

SANTA KILLER

FADE IN:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET -- NIGHT

Just before dawn. A lifesize Santa balloon sways gently on the lawn of a house, a smile plastered on the jolly man's face. Christmas music plays.

A pop. The music stops with a screech. A release of air. Santa cringes. He shrinks downwards, rocking in a circle. With a shiver and a shudder, Santa collapses, splayed flat over the edge of the steps. The smile doesn't waver.

Across the street, the first rays of the sun illuminate a look of shock on the face of a Frosty the Snowman balloon.

A door opens. A scream.

INT. GARDEN CENTER -- DAY

Customers line up to buy deflated Santa balloons, Frosty balloons, Rudolph balloons, Pooh balloons. Christmas songs blare from a loudspeaker.

RUSTY, a lanky teenager, inflates a Santa. The balloon wobbles until it reaches full height. Two young KIDS cheer. A grunting DAD picks up Santa. Rusty mumbles. Dad sneers at the teen as he staggers towards the exit, lugging Santa.

Rotund MR. WILSON, his face red with anger, strides over. He yells. Points Rusty to the door. Rusty rips off his apron, hurls it to the ground, and stomps off.

EXT. GARDEN CENTER -- DAY

Rusty rushes past MICHAEL, sweeping pine needles on the floor.

MICHAEL

What's wrong, Rusty?

RUSTY

Wilson canned me.

Rusty approaches Dad and his two kids. Out of breath, Dad puts down the inflated Santa to rest. Rusty punches the Santa. The balloon teeters and bends over at the waist.

KIDS

(in unison)

Wahhhhhhhhhh!

EXT. ANOTHER RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

A festive block. Houses decked with the fashions of the season. Front lawns cluttered with plastic reindeer and assorted holiday balloons. CHILDREN toss snowballs on the sidewalks. A MOTHER and her SON build a snowman.

A bundled-up GRANDPOP inflates a Santa next to an already air-filled Rudolph. Santa keeps tipping over into the reindeer.

A lit Christmas tree glows from inside a house midway up the street. A van rolls into the driveway of the house. Dad steps out, opens the back of the van, and pulls out the blown-up Santa. The cheering kids reach to help. Dad shoos them away.

He struggles to drag the balloon towards its anointed location on the snowy lawn, next to Frosty. He plops it in place.

KIDS
(in unison)
Yayyyyyyyyy!

EXT. SAME STREET -- NIGHT

Lights twinkle up and down the block. Some all white. Some a mix of colors. A golden hue bathes the Santa and Rudolph pair on one lawn. Several houses down, a red radiance illuminates Dad's Santa and Frosty.

EXT. SAME STREET -- DAY

A deflated Santa wraps around Rudolph's neck. At Dad's house, a collapsed Santa lay face down in the snow next to Frosty. A door opens.

KIDS (O.S.)
(in unison)
Wahhhhhhhhh!

A door slams.

INT. SHOPPING MALL -- DAY

A CHOIR sings Christmas carols. CHILDREN ride a merry-go-round. OTHER CHILDREN wait impatiently in line to tell SANTA what they want for Christmas.

Curly haired ROSEA climbs on Santa's lap.

SANTA
What's your name, missy?

ROSEA
Rosea. I'm five.

SANTA
What do you want Santa to bring you for Christmas, Rosea?

ROSEA
Uh...

She licks her finger.

ROSEA
A Cherry Red tricycle with mag wheels.

SANTA
Mag what?

ROSEA
And Amazing Amanda.

TINY TOM, a little person dressed as an elf, strolls up to Rosea.

TINY TOM
Only one present allowed, tootsie.
Times are tough. Now smile.

Santa squeezes Rosea's face. Tiny Tom snaps a picture. Rosea hops off, gets a candy cane. Heavysset BENNY takes her place on Santa.

BENNY
I'm Benny. My Daddy bought a balloon
looks just like you.

SANTA
The balloon is one of my many helpers
around town. Santa can't be
everywhere, Benny.

Santa winks at the elf. The elf does a double take.

BENNY
My Daddy can't get him to stand up
straight. He just rolls on his side.

SANTA
Well, I...

BENNY
I told him the Santa's too skinny.
He needs to be fatter. Like you.

Santa does a double take.

TINY TOM
No more idle chitchat, chubs. Tell
Santa what you want.

BENNY
A Game Boy Advance.

A camera snaps a picture of a startled Benny.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL -- NIGHT

A bedraggled Santa and two LITTLE PEOPLE elves leave the mall after closing. The elves mosey away together.

Santa saunters off in the opposite direction towards his car. He lights up a cigarette.

Three TEENAGERS run out from the back of the mall.

TEEN ONE

Hey Santa. How 'bout a new baseball
for Christmas?

Santa turns. Teen One hurls a snowball. It clips Santa on the side of the head. The cigarette tumbles to the asphalt.

TEEN ONE

Strike one.

The teens laugh. Santa hurries towards the car.

SANTA

Punks.

TEEN TWO

You better get the elves to guard
you.

TEEN THREE

They can stand on each other's
shoulders.

More laughter.

Teen Two uncorks another snowball. It lands in the middle of Santa's back. He slips and tumbles to the parking lot.

TEEN TWO

Strike two.

EXT. RUSTIC STREET -- DAY

Several small CHILDREN coming home from school wave at Rudolph, Frosty, Santa balloons congregating on lawns. The balloons, bouyed by the wind, return the wave. The children smile as they turn the corner.

EXT. COUNCILMAN'S STREET -- DAY

The children pass yellow police tape cordoning off the front lawn and walkway of Councilman Charlie Schell's house. The remains of a flattened Santa rests half on the lawn, half on the cement.

A trio of COPS mill about. One of the officers leers at the children when they stroll by.

INT. COUNCILMAN'S HOUSE -- DAY

CHARLIE SCHELL paces the floor. His wife, MARYANN, sits in a loveseat dabbing her teary eyes.

Detective RICHARD GOLDBLOOM peers over notes.

RICHARD
You got any kids on this block pissed
at you, Charlie?

MARYANN
Just about every kid, I'd say.
(to Richard)
Charlie closed down the skateboard
park last summer.

Charlie casts a furtive glance at his wife.

CHARLIE
Nuisance, that's what it was. Damn
kids on their evil boards.

He stops pacing.

CHARLIE
That's got nothin' to do with this.
I'm not the only house targeted,
Goldbloom. Sylvin Morrison, over on
Clark Street. Same thing happened to
him. And I know of at least one other.

RICHARD
A serial Santa killer?

CHARLIE
Or killers. Teenage misfits, if you
want my opinion. Running amok.

Richard stares out the window. A crowd of children hang around
the sidewalk, watching the police watch them.

RICHARD
The footprints around the Santa.
All made by the same boot. Looks
like a size 10. Could be a teenager.
Doesn't rule out more than one
perpetrator, either.

He turns back to the Schell's.

RICHARD
Let me understand one more time.
Neither of you saw or heard anything
unusual early this morning?

Charlie gets in Richard's face.

CHARLIE
That's what we said. So don't count
on us to solve this crime for you.

EXT. FRONT DOOR -- DAY

Richard interviews a MOTHER across the street from the Councilman.

EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Richard questions a TEENAGER shoveling snow a couple doors away.

EXT. LAWN -- DAY

Richard chats with two YOUNG BOYS building a snowman down the block.

INT. HANNIGAN'S BAR -- NIGHT

Richard enters. He walks past a corner table populated by Tiny Tom and the two little people elves. Strolls to the end of the bar where Santa plays with a Tom Collins. On the counter, an open newspaper displays an account of the Santa killer.

Richard glances around.

RICHARD

Aren't you concerned with the image of Santa boozing it up at the local pub?

Santa lifts his head towards Richard.

SANTA

A little drink now and then is good for the soul. And my indigestion. Besides, I'm off-duty.

Santa clutches his drink, the newspaper, climbs off the stool.

SANTA

Follow me, Detective.

He walks over to a booth. Richard gestures to the elf table as he passes by, then joins Santa.

RICHARD

Don't get along with the elves?

SANTA

They don't care much for me. They're kind of clickish. The little people.

Richard raises his eyebrows.

RICHARD

You mentioned you have information on these Santa mutilations.

SANTA

Last night. Walking to the car. Three hooligan teenagers unleashed a barrage of snowballs. At me. Santa.

RICHARD

And you think this might be connected to the attacks?

SANTA

It's a longshot, I know. But these were unruly young boys. Really rude. Likely as not to carry out such a dastardly thing.

RICHARD

Could you identify them if you saw them?

Santa nods.

SANTA

I hear something else that may be helpful if they don't pan out.

INT. POLICE STATION -- DAY

Richard sits behind the desk in the interrogation room, file in hand. He stares at Rusty examining his ink-stained fingers.

RUSTY

You got anything to clean off the ink?

RICHARD

Yeh. Later.

RUSTY

It's really disgusting, sir.

Richard glares at the kid. Opens the file.

RICHARD

You stocked the Christmas decorations. Blew up the balloons. Right?

Rusty nods.

RICHARD

Why'd Wilson fire you, Rusty?

RUSTY

I don't know.

RICHARD

You want me to tell you what he said?

Rusty slouches in the chair.

RICHARD

You're late. You took too long of a lunch break. And you made fun of the customers.

RUSTY

Says him.

RICHARD

Not true?

RUSTY

Not a word.

RICHARD

So you were pissed?

RUSTY

Wouldn't you be? But I didn't slash those Santas.

Rusty slouches some more. Richard rises, towers over Rusty. The teen glowers up at him.

RICHARD

I believe you. But I can't confirm your whereabouts in the middle of last night. Saying you were asleep in bed doesn't cut it without someone to vouch for you.

RUSTY

My parents will...

Richard shushes him.

RICHARD

Maybe you have a friend with a grudge, or a mean streak. Maybe a couple of enemies out to blame you for this.

RUSTY

That's nuts. Can I go now?

RICHARD

I'm trying to help you out here, Rusty, but you're not workin' with me. This Santa slashing has gone too far.

RUSTY

It ain't me.

Rusty wipes his snotty nose with a sleeve.

RICHARD

I want you to hang around here for a little while. Until your memory is jogged

Rusty sighs.

RICHARD

Or your parents come by to get you.

Rusty slouches almost off the chair.

INT. POLICE LAB -- DAY

A LAB TECH examines fingerprint comparisons on a computer screen. He picks up the phone.

LAB TECH

Lt., can you come to the lab?

LATER

Richard leans over the computer.

RICHARD

So the perp used gloves?

LAB TECH

Gloves a little too large for his or her hands. Note the smudges.

EXT. POLICE DEPARTMENT PARKING LOT -- DAY

Richard clicks the car remote. His door buzzes open.

KENT (O.S.)

Goldbloom.

Richard turns. KENT SPRAGUE darts up to him, holding hands with his two young SONS.

RICHARD

What is it, Kent?

KENT

Two Santas destroyed on my block. Another on Mission Street. What are you doing about this nutjob?

RICHARD

Investigating. That's what we do in the police.

KENT

You better do a better job. My kids here are in hysterics.

Richard stares at the kids staring back in awe. No sign of tears, let alone hysterics.

RICHARD

I got somebody in custody as we speak.

He gets in his car.

KENT

You should throw away the key.

Richard shakes his head, shuts the door without answering.

EXT. HIGH STREET -- NIGHT

A flattened Santa hangs over the railing. Footsteps disappear in the distance.

INT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

CAPTAIN PASQUALONI hangs up the phone. He turns to Richard.

CAPTAIN

Got to let the boy go, Rich. A Santa went down on High Street. The report just came in.

RICHARD

Could be a copycat.

CAPTAIN

Could be. But we don't have enough evidence to keep Rusty. And his parents are in the parking lot.

Richard shakes his head.

EXT. MAYOR'S HOUSE -- DAY

A crumpled Santa sprawls on the downward slope of the lawn, its head twisted to the side. A scream from inside the house. The front door opens. MAYOR RALPH FORKESH, in bright red pajamas, peeks his head outside.

MAYOR

Sonofabitch.

He slams the door shut.

LATER

Neighbors gawk. Little children point. Police spread crime scene tape around Santa. The Mayor, still in his pajamas, but with a sweater to ward off the chill, yells into a cell phone.

MAYOR

No excuses, Goldbloom. Catch the bastard or you're fired.

He pulls the cell phone from his ear, looks at it, then resumes.

MAYOR

Maybe I can't fire your ass over this, but...just get the guy.

An officer lifts up the collapsed Santa to take it away. It's head slumps to the side.

MAYOR

Please.

INT. POLICE STATION -- DAY

Richard examines the photo of the dead Santa on the Mayor's lawn. The SARGEANT flies through the door.

SARGEANT

Better take a look at this fax, Goldbloom.

He hands Richard the paper. In terse copy, the fax reads: "All imposters will die by Christmas Eve."

RICHARD

Impostors?

SARGEANT

Impostors.

RICHARD

Trace the point of origin.

SARGEANT

I tried. It can't be done.

Richard gazes at the fax.

INT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE -- DAY

The Captain reads the fax.

CAPTAIN

Impostors?

RICHARD

I checked out the companies who make the balloons. See if this is a corporate thing.

CAPTAIN

And?

RICHARD
 And the attacks don't discriminate.
 Every firm is fair game.

The Captain scratches his head.

CAPTAIN
 Impostors. This one has me stumped.
 But that's not an answer, Rich.

INT. SHOPPING MALL -- NIGHT

A red-haired GIRL climbs off Santa's lap, grabs a candy cane, toddles off, the last of the day's children. Santa stretches. Richard ambles up to him.

RICHARD
 Tired?

SANTA
 Wouldn't you be?

Richard shows Santa the fax.

RICHARD
 What do you make of it?

SANTA
 Someone with a real ax to grind.

RICHARD
 When you get right down to it, you're
 an impostor, too.

Santa opens his eyes wide.

SANTA
 But I'm flesh and blood at least.

BEGIN MONTAGE AROUND TOWN

Severed Santas. Dismembered Santas. Fallen Santas. Crumbled Santas. Lying face up. Lying face down. Arms flailed. Arms crouched. Hanging over rails. Lying on lawns. Impaled on fences. Splayed. Frayed. Crouched against walls.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CUL DE SAC -- NIGHT

A smiling, merry Santa waves in the wind on the lawn of a two-story house. The sound of footsteps draw closer. The tip of a machete fires upward, slicing Santa's head clean off. The body loses air, collapsing in a heap on the snow.

PERP (O.S.)
 Oowwww!

Footsteps hobble away.

EXT. CUL DE SAC HOUSE -- DAY

Droplets of dried blood dot the snow near Santa's crumbled, decapitated body on the lawn. Richard scoops up a sample, places it in a vial. A young POLICE OFFICER leans over.

POLICE OFFICER
What's with the blood?

Richard turns to the cop.

RICHARD
Maybe Santa fought back against his
attacker before he lost his head.

The cop furrows his brow. Richard chuckles.

RICHARD
Anyway, I'm hoping we caught a break
with this.

Richard spies a sliver of white cardboard protruding from under Santa's body. He digs out a business card, reads it, puts it in his pocket. Stands up.

POLICE OFFICER
Not that it matters, but it's a few
days before Christmas, and there's
not too many Santa's left standing.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET -- DAY

A grizzly Santa, head lopped-part way off, lies under a bush on the slope of front lawn. Richard notices another fragment of cardboard tucked away under the left arm, half buried in the snow. He gently pulls Santa to the side. Nudges another card out.

POLICE OFFICER 2 (O.S.)
Hey Rich. Take a look here.

Richard rises, pockets the card again, strolls over to POLICE OFFICER 2. The cop points to footprints in the snow.

RICHARD
Odd pairing. A limp, maybe.

POLICE OFFICER
That's what I'm thinking.

Richard bends down.

RICHARD
Take some photos.

EXT. GARDEN CENTER -- DAY

Mr. Wilson stocks boxes of garland ribbons on shelves.
FRANKLIN BEARD approaches.

FRANKLIN

Got any more blow-up Santas?

WILSON

We're clean out, Franklin.

FRANKLIN

Gosh darn it. I waited too long again.

WILSON

Wouldn't matter anyhow. Almost all
the ones we sold been destroyed by
the Santa killers.

FRANKLIN

Some story, huh?

WILSON

Far's I know just two still up. One
at Benjy Peters' place. Another over
at Lemmy Trexel's. Lemmy's got a
fence around the perimeter and
security cameras set up. Anyone sets
foot near Santa, alarms go off.

FRANKLIN

Must be good for your business though.

Wilson scowls.

FRANKLIN

Gimme a box of garland for the road.

WILSON

Sickos, that's what it is. Sickos.

Wilson throws a box of silver garland to a stunned Franklin.

INT. SHOPPING MALL -- DAY

Limping feet saunter along. A bandage coated with dried blood
wraps around the big toe of one foot.

INT. POLICE LAB -- DAY

Sitting at a lab bench, Richard sifts through a chemistry
text. A door opens. The lab tech dashes over.

LAB TECH

This is weird. Very weird.

He lays a report on the bench. Richard picks it up. Reads it.

RICHARD
Blood type unknown?

LAB TECH
And the DNA sequence is hard to decipher by any traditional standards.

RICHARD
Don't tell me it's an alien?

The tech shakes his head.

LAB TECH
I will tell you this. From what little I could decode, the blood did not come from a teenager.

RICHARD
Go on.

LAB TECH
This blood is at least 100 years old.

Richard drops the lab report.

EXT. TREXEL LAWN -- NIGHT

Santa unscathed. Surrounded by fencing. Illuminated by a spotlight. A camera purrs.

A series of snips. The fence separates. The spotlight dims, goes out altogether. The alarm box beeps once and drones to a halt.

Hobbling feet trudge through the fence. The camera turns. A laser beam hurls towards the lens. The camera stops snapping pictures.

A soft snip, and Santa twirls around, crumpling to the turf.

Footsteps hurry away. The camera restarts. The alarm wails. Lights come on throughout the house.

INT. POLICE STATION -- DAY

Richard examines photos of the Santa, first rollicking in the wind, then fallen after the assault. LEMMY TREXEL yanks another photo from his pocket.

LEMMY
The camera managed to get this one in before the bastard disabled it.

Richard takes the picture from Lemmy's hand.

RICHARD

Nothing.

LEMMY

Exactly. Nothing. Maybe the Santa killer is invisible like Claude Rains in that movie.

Staring at the picture, Richard rises.

RICHARD

I don't think so, Lemmy. But I have an idea.

The sounds of young chanters outside his window attracts Richard. He walks over and looks out. Dozens of CHILDREN huddle together in the courtyard, chanting.

CHILDREN

Save Santa. Save Santa.

EXT. BUCOLIC STREET -- NIGHT

Crouched in his unmarked squad car, OFFICER GRAY sips coffee, eyes focused on the Santa on Benjy Peters' lawn. A knocking noise behind his car catches his notice. He opens the door, peers back.

A rush of air whisks by. Gray sniffs. His eyes glaze over. He falls out of the car. Rolls on his back, unconscious.

EXT. BENJY PETERS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

No fence. No alarm. Santa exposed to the world. Santa turning from side to side.

Footsteps traipse up the side of the snow-covered lawn in an uneven meter. A butcher knife swings back and forth, nearing Santa. Inches away, the unseen wielder raises the knife.

Santa's eyes open wide in amazement, peering down towards the weapon. A Santa hand bends, reaches behind, whips out a stun gun.

ASSAILANT (O.S.)

What the hey!

A flash of light pierces the intruder. The butcher knife falls. The intruder tumbles to the lawn. Santa tears off his face, exposing Richard Goldbloom. Richard pounces on the disabled assailant. Another business card flutters to the snow.

RICHARD

Merry Christmas, little man.

Richard clasps cuffs on Tiny Tom.

A pair of OFFICERS rush from behind Peter's house, running down the lawn after the other two elves scampering to get away.

EXT. BUCOLIC STREET -- NIGHT

Tiny Tom and his comrades in crime, all handcuffed, lean against the door of the police car, barely reaching the handle. The Captain ambles over with Richard. A robed BENJY PETERS, his three CHILDREN hiding behind him, follow.

On the stoop of the house, Officer Gray massages his temples.

The Captain retrieves a card from his vest pocket, thrusts it in front of Tiny Tom.

CAPTAIN

There shall be no other Santas before us? What in God's name does that mean?

Tiny Tom turns his head towards the Captain.

TINY TOM

False idols, Captain. Graven images. Read your 10 Commandments.

RICHARD

I don't think the commandments refer to Santa.

TINY TOM

Maybe not to you, Detective. Or you, Captain.

Tiny Tom glances at his fellow elves.

TINY TOM

But to the fraternity of elves, Santa is god.

The Captain leans over.

CAPTAIN

You're an elf?

TINY TOM

Born and bred.

RICHARD

A North Pole elf?

TINY TOM

You know of any other?

The Peters children gasp.

YOUNG PETERS

Real elves.

OLDEST PETERS CHILD

Get real. There's no such thing as
elves, stupid.

CAPTAIN

And you serve Santa, over at the
mall?

TINY TOM

You put on the red suit, the white
beard, you take toy requests, you're
Santa. A surrogate, but good enough
for us to watch over.

Richard bends down to Tiny Tom's level.

RICHARD

Is Santa in on this? The guy at the
mall?

Tiny Tom glances at his pals again.

TINY TOM

No. Neither is the big man. But we
take it upon ourselves to protect
the franchise. As the law commands.

RICHARD

They're balloons, Tiny.

TINY TOM

Impostor Santas, Detective.

CAPTAIN

Book 'em, Rich.

Richard stands, pauses, nods to OFFICER SCANLON. The two
help the elves into the rear of the police car.

TINY TOM

Book us if you must, but it's
Christmas Eve, gentleman. We'll be
out of here before midnight.

RICHARD

Right.

Richard closes the door. Scanlon gets into the front seat,
starts the ignition and drives off. A wobbly Officer Gray
joins Richard and the Captain on the sidewalk.

CAPTAIN

Elves.

OFFICER GRAY

This is nuts.

RICHARD

Maybe they can plead insanity.

Halfway down the block, a swirl of smoke envelopes the police car. A squeal of brakes. The car twirls around, hops a curb, hits a fire hydrant, resulting in a geyser of water. Scanlon jumps from the car, dazed and confused.

Richard, the Captain and Officer Gray rush to the scene.

SCANLON

They're gone. Vanished.

Richard and the Captain peer into the back seat. Only the handcuffs remain amid whippets of smoke.

FADE OUT