

THE DEVIL'S TRAMPING GROUND

an original screenplay by

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FADE IN:

INT. DR. MOTT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

An ornate mantle clock measures the passage of time with the slow TICK, TICK, TICK of its pendulum.

It's one minute to midnight.

EXT. LYNDGATE DORM - NIGHT

KIRBY THEILER (19), unkempt and haggard, hunkers rigidly on the sidewalk. He cuts a positively grotesque and disfigured countenance, a sophomore quasimodo ... waiting.

INT. COLLEGE CHAPEL - NIGHT

LUCAS FOWLER (21), his hair damp with sweat, cuts lines of coke on the front pew. He glances uncertainly to a twisted, deformed sculpture of a crucified Christ.

Christ, caught in his own agony, pays no attention to Lucas.

Lucas grins wickedly and continues chopping.

INT. DOUG'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

DOUG BARRET (21) sits silently staring at his closet door.

From within the closet, a gentle SCRAPING OF CLAWS drawn softly over metal, sliding ever closer ... to the door knob.

INT. DR. MOTT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The clock's minute hand clicks onto twelve. The GEARS WHIR and come to life. The clapper pulls back ...

MONTAGE - AN INTERCUT OF KIRBY, LUCAS, DOUG AND THE CLOCK

-- As the gears of the clock turn, Kirby raises his leg.

On the strike of midnight, he drops his foot against the cracked sidewalk and lurches like a stop-motion puppet around the dorm.

Shadows shift and follow Kirby. Panic-stricken, he runs.

The shadows pursue, a violent vortex of inky blackness.

Kirby throws his head back and screams.

-- Lucas inhales a line of coke. He clutches the pew as the orgasmic rush of coke floods his body.

The tortured Christ turns to Lucas. It opens its mouth in silent agony. Blood trickles from its nostrils.

Lucas touches his own nose. Blood. Something's wrong. He turns fearfully to the Christ.

Christ turns indifferently from Lucas.

Lucas collapses on the altar.

-- A green light glows beneath Doug's closet door. A shadow flits to and fro in the light.

The doorknob twists and turns violently.

Doug rises, his wide eyes fixated on the doorknob.

The door unlatches and swings open, filling the room with an ethereal green light.

Doug steps forward, reaching into the light.

Beneath it all, muted WHISPERS grow in strength, joining forces to become one singular voice in the night.

VOICE
(whispered)
Doooouuug.

-- GONG! The last strike fades away and the clock settles into its monotonous ticking.

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE: "ONE WEEK EARLIER"

EXT. CARRABUS COLLEGE - DAY

The treelined campus of Carrabus College is ablaze with fall colors. A handful of students mill about the quad.

Sporting dark sunglasses Doug leaps down the front steps of his dorm and charges for the Ad-Building.

He passes a group of JOCKS.

JOCK
Yo, Doog!

Doug glances over his shoulder.

A wobbly football flies toward him.

Doug sprints forward and snags the ball from the air.

JOCK
Nice catch.

DOUG
Thanks. Maybe I should've tried out
for the team.

JOCK
Yeah, right.

DOUG
Couldn't hurt your record.

Doug zips the ball back in a perfect spiral.

JOCK
Up yours.

Doug grins and bounds up the rear steps of the Ad-Building.

JOCK
Hey, you goin' to Kyle's tonight?

DOUG
Yeah. You need?

The Jock holds up four fingers.

Doug nods and ducks in the building.

INT. AD-BUILDING - DAY

Doug hurtles down an empty hallway and charges full speed up
a stairway.

ON THE SECOND FLOOR

He pauses to catch his breath.

DOUG
Next semester, no third floor classes.

INT. DR. MOTT'S CLASSROOM - DAY

DR. MOTT (60s) lectures a half-empty class of half-interested
students.

Among them is MISSY SPANGLER (20), who sits by the windows
glaring at Mott.

Kirby sits along the opposite wall, doodling in a notebook.

DR. MOTT
Institutionalize the supernatural
and you have ...
(MORE)

DR. MOTT
 (writes on the board)
 ... Religion.

MISSY
 Are you saying God isn't real?

DR. MOTT
 More real than Zeus or Apollo?

MISSY
 There is only one God. If you read
 your Bible, you'd know that.

Doug slinks into the classroom.

Mott glances at the wall clock. 10:33.

DR. MOTT
 Good of you to make it, Mr. Barret,
 although I wasn't aware you were
 still enrolled in this class.

A few sniggers sweep the class. Doug sits behind Kirby.

DOUG
 Sorry. Over slept.

DR. MOTT
 Glasses, please.

Doug removes his sunglasses. His eyes are bloodshot.

Mott sighs with disapproval.

DR. MOTT
 Now, where were we?

MISSY
 The Bible?

DR. MOTT
 Yes. Beautiful literature, but even
 monotheistic Christianity ...

Doug scrawls on a slip of paper. He passes the note to Kirby.

DR. MOTT (O.S.)
 ... Has subsets of divine beings:
 Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Saints,
 angels, demons. The trend of
 progressive civilization, however ...

Kirby unfolds the note.

INSERT NOTE, which reads:

"I need 10 more"

Kirby nods. He quietly pulls a plastic baggie of pills from his bookbag and passes it to Doug.

DR. MOTT

... Has been from polytheism to monotheism leading, ultimately, to atheism.

DOUG

(under)

God is dead. Long live God.

Another snigger sweeps the class. Missy shoots daggers at Doug who quickly tucks the baggie in his lap.

DR. MOTT

A declared atheist, Mr. Barret?

DOUG

Agnostic. I believe in me.

DR. MOTT

So, no belief in the Devil either?

DOUG

Well, I suppose evil exists.

DR. MOTT

As an outside force exerting its influence on you, or an internal component of your humanity?

MISSY

The Devil tempts in many ways.

DOUG

Yeah, but the devil doesn't make you do anything. He tempts, you choose.

DR. MOTT

Ah, the perils of free will. But if there is a force for evil, is there not also a force for good, since there is no belief in the Devil without belief in God. No darkness without light.

DOUG

I guess.

DR. MOTT
 How easily they fall.
 Congratulations, Miss Spangler,
 another convert to the cause.

MISSY
 I'll pray for you, Dr. Mott.

DR. MOTT
 Thank you, Missy. Unnecessary, but
 the sentiment is appreciated. It
 would seem, however, no matter our
 belief in ourselves, we have an
 ingrained need to believe in something
 greater than ourselves. It always
 amazes me how many professed atheists
 pooh-pooh the existence of a supreme
 deity, but swear by astrological
 predictions, or tremble at the mere
 mention of ...

(to Doug)
 The Devil's Tramping Ground.

DOUG
 Devil's Tramping Ground? What's
 that?

Mott draws a large circle on the chalkboard.

DR. MOTT
 The Tramping Ground: a peculiar
 depression of barren soil, 40 feet
 in diameter, bound by a worn, circular
 path, over which birds do not fly,
 beasts do not cross and only the
 most foolhardy of men dare tread.

KIRBY
 Why's that?

DR. MOTT
 Legend holds Satan himself walks the
 circle, plotting evil deeds against
 mankind. And anyone who encounters
 the fallen angel on his nightly
 circuit will go mad by morning.

DOUG
 But nothing grows there?

DR. MOTT
 Just some wiry grass in a near perfect
 circle.

MISSY
Because Satan walks the path?

DR. MOTT
Maybe ... or it could be the high
acidic level of the soil. In 1954
the State of North Carolina took
samples and found a high level of
salt. Mystery solved.

DOUG
How'd the salt get poured into a
perfect circle?

DR. MOTT
I don't know. Perhaps you should
spend the night and investigate.

A bell rings. Students stampede for the door.

DR. MOTT
Review on Friday for Monday's test
covering Chapters 11, 12 and 13.

Doug attempts to sneak past Mott.

DR. MOTT
Mr. Barret, my office. Please.

Doug groans and drops his head.

INT. DR. MOTT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Doug fidgets in a chair, waiting for Mott who seems in no
particular hurry.

Doug scans the cluttered office.

A doctorate degree from Duke University, various awards, a
framed photo of three scruffy young men with backpacks.

DOUG
That you?

DR. MOTT
What?

DOUG
In the picture. That you?

Mott looks to the picture.

DR. MOTT
Grad school days.

DOUG
You're into camping?

DR. MOTT
I was much younger then.

Mott shifts his disapproving gaze to Doug.

DR. MOTT
I have to say, I was surprised to see you in class today.

DOUG
I've been a little, uh, preoccupied.

DR. MOTT
You realize you have exceeded your allowable absences, Mr. Barret. Your test scores are abysmal, and you can't even complete your basic assignments. You had a paper due last Friday.

DOUG
It's almost done.

DR. MOTT
Almost? You realize I don't have to accept it at this point.

DOUG
I understand, Dr. Mott, but if you could just--

DR. MOTT
No, I'm afraid you don't understand. It is no longer possible for you to pass my class.

DOUG
But I need this class to graduate.

DR. MOTT
Withdraw. Try again next semester.

DOUG
I can't. I'll fall below the required credit hours of my scholarship.

DR. MOTT
You have a predicament.

DOUG
Dr. Mott, please!

DR. MOTT

I'm sorry, Doug, but it's not as if I'm without empathy. I found myself in a similar dilemma at your age, and my mentor, Dr. Wesley, forced me to learn a very hard lesson. One you need to learn now. How you choose to deal with it will be up to you.

INT. DOUG'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Doug types furiously on a laptop.

Lucas, Doug's roommate, pulls two beers from a mini-fridge.

LUCAS

He's fucking with you.

DOUG

I don't think so.

LUCAS

Ain't no way he fails you. School won't allow it.

Lucas slides a beer to Doug. Doug shakes his head. Slides it back.

DOUG

This is the esteemed James Mott we're talking about, two-time recipient of the Peterson Grant.

LUCAS

Three-time. Won it at Peylon, too.

DOUG

I am so screwed.

LUCAS

Dude, you're the golden boy on a full ride. The college isn't going to throw away a three and a half year investment. They'll work out an extra credit assignment or something with Mott.

DOUG

Have to be one hell of an assignment.

Lucas strips off his t-shirt and crosses to Doug's closet.

LUCAS

Naw, just tell him what he wants to hear. God is a fairy tale living on a cloud for the intellectually weak. You know that'll get him hard. Hey, where's your black silk shirt?

DOUG

Yo, outta my closet.

LUCAS

Why, you keepin' skeletons in here?

DOUG

I don't like people in my personal spaces.

Doug hands Lucas a dress shirt from the closet.

LUCAS

No, man, the black silk.

DOUG

Un-uh, Amy gave me that for my birthday.

LUCAS

Looks better on me.

DOUG

That the only way you can get laid? Impersonating me?

Doug returns to the laptop.

LUCAS

Hey, man, we cool?

DOUG

How do you mean?

LUCAS

You, me, Amy?

Doug glances at a photo pinned to a corkboard of Lucas with his arms wrapped around a young woman (Amanda).

DOUG

Gonna break up with her if I'm not?

LUCAS

No.

DOUG

Then why ask?