

BERSERK

"Ch. 1: The Black Swordsman"
7/21/20 Draft

Written by

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Based on the Berserk series by Kentaro Miura

BLACK SCREEN

Over a black screen, we hear a voice. Something about it is both calming and terrifying. Inspiring to allies and demoralizing to foes. Calm. Calculating. Ruthless. A voice we'll come to know all too well. The voice of GRIFFITH.

GRIFFITH (V.O.)
In this world, is the destiny of
mankind controlled by some
transcendental entity or law?

FADE IN:

EXT. EDGE OF BURNED DOWN VILLAGE - DAWN

From a blurry POV, we see leaves on an enormous tree. Several forms appear to dangle from its mighty branches, but we can't quite tell what they are. Not yet.

Slowly the tree comes into focus.

And we see bodies, hanging from nooses tied to the trees ancient branches.

One in particular catches the focus of our shot. A woman hanging just above camera. Over this, the speech continues:

GRIFFITH (V.O.)
Is it like the hand of God,
hovering above?

Two infant hands reach out from our POV, toward the hanging woman. The infant's mother. We hear a gurgle, then a full cry.

We hear a man's voice yelling, but the words are muffled and garbled. The child stays focused on his mother.

A new face overtakes the sight. A woman with dark, shoulder-length hair and a warm smile, but with eyes that speak to a life of pain, SHISU (late 20's). She cradles the crying infant into her arms. From the infants's POV we see only her face and the cloudy sky.

Shisu speaks, but the child cannot understand her. The words are garbled, but the voice sounds soothing. Over this:

Suddenly the man we've heard's face comes into frame, trying to stop Shisu. He is a picture of a veteran swordsman, scars and all, with unkempt brown hair. GAMBINO (late 20's).

GAMBINO

Shisu...

The rest of what he says is garbled, but we can tell he doesn't want to take the child.

But Shisu brushes past him, stepping into a wagon and pulling the baby in, swaddling it with a cloth.

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAINING CAMP - DAY

CLASH!

Sparks fly as two swords strike in a clearing in a small camp lined with simple tents, ready to move at a moments notice. Mercenaries go about their daily routines, but a few stop to watch.

On one end of this skirmish is Gambino, now in his late 30s, grey creeping into his hair.

GAMBINO

You call that a strike!? Pathetic little runt!

His opponent strikes become faster, harder. Over the training.

GAMBINO (CONT'D)

Harder! Faster! Fight like you wanna live!

We see his opponent is 10-year-old GUTS (Japanese, spiky black hair styled similarly to Gambino's), the infant from before. Despite his young age, he is wielding a full sized longsword. It takes all of his energy just to swing it.

Over their training, we hear:

GRIFFITH (V.O.)

Man takes up a sword to shield some small pain in his heart from some far off time beyond remembrance.

Guts's nostrils flare and teeth grit as he strikes with increasing fervor. He's angry, and Gambino loves it.

GAMBINO

That sword weighing you down? Get used to it! Your enemies won't care how tired you are! So get mad!

(MORE)

GAMBINO (CONT'D)

Strike first! Strike hard! Show
them--

Guts lets loose a scream as he swings his sword down at Gambino. Gambino is caught off-guard by its force, and the blade hits his wrist, drawing blood.

Guts pulls back, the rage disappearing from his eyes.

GUTS

Gambino! I'm sorry--

Gambino draws a knife from his belt and slices Guts across the bridge of the nose. Guts falls to the ground, clutching his bleeding face.

GAMBINO

Show them no mercy.

A few of the men watching move to try and help Guts, but Gambino raises a hand, stopping them. He lords over the terrified, bleeding boy.

GAMBINO (CONT'D)

You're gonna be fighting people bigger, stronger, and meaner than you. You're gonna get hurt. You're gonna bleed. But if you can't stand up on your own, you will die. So stand up! Fight goddamn it!

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MORNING

The sun rises on a clearing in a forest. A now 24-year old Guts is slumped against his SWORD in a forest clearing, sunlight illuminating his blood-specked features. He's a tall, muscular warrior in segments of dark plate mail under a billowing black cloak. A bandolier of throwing knives is draped across his breastplate. He has a faded scar across his nose, right where Gambino slashed him. He even still sports a similar hairstyle.

Over this, we hear:

GRIFFITH (V.O.)

Man wields the sword so that he may
die smiling in some far-off time
beyond perception.

He's picked up a few more scars through the years. He's missing his right eye, and his left arm has been replaced with an iron prosthetic, starting just below the elbow.

On the back of his neck, next to his jugular, is a red scar, resembling a diamond-shaped runic symbol. A faint trace of blood trails from it.

The SWORD he leans on is monestrous, as long as its wielder is tall, and wider than any blade should be, each side sharpened to a razor edge. Its more a slab of iron than a traditional blade. It is called THE DRAGONSLAYER.

Guts is covered with wounds. Before him, the large moss-covered MONSTER that caused them lies to one side. Its head, the other. Guts can deal blows as well as he takes them.

Guts spits on the slack-jawed face of his defeated opponent. He smiles a crazed smile and chuckles to himself.

GUTS

Not tonight.

Guts sheathes his blade on his back as he limps away from the scene. As he walks away, we hear:

GRIFFITH (V.O.)

In this world, at least this much is true. Man has no control. Even over his own will.

CUT TO:

Opening Sequence plays

Title Card: Berserk Ch. 1: The Black Swordsman

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - MORNING

Guts limps along, tying off a stitch on his forearm. His stitching is sloppy, but he won't die.

A distant sound of creaking wood catches his ear. Guts turns, one hand on his blade.

He sees only a simple covered wagon pulled by a pair of horses. At the driver's seat is a kind looking old man, FRANCIS (60), who is squinting to get a better look at him. Francis flicks the reins and the horses pick up their pace.

Guts groans, throwing the hood of his cloak over his head.

As the wagon draws up to Guts, Francis pulls on the reins, matching his pace.

FRANCIS

Whoa boys! (to Guts) Hello there traveler! You look like you need some help.

GUTS

Piss off.

Francis is taken aback.

FRANCIS

I simply wished to be neighborly.

GUTS

We're not neighbors.

FRANCIS

We're all neighbors in God's kingdom!

GUTS

Stay away from--

Guts trips hard over a root on the side of the road, landing face first in the dirt. As he struggles to regain his footing, Francis stops the wagon and rushes to his side

The fall has reopened his fresh stitch.

GUTS (CONT'D)

Damn it!

FRANCIS

How are you standing?

GUTS

I'm fine! Stay back!

FRANCIS

No you are not.

(to the wagon)

Colette! Come! There's an injured man that needs our help!

From the back of the wagon a young blonde girl, COLETTE (15), hops down and sees the battered man. She gasps for a moment, then rushes to aid her grandfather.

COLETTE

Coming grandpa!

Francis reaches for Guts. Guts's eyes shoot open, his breathing quickens, a small panic attack. He slaps the outstretched hand aside, stopping Colette in her tracks.