

# MEMORANDUM

*Privileged and Confidential*

**TO** : ANTI-VIGILANTE TASK FORCE (GROUP)  
**FROM** : AGENT DALE PETEY  
**DATE** : SEPTEMBER 22, 2019  
**SUBJECT** : The Origin of “Sister Night”

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At the direction of Agent Blake, I have been investigating the origin of Detective Abar’s “Sister Night” persona so as to better understand her. If masks are expressions of trauma, then what does “Sister Night” say about Detective Abar?

I began by checking her personnel file. The masking protocols of the Tulsa Police Department require that detective class officers provide a statement explaining their chosen guise. Detective Abar’s statement was just three words: “Watch the movie.” Alas, watching *Sister Night* isn’t yet an option for the 21<sup>st</sup> century entertainment consumer. It’s an oldie (1977), and an obscure one, too. According to the proprietor of Tulsa’s only Mondo Video, it might be years before Hollywood re-releases “the cult stuff” as part of the larger re-introduction of home entertainment technology and media into the public sphere.

And so I visited the local library and consulted *Ebert’s Guide to Practical Filmgoing* (2012 edition). From this book I learned that *Sister Night* lives in a proverbial parallel world of American cinema. I speak of Vietnam, which has always had its own unique pop culture. For example, the seventies and eighties saw a phenomenon of films made specifically for the large population of African Americans who migrated there after the war to escape the institutional racism of the Nixon era and seek new opportunities in the new frontier. Mr. Ebert notes that *Sister Night* belonged to a subgenre called “Black Mask” movies — responses or parodies of masked vigilantes. Some were very specific; *The Black Superman*, for example, was an on-the-nose spoof of Dr. Manhattan. Others, like *Sister Night*, *Tarantula*, and *Batman*, were expressions of archetypes forged by the likes of Silhouette, Mothman, or Nite Owl. They all provided wish fulfillment fantasy that doubled as social commentary. Their implicit critique — that masked vigilantes were a largely white phenomenon, and a problematic one at that — is now rather ironic, given our discovery that Hooded Justice, the first masked vigilante, was William Reeves, an African American. But we might also say that Mr. Reeves was an exception that proved the rule.

According to Mr. Ebert’s three-star review, *Sister Night* tells the story of Pamela Davis, a devout nun by day, ministering to lost souls in the Hell’s Kitchen section of New York City; and a masked vigilante by night, waging a war on crime wherever she finds it, armed with a Colt .45 and a whip of nickel-plated rosary beads. (It sounds like the firearm was her preferred weapon: after all, the film’s tagline was “The Nun With The Motherf%&Sing Gun!”) It does not appear the film was all that interested in presenting what one might call ‘orthodox theology.’ Among her quips: “The devil created the problem of evil; God created me to solve it” and “You know why Jesus wants you to turn the other cheek? So I can punch that one, too!”

After an introductory sequence in which she brutalizes a gang of racist Knot-Tops preying on the homeless, *Sister Night* investigates the murder of local prostitute who routinely visited her soup kitchen. Over the course of investigating an intricate mystery, *Sister Night* takes down a slumlord, a sex trafficking ring, and white-collar gangsters, while also finding time to romance a handsome graffiti artist and make peace with the tragedy of her origin story, the murder of her parents. (One can see why Detective Abar might have found this story so compelling.)

*Sister Night* was released in Vietnam in June of 1977, just as the “Black Mask” subgenre was reaching its peak — and just as costumed adventurers were about to become outlawed by the Keene Act throughout all the Americas. It was a box office success, according to Mr. Ebert, for three reasons: a star-making performance by Stacy Teigh (“Never has fierceness and finesse been balanced so perfectly in this genre”); “hyper-kinetic direction” by Darlene Durham; and a “funky and really funny” theme song performed by Teigh herself that became “the song of summer” in Saigon. Mr. Ebert was so taken by the tune, he quoted all the lyrics:

*She's got a body like an angel  
34 – 48 – brick red  
But if you touch her chocolate body  
Yo' turkey ass will turn up dead!*

*She's outta sight, sight, sight  
Ohh, that's right, right, right  
She's Sister Night, Night, Night  
(Get outta town honkey!)*

*When you're eating too much coleslaw  
And the mayo has turned sour  
Sister Night is getting stronger  
By the minute, by the hour*

*She's outta sight, sight, sight  
Yesss, that's right, right, right  
She Sister Night, Night, Night  
(Get outta town, honkey!)*

One final note. As I wrote this memo, I found myself having a hunch. I placed a call to a certain movie theater in New York — the one that employed William Reeves back in 1975, where the executors of Nelson Gardner's estate presented Mr. Reeves with Gardner's will (see previous memo). It turns out Mr. Reeves bought that theater one year later, and he's been showing *Sister Night* every Sunday at midnight since 2017 — the same year Detective Abar decided to put on the mask of her childhood hero to fight crime.

Thermodynamic miracle? I think not.

Once this adventure in Tulsa is concluded, perhaps a field trip to New York is in order. For purely academic reasons, of course. And that theme song does sound catchy.

*Submitted respectfully,*



***Special Agent Dale Petey***

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