

THE KHMER PRINCE

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - DAY

A circle drawn in chalk. Marbles in play. Giggling.

INT. CELL 64, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

Complete darkness. Fingers drumming on a bench.

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - DAY

Three boys. Laughing hysterically. Can't be older than 9.

INT. CELL 64, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

Fingers stop drumming. Footsteps.

INT. CORRIDOR, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

A convex safety mirror reflects a troupe of officers as they round a corner.

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - DAY

The boys pick up the marbles. WEI lifts his gaze at an ugly, cement block building.

INT. CORRIDOR, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

The jingle of keys. One officer holds a suit on a coathanger.

INT. CELL 64, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

The hands tremble. The PRISONER stands.

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - DAY

KIRO and SAK walk up to him.

KIRO  
What you looking at?

WEI  
That building, over there. Hey  
Kiro, you're smart. What's it for?

KIRO  
Should we tell him Sak? Eh?

SAK  
You'll have to tell him sooner or  
later. Wei could die of curiosity.

KIRO

Mama says that the government came  
and built it a long time ago.  
Before we were born. And they put  
really evil people inside.

WEI

How evil?

KIRO

Oh, you don't want to know. It'll  
give you nightmares.

Kiro makes a thrashing gesture and leaves.

WEI and SAK run after him.

WEI

Even more evil than *Darth Vader*.

KIRO

Much more evil.

INT. OUTSIDE CELL 64, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

OFFICER KHAN inserts a key into the lock.

INT. CELL 64, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

A hand gropes against a clammy wall, finds the door.

The lock clicks open. The door flings open. Light enters  
into the prisoner's eyes for the first time in 30 years,  
frying them to a pulp. White out.

TITLE CARD: KHMER BLANCHE

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE, 1979 - NIGHT

White morphs into the blinding light of a car headlight.  
Lighting up the Khmer Rouge insignia. Confused shouts from  
within the stilt houses.

The insignia belongs to the prisoner. His expression is  
neutral. A nod.

The clatter of gunfire. Screaming.

The prisoner reaches for a pair of aviators. Puts them on.

Pleading. Children crying.

Sporadic gunfire continues. Fires erupt in the prisoner's  
aviators.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. EMERGENCY WARD, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

The prisoner stirs from the operating table. He gets up.

DOCTOR

It's nothing serious. He's just  
been starved of light too long.

OFFICER KHAN

Intriguing.

DOCTOR

And on that note, I've been  
starved of a paycheck for some  
time now.

(to prisoner)

Open up.

The doctor examines his teeth.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Bad teeth.

OFFICER KHAN

I only give as much as I get from  
the government.

DOCTOR

Strong pulse.

(to officer  
KHAN)

Without me your prisoners die.

OFFICER KHAN

A gross exaggeration.

DOCTOR

Does anyone have a light?

OFFICER OMAR fumbles with a cigarette lighter. He slides  
open a drawer of cigarette packets.

OFFICER OMAR

You a Marlboro person or --

DOCTOR

No. No. I meant flashlight.

Omar sheepishly unholsters the flashlight from his belt.  
Tosses it to the doctor.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
 See. Point proven. You can afford  
 cigarettes but you can't...

He shines the torch in the prisoner's eyes.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE, 1979 - NIGHT

Ominous, rhythmic thumping. Gives way to heavy breathing. A  
 helicopter flies overhead.

The prisoner stares into the searchlight. Dazed.

KHMER SOLDIER 1  
 C'mon!

Shakes him roughly. The prisoner doesn't move.

KHMER SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)  
 Fine!

The soldier bolts out of the spotlight into dark forest.

A burst of machine gun fire. A shriek. Then a thud.

The helicopter moves on. Bathing the mutilated Khmer soldier  
 in artificial light.

He's still alive. He inches forward.

The helicopter swivels again, fires a rocket into a tree.

Flames lick towards heaven, branches crashing through  
 branches.

The prisoner bolts through the jungle. All around him Khmer  
 rouge soldiers are gunned down. Trees splinter.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

INT. EMERGENCY WARD, LOCAL PRISON - DAY

The prisoner starts convulsing.

OFFICER KHAN  
 Turn it off!

DOCTOR  
 Just--

OFFICER KHAN  
 Turn it off, damn it!

The doctor complies. The officer takes the flashlight, gives

the doctor a dirty.

OFFICER KHAN (CONT'D)  
You're doing a fine job killing my  
prisoners, without my help.

INT. WEI'S HOUSE - DAY

WEI'S MOTHER  
Your late. It's your second week  
on the job.

WEI  
I know.

Mum tosses him a bow tie.

WEI'S MOTHER  
You want to make a good  
impression.

Wei gets his tie in a knot.

WEI  
I know.

Wei's mother puts a firm grip on Wei's shoulders.

WEI'S MOTHER  
You got to take this seriously.

WEI  
I do.

WEI'S MOTHER  
Good. Let me help you with that.

Wei's mother undoes the knot.

WEI'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
The tourists are going to love  
you.

WEI  
You think?

WEI'S MOTHER  
I know.

Tugs on the bow tie.

WEI'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
I can't take you, tonight.

WEI  
What do you mean?

WEI'S MOTHER  
I need to take care of your little  
brother.

Wei frowns.

WEI'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Your father will be taking you.

WEI  
No. I don't want--

WEI'S MOTHER  
Do it for me, Wei. Would you?

Wei nods.

EXT. LOCAL PRISON RECEPTION - DAY

Khan nudges OFFICER JAE forward.

Jae walks up to the prisoner with the suit.

OFFICER JAE  
For you.

The prisoner looks confused.

OFFICER JAE (CONT'D)  
It's... It's a gift.

The prisoner's lips tremble as it sinks in.

The prisoner leaps forward, embraces the officer.

He drops the coathanger, surprised.

The others reach for their pistols.

The prisoner cries, staining the officer's shirt.

EXT. OUTSIDE LOCAL PRISON - DAY

The prisoner steps out in a neatly pressed business suit.

He pauses. Breathes.

INT. LOCAL PRISON RECEPTION - DAY

Officers KHAN and JAE look on as the prisoner makes his way into the town square.

OFFICER JAE

I can't believe we're letting him go like this.

OFFICER KHAN

It's been thirty years. A man can change a lot.

OFFICER JAE

He could have killed my father for all I know.

OFFICER KHAN

Jae, you know that I grieve for your father. But sometimes it's more noble to forgive.

OFFICER JAE

You don't know the meaning of that word.

OFFICER KHAN

That may be true but --

OFFICER JAE

You're so wrapped up in your morals that you're out of touch with reality.

OFFICER KHAN

Pardon?

OFFICER JAE

Not everyone is as noble as you. Besides, I bet you're every bit as edgy about letting him go as everyone else.

OFFICER KHAN

I'm just better at hiding it?

OFFICER JAE

Yeah.

OFFICER KHAN

If you'll excuse me, I've got to be somewhere.

Khan takes a coat off the wall rack.

OFFICER JAE  
Your son?

OFFICER KHAN  
You know better.

OFFICER JAE  
One day, you're going to have make  
up with him.

OFFICER KHAN  
Today is not that day.

Khan walks out into the rain.

EXT. OUTSIDE GROCERY STORE - DAY

The prisoner discovers a thick wad of Cambodian notes in his blazer pockets.

INT. CANNED FOOD AISLE, GROCERY STORE - DAY

The prisoner traces his finger along the shelf. He picks up a plain tin can of beans.

INT. COUNTER, GROCERY STORE - DAY

In a queue. The prisoner's looks around curiously.

He spots a tourist child holding a plastic AK-47, shooting passers-by.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. FOREST CLEARING, 1973 - DAY

A square pit in the ground. 2-3 metres deep. About as wide. Villagers digging inside.

VILLAGER 1  
Is that deep enough?

A boy soldier, maybe 14 years old appears on the rim of the pit.

He takes out a pair of aviators.

It is the prisoner.

VILLAGER 1 (CONT'D)  
Hey Jal! Is that you! Remember me?  
I knew your father.

The prisoner raises his AK-47, flicks off the safety.

VILLAGER 1 (CONT'D)

Jal, you don't remem --

The machine gun roars to life. Bodies drop. Blood everywhere.

Running. Screaming. Moaning.

A tear escapes his aviators.

In the end there is only the villager. Hands raised above his head.

VILLAGER 1 (CONT'D)

Jal. Please. Don't do it. You're a good kid.

The prisoner's voice is shaky, choking back tears.

PRISONER

My name is not Jal anymore. I work for the Khmer Rouge now.

He shoots the villager in the head.

He stares for a while into the pit, contemplative.

It starts raining. Mud mingles with blood.

Behind him, a pile of bodies loaded in the back of a truck. Waiting to be buried.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

INT. COUNTER, GROCERY STORE - DAY

CASHIER

Excuse me. Sir?

The prisoner snaps out of the daze. He hands over the can and the notes.

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - DAY

The rain has stopped. The prisoner is seated at a picnic table, spooning beans out of a can with his fingers.

He pockets the lid.

EXT. OUTSIDE WEI'S HOUSE - DAY

WEI

Are you sure he's coming?

WEI'S MOTHER

He'll come.

WEI

He's always disappointing everybody.

WEI'S MOTHER

Don't say that. He's your father.

WEI

So is a rock.

WEI'S MOTHER

Have you ever got to know your father? Have you ever given him a chance?

From around the corner, Khan comes running. He's changed into civilian clothing.

OFFICER KHAN

I'm sorry I'm late.

(to Wei)

Hey. How you doing?

He ruffles his hand through his hair, a bit too roughly.

WEI'S MOTHER

You know where to go?

OFFICER KHAN

Yeh. I'll take care of it. Get some rest.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

The two walk in silence for a while.

WEI

Thanks for coming.

OFFICER KHAN

I wouldn't miss it for the world.

An awkward silence.

WEI

Have you ever had to give someone  
a second chance?

A contemplative pause.

OFFICER KHAN

Yes. I have.

WEI

How did that turn out?

OFFICER KHAN

I don't know. Not just yet. Why?

WEI

Nothing. Just a question.

They arrive at the back entrance of a pub.

OFFICER KHAN

Well, good luck. I'm sure you'll  
do well.

Wei disappears into the pub.

EXT. OUTSIDE PUB - NIGHT

Neon lights paint the prisoner's face. Tourists scurry past.

INT. TABLE, PUB - NIGHT

The prisoner sits down by a table. Flicks through the menu.

WEI

Good evening. I'll be waiting on  
you, tonight. What would you like  
for a drink?

The prisoner looks up. Meets Wei's gaze.

And freezes.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. STILT HOUSE, 1978 - NIGHT

Dark. A man wearing aviators approaches a CHILD. He looks  
almost like Wei.

PRISONER

It's going to be OK. Don't worry.

The child quivers. The prisoner crouches beside him.

PRISONER (CONT'D)  
 We just need to count how many  
 people in the village.

He puts his hand on the child's shoulder. He flinches.

PRISONER (CONT'D)  
 You can trust me.

CHILD  
 Promise?

PRISONER  
 Promise.

He guides the child towards the door. The child looks back,  
 hesitant.

The prisoner nods. The child steps out of the house.

The prisoner rushes over, slams the door shut behind him.

A blinding spotlight on the child.

A volley of bullets. The child drops like a stone.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

INT. TABLE, PUB - NIGHT

PRISONER  
 Excuse me.

He gets up and heads for the toilet. He brushes past Wei,  
 knocking him over a waitress holding a tray of wine glasses.

The prisoner finds the toilet door, behind him a scene of  
 commotion.

WEI  
 I'm so sorry, sir. I'll clean it  
 up right away.

INT. TOILET, PUB - NIGHT

He heads for the sink. The bright toilet lights morph  
 seamlessly into...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BASEMENT, PHNOM PENH - NIGHT

Interrogation lights. Strapped to a chair. Dribbling blood.

A punch to the guts.

Officials talking in the corner.

OFFICIAL 1

He's one of them, alright. Enough  
evidence to fill a library.

An uppercut to the jaw.

OFFICIAL 2

What's the verdict?

OFFICIAL 1

Prison. Like the others. He gets a  
trial of course. But with this  
much evidence he's sure to lose.

Grabs his hair.

OFFICIAL 2

And in prison?

OFFICIAL 1

For savages like this, darkness is  
best.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. TOILET, PUB - NIGHT

He holds the can lid to the mirror, marvels at the serrated  
edge. Traces an incision across his right eye.

PRISONER

Maybe darkness is best.

Maniacal laughter.

Wei comes running in to the bathroom, to get some towels.

He looks over to the prisoner who has already begun the  
operation.

Blood drips into the sink.

Wei opens his mouth to scream and only manages a feeble  
croak.

The prisoner meets his gaze. Raises his finger to his lips.

Wei hyperventilates.

The prisoner covers Wei's mouth.

PRISONER (CONT'D)

Quiet.

The prisoner lets go, returns to the sink.

Wei struggles to breathe properly.

The prisoner fumbles with the razor-edge can lid.

PRISONER (CONT'D)

It'll be quick. And you don't have to watch.

He raises the lid. Now to his jugular.

WEI

Stop. Please.

Wei's face is streaked with tears.

PRISONER

Why are you crying? Do you know how many people I've killed?

WEI

No. Please.

PRISONER

It's just another life.

WEI

Please. This isn't right.

PRISONER

Isn't right? The world is screaming for my death. Everywhere I look --

WEI

I need you to live. If you kill yourself, I'll get fired. I need this job. I need you. You're my customer.

The lid drops out of the prisoner's hand. Falls to the floor. The prisoner goes pale.

Wei embraces the shaken prisoner. The prisoner weeps profusely.

PRISONER  
I'm needed. That's all I need. As long as I'm needed.

Wei's reflection smiles a weak but genuine smile.

INT. TABLE, PUB - NIGHT

Wei sits across from the prisoner.

WEI  
What's your name?

PRISONER  
My name... My name is Jal.

The MANAGER stalks up behind Wei. Taps him on the shoulder.

MANAGER  
Wei. It's your cabaret.

WEI  
(to prisoner)  
I'll come back.

INT. CABARET STAGE, PUB - NIGHT

The microphone squeaks as a timid Wei positions it.

WEI  
I would like to dedicate this song to my new friend, Jal.

Heads turn. Murmuring.

Wei breathes deeply. Sings.

A hush descends on the listeners.

Jal sobs.

EXT. OUTSIDE PUB - NIGHT

The tourists are leaving. Wei and Jal sit on the pub steps.

JAL  
Mama used to sing the song when it was raining. To help us get to sleep. It's my only memory of her.

WEI  
Jal. You can live with us. With me and my mum.

A new light enters Jal's eyes.

JAL

You see that house over there,  
with the flickering light. That's  
my house. You could build a new  
room --

JAL (CONT'D)

Why are you so nice? To me?

WEI

What do you mean?

JAL

You must have a really good  
father. I would like to meet him  
someday.

WEI

Dad doesn't seem to be coming. I  
better get going.

Wei gets up.

JAL

You'll be okay, walking home.

WEI

Sure. Done it a dozen times. I'll  
be fine.

He starts walking.

JAL

Be safe.

EXT. OUTSIDE WEI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Khan looks up at the stilted house. Inside a weak electric  
light flickers.

He clambers up the ladder steps.

Opens the door. Enters.

INT. WEI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Khan stalks gingerly across the floorboards.

He pulls out a flashlight, turns it on, and waves it round.

He finds himself in front of a picture frame, perched on a a  
window.

A family portrait of him, Wei and his wife. Smiling back.  
Condemningly.

Khan sighs deeply.

EXT. OUTSIDE PUB - NIGHT

Jal is still sitting on the pub threshold. He finishes etching his new name onto the can lid with a sharp rock.

He smiles like a child beholding their first crayon artwork.

JAL

Jal.

He sounds it out slowly, weighing it in his mind.

He hears voices. From inside.

DEALER

Manager Taro. A word.

MANAGER

What?

DEALER

It's about the boy. He's a very nice accessory to have but he's simply not bringing in enough revenue.

Foorsteps. Jal dives behind a shrub. The manager and dealer step out of the pub.

MANAGER

That isn't --

DEALER

Let me finish. In the past two weeks we've actually lost money. Now Mr Tsang is prepared to offer a ridiculous amount for the boy. I urge you to accept.

MANAGER

But --

DEALER

And the sooner we agree, the more he pays. We can't procrastinate. Everything is ready. You just give the go-ahead.

The manager is torn.

DEALER (CONT'D)

It's the only way to recover our losses.

MANAGER

Do it.

DEALER

Thank you manager. Good night.

The manager leaves. The dealer produces a mobile. Opens a draft text. It reads 'We accept.'

He sends.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Wei hums to a familiar musical number.

Suddenly four balaclava-clad men pounce on him. And wrestle him to the ground. He struggles. But to no avail.

EXT. OUTSIDE PUB - NIGHT

Jal strangles the scrawny dealer against a wall.

JAL

Where is he?

The dealer pulls a brave face. Manages a chuckle.

DEALER

It's too late.

A punch to the gut. The dealer wheezes.

DEALER (CONT'D)

They're taking him to a jungle clearing along the highway. The place is littered with mines. You have no chance.

JAL

I never did.

Jal rams his knee into his groin. The dealer crumples.

Jal runs.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Jal tears up the road. A juggernaut of anger.

For a moment he's back in the Cambodian jungle. Fleeing the helicopters.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - NIGHT

Elsewhere, Wei is shoved mercilessly into a trunk of a van.

EXT. OUTSIDE WEI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jal follows the flickering light. He races up the ladder. Hammers the door.

It opens revealing Khan. He drops his flashlight in shock.

He instinctively reaches for his holster.

JAL

No. You don't understand. Wei is in danger.

OFFICER KHAN

How do you know Wei?

JAL

They've taken him to the clearing. Next to the highway.

OFFICER KHAN

You stay away from my son.

JAL

You have to believe me. You've got to. Your son's been kidnapped.

OFFICER KHAN

I will shoot your face in if you don't get off my porch.

JAL

This is not a trick.

OFFICER KHAN

Off!

JAL

I'm wasting my time.

Jal slides down the ladder and heads for the highway.

Khan watches. And suddenly he's worried.

EXT. JUNGLE CLEARING - NIGHT

A van is parked against the clearing. The four thugs make their way across the clearing slowly.

One of the thugs carry Wei on his shoulder. He's been knocked out.

Jal snaps off a branch. Heads turn. Jal rushes towards them.

He flails wildly, knocking one of the thugs to the ground.

His blood boils, his eyes flare. He turns to the LEADER, swinging at his head. Cursing and fuming.

The thugs come from behind him. Thrust him to the ground. They kick him breathless. Blood seeps freely from his nose and mouth.

LEADER

Enough.

They melt away and return to navigating the minefield.

Jal sits up, his entire frame convulsing. He groans as he grips his leg. It's been dislocated. He slumps back to the ground.

And then the sirens. He turns. Three, four... five police cars pull up, their headlights flooding the clearing.

Police officers swarm out. Pistols raised.

The thugs are on the other side of the clearing.

OFFICER KHAN

Mines.

OFFICER JAE

We'll need to go around.

OFFICER KHAN

There's no time.

OFFICER JAE

We don't have any other options.

Khan stares out across the clearing.

OFFICER KHAN

I'll do it.

OFFICER JAE

No. You can't. I won't let you.

OFFICER KHAN

You can't stop me.

Khan begins to walk across the clearing. Jae trains his pistol to Khan's head.

OFFICER JAE

Take one more step and I will be obliged to use force.

OFFICER KHAN

He's my son.

Jal sits up for a second time. Wei stirs from the thug's back.

Jal clenches his fist. Bites his tongue. And forces himself up.

There is an audible crack as his dislocated knee snaps into position.

Wei realises what he's going to do.

Jal runs.

For a moment he's in the jungle fleeing the helicopters.

A moment of shock descends on the thugs and officers.

He bolts across. He's unstoppable.

WEI

(breathes)

No.

Jal trips the wire. The twang of broken wire. A moment's delay.

Then the earth erupts beneath him. Earth is dislodged into the air.

And it rains dirt. The clouds subside. The officers charge.

A metal disc sings through the air. And wedges itself into the dirt. The sides are serrated. On the side it reads 'Jal'.

FADE OUT.

THE END