Darkest Night 2x03

"Initiation"

Written by
Kimberly Ndome
Characters

Katie Reed – Mid 20s. Impulsive and spontaneous. Quick learner who isn’t afraid to speak her mind.

Dr. Lionel Ricketts – 30s. Younger member of Project Cyclops, working independently from Dr. Kinsler. Extremely cold. Soft-spoken but menacing. Guarded.

Corey – 18. College freshman pledging Omicron, a distinguished black frat. Not sure if this is all worth it.

Moses – 18. Corey’s friend and fellow pledge. Cocky, aggressive, and dutiful to Omicron.

Hill – 21. The Omicron pledgemaster who takes it too seriously and gets off on the power.

Effi – 18. Scrawny freshman who hasn’t made much of a mark at college besides dealing weed to people.

James – Early 50s. Corey’s overbearing father who has very strong opinions about what a strong, successful black man looks like.

Locations:

1. Dr. Ricketts’ Lab at The Roth Lobdow Center for Advanced Research
2. Corey’s Dorm Room
3. College Campus / Off Campus
4. Car
5. Forest

Time of day:

Evening
KATIE
(whispering)
Roth-Lodbow Center for Advanced
Research. Project Cyclops, Day 13,
about to begin. Entering the
laboratory now.

Efx: keycard beep. A loud buzz, a metal lock unlatched. Door opens, footsteps.

DR. RICKETTS
Morning.

Efx: Rickets eating an energy bar.

KATIE
Dr. Ricketts. Are you eating? After
Yesterday, I could barely keep any
food down.

DR. RICKETTS
Katie, don’t dwell on what you see
in Project Cyclops. The only thing
of concern to us is our work.
Many of the greatest scientific
advancements of mankind, were born
in the most unfortunate of
circumstances.

Efx: Walking up and breathing

DR. RICKETTS (LEFT HEAR) (CONT’D)
Ever heard of the drug
tretinoin?.... It was created in a
series of violent tests on
unwilling prison populations.

KATIE (TIMID)
What are you trying to say?

DR. RICKETS (RIGHT EAR)
Tretinoin is what is keeping your
uncle alive.

KATIE
What do you know about my Uncle
Tim?
DR. RICKETTS
Enough. We don’t have time for personal matters... Who do we have today?

Efx: sheet being thrown off a box.

KATIE
At least there’s one eye left.

DR. RICKETTS
You only need one to see. The other only provides perspective.

Efx: Wet popping noise.

KATIE
Withdrawing blood from the optic nerve. Depositing into the box. Locked and loaded.

DR. RICKETTS
Project Cyclops. Trial 7-zeta-3. Timestamp is registering correctly. Initiating playback in 3... 2... 1...
Initiate.

INSIDE A DORM.

Efx: Rhythmic stomps and claps are punctuated by guttural shouts as Corey practices step. The rhythm goes awry.

COREY
Damm! It’s uh...

Efx: The stomps and claps start again, but the beat is off.

COREY (CONT’D)
It’s...

Efx: The stomps and claps peter out quickly this time.

COREY (CONT’D)
You’re going to get your ass whooped if you don’t figure this out!

Efx: Corey smacks himself on the head a few times.
COREY (CONT’D)
You can’t let that happen. C’mon man.

Efx: Corey dials a cell phone. Dial tone.

JAMES
Corey. How are you?

COREY
Hey dad.

JAMES
Is this the call where you tell me you’re in?

COREY
Not yet.

JAMES
They’re really dragging it out then. Making you guys suffer.

COREY
You have no idea.

JAMES
I have some.

COREY
Was it like this in your day?

JAMES
I’m pretty sure it was worse back then. These colleges are all over these frats now. Trying to make sure nobody gets hurt.

COREY
So you were hurt?

JAMES
Oh yeah. I got smacked around with that paddle. They put a burlap sack over my head and practically drowned me at one point.

COREY
Jesus.

JAMES
I can take a beating. That shit made me a man. You hear me?

(MORE)
I said you hear me?

COREY
I hear you.

JAMES
You sound scared son.

COREY
I’m not scared. I’m just... Is this really worth it? I’m barely getting my work done. I feel like my thoughts aren’t even mine anymore, you know? It’s all Omicron all the time.

JAMES
Hell yeah it is! Because being an Omicron means something. You’re joining a brotherhood of distinguished black men. You’re not going to end up like the others living down to expectations.

COREY
Why you always gotta bring this up? It’s always about being better than other people.

JAMES
If you don’t want this, then drop, quit. It wouldn’t be the first time for you.

COREY
I just feel like--

JAMES
Like what? Like a pussy? ‘Cause that’s what you sound like. Can’t believe a son of mine is going to pussy out of pledging.

COREY
I’m not!

JAMES
You going to make it?

COREY
I will.
JAMES
Good. How you think I got this cushy job? You know 75% of black male lawyers are Omicrons. And who do you think introduced me to your mom? Being an O is worth it.

COREY
Right. Imma keep practicing my steps.

Efx: Through the phone. James stomps, claps, and shouts out the beats perfectly. Ending in a resonant...

JAMES
Omicron!
(laughs)
See you son.

Efx: Phone hanging up.

COREY
Ok, c’mon. You can do this.

Efx: The rhythmic stomps, claps, and guttural shouts. He’s almost to the end.

Efx: KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

COREY (CONT’D)
(catches his breath)
Shit!

Efx: Opens door.

MOSES
What’s good, bruh?

COREY
‘Sup Moses.

MOSES
Ready?

COREY
Ready as I’ll ever be.

THE NARRATOR
Corey and Moses left their dorm and stepped out onto campus. Corey clung to his hoodie in the crisp, fall air. Tonight was the night. He could feel it. It was do or die.
COREY
So you’re not worried at all? You think this is all just-- cool?

MOSES
Yeah man. We’ve been putting in the work. Tonight, after we get inducted, we’re going to be somebodies.

COREY
You think it’s definitely going down tonight then?

MOSES
It better be. I might get some PTSD if this goes on any longer.

Efx: A boy bumping into them. Books falling on the ground.

EFFI
Sorry.

MOSES
Watch it man!

EFFI
I said I was sorry!

Efx: Effi picks up his books and leaves.

EFFI (CONT’D)
(sotto)
Dicks.

MOSES
Say it to my face!

THE NARRATOR
Effi paused for a moment and looked at Moses and Corey. After a brief moment, he started to run.

MOSES
Look at that Effi kid. You want to be him? He’s not smart, he’s not cool, he’s not funny, he’s not anything.

COREY
I thought he dealt some of the brothers weed.
MOSES
Maybe he does, but he’s definitely not an O. And you know he tried. Hill would never let him happen.

COREY
I guess you’re right.

MOSES
Yeah, I’m always right. You ever hear this one? “Greatness is never on sale. You always got to pay full price.”

COREY
That shit’s whack man.

MOSES
Shut up! It’s cool. We’re cashing in on greatness tonight.

THE NARRATOR
The boys meandered away from campus. The brightly lit bars and shops were replaced by boarded up windows and graffiti.

MOSES
You know where we’re going right?

COREY
I’m following the directions.

MOSES
Oh yeah? ‘Cause we look lost.

COREY
We’re not lost. This is the way.

MOSES
I never should have let you lead. Tyrell is going to kill me if I’m late again.

COREY
I wish Tyrell was my big. Michael spit in my eye when I couldn’t get all those facts straight about Omicron’s history.
(sighs)
Damn. We can’t be late. Have you seen these directions? Turn left where the stop sign used to be?
MOSES
It’s supposed to be hard. That’s the point. Let me see those. Man, you’re lucky your dad was an O.

COREY
What are you trying to say?

MOSES
You know what I’m saying.

THE NARRATOR
Corey balled his hands into tight fists.

MOSES
You’re not going to hit me. Let it go.

Efx: Screeching tires.

THE NARRATOR
The boys turned to see masked men getting out of two cars. The men came right at Corey and Moses tackling them to the ground.

MOSES
Get off me!

COREY
What the hell!

THE NARRATOR
The men binded the boys’ hands behind their backs with zip ties. Corey watched as the men shoved Moses’ head into a burlap sack. The world went black as they did the same to him.

COREY
Moses! Moses!

THE NARRATOR
Corey struggled against the men as they lifted him off the ground. He hit a flat surface with a hard thud.

Efx: Trunk shutting.

THE NARRATOR (CONT’D)
Corey slid around in the trunk as the car took off. He took deep breaths in and out. In and out. (MORE)
THE NARRATOR (CONT’D)
He knew this is most likely a part of the initiation process. So why wouldn’t the fear subside?

COREY
(sotto)
Relax. You’re cashing in. You’re just cashing in.

THE NARRATOR
Corey filled the time quelling his doubts about joining Omicron. He imagined his father’s pride. He remembered Effi running away on two thin legs. Omicron is a better fate than that.

Efx: Car parking. People getting out of the car and opening the trunk.

THE NARRATOR (CONT’D)
The men pulled Corey out of the trunk and stood him on his own two feet. One of the men grabbed Corey’s hand and placed it on his shoulder, guiding him. Corey’s shoes sunk into the mud as he walked. He heard breathing and wet footsteps. The sounds of people. Pairs of hands moved him where he belonged. Bodies shuffled into place on either side of him.

HILL
Take them off!

THE NARRATOR
The bag was whipped off of Corey’s head. He looked around and found himself in a clearing in the woods. He was standing in a line with his pledge class, Moses by his side. The masked men took out pocket knives.

COREY
(sotto)
Oh my god.

THE NARRATOR
They cut the zip ties, freeing the boys’ hands.
MOSES
(sotto)
Pussy.

HILL
Brothers, you may go.

THE NARRATOR
The masked men, fellow Omicrons, made their way towards the woods. The one nearest Corey grabbed his face in one hand, fingers digging into his cheeks. He forced Corey to look hard into eyes. Corey recognized them. These were same eyes he couldn’t look away from when his big, Michael, spat into his mouth. It felt like a warning. Michael let go and followed the other masked men who one by one disappeared into the forest.

HILL
Here we are boys. Here we are.

THE NARRATOR
Hill orated from in front of a tall, roaring fire. His face was shrouded in darkness until he lifted a lighter to a joint. He took a deep drag, before letting the cloud of smoke billow out of his mouth. He boke out into a big, toothy smile that stretched from cheek to cheek.

HILL
Ooh that shit’s good. That’s damn good.

THE NARRATOR
Hill marched up to the line, so that he was inches away from one of the pledges. With a swiftness that nobody was expecting, Hill landed a punch square in a boy’s nose.

Efx: A boy getting punched in the face and holding in his pain.

HILL
(laughing)
God, I love that I can just do that!

(MORE)
HILL (CONT'D)
You boys can’t do anything about it. Omicron step right now for me.

THE NARRATOR
The boy instantly went into step, ignoring the blood dripping down his face from his nose.

Efx: The rhythmic stomps, claps, and guttural shouts of the Omicron step that Corey was practicing earlier.

HILL
That was beautiful! Why don’t you all do it together. Omicron step!

Efx: The boys in unison -- the rhythmic stomps, claps, and guttural shouts of the Omicron step that Corey was practicing earlier.

BOYS
Omicron!

HILL
(laughing)
Keep dancing for me boys. Omicron step!

Efx: The boys in unison -- the rhythmic stomps, claps, and guttural shouts of the Omicron step that Corey was practicing earlier.

HILL (CONT’D)
I love the sound of this, the way you boys are moving. Don’t you dare stop moving until I tell you to.

THE NARRATOR
The boys didn’t stop. In perfect unison they continued and continued and continued.

BOYS
Omicron! Omicron! Omicron

THE NARRATOR
They shouted To mark each turn.

HILL
(laughing)
Dance boys! Dance!

THE NARRATOR
One of the boys started lagging behind.

(MORE)
Hill grabbed him by his hair and flung him to the ground. The rest of the boys kept going like nothing has happened. Hill quickly approached Moses.

**HILL**
Why are you looking at me like that? Like I’m nothing, when you’re the one who’s nothing! You’re not even a brother.

**THE NARRATOR**
Hill punched him in the gut.

_Efx: Moses taking a punch to the gut and groaning._

**THE NARRATOR (CONT’D)**
Corey faltered as he watches his friend clutching his stomach. Hill grabbed him by his shoulders and shoved him to the dirt.

**HILL**
Did I tell you to stop?

**THE NARRATOR**
He kicked Corey in the stomach.

**HILL**
Answer me!

**COREY**
(weak)
No.

**THE NARRATOR**
Hill stomped his booted foot on top of Corey’s head. Corey had never felt more alone as his face was driven deeper into the ground.

**COREY**
(muffled)
I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe.

**THE NARRATOR**
Hill finally lifted his boot off of Corey’s skull.

**HILL**
Did I tell you to stop?
COREY
(yelling)
No!

HILL
That’s right.

Efx: The boys in unison -- the rhythmic stomps, claps, and guttural shouts of the Omicron step that Corey was practicing earlier.

HILL (CONT’D)
Every body stooooop!

THE NARRATOR
Still. Nobody moved. They panted and remain as upright as they coul.

HILL
Enough of that. You boys have been through a lot these past few months. It all ends tonight. But it gets worse before it gets better. You see this on my chest, over my heart? This is the measure of the Omicron men.

THE NARRATOR
Hill lifted his shirt to reveal his Omicron branding... raised skin in the shape of an O.

HILL
One by one, I’ll take you out into the woods to make each of you a man.

THE NARRATOR
Hill walked toward the fire and grabbed a metal branding rod that had been stuck into the ground. He raised the O-shaped end into the fire until it burned bright red. Hill motioned to the first pledge to follow him.

HILL
You’ll know when it’s time for the next one. Just walk straight ahead into the woods.

THE NARRATOR
They disappeared into the forest. Corey looked at his fellow pledges. (MORE)
Their blank faces revealed that he wasn’t the only one feeling lost.

COREY
I’m fine thanks for asking.

MOSES
That’s right. I didn’t ask.
(sighing)
Sorry. It’s just that you need to worry about yourself more.

EfX: A screaming boy from faraway.

THE NARRATOR
Crows burst from the tops of the trees all at once as the echo of the scream died out.

COREY
I guess that’s the cue.

THE NARRATOR
Without hesitation, the next boy in line walked the straight path into the woods.

COREY
I can’t believe we’re getting branded.

MOSES
You’ve known that! Your dad is an O.

COREY
But that was years ago. I can’t believe they still do that. We’re not animals.

MOSES
Aren’t we? Eat or be eaten man. That’s this school, this world. It’s everything. Get on board or get gone.

EfX: A screaming boy from far away.

THE NARRATOR
The next boy disappeared into the darkness.
MOSES
What are you so scared of? Hill already kicked your ass. A brand? It’s just a little more pain, and then you’re in. No pain, no gain, right?

COREY
What is with you and all these dumbass idioms? No pain, no gain? Greatness is never on sale? What does any of that mean.

Efx: A screaming boy from far away.

MOSES
I guess I’m just looking for some words that will make you understand what it means to be a man, but I don’t think you’re ever gonna get it.

COREY
Get what? I just got beat up in the name of brotherhood. What is that? These guys aren’t my brothers.

Efx: A screaming boy from far away.

MOSES
Well they’re mine.

COREY
Don’t go!

MOSES
Get off me.

THE NARRATOR
Moses shoved him off and marched into the woods. Corey wanted to run away from there, from fire and branding and boys who thought these actions would transform them into men. Instead, he found himself running after Moses.

COREY
Moses? Moses?

THE NARRATOR
His eye caught the red glint of the branding rod. He saw Hill raising it high in the air.

(MORE)
Moses knelt in front of him. His eyes shut and tears slipped down his face.

MOSES
Just do it. And please don’t tell the others I cried. Please don’t.

HILL
Don’t you worry.

THE NARRATOR
Corey watched, bracing for the branding until he noticed the sharp, stake-end of the metal rod pointing at Moses.

COREY
(yelling)
Nooo!

THE NARRATOR
Corey sprinted at Hill. The branding rod went flying as Corey tackled him to the ground. Hill landed a hard punch on Corey’s face. They grappled, but Hill easily gained leverage.

CEDOREY
Help me!

THE NARRATOR
The muscles in Hill’s biceps rippled as his thick fingers squeezed tighter and tighter around Corey’s neck, choking him. Corey sucked in what little breath he could as he stared into Hill’s cold vacant eyes. Corey’s arms flailed on the ground around him. They were searching, reaching for anything.

(Efx: snapping twig)
Hill released Corey’s neck, grabbed a rock and spun around. Moses sneaked up behind Hill with the branding rod held high in his hand. Hill whipped around and smashed the rock into Moses’ face.

(Efx: rock into head) again.

(Efx: rock into head) again.

(MORE)
THE NARRATOR (CONT'D)
(Efx: rock into head)
And again.

Blood covered Hill’s entire body.

COREY
(crying)
Please don’t kill me. Please don’t.

EFFI (BEHIND)
You’re asking the wrong guy.

THE NARRATOR
Effi stepped out from behind Corey.

COREY
Help me! Please help me.

EFFI
Again. You’re asking the wrong guy.

THE NARRATOR
Corey ran to Effi’s side as Hill turned away from Moses’ lifeless body. Hill’s teeth shined bright through his blood covered face as he leered at the two boys.

EFFI
I’m not afraid. I’m not smart or cool or funny either. I’m nothing. Hill, if you will?

THE NARRATOR
Hill grabbed the metal rod off the ground and tossed it to Effi. He caught it and in one swift motion jammed the rod through Corey’s kneecap.

Efx: Rod through knee. Corey screaming.

COREY
What the hell is going on?

EFFI
He’s acting weird right? That must have been the weed I sold him. I cut it with this shit my dad was working on. Check this out.
COREY (SURPRISED)
Professor Igwe?!!

THE NARRATOR
Effi looked over at Hill. His eyes shrunk in concentration. Hill nodded. He took off his shirt, walked over to Effi and grabbed the branding rod from him. He lifted the sharp, pointed metal end and started scratching lines into his chest. Streaks of blood followed the rusted rod as Corey watched the lines form a name, EFFI.

COREY
Oh my god.

EFFI
That’s right. I put a little something in that weed. That something makes me the transmitter -- aka the boss -- and makes Hill here the receiver -- or as I like to call him, my little bitch. Pretty cool huh? I’m going to take pleasure in this.

Efx: Effi does the Omicron step. As he finishes...

EFFI (CONT’D)
Omicron!

THE NARRATOR
Effi grabbed the metal stake from Hill and lifted it high to drive it through Corey’s face.

COREY
Don’t! Please don’t kill me. Please!

THE NARRATOR
Effi halted, the stake was still high.

EFFI
Oh. I like that. The begging is nice.

COREY
Please, let me go. Please. I’m not one of them.
EFFI
You’re here aren’t you? You think that makes you better then me?

COREY
No I-- I don’t think like that. I swear.

EFFI
Keep begging..

COREY
Please don’t kill me. I won’t tell anyone. I swear to god. I’ll do whatever you want. Just don’t kill me. Please.

EFFI
God I love the way you beg. It’s not going to save you though.

COREY
No wait!

Efx: Effi jamming the rod through Corey’s eye. Corey drops dead with a thud.

EFFI
(laughing)
Omicron!
(laughing)
Omicron? What does that even mean, huh? Why did I even want it so bad?
(laughing)
I wanted to be one before your stupid ass failed my dad’s class. Isn’t that right?

HILL
Yes, sir.

EFFI
You made sure I’d never be one of you after that.
(laughing)
Some joint, huh?
(laughing)
Omicron!

Efx: Rod jamming through a throat and blood gurgling out of Hill’s neck.

OUTRO BUMPER
Efx: Distinctive noise.

DR. RICKETTS
Heard about this one on the news. They called it a hazing incident gone wrong.

KATIE
Did they go into detail?

DR. RICKETTS
Not at all.

KATIE
What happened there? I mean how would you describe that?

DR. RICKETTS
I wouldn’t.

KATIE
That kid, Effi... he made Hill do things.

DR. RICKETTS
We don’t know that. Corey could have easily been... delusional by that point.

KATIE
Right, but we don’t see delusions. We just see an accurate portrayal of what the patient saw. Effi was controlling Hill against his will.

DR. RICKETTS
Maybe Hill was on his side from the beginning.

KATIE
A normal boy wouldn’t start killing people out of nowhere.

DR. RICKETTS
What are you getting at, huh? You sound like you want to find something whether it is or isn’t there. Mind control? Is that what you’re suggesting? Listen to yourself. You sound crazy. Here’s some advice. Shut up and do the work. Save your crazy theories for someone else, ok?
KATIE
How can you just deny, deny, deny day in and day out? Yesterday we saw Carlisle. Today, it’s this Effi guy.

DR. RICKETTS
Katie...

KATIE
Effi called himself a transmitter and mentioned a receiver. You heard him say that right? What are those things. How are you not curious?

DR. RICKETTS
Don’t--

KATIE
And why is this the first body where we’ve seen past his death, huh? That used to happen all the time when I worked with Dr. Kinsler, but this is Corey’s head... yet we clearly saw past Corey’s death all the way to Hill’s death.

Efx: Ricketts topples over some equipment. The sound of crashing metal.

KATIE (CONT’D)
Dr. Ricketts!

DR. RICKETTS
(yelling)
Do you want to get us killed?! Stop this now. I am not Dr. Kinsler. I’m not some older friend you can toy with.

KATIE
Screw you.

DR. RICKETTS
(yelling)
I refuse to end up like him in order to entertain your delusions.

Efx: Ricketts picking up a scalpel and placing it by Katie’s neck.
DR. RICKETTS (CONT’D)
(sotto)
You feel that blade against your neck. You think I’m afraid to do it?

KATIE
Dr. Ricketts, please stop.

DR. RICKETTS
If we can’t coexist, and it has to come down to you or me, I assure you, it will be me.

Efx: The scalpel hitting the floor. Ricketts’ footsteps walking away.

KATIE
This isn’t the first time someone’s tried to kill me. I’m not afraid of you.
(beat)
How much you want to bet Effi’s dad, Professor Igwe, worked for the center?

Efx: The footsteps continue. A door opens and shuts. The recorder is removed from the purse.

KATIE (CONT’D)
(into recorder)
Roth-Lodbow Center for Advanced Research. Project Cyclops, Day 13, completed.

Efx: recorder button press/tone.

END OF EPISODE