

"THE ROAD AVENGER"

(Public Demo I)

A **Mary Margaret Park** Original

Co-Produced by: **Sekrett Scilence**

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The Reason

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Night fell upon this *City of Angels* -- People milled in and out of the clubs, laughing, swaying to the beats that poured across their streets -- They were the beautiful, the successful who'd laid claim to this oasis of cosmopolitan delight; it shown in their expressions and how they carried themselves - self aware - but only blindly, for they'd become unaware.

As the dark settled around the partygoers, the drug dealers and the desperate awakened, emerging from the city's underbelly to ply their trades -- In ghost towns that had once housed thriving businesses, crime rates skyrocketed, and the politicians did nothing. The city had been sold out, poisoned one sliver at a time.

The winds of change were blowing, issuing from the east. As the seasons passed, the city fallowed.

The wealthy merely worried over where to have their next vacation, next lover, or next drink.

It never occurred to them to take action.

By the time they saw reality, it was a distant dream.

The city was cloaked; its hands no longer gentle -- **S.C.U.M.** had arrived.

* * *

A grinding buzz echoed along the downtown corridor, signaling high noon. Motorcycles surged down the street in a rumble of color and chrome, followed by a blue '78 Lincoln Town Car, its grill strained in a metallic grin.

At a coffee shop on the corner, spoons rattled against steaming mugs of java as the cycles blazed up onto the sidewalk, scattering diners like quail.

An old man sat on the walkway, peering at the edge of his table, his hand draped atop his wife's bloodied head. The beginnings of a sentence stayed stuck in his throat as the engines dissipated.

Those left in the backwash sat at first unknowing then stunned.

Finally, they awakened, and the streets filled with their cries and shouts.

* * *

It wasn't long ago that Blake had spied a young woman dashing across the library's parking lot in the pouring rain. She'd zigzagged around the puddles like a tipsy sailor, balancing an accordion of books.

Blake had looked on with amusement.

She'd slipped, landing in an explosion of library books and muddy water. He'd made a beeline for her, arriving soaking wet. "Are you alright? Can I get you anything?" Blake had asked, handing her a sodden book. She'd looked so vulnerable sitting there, dripping like a drowned puppy. She'd peered up at him, eyes filled with mirth, "How about a hair dryer?" she'd replied, bursting into giggles -- Blake had been mesmerized, and as they'd talked over coffee that night, he couldn't help wanting to know everything about her -- It had been a perfect wedding, Blake thought, as he and his new wife headed to the airport. They were catching a flight to Maui, excited to be having their honeymoon on the island. He couldn't take his eyes off of her - "What?" Alicia giggled.

"You're absolutely beautiful, Mrs. Sanders."

"Why thank you kind Sir." She batted her eyes. "Do you think our flight will be smooth? Flying makes me nervous."

Blake was amused by her reluctance; he'd grown up a pilot's son, so flying was nothing new for him. He cradled her hand in his, squeezing it reassuringly. "Don't worry, before you know it, we'll be sipping Piña Coladas on the beach."

She shrugged, feeling a bit silly; a keen smile teased the corners of her mouth, "I want one of those flower necklaces and a massage when we get there, okay?"

"You can have whatever you want." Blake nodded. "At least until I'm broke; then we'll have to hitchhike."

Alicia budged his arm, admiring his ability to be himself; Blake was a natural, even on his wedding day -- The afternoon was ideal, the sky

a blameless blue as they shot down the highway in their convertible. They wound their way along the striking cliff sides and chasms -- The airport was located at the edge of town near "Gambler's Gulch", a rocky sided canyon - It was late afternoon; the Sun's rays dappled the pavement with lazy pools of light - Shortly, the sky would ripen into the golden orange hues of sunset - Alicia turned on the radio and began swaying to the music. Blake joined her, and soon, they were singing together.

The low rumble of approaching vehicles pierced the air, escalating into a vibrating whine as a caravan of motorcycles edged up behind them. Blake motioned for the bikers to go around. They passed; snaking around the car in tight formation then settled inches from the bumper, like a swarm of angry bees.

Blake stopped singing, his nerves on edge.

The biker in the lead punched his fist into the air, triumphant, as if owning the road.

The sun seared lower on the horizon, swallowing the road. Blake squinted; the bikers' images were lost in the molten glare. He tapped the brakes; the cycles had slowed. He waited for them to speed off but instead, they crowded in closer, stealing his space. He was hemmed in, the land at the road's edge free falling into the canyon. He clutched the steering wheel, his grip rigid, as he rounded a tight curve, the roaring cycles squeezing closer. *I wish these guys would give us a little room.* He glanced at Alicia and smiled to put her at ease, but it was a lie.

The road continued along the rim, disappearing in a twilight blaze of sky and rock, offering no refuge. A low uneven rumble joined the tight buzz of the motorcycles engines. The sound intensified, boring deeper into Blake's consciousness, like a homicidal drill bit. The faltering cadence grew closer. A black semi-truck materialized in the rear view mirror, the blat of its air horn split the air like a harsh knife. Blake could feel its urgency in his bones.

The truck gobbled up the roadway then slewed towards them. Blake glanced to the side, jerking the steering-wheel hard-right to avoid being hit. A woman was hunched over the wheel, her mouth pulled in a harsh grimace of determination. The truck swerved again, jolting the driver's side door in a deadly game of tug-o-war. Blake fought to stay on the pavement, his stomach churning as if he'd swallowed ground glass. The convertible's engine

screamed in protest as the road climbed, the speedometer dropping to 50MPH then an alarming 40.

Blake pushed the accelerator, the engine bogged, struggling. He was barely breathing, silently cheering when the truck lost its battle and the vehicles separated. He exhaled as the convertible popped back onto the pavement. Blake pushed the gas to the floor, swerving into the passing lane along the rocky wall. When they got to the top of the rise, the motorcycles were clustered ahead on a long, straight away. Blake gripped the wheel tighter -- *drive mother-fucker, drive* -- He could hear Alicia murmuring the familiar cadence of the Lord's Prayer; her hands were folded solemnly over the bouquet she'd been waving with excitement only a few hours earlier. The diesel engine cycled higher, it was picking up speed. Fighting the urge to surrender, Blake pushed the accelerator, and the car shot forwards - *close your Goddamn eyes*.

The Semi roared, slamming into them. Blake pushed back from the dash, screaming for Alicia to hold on, and jammed the gas to the floor.

With the speedometer hovering over 90, they shot kamikaze-like down the road, scattering the bikers in a burst of screeching metal.

Blake pounded the dashboard, bellowing relief, but the feeling faded -- There was an impossibly tight curve ahead, and the car was moving too fast. He slammed on the brakes; the car shot across the roadway, skidding pell-mell towards the canyon's edge.

Blake could hear Alicia's screams as they headed towards the ledge. He jerked the wheel to the left, skirting the canyon's rim. The front tires slid over, pulling the vehicle into a graceless dive. The wail of the Semi's air horn ushered them to the bottom and was lost in the harsh squeal of metal and glass.

Blake took a shuddering breath, gasoline fumes stealing his oxygen.

The fuel ignited and flames sprouted like weeds. The fire singed Blake's hair, baking his skin.

Alicia wailed.

The flames nibbled at the hem of her gown, lingering, then shot upwards, devouring her.

The bouquet tumbled onto the canyon's floor.

The car jolted once more, and with a snap, Blake was thrown clear. The roar of flames was overlaid with the sound of his screams. He struck the hardpan then knew no more.

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The Chase

Months later -- Blake turned on his scanner and listened carefully to what the local patrols were saying about SCUM's activities. He stared past the nest of monitoring equipment, his eyes resting on a photograph of Alicia.

God, I miss her smile.

They'd played hard the day the photo was taken, running along the beach, spiking the volleyball. Later, they had walked along the water's edge, sipping Piña Coladas until the moon was high above the ocean and they'd been too exhausted to go on.

Those days had been vibrant.

Since Alicia died, all of his days had faded to black and white. Revenge had become his only path back to living. His eyes slipped from Alicia to the scanner on the cluttered tabletop. Crumpled napkins and empty beer cans littered the area; the trail continued on the worn carpet below. A call sent the red lights on the scanner into a frenzy -- Blake tried to focus, but his senses were dulled and blurry; he was diffuse, like the shadows that now lived in these rooms with him.

* * *

The streetlights cast harsh globes of light along the downtown corridors, chasing the shadows into the nooks and crannies beneath parked cars and between buildings. Blake circled the block several times, and then pulled discretely into an alleyway sans lights. The Mustang coughed to a halt and Blake settled into his seat. He had a perfect view of "The Red Door", a seedy bar frequented by bikers, drug dealers, and SCUM members.

Blake wasn't concerned with the drug dealers; he had bigger fish to fry.

Hal, his friend over at the Metro Force, had told him about this joint, said he might catch a glimpse of SCUM's comings and goings. Word on the street was that they were using *The Red Door* as a meeting place.

Blake watched the goings-on of the night trade; a drug dealer lingered on a nearby corner -- baggy jeans strapped below a pair of checkered boxer shorts and an official Ram's jersey his fashion statement. A pair of hookers trolled back and forth along the street; their skirts left little to the imagination.

A man and woman erupted from the bar, staggering out onto the sidewalk. The woman gestured wildly. "Fuck you Reggie." Her angry words cut through the night like razor blades.

The rest of what she said was lost in the rise and fall of loud music as the door to the bar fanned open and several more patrons stumbled out. One of them was a striking blond woman who looked out of place.

Blake pulled up in his seat, his heart thundering.

It was the woman he believed to be the movement's leader, Xena.

There was no way he could forget her; the image of her behind the wheel of the Semi was seared in his mind. The edges of his memory were sharp, painful, bringing him back to the day his wife died; the woman standing across the street responsible for it all. Blake watched her closely. A sick feeling snaked into his guts, and it was hard to breathe. He gasped for air, regaining his composure, feeling colder, feeling overwhelmed.

Another group of cars and motorbikes pulled up in front of the bar. Doors slammed as several men and women spilled out, their swaggering walks daring anyone tough enough to approach.

One of the bikers, a tall Nordic looking man, thrust his arms into the air, gesturing toward the blond. The blue star upon his jacket flashed in the headlights.

Blake studied the blond as she approached the man and hopped on the bike, snuggling up behind him.

The Nord gunned the engine, and they sped down the street.

Blake hit the accelerator, tires squealing as he roared after them. Xena and the Nord zigzagged along the roadway in a game of 'cat & mouse'. Whenever Blake grew closer, the pair on the motorcycle shot off into the shadows.

The ebb and flow of the motorbike's engine echoed along the street, taunting Blake in a macabre dance.

They flew along the roadway, faster and faster, the city lights blurring by in a streak of red and gold, and still, the motorcycle pulled away.

Blake streaked through an intersection, blazing impossibly close to a taxicab; the driver's screeching tires and honking horn an angry testament to his passage.

The impossibly small taillights of the motorcycle blinked then banked to the left as the pair sailed down an alleyway. Blake punched the gas pedal; the speedometer hovered just over 85, until he was almost on top of the alley. He hit the brakes and the car fishtailed to the right; the screaming of the Mustang's tires and the smell of burning rubber trailing after him.

He could hear the rumble of the motorcycle up ahead, but his going became slower; the narrow corridor was spilling over with garbage and rusting debris.

The bricked buildings on either side squeezed him in. An old truck in the middle of his path suddenly blighted the narrow beams of his headlights. He stomped on the brakes, skidding to a stop, a hair's breadth from its rusty bumper.

Blake took a shuddering breath and pulled his hands from the wheel - They were white knuckled - He'd been clutching the wheel in a death grip. He flexed his fingers and willed his heart to quiet its runaway beating.

A shriek tore from his throat; it echoed along the alleyway and up into the darkness.

Metropolitan Manner

The Foreign Council was located in the oldest part of the city and boasted a grand entryway befitting of the various dignitaries that graced its halls. The domed ceiling was a work of art; its thousands of mosaic tiles glittered nearly thirty-feet overhead. A remnant of high society, the establishment was surrounded by the neighborhoods of the lower classes, a relic in this dying age of class-defined citizens.

Few in power wanted to acknowledge that the foundations of order had crumbled. The city was pulsing with unrest, and the gap between the classes was closing. A local Senator saw it coming, rallying Nations and battling for the funds and legislation that would stem the tide of corruption and unrest, hoping against hope that it wasn't too little, too late -- The Senator and two Japanese Ambassadors, Yokoh and Hirachi, were in the Hamilton Room of the Council, feverishly discussing the crisis on the streets brought on by SCUM's ambitions to monopolize the entire metropolitan area. "It is imperative that we see resolve for our citizens safety," Senator Meyer emphasized. He shifted, his bulky waist straining against the chair. "There doesn't seem to be any change, even with our attempts to negotiate. The rogue nations who channel funds to the *Secret Criminal Underground Movement (SCUM)* won't reciprocate."

An overhead fan turned the air as the ambassadors listened. "Look, the bottom line is that you've got subversive groups in your homeland who are supporting SCUM, and I'm not sure they can be reasoned with. How can we truly have effective intelligence collaborations under these circumstances?"

Ambassador Hirachi looked at Meyer with disgust. "And within your own region, what have you done to make things better? You should note that when we proposed joint efforts, insisting on stronger financial sanctions, your leaders balked."

Ambassador Yokoh lowered his head in a slight bow. "Respectfully, how can you trust your own intelligence to be diligent? I value our relationship Mr. Meyer, but all that my friend is saying is true."

Senator Meyer sighed, pulling a roll of antacids from his pocket. "I know; we both have issues within our intelligence communities, but I still think it's worth pursuing."

Ambassador Hirachi relaxed, bowing his head to Senator Meyer. "I apologize for my outrage. I sincerely hope we can help each other find resolve for our citizens."

The following morning, Blake was awakened by the wet kisses of Jax, his German shepherd. He tried pushing her aside, but she wouldn't budge. He grunted, pulling himself up from the warm bed covers. "Come on Jax, outside."

He shuffled into the tiny kitchen with the dog in the lead. She squeezed between several boxes on the way to the sliding doors and tapped the glass with her paw, signaling him to let her out. With Jax taken care of, he made a pot of strong coffee then settled at the table to read the newspaper.

SCUM's activity down in the city was getting worse according to one article. Blake wasn't the least bit surprised. He called his friend Hal and asked if he'd come over and help him tune up the Mustang. He hadn't stood a chance in catching Xena and that had to change.

*

Hal showed up a little later; he had his tools in one hand and a six-pack of beer in the other. Blake nodded with approval, motioning for him to enter the garage. While Blake was checking the fuel injectors, Hal sat nearby in an old lawn chair, offering tips. Blake smiled at his friend. "What I really want is a turbocharger like you got in that patrol car of yours. Don't ya'know that'd be sweet?" He whistled for emphasis.

Hal reached for the cooler, his bulky waist making it difficult. He popped the tab on his beer. "Yeah, you bet, would be sweet, but you get this baby tuned up and I guarantee she'll run better and faster; don't count her out yet."

Blake finished checking the injectors; the smell of gas was overpowering, so he opened the garage's back door. Jax trotted in,

her tail wagging her rather than the other way around. Hal chuckled, calling her over. Blake watched with mild amusement then grew somber. Jax had been a Christmas present from Alicia.

A shadow passed over Blake's face.

"You okay, buddy?"

"Yeah, sure..." Blake stammered. "Just woolgathering is all."

He started digging into some nearby boxes, turning his back to Hal. "Hear anything new on SCUM?"

Hal leaned down and ruffled Jax's fur. "Well, we got some new leads..."

Blake turned to face his friend, eye's eager.

Hal wasn't supposed to talk about SCUM away from H.Q. -- He took another sip of beer, contemplating; then changed the subject. "Hey Blake, it may not be my place to say, but are you alright? You've seemed far away lately."

Blake's face shaped with resignation. "Yeah, I've been thinking about Alicia more lately, but I'm alright, really. Besides, it makes me feel good to know that you guys are out there taking care of business."

Hal relaxed, and he felt more secure about sharing the latest. "Well, SCUM members keep popping up in places we don't expect, so the only thing that makes sense is that someone on the inside is dancing on their side. It's mostly speculation, but sometimes being paranoid is a good thing, you know?"

"Uh huh..." Blake sighed. "And the headlines keep getting weirder too. By the way, I'm going to my nephew's baseball game on Saturday, save you a seat?"

"Sure."

They finished working the kinks out of the Mustang's engine then called it a day, settling back on the worn couch to relax.

"Are you still dating that girl Cindy?" Blake asked.

Hal rose and laughed as they headed for the door. He clapped Blake on the shoulder as he made his way out. "Have to meet someone at 7."

"Hot date with somebody named Cindy?"

"Something like that, see you Saturday."

"King's Diner"

A blue Lincoln Town Car surrounded by a caravan of bikers pulled into the parking lot of *King's Diner*. The gunmetal glint of the Lincoln's grill was as charming as it was sinister.

"Hey mommy, who are those big guys?" a little girl asked, tugging at her mother's skirt.

Her mother grabbed her hand, pulling her quickly into the car. "Don't stare at them honey. It's time to go."

The group of bikers trailed into the diner; one of them had his hair pulled into a ponytail. He plopped several coins into the jukebox then headed to a table in the back.

The sound of Johnny Cash's voice soon overlaid their conversations.

As the afternoon faded into evening, the sun painted the sky in desert purple and orange; a motorcycle's high beams cut across the parking lot. The Nord hurried into the diner. He cut through a tangle of people at the bar and headed straight for the bikers.

"Look what the cat dragged in," the man with the ponytail announced.

The Nord's expression soured and the ponytailed man looked worried. The Nord pierced forward with his eyes then pointed at the ponytailed man. "Donnie, I am happy that you find my 'dragged in by a cat' look to be sexy."

The bikers erupted in laughter and tensions momentarily eased. He stole a seat from a nearby table and pulled up next to Donnie. "We might have a problem. There's a man in a red Mustang that's been following us. I want you and the boys to keep your eyes open."

Donnie leaned his tattooed arms on the table, peering intently at Hans. "Do we know him?"

Hans smoothed the hair from his eyes, catching a glimpse of Donnie's serpent tattoo. "Sort of, but that's not important. If he gets in the way, kill him."

Donnie nodded with complete understanding. He looked to Hans, anxious to hear if he could be of further service. Hans pointed to his serpent tattoo as he rose from his seat. "Nice art, Donnie."

Another biker near the bar spun circles in his chair as Hans exited the diner.

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admin@theroadavenger.com
<http://www.theroadavenger.com>

The excerpt you've just experienced is from, "**The Road Avenger**" – Written by Mary Margaret Park (and co-produced by Sekret Scilensce), the production is a novelization of the 1985 'Data East' laserdisc classic, *Road Blaster*. Follow the links above to learn more (or to make direct contact with the authors).

Thanks for reading!

mary@mmp-publishing.com | <http://www.marymargaretpark.com>