

Second Coming

Original Screenplay
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT OUTSIDE JERUSALEM - DAY

A dozen ARABIC MEN work inside a large, corded off grid. The workers dig, sift and examine artifacts found; while at the edges of the grid lays an excavated ancient structure and a group of tents.

SUPER - JUDEAN DESERT, 1976

One man is in charge of this archeological site.

FATHER RICHARDS, late 40's, a gaunt yet wiry, studious type. Although dressed in KHAKIS, he wears the familiar clerical collar and black shirt of A PRIEST.

TWO WORKERS lift a large ceramic pot from a dug hole. Father Richards examines the workmanship of the ancient pottery.

FATHER RICHARDS
Beautiful. Have it sent to the
tent.

He heads toward a tent at the edge of the compound.

As he approaches it, a JEEP HONKS as it comes into view. It pulls up.

Inside, the passenger, FATHER PATRIZIO, 30's, a heavy-set, yet jovial young priest gets out.

FATHER PATRIZIO
My Lord, John. This heat-- Seminary
never prepared us for this.

He pulls out a handkerchief and wipes the copious amounts of sweat from his brow.

FATHER RICHARDS
Show some backbone, Bill. If our
Lord could live in these lands for
thirty-three years, I'm sure you
can handle a few weeks of this
heat...

He takes a duffle bag from Patrizio.

FATHER PATRIZIO
I hope so... Your uncle sends his
best. You should have been at the
blessing, it was very moving-- you
must be very proud.

FATHER RICHARDS

I love my uncle, he raised me,
but... He just wants to keep the
status quo. The church today needs
more than just business as usual.

FATHER PATRIZIO

With him as Pope now, I'm sure
you'll be going places-- make
changes...

FATHER RICHARDS

We'll see... I'm sure you would
like to get settled in before we
start.

FATHER PATRIZIO

I'm anxious to see the site.

FATHER RICHARDS

Right this way...

Richards throws the duffle bag near the tent and they
proceed back toward the dig site. Patrizio wipes his brow
some more.

FATHER RICHARDS

We turned up a few things.

He pulls out a coin from his pocket and hands it to
Patrizio, who examines it.

FATHER PATRIZIO

Roman Denarius? Is that Pilate?

CLOSE ON: Face on coin bears a relief of the Roman Governor,
Pontius Pilate. Latin markings encompass the edge.

FATHER RICHARDS

Yes, early first century. See why--

FATHER PATRIZIO

I don't see how you can conclude--

FATHER RICHARDS

Wait! The wall paintings in the
structure are remarkable. They
clearly show this as a "Christian"
house of worship.

FATHER PATRIZIO

Third century perhaps, but first
century? The Romans executed
Christians for a lot less.

FATHER RICHARDS

I agree, but how else can you explain it? Who ever built this didn't hide-- didn't fear persecution.

FATHER PATRIZIO

Short of Peter or Paul, who would have had the devotion to build this?

As they reach the excavated structure, they stop as workers behind them YELL AND SHOUT in Arabic.

Suddenly a YOUNG BOY, 13, scampers into view, chased by several angry workers, wielding shovels. He weaves through the heavy equipment, which surrounds the ancient structure.

FATHER PATRIZIO

What in God's name is going on here?

The FOREMAN, 40's, a dirty, puny man, rushes up. He listens for a moment to the workers' loud ramblings.

FOREMAN

Father. They found him stealing.

Richards looks at the boy, who holds the side of his head, blood oozing from a wound, leaving him with ONE-EAR.

FATHER PATRIZIO

That's no reason to cut off this boy's ear.

FOREMAN

This is our justice. They should have cut off his hands, but rest assured, he will never do it again.

The workers SURROUND the boy. Like a trapped animal, he cowers under the machinery, just out of reach. The workers poke at him with shovels to flush him out.

FATHER RICHARDS

Stop this! Get them all away from here. I will have no more of this.

FOREMAN

(in Arabic)

You heard. Leave the young jackal alone.

Reluctant and vocal, they back off. Father Richard holds his handkerchief out for the wounded boy.

FATHER RICHARDS

It's okay. I won't hurt you.

The boy reluctantly crawls from under the machinery and cautiously takes the handkerchief from Father Richards.

As the boy stands and takes the cloth to his bloody wound, one worker THROWS a stone at him.

Fearful again of his safety, the young boy bolts off to the only refuge available-- into the structure.

Several workers start chase, but Father Richards blocks the entrance.

FATHER RICHARDS

No! You all have done enough!

The Foreman YELLS at the workers to back off.

INT. ANCIENT STRUCTURE - MOMENTS LATER

Father Richards and Father Patrizio enter the large space as the Foreman keeps the workers at the entrance. The space is dimly lit, but the flashlights illuminate the area. The young boy is nowhere in sight.

FATHER RICHARDS

Where did he go?

Except for some scaffolding against the walls and a large stone altar at one far end, the space is empty. Father Patrizio is amazed at the detail of the artwork on the walls. They depict the passion and crucifixion of Jesus.

FATHER PATRIZIO

Amazing...

Metal CREAKS as dust falls to the floor. Richards points his light beam toward the ceiling to see the young boy crouched at the top of the scaffold.

FATHER RICHARDS

It's okay. I will protect you.

The boy clings to the metal railing as Father Richards hands the flashlight to Patrizio and climbs up the scaffold.

FATHER PATRIZIO

What do you think you are doing?

FATHER RICHARDS

If the mountain won't come to Mohammed...

He climbs up toward the boy. Metal CREAKS under the weight. He reaches the boy and holds out his hand.

FATHER PATRIZIO

John. Be care--

Just then, the scaffolding GIVES WAY and CRASHES to the floor. The young boy and Father Richards FALL as the metal rods drop around them. Patrizio rushes to help them up.

FATHER PATRIZIO

Are you okay?

FATHER RICHARDS

Yes. I'm fine. The boy too.

The Foreman rushes to their side as the young boy clings to Father Richards. They look at the damage caused.

FATHER RICHARDS

Oh no... The Altar.

He is upset to see a heavy metal rod that has fallen onto the side of the altar; shards of stone lay at the base. There is a large, gaping crack.

FATHER RICHARDS

Bill, Give me your flashlight.

Father Richards takes a flashlight and crouches down to get a closer look. The boy stands nearby tending to his wound.

FATHER RICHARDS

Hollow? I can't get a good look though.

After a few seconds, the light focuses deep into the space.

CLOSE ON: FATHER RICHARDS FACE.

FATHER RICHARDS

My God.

FATHER PATRIZIO

John, what is it?

FATHER RICHARDS

Get a crew in here... Now!

EXT. ROME - ST. PETERS SQUARE - NIGHT

SUPER: 20 Years later...

Crowds of people visit this most holy of places. Photographs are taken, and young lovers kiss by the fountains.

INT. VATICAN PALACE - HALLWAY - SAME

CARDINAL RICHARDS, now in his 60's, is dressed in the vestments of a Cardinal. He walks down an opulent hallway, as THE POPE and his assistants converse with two priests.

When the priests leave, he steps up, bows, and kisses the Pope's ring.

CARDINAL RICHARDS

Your Holiness, I came as quickly as I could.

THE POPE, 90's, dressed in white, is an old, severely hunched and arthritic man. He breathes heavily as he walks. The Cardinal follows.

THE POPE

(in broken English)

Thank you Giovanni. I hope your flight was comfortable.

CARDINAL RICHARDS

Yes it was. Thank you, your Holiness.

THE POPE

We have a "situazione" that requires your wisdom.

CARDINAL RICHARDS

Anything you wish, your Holiness.

THE POPE

Grazzie... As you know, Cardinalle Buscanti has resigned.

CARDINAL RICHARDS

I heard... It's such a shame.

THE POPE

Yes... I'm afraid that his faith has wandered. But fortunately, the boy's family is being... cooperative.

CARDINAL RICHARDS

That's good at least-- To avoid scandal... What can I do?

THE POPE

Being "familiare" with this, in your own diocese, I would like you to conduct the "investigazione" and handle any possible damages.

CARDINAL RICHARDS
Of course. Gladly.

THE POPE
Now that his office is vacant, I
wish to appoint you as Cardinalle'
Carmerlengo.

CARDINAL RICHARDS
(taken aback)
Head of State? I am quite honored,
but won't it be perceived as
nepotism?

They stop in front of a door. The Pope places a hand on the
his shoulder.

THE POPE
We need one who is familiar with
the administrative duties of the
church and state. You are my
nephew, but you are also best
suited for the position.

CARDINAL RICHARDS
I am honored of your faith in me.

He opens the door to show the Cardinal the room.

INSERT - OFFICE OF THE CARDINALLE CARMERLENGO.

A large room richly appointed.

BACK TO SCENE -

The Cardinal is impressed and taken aback.

CARDINAL RICHARDS
I humbly accept...

He kisses the Pope's ring again as the Pontiff leaves and
goes down the hall with his assistants.

The Cardinal enters his new office.

INT. OFFICE OF THE CARDINALLE CARMERLENGO - CONTINUOUS

The Cardinal looks about the room with the glee of a
schoolboy, as he strokes the top of the richly detailed
desk. He grabs the phone and dials.

CARDINAL RICHARDS
Constantine... Meet me at the
office of Carmerlengo--... I have a
package for you to deliver.

He hangs up and places an ELECTRONIC CARD KEY in a plain envelope. He then admires the exquisite artwork on the walls.

EXT. VATICAN - PALACE COURTYARD - NIGHT

At a far end of the courtyard, near a set of thick iron doors, two PONTIFICAL SWISS GUARDS stand silently as several priests walk out of the building.

A third guard comes up to them. He, an UNKEMPT GUARD, 30's, pulls out a cigarette and lights it. He offers the pack to the others.

UNKEMPT GUARD
(in Italian)
Good evening gentlemen... Smoke?

The two guards look dumbfounded at the insubordination this guard presents.

Suddenly and without warning, THREE MEN with black clothes and ski masks jump from behind the corner.

They silently overpower the two main guards, and inject a HYPODERMIC NEEDLE into their necks. They stealthily drag the unconscious guards behind bushes, as the Odd Guard takes their place.

They return and head for the massive iron doors.

THE LEADER, masked, pulls out the electronic card key and swipes the control panel. The light above the lock flashes green as the lock clangs open. He opens the door and the others quietly rush in.

Before going in, The Leader hits a cigarette from the unkempt guard's mouth.

LEADER
(in Italian)
Imbecile! Stand guard!

He shuts the door as the unkempt guard keeps watch. Alone now, he discreetly pulls out another smoke.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - MOMENTS LATER

The three men traipse down the stairs into the Great Hall of Archives. They carefully watch and count the half dozen priests who catalog and handle religious artifacts.

Confident in their move, they pull out tranquilizer pistols, and fire silently upon the clergy in the hall. Each FALLS to the floor, UNCONSCIOUS.

They rush toward the center of the room. One man gets in front of a computer and searches the online catalog. The leader keeps watch, as the third rifles through drawers and cabinets, and throws small and valuable items into a large duffle bag.

LEADER
(in Italian)
Hurry! Take only jewels and gold.

It only takes a few seconds for the man on the computer to find something. He points to the screen.

THIEF
(in Italian)
Here it is! Section B-- Vault one hundred and three.

The leader whistles to the third man, and they quickly head toward the vaults in the back of the hall. They run down past each vault.

LEADER
(in Italian)
One hundred... and one... two...
One Hundred and three-- Okay-- Go
to work.

The computer man takes out a device and places it on the safe, near the tumbler. A few moments later, he pulls the lever and it OPENS.

INT. WALK-IN SAFE - CONTINUOUS

Light enters the dark space. The three men cautiously enter. Two men rummage through drawers, but The Leader quickly stops them.

LEADER
(in Italian)
No! No! Nothing from here. Back to
the main hall.

Alone, he walks slowly to a small wooden cabinet, ornate with gold leaf, and painted medieval icons depicting the crucifixion.

He removes his ski mask and reveals himself to be the boy with ONE-EAR, now in his thirties.

He crosses himself and slowly opens the chest. Inside, swathed in black felt, rests... A CROWN OF THORNS.

One-Ear smiles as he rubs the side of his head where his ear once was. He pulls out and prepares a TEST TUBE AND SWAB.

INSERT - CROWN OF THORNS.

On the thorns is what appears to be dried BLOOD.

CLOSER - BLOOD.

The dried blood slowly LIQUEFIES as TITLES appear. They seep in and out from the liquid.

CLOSER - MOLECULES

Blood cells, molecules, and DNA strands dance about as TITLES continue to OOZE in and out from the red liquid.

FADE TO:

EXT. US SUPREME COURT STEPS - MORNING

DR. BRANDT, 55, a thin, distinguished man with all the characteristic glory of a rich, successful doctor, walks down the steps, with his lawyer and driver, as a DOZEN REPORTERS follow close behind.

One Reporter, CINDY GREGS, 30's, a petite, beautiful, newscaster, forces a microphone into his face.

CINDY GREGS

Doctor Brandt-- Cindy Gregs - CNN... Since the Supreme Court has upheld its decision against stem cell research, what plans does GenMed have?

DR. BRANDT

GenMed has always been about understanding the human condition and helping mankind with its most dire health problems. Stem cell research is not only a right, but also our best hope, to give humanity a fighting chance.

CINDY GREGS

Care to comment on rumors of GenMed conducting experiments in human cloning?

DR. BRANDT

You're talking science fiction. I do have to say, however, that science fiction can be at best pre-fact science.

He pushes his way through, down the steps. She follows close behind.

CINDY GREGS

Let's say you could and did, who
would you like to clone?

DR. BRANDT

I haven't given it much thought...
How about Elvis?

Everyone LAUGHS, except the Doctor.

DR. BRANDT

No more questions...

Dr. Brandt is whisked away by his people into a limousine.
Most reporters follow and blare off more questions--
unanswered. The limousine pulls away.

EXT. GENMED LABS - LATER

Across the river in New Jersey, among warehouses, stands a
shiny, new BUILDING. Surrounded by a high gate and guards,
this is a VERY SECURE place.

A limousine pulls up as the gate opens. At the main
entrance, DR. BRANDT waits.

Cardinal Richards comes out of the limo. Next to him, BISHOP
CONSTANTINE, 50's, the Cardinal's Personal Assistant. A
Greek elder with a rough, bulky exterior, but seemingly
gentle.

They shake hands.

DR. BRANDT

Your Eminence. Welcome to GenMed
and congratulations on your...
Promotion?

CARDINAL RICHARDS

Appointment... and thank you.

DR. BRANDT

How was your flight?

CARDINAL RICHARDS

Long... As has been this journey.
Shall we proceed?