

But The Word Shall Endure

By

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FADE IN ON:

EXT. CITY SKYLINE - NIGHT

Who cares what city this is? NYC, Hong Kong or Singapore. Fairy-lights glisten. It's a breath taking view.

A young man's voice - ETHAN - intrudes:

ETHAN (V.O.)

I wasn't born when the skies rained fire.
The fiery tears of the Great D's wrath.

MISSILES streak from the clouds. One flash - and the buildings disappear. What's left glows with atomic heat. Less subtle; but just as bright.

ETHAN (V.O.)

As the tales say, the Sin of Sodom and Gormorrah was grievous. And the Earth's cry - very great.

A time lapsed blur follows: Ruins overgrown with weeds. Soon, there is little man-made left. Nature has returned.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Dozens of unwashed WORSHIPPERS gather near a TENT. The ground fused with discarded junk and dirt.

Parishioners sit on rocks. Limbs of trees. They murmur in excitement. Ethan's voice pierces through the crowd.

ETHAN (V.O.)

I was born three generations after the Purge of Fire. The Faithful banded together, and survived. Despite hardships, my life has been one of Luck. Luck that I never heard the dying screams. Luck that my forefathers never lost hope. Instead, they huddled on the outskirts, waiting - until the heat of the dragon's breath faded in the air. They stormed into his forsaken cities, and collected what remained of his Word. It is that sacrifice that makes my life more blessed still. I have the greatest of riches. The Luck to be hand-picked by the Wisest Teacher in the land. Michael, Keeper of the Holy Book.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

Stick-thin furnishings. A card table with three legs. An army footlocker underneath. INSULATION thickens the tent walls. Scraps of brass spruce up the scene.

ETHAN scrambles about - a rangy youth of 17. He polishes a candle holder. Brushes dust off a robe.

MICHAEL (70s) shrugs the vestment on. He examines his profile in a cracked mirror. Finally he nods: impressed.

Ethan fusses with Michael's collar. The old man gently pushes him away.

MICHAEL

Enough. Preserve energy for us both.
Don't waste it on my vanity. Or D will
turn his eyes away.

ETHAN

The Faithful are waiting. You must look
your best!

Michael cups Ethan's face in his hands.

MICHAEL

Ethan, you are pure of heart and eager. A
perfect Disciple in my eyes. They are
waiting for me?

ETHAN

Tales have spread of your teachings.
There are so many today. Even more than
your last sermon!

MICHAEL

Then we shall go. There is little time.

Ethan leads Michael towards the exit by the hand. It's slow going. Every movement brings the old man pain.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

The priest appears. The crowd cheers. Michael shuffles to a make-shift podium - once a high-school music stand.

The stand wobbles. Ethan hastily tightens the base. Michael holds up a hand: Silence. The worshippers hold their breath.

MICHAEL

This is an exquisite sight. So many exposed faces. Unafraid.

He lays a hand over his heart.

MICHAEL

It does a old man proud to see such sacrifice. So many Faithful surround me - traveling from far and wide. Are you ready for your lesson?

The crowd cheers again. Michael smiles.

MICHAEL

So be it. Understand. And be free. Today's Psalm will be from Chapter Four, Page Fifty-Three. Listen carefully to what I say. I've studied the Holy One's meaning. Line by line.

Michael clears his throat, and begins.

MICHAEL

"For the Great One created a ladder: a winding staircase to the sky. Imbedded in every step was the wisdom of the world. From the tiniest insect to our souls."

He points out an INSECT on a rock. The mutated bug glows - "blessed" with extra legs. The old priest's movement causes vertigo. Ethan catches Michael before he falls.

ETHAN

(whispers to Michael)
Please. Do not move so much.

MICHAEL

(whispers to Ethan)
Lessons are more vital than Teachers. Unhand me. I will be okay.

Michael turns back to his audience, forces a smile.

MICHAEL

It is the wisdom of the Great One that makes me dizzy. So much knowledge for a poor, mortal brain.

Michael glances from face to face.

MICHAEL

Where were we? Ah yes: the story of how He gave us life.

Know this: the Great One believes in perfection. He did not create Man sloppily. No, he experimented for Millennia - destroying creations which displeased his eye. He even brought the Purge of Fire, creating what we are now. You are all perfect - is that not true?

The crowd roars approval. Michael beams. And COUGHS. He peeks at his hand, curls it in a fist. Thumps it hard against the stand.

MICHAEL

That is enough to learn in one sitting. You should all depart, to your homes.

Michael holds up a finger: "One More Thing."

MICHAEL

Remember: the Blessed One has forged you from the Universe. Every inch of you is holy: a shared sacrament of life. Now, lift your voices with me to the sky.

He looks up at polluted clouds.

MICHAEL

Blessed be He, the Engineer of Mankind. The Good, the Holy...

The crowd chimes in (they've heard this part before):

MICHAEL AND CROWD

The Creator Dan!

Michael pokes side-kick Ethan in the ribs.

MICHAEL

We've run overtime. Make sure they go.

Ethan weaves through the crowd, chases worshipers away. He runs back to Michael, guides the priest to the tent.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

Michael reaches up to remove his robe.

MICHAEL

I did good, didn't I?

ETHAN

The best, Teacher. As always!

The boy squints closer. Michael's mouth and hand -
smeared with blood!

ETHAN
(alarmed)
Is it the sickness?

MICHAEL
Of course. What else could it be?

The priest totters to the card table, and lights a candle. His wrinkled hand shakes in pain.

MICHAEL
I have spent too much time under the sun.
A fair trade to enlighten the world.

Michael produces a skeleton key. He leans over the foot locker: causing his ancient back to POP. He yelps, but opens the chest - pushing a HAZMAT SUIT aside.

He stands up, cradles a cloth wrapped rectangle.

ETHAN
The Book!

MICHAEL
Yes, my boy. The time has come to give you this.

He hands the key to Ethan.

MICHAEL
I will ascend to Heaven soon. Keep that -
and this - safe. No-one should touch
them, but you and me.

The priest drops into a torn recliner. The book lies swaddled in cloth; a heavy tome. Michael cracks it open. Most of the pages are burned and black.

MICHAEL
This is why I've taught you to read. So a
worthy one will always see.

A single page in the book is preserved. Michael runs down it with a blood-stained finger. Stops at a block of text.

MICHAEL
Read it to me, Ethan. Be my loyal, so
smart boy.

ETHAN

"Purines form hydrogen bonds to pyrimidines, with adenine bonding only to thymine..."

(looks up)

Am I pronouncing this right?

MICHAEL

I know it's hard. You need to understand the meaning *between* words. Start with the pictures, then move on.

Michael points at an illustration: It's a DOUBLE HELIX GENETIC STRAND. The "ladder" that Michael preached about.

Underneath lies a caption: "Composition of DAN." The typo's printed in bold on the page.

ETHAN

(gasps)

His Name! Teacher, please. Show me more!

The book slips, and falls to Michael's lap. Ethan gazes at his teacher's face. The priest's eyes are open. But he's dead.

Tears stream down Ethan's cheeks. He peels off the Book's cloth, and reads the cover for the very first time.

ETHAN

"Molecular Biology. The Science and Study of Life." The Holy Book. So sacred.

Ethan gently closes the old man's eyes.

ETHAN

Thank you for entrusting this to me. I promise, it will stay safe.

That mutated bug scurries across Ethan's foot. He looks down upon it and smiles.

ETHAN

You are part of the Universe. We all carry his sacred code. I will let you be; do not be afraid.

Outside, wind rustles. Ethan hugs the Book to his chest.

FINAL FADE OUT: