitz, he gives a weak arm salute tinged with irony.

BECK

Detective Superintendent Beck, present and accounted for. Oh, yes. Heil Hitler!

HERR SCHLITZ

It took you long enough.

BECK

(replies dryly back)

Traffic and all, you understand -- the parade. I take it the woman is still dead even with our lengthy delay?

Then, Beck at that exact moment, appears to notice Max and Hans in the corner of the room.

BECK (CONT'D)

Max, what are you doing here? Miss me?

Max steps forward.

MAX

Not particularly.

BECK

We miss you.

MAX

Well, you were the one that fired me.

BECK

I had to. You pissed off too many people.

MAX

I just wanted justice done.

BECK

For Jews?

MAX

Yeah.

BECK

Max, you are a dreamer.