

THE DARKNESS

“GUARDIAN”

Written by:

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Top Cow Talent Hunt 2020

Page 1 (Five Panels)

Panel One

Nighttime. Inside a warehouse, BENNY RUSSO is being tied to a chair by JED while TURK points a handgun at his face. Jed and Turk are both members of the gang THE FALLEN.

1. CAPTION: Brooklyn, New York
2. TURK: Hurry up Jed!
3. JED: Oh shut it Turk! You want him tied up or not?

Panel Two

Close up on BENNY’s face. He’s sweating, red-faced, and pissed off.

4. BENNY: You punks are dead! Once Jackie finds ou—

Panel Three

Same shot. JED puts a piece of duct tape over BENNY’s mouth.

Panel Four

High-angle view from behind JED and TURK. TOMMY, a kid, is lying down flat on a stack of crates out of sight, watching the scene before him unfold.

5. JED: You ready?
6. TURK: Did you put the money in his pocket?
7. JED: Yep.
8. TURK: Then let’s kill this bastard and get out of here.

Panel Five

Medium shot facing TURK, cocking the hammer of the handgun while grinning.

9. TURK: See you in Hell, Benny the rat!

Page 4 (Five Panels)

Panel One

In the same warehouse, we see JACKIE ESTACADO, in a well-tailored suit, through the bullet hole in BENNY’s head. He is staring at Benny’s corpse.

1. CAPTION: Later the next day...
2. JACKIE (V.O.): Someone killed my informant.

Panel Two

Side view of JACKIE standing in front of BENNY’s corpse, still tied to the chair.

3. JACKIE (V.O.): Benny Russo kept tabs on all the families, knew their business, their hangouts, everything. Someone killed him in my warehouse to send a message. But who?
4. DARKNESS (V.O.): Let us out Jackie.
5. JACKIE: Not now.
6. DARKNESS (V.O.): We can help.
7. LEO (OFF): Whoa!

Panel Three

LEO stands a few feet behind JACKIE.

8. LEO: Is that...Benny?
9. JACKIE (V.O.): Leo Muntz. One of the few guys I can trust, and a handyman of sorts.

Panel Four

JACKIE reaches his hand into BENNY’s sport coat.

10. JACKIE: It is.

Panel Five

Low angle, up at JACKIE. He is holding a stack of money.

11. JACKIE (V.O.): Renminbi. Triad money. Was Benny in bed with the Chinese?
12. DARKNESS (V.O.): Something is here Jackie.

Page 6 (Four Panels)

Panel One

Widescreen panel. JACKIE shuts the door to his red sports car, parked in front of a building.

1. CAPTION: Oakwood Christian Academy

Panel Two

Widescreen panel. Looking down at JACKIE, he is standing at the counter of the front office. RECEPTIONIST is seated behind the counter pecking away at a keyboard.

2. SFX: CLICK CLACK CLICK!
3. RECEPTIONIST: Can I help you sir?
4. JACKIE: Yes, I'm looking for Tommy Martin?
5. RECEPTIONIST: What's he done this time?

Panel Three

Widescreen panel. JACKIE holds up Tommy's notebook. RECEPTIONIST holds out her hand to accept the notebook from him.

6. JACKIE: Nothing. He and his family were visiting me and left this at my place.
7. RECEPTIONIST: I'll see to it that he gets.
8. JACKIE: Actually, I was hoping I could take it to him. You know, say hi?

Panel Four

Widescreen panel. RECEPTIONIST, a bit annoyed, hands a clipboard and pen to JACKIE.

9. RECEPTIONIST: Okay.
(second)
Sign your name on this sheet. Go down the hall and out the double doors at the end. The kids are having recess on the playground.
(third)
I'll let his teacher know you're coming.

Page 7 (Five Panels)

Panel One

JACKIE is on the school playground where KIDS are playing. TEACHER approaches him.

1. TEACHER: Mr. Estacado?
2. JACKIE: Yes.
3. TEACHER: He’s over there on the swing set.

Panel Two

JACKIE turns his head to see TOMMY sitting alone on a swing at the edge of the playground.

Panel Three

JACKIE stands in front of an empty swing next to TOMMY, who is staring at the ground. He has a bruise on his left cheek.

4. JACKIE: Tommy Martin?
5. TOMMY: Who wants to know?
6. JACKIE: The guy who found your notebook.

Panel Four

TOMMY has a surprised look on his face as JACKIE hands him the notebook.

7. TOMMY: My notebook?
8. JACKIE: Found it in my warehouse. Where my friend was murdered. Know anything about that?

Panel Five

TOMMY, holding the notebook, looks away from JACKIE and stares at the ground.

9. TOMMY: I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Page 7 (Four Panels)

Panel One

Front view. JACKIE is seated on the swing next to TOMMY.

1. JACKIE: Now’s not the time to play games. What were you doing there?
2. TOMMY: I was looking for someone...Paulie Franchetti. He’s...my grandfather.

Panel Two

Close up on JACKIE, who is slightly confused.

3. JACKIE: Your grandfather? What in the hell makes you think that?

Panel Three

TOMMY hands JACKIE a wrinkled photograph of PAULIE FRANCHETTI from his pocket.

4. TOMMY: When my foster parents adopted me, this was in a box of my things. I once saw his picture in the paper and figured we were related.
5. JACKIE: So you were an orphan?
6. TOMMY: Yes.

Panel Four

Back to close up on JACKIE. He takes a hard look at the photograph.

7. JACKIE: I’m sorry to be the one to tell you this but...Paulie is dead.
(second)
And I’m pretty sure he didn’t have any grandkids.

Page 8 (Three Panels)

Panel One

Wide panel. Looking down at JACKIE and TOMMY as they continue their conversation on the swing set.

1. TOMMY: Oh...
2. JACKIE: How old are you Tommy?
3. TOMMY: Ten.
4. JACKIE: I get it. You're stuck here, getting beat up and bullied all the time, and you think finding your real family will be your one ticket out of this place.
5. TOMMY: Yeah...

Panel Two

Wide panel. Closer on JACKIE and TOMMY sitting on the swing set.

6. JACKIE: You know, I was an orphan too.
7. TOMMY: You were?
8. JACKIE: I lived in an orphanage when I was a kid. Everyday someone wanted to beat the crap out of me or hurt my friend Jenny. So I had to learn to fight back. Stand up for myself and keep her from harm.

Panel Three

Wide panel. Switch perspective to looking at JACKIE and TOMMY on the swing set from behind.

9. TOMMY: You fought back and protected her?
10. JACKIE: I did. If you let people push you around, they'll never stop.
(second)
Next time someone gets in your face, don't back down. If they knock you down, get back up.

11. TOMMY:

I will.

Page 9 (Five Panels)

Panel One

Medium shot straight on JACKIE and TOMMY.

1. JACKIE: I need your help Tommy. I need to know what happened.
2. TOMMY: I saw two guys. One tied your friend up and the other shot him.
3. JACKIE: Were they Asian?
4. TOMMY: No.
5. JACKIE: Didn't think so.
6. TOMMY: They were wearing these jackets with black angel wings on them.
7. DARKNESS (V.O.): The Fallen. We've heard of these nutjobs before.

Panel Two

Closer on JACKIE and TOMMY.

8. JACKIE: Anything else?
9. TOMMY: They tried to catch me, but I got away.

Panel Three

TOMMY turns his head away from JACKIE.

10. DARKNESS (V.O.): He's scared Jackie.
11. JACKIE: What is it Tommy?
12. TOMMY: They grabbed my jacket.
(second)
My school jacket.
13. JACKIE: Then they know where to find you.

Panel Four

JACKIE, now standing, hands TOMMY a flip-phone.

14. JACKIE: Take this. There’s one number saved in it. You find yourself in trouble, you call that number.

15. TOMMY: What are you gonna do?

Panel Five

JACKIE begins to walk away from TOMMY.

16. JACKIE: I’m going to get these guys.

Page 10 (Five Panels)

Panel One

Exterior of an abandoned church, gathering place of THE FALLEN.

1. MERCER (OFF): A kid! You killed Benny Russo in front of a #\$\$! kid!?

Panel Two

Inside the church, MERCER, leader of The Fallen, slams his fist on the desk. TURK and JED both sit in front of him.

2. MERCER: This was supposed to be a setup! We were gonna make Estacado think the Triads had killed Benny Russo, so that he would wipe them out!
3. JED: Mercer, we're sorry, we didn't even see the kid before—

Panel Three

MERCER, leaning forward, slams JED's head on the desk.

4. SFX: THUNK!
5. MERCER: Shut up!
(second)
I swear, if that little bitch squeals—

Panel Four

MERCER holds JED's head down on the desk. He glares at TURK, who is holding his hands up in defense.

6. TURK: We know where to find him. We can still fix this.

Panel Five

Close up on Mercer, grinning manically.

7. MERCER: You better! Find the kid, bring him to me. We'll send Jackie a message and tell him we have information on his dead friend and want to arrange a meeting. When he shows up, we kill'em both.

Page 14 (Five Panels)

Panel One

JACKIE is behind the wheel of his sports car on the freeway. His phone vibrates on the passenger seat.

1. SFX: BZZZZ! BZZZZ!

Panel Two

JACKIE picks up the phone and answers the call.

2. JACKIE: Hello?
3. TOMMY (PHONE): Jackie! Help!
4. JACKIE: Tommy! What’s going on?
5. MERCER (PHONE): Jackie, Jackie Jackie...we have your little friend.
6. JACKIE: If you hurt him, I swear I’ll—
7. MERCER (PHONE): If you want to see the kid again, alive, do as I say. Meet us tomorrow night at Prospect Park Bandshell, 9PM. You don’t want to be late for this.
8. SFX: CLICK!

Panel Three

Close up on JACKIE’s hand holding his phone. The name LEO MUNTZ is visible in the display. He presses a button to make a call.

Panel Four

JACKIE holds the phone to his ear while driving.

9. JACKIE: Leo!
10. LEO (PHONE): Jackie? What’s going on?

Panel Five

Extreme close up on JACKIE's mouth as he talks on the phone.

11. JACKIE: It's time for payback.

Page 15 (Five Panels)

Panel One

Nighttime. From behind JACKIE, we see him approach the Prospect Park Bandshell. Ahead of him are members of THE FALLEN, forming a semicircle around MERCER, who is holding TOMMY hostage in front of the stage. A string of hanging lights forms a perimeter around the concert area.

1. MERCER: Ah, Jackie Estacado! So nice of you to show up.
2. JACKIE: Let the kid go. This is between us.

Panel Two

Over MERCER’s shoulder. JACKIE comes to a stop inside the light perimeter, pointing at him.

3. MERCER: Sorry Jackie, it won’t be that easy.
4. JACKIE: You tried to ignite a war between me and the Triads, hoping they’d take me out. You failed.

Panel Three

High-angle view of the scene. The hanging lights are glowing brighter. MERCER keeps a firm grip on TOMMY.

5. MERCER: You’re not wrong. But thanks to the kid, we were able to draw you out into the open. Now we’ll just kill you ourselves.
6. DARKNESS (V.O.): Something is wrong.

Panel Four

The hanging lights are glowing even brighter now. JACKIE drops to his knees in pain and his head hangs low. MERCER approaches him.

7. JACKIE: GAAAHHHHHH!

8. MERCER: Do you feel it Jackie? We know all about the light. How it weakens you, makes you vulnerable. We’re gonna kill the kid while you watch and then...we will destroy you.
9. JACKIE: If you know so much about me...

Panel Five

Closer on JACKIE, still on his knees. He raises his head.

10. JACKIE. ...you should know not to pick a fight at night.
(second)
Leo! Now!

Page 16 (Nine Panel Grid)

Panel One

Close up on a breaker box. LEO’s hand flips the lever to the OFF POSITION.

Panel Two

THE FALLEN, barely visible in the dark, cry out in panic.

1. FLOATING BALLON: What’s going on?
2. FLOATING BALLON: I can’t see!

Panel Three

Close up on JACKIE’s face in the moonlight, flashing an evil grin as his face begins to change.

3. DARKNESS: Time to play.

Panel Four

JACKIE rises to his feet as his armor takes form on his body.

Panel Five

JACKIE stands upright, arms open, fully encased in his armor.

4. DARKNESS: In the dark, you die!

Panel Six

Serpentine-headed tentacles spring forth from JACKIE’s armor in every direction.

5. DARKNESS: HSSSSS!

Panel Seven

The serpentine heads eviscerate members of THE FALLEN.

6. THE FALLEN: Oh sh—!

7. SFX: CHOMP!
8. SFX: SQUISH!

Panel Eight

Jackie’s serpentine-headed tentacles continue to rip apart more members of THE FALLEN.

9. THE FALLEN: Please, please no!
10. SFX: SNAP!
11. SFX: SQUELCH!

Panel Nine

MERCER cries out in anger as THE FALLEN around him are slaughtered. TOMMY drops to the ground while covering his head.

12. MERCER: Noooooooooooooo!

Page 17 (Four Panels)

Panel One

JACKIE grabs MERCER by the throat, lifting him off the ground.

1. MERCER: T-this ain't over J-Jackie. One day someone will f-finish what I started. You c-c-an't control this city forever.

2. JACKIE: It's over, for you.

Panel Two

Closer on JACKIE and MERCER's face and neck. Jackie stabs Mercer in the larynx with a blade extending from his other hand. Choking, blood drips from his mouth, his eyes wide.

3. MERCER: URRRRK!

Panel Three

JACKIE tosses MERCER's body aside. TOMMY is sitting up, unharmed.

Panel Four

Closer on TOMMY. He is visibly shaken but glad to be alive.

4. TOMMY: Jackie?!
 (second)
 Wha-what was that? What are you?

Page 19 (Three Panels)

Panel One

Playground of Oakwood Christian Academy. JACKIE stands with his hands in the pockets of his pants.

1. CAPTION: One week later...
2. TOMMY (OFF): Jackie!

Panel Two

TOMMY wraps his arms around JACKIE’s waist, hugging him enthusiastically.

3. TOMMY: What are you doing here?
4. JACKIE: I came to say goodbye.

Panel Three

TOMMY, surprised, pulls back from JACKIE.

5. TOMMY: But why?

Page 20 (Five Panels)

Panel One

JACKIE kneels to speak with TOMMY eye-to-eye.

1. JACKIE: You don't need me to keep you safe anymore.
2. TOMMY: Will I ever see you again?
3. JACKIE: Maybe, maybe not. But you're a tough kid Tommy.
Remember what I told you, and you'll be just fine.

Panel Two

JACKIE begins to leave. TOMMY speaks, stopping him.

4. TOMMY: Jackie?
5. JACKIE: Yeah?
6. TOMMY: I think I know what you are.

Panel Three

JACKIE turns to face Tommy.

7. JACKIE: You do?
8. TOMMY: You saved me, just like you protected your friend Jenny
and kept her safe when you two were kids. You're like...a
guardian.

Panel Four

Close up on JACKIE, smiling.

9. JACKIE: I guess you're right Tommy.

Panel Five

Blacked-out panel. Silhouette of a Darkling's evil grin.

10. JACKIE (CAPTION): A guardian, full of darkness.