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BLACK BETH: THE WITCH TREE

Eight-page one-shot

F.A.O. Editor Keith Richardson; Artist Dani

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Hi Dani!

Looks like we got our wish! ;)

Okay, so with this I've written a story to suit your style. I've gone for something super-simple in contrast to the frantic action of the last adventure. There's only one location: a tree on a hill with Beth vs. a bunch of bad guys and lots of open space. I've boiled everything down to an iconic minimum, so the whole thing (hopefully) feels sparse and poetic, kinda like a samurai movie. Lots of stillness and tension with explosions of violence. Think vintage Frank Miller or *Lone Wolf and Cub*, but with a ghostly supernatural edge, a la *Misty*.

Again, I've tried to keep the dialogue and panel-count to a minimum to give your art as much room as possible. Keith's given us eight pages, so the whole thing should really sing! As always, please feel free to get in touch, or amend the panels if you feel it will help the story flow more smoothly.

I've added character notes from before, so you don't have to dig them out again. I've also added new notes on the setting and a couple of new characters.

Hope this all helps, Dani. Catch you in a bit.

BLACK BETH: The character in the original strip appeared to be in her early twenties, but our Beth needs to be around 16-17 years old with long wild black hair and super-intense eyes. There needs to be something witch-like about her! (I'm thinking she looks like a young [Barbara Steele](#)). She's tall and athletic and moves like a panther.

She's wearing her armour throughout this story, though she won't be wearing her helmet.

Motivated by hatred, she's an avenging knight driven to punish the unjust, a hothead who always takes the direct approach. Her mission is all that matters; all thoughts of law, democracy, diplomacy, right and wrong are for other people to worry about. Instinctive and remorseless, she loves the wild outdoors, physicality and fighting.

QUIDO: Beth's moral compass and companion. Keep this character as the brutish lummoX he was in the original strip, but make him the same age as Beth (16-17 years old).

He's blind but hides his scarred eyes behind a blindfold.

He's slightly shorter than Beth, but still a big, broad guy with a physique like that of a gorilla: broad shoulders, big arms, caveman posture, scruffy hair, and super-hot!

He wears the same ragged shirt and pants as in the original strip, though maybe with boots or sandals. And have his shirt open so you can see his abs!

He carries a small hand-axe in his belt and a wooden staff in his hands, which doubles as a quarterstaff in combat.

Quido is Beth's opposite: as thoughtful and restrained as Beth is wild and reckless.

MADELENA: Mediterranean female, early thirties. Leader of an angry mob, also the village blacksmith; broad shoulders, angry and intimidating. Peasant clothes with a fur coat (it's still early morning and a bit cold).

SOOTHSAYER: North African male, early twenties. Travelling mystic; well-worn (but not ragged) travelling clothes. (No backpack; it

would have been taken off him.) Feel free to add any trinkets to convey that he's a wandering astrologer.

SETTING: Going by the original strip, I've nominally set Beth's adventures in a kind of medieval Spain. So the terrain in this adventure is based on Almeria (where they filmed the original *Conan* and all those Spaghetti Westerns). Think rugged hills, distant mountains, parched rocks and sparse grasses.

There's only one location: a single gnarled tree perched on a hill. Here's a quick [couple of bits of reference](#) to get the general idea of the terrain.

PAGE ONE (four panels)

1.) Establishing shot of the landscape with our gnarly tree perched on a small hill in the distance.

It's early morning; the sky is gloomy and overcast.

The bushes quiver in the breeze and the general sense is one of a foreboding fairy tale.

CAPTION: THROUGH THE HAUNTED HILLS OF MOURNVEIL SHE RODE...

[INSERT TITLE: BLACK BETH]

CAPTION: A DEMON OF VENGEANCE, HER NAME BORN OF THE BLACK RAGE THAT FILLED HER HEART...

2.) Closer now on the gnarled tree.

We can see that BLACK BETH has set up camp here; she's sat cross-legged, a blanket over her shoulders, dozing over the now-smouldering fire.

Her helmet lies beside her, her hair stirring in the wind.

She's a few metres away from the tree (a respectful distance).

A black horse grazes nearby, bucking its head, unsettled by an approaching presence.

CAPTION: SHE TRAVELLED ALL NIGHT UPON THIS TRECHEROUS ROAD, BOUND ON A PRIVATE ERRAND.

LINK: SHE SOUGHT NOT DEATH. NOT THIS TIME...

BETH: ZZZZZ.

HORSE: HHNN?

3.) Close on Beth, startled as she wakes.

CAPTION: HOWEVER, DEATH WAS SOON TO FIND HER...

BETH: ZZ-HUH?

MADELENA (OFF): I TIRE OF YOUR SCREAMS, BOY!

4.) Beth looks up to see a mob of around a half-dozen villagers approaching from the other side of the hill, dragging someone with them.

Leading the mob is Madelena (whom we'll reveal properly on the next page); their prisoner is the young Soothsayer (also revealed next page).

MADELENA: IF YOUR DEVIL MASTERS WERE GOING TO SAVE YOU, THEY WOULD HAVE DONE SO BY NOW!

MOB: HAHAHA!

SOOTHSAYER: NO!

PAGE TWO (four panels)

1.) The mob approaches Beth; she stands sword sheathed, but ready to confront them.

MADELENA: BE ON YOUR WAY, TRAVELLER!

2.) Two-shot revealing MADELENA and the SOOTHSAYER.

Madelena growls, grim and intimidating; the Soothsayer calls out to Beth; his hands are bound with rope in front of him and he looks terrified.

MEDELENA: WE HAVE WORK TO DO...

SOOTHSAYER: PLEASE! HELP ME! I AM MERELY A SOOTHSAYER, YET THEY THINK ME SOME KIND OF NECROMANCER!

3.) Pull back into a long shot of the whole scene: the Soothsayer restrained by the mob with Madelena stepping forward to speak.

Beth stands firm, blocking their way to the tree.

SOOTHSAYER: I OFFERED TO FORECAST THEIR HARVEST, THAT IS ALL!

MADELENA: I SAID, BE ON YOUR WAY, GIRL. WHAT BUSINESS HAVE YOU HERE ANYWAY?

LINK: THIS TREE IS SACRED TO US, ITS SOIL DRENCHED IN THE SOULS OF A THOUSAND DEAD SORCERERS!

4.) Beth draws her scimitar, grimacing with distaste to hear Madelena's words.

MADELENA (off): FOR WE DO NOT TOLERATE ANY BREED OF WITCH IN OUR LANDS - NOR THEIR ALLIES.

BETH: MY REASON FOR BEING HERE IS MY OWN.

SFX: SHIIIIIIING!

PAGE THREE (five panels)

1.) Beth points her scimitar at the captive Soothsayer.

A SCRAWNY MAN emerges from among the mob; he stares at Beth with a look of alarm.

BETH: NOW LET HIM GO.

SCRAWNY MAN: MADELENA, WE MUST AWAY!

2.) The Scrawny Man tries to reason with Madelena, his eyes wild and full of fear.

SCRAWNY MAN: I HAVE HEARD TALES OF A BLACK-HAIRED GIRL BEARING JUST SUCH A SWORD!

LINK: THEY SAY SHE IS A DEMON! A KNIGHT OF HELL! A THING OF UTTER DARKNESS!

3.) Madelena sneers, pushing the Scrawny Man aside.

SCRAWNY MAN: LET US BEGONE!

MADELENA: AND SUFFER ANOTHER WITCH TO LIVE? YOU SPEAK HERESY!

4.) The mob edge towards Beth, her sword now held in a defensive stance; she's clearly outnumbered!

MADELENA: NOT TO MENTION COWARDICE!

5.) Close-up of Beth, smiling to herself.

MADELENA (off): FOR WHAT CAN ONE DEVIL DO AGAINST SO MANY...?

PAGE FOUR (five panels)

1.) Spectacular shot of Beth springing into action, sweeping through two of the approaching villagers with a single strike as they move to grab her.

Make it clear she's killed them, but don't have too much blood; no severed heads or limbs.

BETH: HYAAAAAA!

VILLAGER ONE: AWK!

VILLAGER TWO: AAH!

2.) Beth kicks Madelena hard in the chest, knocking her back.

MADELENA: OOOF!

3.) Close on Beth's scimitar slashing through the rope tied around the Soothsayer's wrists.

SFX: SCHIK!

SOOTHSAYER: MY THANKS, BLACK BETH!

4.) Beth shoves the startled Soothsayer towards her nearby horse as the rest of the mob recover and surge towards her.

BETH: JUST GO! TAKE MY HORSE!

5.) Madelena's hand seizes Beth's wrist as the girl goes to bring down her sword.

BETH: I SHALL- AH!

SFX: PAK!

PAGE FIVE (five panels)

1.) Beth is overwhelmed by the mob, battling hard, snarling like a wild animal as she manages to cut one of them down.

BETH: COME THEN, YOU DOGS!

LINK: FEEL THE BLADE OF BLACK BETH!

WOUNDED VILLAGER: AHH!

2.) The panicking Soothsayer flees on the horse as the mob finally take Beth down.

FOREMOST MOB MEMBER: HE'S GETTING AWAY!

MADELENA: LET HIM RUN!

3.) Close on Beth, now restrained by the mob, enraged as she stares through the loop of the noose now being dangled in front of her.

MADELENA: OUR JOURNEY TO THE WITCH TREE SHALL NOT HAVE BEEN WASTED!

CAPTION (bottom-right): "I SEE NOW YOUR REASON FOR BEING HERE, DEMON!"

4.) A little time has passed as we cut to a shot of Madelena and her cronies looking up at the reader and gloating (we're looking down from Beth's PoV).

MADELENA: YOU CAME TO COMMUNE WITH YOUR DEAD KINDRED!

LINK: VERY WELL, THEN!

5.) Reveal Beth, now hanging by her neck from the tree!

Keep this reveal dramatic rather than graphic; she's struggling, fighting for life rather than horribly choking to death.

MADELENA: LET THEM RECEIVE YOU!

MOB: HAHAHAHA!

BETH: HHNN!

PAGE SIX (four panels)

1.) Close-up of Beth, her teeth gritted, eyes still glaring down in defiance.

CAPTION: AND SO DEATH EMBRACED BLACK BETH AT LAST, DEAFENING HER WITH THE SOUND OF HER STRAINING HEART...

SFX (loud): BDOOM! BDOOM!

2.) Looking down once again at the mob from Beth's PoV, only now their outlines are blurred - trembling with the reverberations of Beth's heartbeat.

CAPTION: THE WORLD TREMbled BENEATH HER, HER HEARTBEAT ECHOING, MULTIPLYING, UNTIL IT FELT AS THOUGH SHE HAD SUMMONED A THOUSAND MORE...

SFX (loud, scattered): BDOOM! BDOOM! BDOOM! BDOOM!

3.) Spectacular shot of a dozen GHOSTLY WITCHES rising from the ground and laying hold of the terrified mob.

These ghosts are male and female, all with frayed ropes still around their necks, each in varying states of decay.

Beth believes she's hallucinating this, so feel free to make the scene stylised and strange.

CAPTION: AS THE WORLD FADED FROM SIGHT, SHE FANCIED THE SOULS OF THE VENGEFUL DEAD MIGHT RISE FROM THE EARTH TO PUNISH HER TORMENTORS.

4.) Close-up of Beth's eyes rolling back.

CAPTION: THOUGH SHE KNEW IT WAS NAUGHT BUT A DYING WISH.

CAPTION (J-cut dialogue from next panel): "BETH!"

PAGE SEVEN (five panels)

1.) Beth awakes on the ground, gazing bewildered at the frayed end of the rope. The noose now hangs loose around her neck.

QUIDO (off): BETH, WAKE UP!

BETH: HHN?

2.) Reveal QUIDO kneeling beside Beth, looking both concerned and gorgeous!

The Soothsayer and Beth's horse stand behind him.

BETH: QUIDO!

QUIDO: I LEAVE YOU TO DOZE FOR AN HOUR AND STILL YOU FIND TROUBLE.

3.) Pull back to reveal the two of them are surrounded by the desiccated corpses of the villagers, each mummified within their clothes, drained of life!

Madelena is foremost among them, her lips shrunk back from her teeth, her withered face frozen in a hideous scream!

QUIDO: WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

4.) Beth looks up at Quido.

BETH: DID YOU FIND ME THOSE FLOWERS?

5.) Quido hands over a bunch of beautiful wildflowers.

QUIDO: AYE. IT TOOK ME A WHILE, BUT THEIR PERFUME LED ME STRAIGHT TO THEM.

CAPTION (bottom-right): FOR BLACK BETH HAD BEEN BOUND ON A PRIVATE
ERRAND, AN ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE...

PAGE EIGHT (five panels)

1.) Flowers in hand, Beth solemnly approaches the tree, its gnarled branches looming over her.

CAPTION: TO VISIT THE SITE WHERE HER MOTHER HAD BEEN MURDERED!

2.) Beth lays the flowers at the foot of the tree.

CAPTION: TO REMEMBER THOSE FALLEN TO FEAR AND EVIL.

3.) Close-up of Beth, her jaw set, bottom lip clenched as she stifles her tears.

CAPTION: TO RENEW HER VOW OF VENGEANCE!

4.) Beth, Quido, the Soothsayer and the horse depart; Beth is in the lead, the others giving her space.

The tree is visible in the background.

CAPTION: THE VILLAGERS WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES TO REVERE THE WITCH TREE OF MOURNVEIL.

LINK: A SACRED SITE...

5.) A GHOSTLY FEMALE FIGURE wearing long robes stands beneath the tree, her back to us as she watches them depart.

She has long black hair and the frayed end of a rope around her neck, all drifting in an unearthly breeze.

The sun breaks through the clouds, in contrast to the gloomy skies of the opening scene.

If possible, have the flowers in shot at the foot of the tree where Beth left them.

CAPTION: TO WHICH THEY HAD CHOSEN THE WRONG DAY TO PAY TRIBUTE!

LINK: END.

[end]