

The Flayed Lord

Synopsis / Pitch



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In Brief

TITLE: "The Flayed Lord"

GENRE: Supernatural Horror

LOGLINE: Devastated by a traumatic marriage that nearly killed him, Simeon Blackwood leaves his life behind to pursue his youthful dream of being a writer. He withdraws from the world to a cheap apartment house where he is the only resident. Except for whoever is living--or not living --upstairs in Number 7...

RATING: PG-13 (projected). For graphic violence and adult language.

EST. LENGTH: 90 minutes

EST. SHOOTING SCHEDULE: 21 days (Principal Photography)

EST. BUDGET: 50k - 1m

WRITER/DIRECTOR: Jeff Thelen

PRODUCERS: Jeff Thelen & Joshua Berwald & Rasa Perkunas

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Quixotic Arts www.QuixoticArts.com

The Story In A Nutshell

Simeon Blackwood is a young man at the end of his rope.

Simeon always considered himself a writer, but his terrible marriage and grinding job have conspired against him and crushed his dreams.

When his marriage finally collapses--when his lunatic wife comes at him one night with a knife--**Simeon** resolves to change his life. He resolves to "shed his skin" and begin anew.

He quits his job and without a word slips quietly away from friends, family, everything. He withdraws from the world, just as the world is withdrawing behind locked doors and plague masks...

Simeon moves into a very cheap apartment complex downtown. He is surprised to learn no one else lives there. For good reason.

The noises. The bumps in the night. The animal snuffling at the threshold.

The acrid smoke that seems to hang in the air.

The cancerous red fungus in the shower that keeps growing.

The snake-skin found under his bed, looped in the shape of a **Ouroboros**.

The relentless dreams and nightmares--hallucinations even--of a tattooed man entering his room, crawling on his chest, and threatening to flay the skin from his flesh.

Simeon attributes these phantasms to the drugs the doctor has prescribed.

But also to his complete isolation from the world.

Chloe, an old girlfriend, discovers where **Simeon** has withdrawn, and her friendly visits alleviate his isolation.

But **Simeon** is so committed to his "writing," so fixed in his withdrawal to his "desert wilderness," and so gun-shy from his tragic marriage that he is brusque and cold to her.

And then there is his new neighbor upstairs in Number 7...

Simeon spies this recluse coming home late one night, wrapped in bandages like **The Invisible Man**...

Vlad, the handy-man, assures **Simeon** that he is the only one in the building. Certainly no one lives in Number 7, which had not been cleaned up from when the previous occupant, **The Tattoo Man**, burned himself alive...

VLAD

...Poor bastard was a real freak. He looked like the devil. I think he mighta been the devil.

Every inch of his skin was ink. The sun did something to all that ink. Made him blow up like a balloon.

I don't know. He never came out of that room, so I never saw him, except that one time he chopped off his finger...

Then there is **The Black Book** that mysteriously shows up on his bookshelf, and which **Simeon** cannot remember having seen before. The Black Book has a black-dyed cover with an illustration of a Ouroboros.

The book has an elaborate lock which cannot be picked, so **Simeon** takes it to two antiquarian booksellers. The men speculate it is an ancient book of diabolical magic, confirmed by the fact that its cover and parchment are of human skin--and that the Ouroboros on its cover is in fact

a tattoo. Simeon leaves the book with the men, but not long after he finds the book again on his bookshelf, and the two men murdered in their shop...

What connection is there between The Black Book and **The Invisible Man** upstairs in Number 7?

The hallucinations of **The Tattoo Man** wielding his razor?

The dream of the snake that bites Simeon's neck as he sleeps...and the strange tattoo that grows from its bite?

The still smoldering corpse he finds upstairs in Number 7...

...And on its wall, the diabolical mask of **The Flayed Lord**...

So **Simeon** swirls into the maelstrom of madness, engendered by the drugs and his isolation and the realization that he has no writing talent whatsoever...

And when he at last reaches out to **Chloe** as a safe haven, a way back to sanity and society and a normal life...

...it may be too late.

The tattoo on his neck has grown, like a cancer, and taken the shape of the Ouraboros...



Notes

The Flayed Lord was written for very low budget, with an emphasis on few locations and few characters.

The majority of the film takes place in Simeon's apartment, engendering in the audience, hopefully, Simeon's own feelings of isolation, claustrophobia, and mounting madness.

He leaves the apartment house occasionally, to get exercise or have a coffee--but outdoors he finds society itself has withdrawn and gone into its own kind of isolation behind masks.

Characters are few. Simeon is often alone on the screen, commenting on his new circumstances and the strange happenings in the apartment house.

Chloe enters to lift his gloom, but her friendliness is not answered by Simeon's coolness, and their "romance" is frustrated and threatens to die on the vine.

Vlad, the handy-man, appears now and then to fill Simeon in on the backstory of the Tattoo Man.

Then there are the appearances of the neighbor, the Tattoo Man who haunts Simeon--and his alter ego as The Invisible Man "living" in Number 7.

Or is he Simeon's alter ego?

"The Flayed Lord" falls into the genre of art-house horror --supernatural thrills with psychological depth and commentary.

The story has its origins in "The Listener" (1907) by Algernon Blackwood, about a writer who moves into an empty apartment house and is haunted by the ghost of a neighbor who had died of leprosy.

The script was influenced by Bresson's quiet masterpieces, especially "Pickpocket" (1959). Simeon has a lot in common with Bresson's lonely wayward hero, including voice-over. And Chloe could be the twin of Bresson's Jeanne, in her warm humanity and quiet despair.

Is it possible to combine Bresson's aesthetic with horror? I think so. Coppola's psychological thriller "The Conversation" (1974) is clearly influenced by Bresson's work, and Scorsese and Schrader admitted to Bresson's influence in "Taxi Driver" (1976).

Simeon's story of isolation and growing madness--and of writer's block--shares some similarities with Kubrick's "The Shining" (1980), although on a much smaller scale (and budget).

The driving horror is the slow burn of a malevolent haunting--a ghost who wants something from the hero--namely, *his skin*. The horror is delivered in bits and pieces as a mystery, punctuated by violence and terror.

Just as importantly, however, "The Flayed Lord" is the story of a defeated young man trying to restart his life--to "shed his skin"--and get back on course, to recover his youthful dream of being a writer.

But his withdrawal from the world for the sake of his work is misguided, and like his heroes Van Gogh and Nietzsche, Simeon descends into madness...