

HEROD

"Pilot"

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Based on a true story

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The dominions of Herod were too little
for the greatness of his soul.

-- Augustus Caesar

FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNT ARBEL - THE GALILEE - NIGHT

We rise up the face of a cliff... Passing cave openings lit by a faint and flickering glow within...

SUPER: 45 B.C.E. -- The Galilee

Sounds of CHOPPING and HAMMERING become louder...

EXT. THE CLIFF TOP - NIGHT

A sudden blaze of torchlight reveals dozens of dirty, sweating men, stripped to their loincloths.

A huge rough-hewn box hangs by chains from a tree trunk that extends over the edge of the cliff. The chains pass through pulleys and are wrapped around a massive wheel --

It's a primitive elevator.

HEROD (mid/late 20s) surveys the scene with a critical eye as he straps his armor over his filthy tunic.

Three of his men -- NATHAN (early 20s) and two archers -- also arm themselves. Nathan has an unusual weapon -- a scythe lashed to the end of a spear.

Herod goes to inspect the ropes controlling the wheel, and is joined by his brother JOSEPH, late teens.

JOSEPH

I wish you'd let me go with you.

HEROD

I need you up here. And mother would never forgive me if I brought you home dead.

JOSEPH

And what if I bring YOU home dead?

HEROD

Then they'll make YOU governor of the Galilee. And you can deal with the damn rebels.

He smiles, reassuringly, then climbs up onto the tree trunk.

Joseph hands him up a torch. Holding it in one hand, Herod walks along the tree trunk, balancing carefully.

He glances down into the black void... and is overcome with vertigo.

He struggles to keep his balance... almost falls...

...then recovers, takes a few more steps, and swings down into the box hanging below.

Joseph, watching from the cliff top, lets out the breath he's been holding and helps Nathan up onto the trunk.

INT. THE BOX - NIGHT

Herod and his men brace themselves.

HEROD
Let it down!

EXT. THE CLIFF TOP - NIGHT

Joseph and the men struggle to control the descent of the box; chains RATTLE and timbers CREAK.

INT. THE BOX - NIGHT

Herod peers out through an arrow slit.

HEROD
Stop!

The box jerks to a halt before the glowing mouth of a cave.

HEROD (CONT'D)
(calling to cave)
By order of the king, surrender the rebel Antigonus!

The light from the cave snuffs out.

FWIIIIIIK!

A dagger whistles toward the box and impales itself in the wood an inch from Herod's eye. Herod barely flinches, then spots a rebel squatting in the shadows by the cave mouth.

HEROD (CONT'D)
Nathan -- use the hook.

Nathan thrusts the spear-scythe through a window slit.

The rebel parries the hook with his spear, but Nathan grabs him around the waist and jerks him, screaming, off the ledge.

THUD.

INT. THE CAVE - NIGHT

The REBEL LEADER crouches in the inner recesses of the cave, the torchlight from the box reflecting in his eyes.

INT. THE BOX - NIGHT

Herod peers into the dark cave.

HEROD

Cover me.

The archers move to the arrow slits and draw their bows.

Herod climbs to the top of the swaying box, looks down into the blackness, then launches himself toward the cave mouth.

INT. THE CAVE - NIGHT

Herod lands precariously, almost falling from the cave mouth, then steadies himself and draws his sword.

HEROD

Throw out your weapons!

He waits. No response.

HEROD (CONT'D)

(to his men)

Fire-arrows!

He flattens himself against the cave wall.

Two fire-arrows streak by. One sets a basket ablaze.

Squinting in the sudden burst of light, Herod's startled to see:

A WOMAN holding her hand over the mouth of her DAUGHTER (10) as her SON (5) cowers at her side.

The Rebel Leader guards them, brandishing a long knife.

HEROD (CONT'D)

(to his men)

Hold!

He indicates a rope ladder coiled at the cave mouth.

HEROD (CONT'D)

(to Rebel Leader)

They can go.

The woman looks imploringly at her husband.

HEROD (CONT'D)
(to his men)
Let the woman and children pass!

The woman gets to her feet, looking anxiously from Herod to her husband.

REBEL LEADER
NO!

He throws a fistful of dirt at Herod's eyes. Herod wipes his face, blinking, as the rebel lunges at him with the knife.

Herod fends him off and they angle for position.

The rebel grabs the boy and uses him as a shield.

The woman gasps.

Herod hesitates, looking at the boy.

Nathan and an archer land at the cave entrance. The archer fits an arrow to his bow.

The rebel raises his knife to his son's throat.

REBEL LEADER (CONT'D)
My son will not die a slave.

WOMAN
No!

She screams as the boy falls dead, then drops to cradle his bleeding body as her daughter clings to her skirts.

Herod signals to the archer.

HEROD
Shoot him.

The rebel jerks the woman to her feet.

THWAP.

The arrow meant for him hits her instead. She crumples to the ground.

DAUGHTER
Eema!

The rebel grabs a clay oil lamp and flings it at the archer. It smashes against his breastplate, spreading oil over his tunic and dripping down his legs.

The rebel kicks the burning basket at him.

The archer goes up in flames. As his hair CRACKLES and burns, he screams and staggers out of the cave.

The scream ends with a THUD and a RATTLE of stones.

Now it's dark again in the cave.

There's the sound of scuffling feet and a child's whimper.

HEROD
(toward the box)
Throw in the torch!

The torch sails into the cave, igniting the oil on the floor.

Herod and Nathan hug the cave walls to stay clear of the fire.

Across the flames, the rebel holds the terrified girl.

HEROD (CONT'D)
Let her go!

REBEL LEADER
So you can make her your whore?

He hurls himself out of the cave, holding his daughter.

REBEL LEADER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Shemaaaaa --!

A THUD cuts short his cry.

Herod and Nathan are unnerved, breathing hard.

Then --

WAAAAAAAAA!

A baby cries out from the back of the cave.

The men exchange looks -- now what?

EXT. THE GALILEE - NIGHT

ANTIGONUS and his sister ROXANA, on horseback, watch the cliff battle from afar. They're an aristocratic pair in their early 30's. She's dressed like a man, and their cloaks are fastened with gold brooches decorated with menorahs.

ROXANA
We could have stayed, to help them.

ANTIGONUS
Why die, when others will do it for you?

Roxana looks at him, disapproving.

ROXANA

So where do we go now? Home to
mother in Ascalon?

ANTIGONUS

You don't think I'm giving up that
easily, do you?

He turns his horse away from the cliff.

ANTIGONUS (CONT'D)

To the east!

He spurs his horse to a gallop.

CREDIT SEQUENCE

A map of the ancient world, centered on the Mediterranean.

The place names are written in the original languages, then
morph to English.

Each nation has its own symbol: a golden Eagle for Rome, a
mounted archer for Parthia, a golden menorah for Judea, a
cartouche of Cleopatra for Egypt...

ROME covers a large part of the map, and PARTHIA takes up a
big swath to the East. Between them is tiny JUDEA.

To Judea's north lies the Roman province of SYRIA with its
capital of DAMASCUS.

NABATEA is south-east, on the far shore of the DEAD SEA, with
its rose-red capital of PETRA carved in the living stone.

EGYPT is south, across the NILE DELTA. The harbor at
ALEXANDRIA is guarded by a LIGHTHOUSE 400 feet tall.

The ancient trade route of the VIA MARIS (indicated by a
dotted line with CAMEL CARAVANS) connects them.

Within Judea we see the SEA OF GALILEE in the north, with
GAULANITIS (the Golan Heights) rising on its Eastern shore
and MOUNT ARBEL (where the battle just took place) on the
Western shore.

Between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean lies
SEPPHORIS, capital of the Galilee, next to the little village
of NAZARETH.

And to the south, in the hilly center of the country, is
JERUSALEM and the GREAT TEMPLE.

South of the capital is a cone-shaped hill that will someday
be known as Herodion.

And south-east of that, on the western shore of the DEAD SEA,
is the mountain fortress of MASADA.

END OF CREDIT SEQUENCE

EXT. THE CLIFF BOTTOM - DAY

A shovel flings dirt into the air

Herod, Joseph, and the men dig graves. Their fallen comrades lie alongside dozens of dead rebels.

There's a baby in a basket. Nathan milks a goat and dips a cloth into the milk, then gives it to the baby to suck.

The men look up as they hear HORSES approach.

A TRIBUNE comes into view, leading a company of Roman soldiers. One carries a tall standard topped with a Roman eagle and the inscription "SPQR."

Herod stares at the eagle, gilded and imperious, then at the Romans' gleaming armor and scarlet cloaks. Self-consciously, he wipes his hands on his dirty tunic.

A young Judean SENTRY with a spear steps out to block the Romans' path.

SENTRY

Who goes there?

This amuses SEXTUS CAESAR (early 40s).

SEXTUS

I'm Sextus Caesar, young man --
governor of the Roman province of
Syria.

He gestures at BASSUS (40s), the stumpy officer riding at his side, who eyes the Judean soldiers with distaste.

SEXTUS (CONT'D)

And this is my lieutenant, Quintus
Caecilius Bassus. And you are --?

HEROD

Let them pass.

The sentry steps aside.

Sextus rides up to Herod.

SEXTUS

You must be Herod.

He looks at Joseph and notes the family resemblance.

SEXTUS (CONT'D)

Your brother?

HEROD

Joseph.

SEXTUS

I see your father in you both. I trust the governor of Judea is well?

HEROD

We left him in health.

SEXTUS

You must give him my regards -- and those of my cousin Julius.

He looks at the row of bodies.

SEXTUS (CONT'D)

Did you find Antigonus?

HEROD

Our scouts are still out looking. But we emptied the rebel hideout.

SEXTUS

Rebels? Bandits, more like.

He dismounts and strolls with Herod, inspecting the burials.

SEXTUS (CONT'D)

It would be far less work to burn them. Or leave them to feed the jackals.

HEROD

That is not our custom in Judea.

Sextus scoffs.

SEXTUS

In Rome, we'd nail them to crosses and line the roads with them. Set an example.

Bassus notices the baby in the basket.

BASSUS

Looks like you missed one.

He gets down from his horse and draws his sword.

HEROD AND NATHAN

NO!

Bassus stops, and looks at Sextus in disgust.

SEXTUS

You really must learn to harden
your hearts.

They reach the grave holding the family of the Rebel Leader.
Herod stares at the dead children, in pain.

Sextus barely notices the dead. He peers up the cliff face.

SEXTUS (CONT'D)

How did you reach the caves?

Herod points straight up. Sextus cranes his neck to see the
box dangling above.

SEXTUS (CONT'D)

Impressive. A Roman engineer could
not have done better.

Herod's pleased by the compliment but tries not to show it.

A shout comes from the cliff top.

SOLDIER (O.S.)

Ready to drop?

Joseph clears the men away from the drop zone.

Herod puts his arm out to stop Sextus, and nods at Joseph.

JOSEPH

Ready!

With a RATTLE of chains, the box hurtles to earth and SMASHES
to splinters.

SEXTUS

A wise precaution. Never leave
your tools for your enemies to use
against you.

Herod helps him back onto his horse. Sextus smiles down at
him, beneficently.

SEXTUS (CONT'D)

Judea's too small for a man of your
talents. You should come see me in
Damascus.

The Romans ride away.

Herod watches until the golden eagle disappears, then sighs
and reaches for a shovel.

LATER

The Judean soldiers lay the bodies in the graves.

The scouting party returns. A SCOUT herds an OLD WOMAN carrying a basket.

SCOUT

We lost his trail. But we found her hiding in the bushes.

Joseph looks in her basket and pulls out an apple.

JOSEPH

Bringing food to the rebels?

She snatches away the apple.

OLD WOMAN

For my grandchildren!

The baby cries. The old woman goes to look in the basket.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Where are the others? What have you done with them?

Herod looks over at the graves.

The old woman hurries toward the graves, then drops to her knees as she sees the bodies.

Nathan kneels beside her and tries to comfort her. She pushes him away, then turns her blazing eyes to Herod.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Do your gods demand the blood of children, Edomite? Or do your Roman masters?

HEROD

Their deaths were not my doing.

The old woman gestures at the other bodies.

OLD WOMAN

Nor any of these, I suppose?

HEROD

We killed those who would not surrender.

OLD WOMAN

You killed those who would not kneel.

She struggles to her feet, refusing Nathan's help.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

I will not kneel to you, nor will my grandson.

