

Short Film of the Week: Dark Noir

written by edward j rathke | March 29, 2014



I'm a cursed man.

I see things other people can't.

Dark Noir by [Rafael Grampá](#) combines some of my favorite elements into an amazing surreal noir full of magic, deception, and creation all in just four minutes.

[The story behind the making of the film](#) is also worth a look. Funded and promoted by Absolut, *Dark Noir* is a collaboration between Grampá and millions of Facebook fans from around the world:

The ambitious challenge invited people around the world to unleash their imaginations and transform their ideas into an animated film. During a live interactive three-week period, on Facebook/Absolut, Grampá encouraged consumers to take part and influence the action and storyline as he wrote it. To help him transform his 2D characters and script into 3D, Grampá teamed up with Red Knuckles animation studio.

Grampá, Rick Thiele and Mario Ucci and their team of animators then transformed the crowd-sourced suggestions into an animated short film which premiered at MADE Berlin March 2014.

While I could perhaps talk here about corporatism, I'll leave that for another day and focus on the film itself.

The 3D animation is stunning and perfect for the noirish genre they're working with, and I love how the surreal and magical elements of the story come through in animation distinct from the 3D surroundings. It creates a separation that highlights the otherworldly elements at play in the story.

But let's get back to the story itself. *Dark Noir*, in true noirish fashion, begins with a stranger coming to a detective, Vincent Black, with a problem in a bar, because that's where you find grizzled PIs. The man's an artist whose ideas were literally stolen from him by a woman.

Vincent Black isn't like most people. He sees the world beyond the physical one allowing him to tap directly into the world of ideas, of inspiration. It's his curse to see the daemons influencing human behavior, but it's his greatest tool in this case as he searches for the idea thief.

From here we meet unseemly characters, both human and daemonic, leading Black

to the woman he's looking for. From there, the surreal and magical erupts into the world, and we see what it means to be cursed in this way, what it means to be assaulted by daemons and the fury of inspiration, and what it means to lose those parts of yourself as the thief decays from beauty to age, and the trapped daemons rage back into the world.

Like all great noir, this is more than a story about crimes and passions: it's a journey of selfdiscovery. In this case, that finding of self is quite literal. Vincent Black discovers who he is and where his curse comes from, why it falls on him and seemingly him alone in this dark and noirish world.

The film ends on a surprisingly sweet note. The genre elements are still in place, that seething alcohol fuelled darkness and rage, but we see Black, orphaned and cursed and alone, connect with a man who may as well be his father, as he whispers the man's ideas and inspirations and daemons back into his head.

While there's nothing wrong with seeing this purely as a pretty cool surreal noir, I think there's a bit more going on here, or at least it wrestles with bigger ideas while remaining true to its genre.

Noir, in my opinion, is all about human relationships in sharp contrast, made sharper because of the antisocial behavior of the protagonists. The relationships between father and son, between lovers, between women and men being the most obvious and ubiquitous concerns. Though only briefly, *Dark Noir* touches on the conflicted relationship between father and son. Though it's unclear whether or not Vincent is actually the artist's son, Vincent carries the weight of the artist's visions and daemons within himself.

The sins of the father shall be visited upon the son a thousand times.

To you, your father should be as a god;
One that compos'd your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it.

In this way, Vincent has been shaped by the daemons of his father, the abandonment of his mother, and the cruelty of the world so prevalent in noir. We see this reflected in the animation, the twisted daemons, the darkness of every single scene: this is a world without lightness, nearly out of human control.

But by returning to the artist and giving his daemons back, Black ties a circle broken before his birth, healing an old and fractured man, and possibly healing himself in the process, relieving himself of the curse's weight and pain.

And then there's the interesting thoughts about storytelling and art, that the artist is cursed, in a manner of speaking. Cursed by the visions always swirling through the world that only we can see, and the only way to alleviate this burden, to deal with the daemons haunting us, is through creation.

I often feel this way, in fact. Though I will always deny the existence of ghosts, I feel them everywhere. I used to believe that the places I lived were haunted and that they were feeding on me, but I came to realise and understand that it wasn't a place—it was me. I'm haunted by a world of my own creation, filling with visions that swarm and berate me, and so I steal as many hours as I can to dump them back into the world one fingertip at a time. It makes me feel human. It might be the only thing that does, and it's why I feel the old man's loss so acutely.

Synaesthetes often feel bad for the rest of us because our senses are missing that beautiful synaesthetic element of the world, and they can't imagine having that part of their life removed. It's something I think about a lot, and I think it applies to people who play at artistry, like me. Though, at the same time, I often feel the way Vincent Black does—that it's a curse. And so art has become this insanely beautiful part of my life and I can't imagine not creating stories out of words, but I also feel eaten by it. Every day I go without writing, without creation, causes the daemons to swarm, to hound me, to berate me.

Writing and creation isn't really a choice anymore, and the ideas and visions are so piled upon me that I no longer know where to start, which makes every journey into the words a unique and constantly evolving adventure creating a map of continual discovery, and all roads lead to me, to different dreams and visions and ghosts I drag around with me.

So to lose them, to lose the ghosts who accompany me, the visions that consume me, the ideas that create me—I can't imagine an absence more devastating.