

Heading Oh, Oh, Heavenwards



An East-sper-ionage Story With A Difference

(or “How Hollywood tried to turn a load of bumf into a screampplay”)

[That should be “screenplay”, probably. I wasn’t sure whether “heading” was a printing instruction or part of the title. - Script Ed]

Story outline: for comment and return to the screenwriters’ office

Circulation: all departments (U I O G D Studios), all specialisms (Go On Productions) and all contractors [who should be well and truly thankful for what they are about to receive. Remembah, I ain’t made o’ money. - Producer]

“He is actually dead, this time. Not even he could have survived that.” said the first man, closing his eyes for a moment. He and his fellow Sacred Service operatives had arranged a rendezvous outside an anonymous-looking, two-storey, beige boulder in Repents Park. They had come to remember their fallen colleague.

“I never thought I’d live to see the end of the great Jeez Beyond. In three years, he travelled from one end of the Levant to the other. He uncovered dens of iniquity; put moneylenders out of business. He dodged the worst that that wretched Sam Hedrin...

[Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Ya can’t name a character after the guy who wrote the novelisation of “Network”. Change it to, I dunno, “Farrah Seese” or somethin’ like that. - Producer]

...or the SATAN organisation had to throw at him. His reports were so accurate, it was as if he knew what was going to happen before it did.”

“When the Corinthian mob discovered they had been set up” said the second man, “their boss went right up right up to him in the street, looked him in the eye and said, ‘OK, fella, where is your sting?’, Beyond didn’t bat an eyelid. He just said ‘You must be confusing me with someone else. Now, if you’ll excuse me...’, adjusted his robe and walked away. The Corinthian boss was speechless.”

“He would never leave or forsake a colleague. Don’t be afraid: just believe! Wasn’t that what he used to say, when a situation appeared hopeless?” said the first.

“When I started out, I had real doubts about working for the service but he could make anyone have absolute faith in what he was doing.” said the third.

“Let’s not forget those fantastic water-based cocktails he mixed or the hair-raising stunts he performed.” said the second.

The first said “Yes, he was a breath of fresh air and a tower of strength...

[I never knew that he came from Blackpool. - Dir]

... Do you remember that time he displayed his amphibious capabilities on the lake?”

“Operation Lotus Blossom, wasn’t it?” said the fourth with a flash of recognition. He had been meaning to take the flash of recognition off his robe, in case someone realised those were the colours of the Sacred Service but he was afraid he might tear the cloth.

“Yeah, that’s the one. Someone was stirring up trouble in the lake but he soon had it under control. He climbed back on to the beach and coolly handed a couple of fish to bystanders, bowing his head slightly and smiling wryly. I think they had a barbecue afterwards. There were thousands there.”

“Ah, but now he’s gone.” said the first, with a sigh. His eyes grew moist, as he remembered some of Jeez Beyond’s adventures and the famous Beyond sense of humour, in a short montage sequence, accompanied by sentimental music.

A fifth said “It hath been an awful year, verily awful, I tell thee. Another brave soul hath joined the XXVII club.”

“But Beyond was xxxiii, was he not?” asked the third.

“So he was.” said the fifth. “Notest-thou not mine use of the capital numerals? This is the year XXVII and a great mass of people hath left the service.”

[And ‘tis no wonder, for ye olde sermon’s too long. - Script Ed]

“Oh, right.” said the third, sheepishly. He was an expert at that. One spring, a few years previously, he had been sent to stake out a bunch of crooks. He had been required to spend several starry nights on a hillside, disguised as a shepherd. I mean that he was disguised as a shepherd, not that the hillside was.

“I am not going to be a hypocrite.” said a sixth man with a frown. “It’s no secret that he and I had our disagreements. I thought he was a bit wooden and I wasn’t afraid to say so.”

“Be fair, Number Six,” said the third man, “He didn’t have a very stable home life and that long-term sleeper operation left its mark but it was a joy to work with him. Off duty, he was a perfect gent and he was far more talented than casual observers realised. He always played down his abilities. That was just his way.”

“Sleeper operation? Oh, yes, the old carpentry workshop!” The fourth man lit up again. The others turned away, disliking the smell of incense. “Your branch ran that for years, before anyone twigged, Number T’ree.”

Dressed in robes and skull caps, they all formed a line behind the fourth man and walked away from the tomb, singing a funeral dirge.

[Aw, come on. The theme song isn’t that bad. Careful what you say! The composer can be a bit tetchy. - Music Editor]

[Look. The Producer told me what he wanted. The score had to “encompass chords of death” or some such piffle. I merely did as I was told. If you have a complaint, take it up with “Don Cornystory” himself. - Composer]

The inscription on the front of the tomb read

“Wndrfl Cnslr Jeez Beyond, INRI, born XXV Martius -VI, died III Aprilis XXVII.”

At least, it should have. It was only three days since Jeez Beyond’s death but already a graffiti artist had defaced the sandy-coloured dolomitic limestone. The dates had been partially obscured and, immediately above, someone had carved “XXV Decemb 0 usque ad III Aprilis XXXIII”. In the bottom, left-hand corner were the mysterious initials, “Hyp”.

The voices of Beyond’s friends and colleagues had faded into the distance.

[Cue/ “Beyond 33” theme, slow, menacing, repeated semi-tone change on a bass guitar and a threatening chord sequence on tremolo strings, leading to a thumping disco beat, with a Jew’s harp. What else? Call and response pattern with higher brass and flutes on one side and lower brass and strings on the other. The musical sequence finishes with staccato five-note bursts on strings, silence as the chase ends and a

heavenly, high-pitched synthesiser chord with heavy sustain, which fades completely as the main-title theme begins. - Composer.]

[But we haven't got to that bit, yet. - Dir]

An odd-looking character in a white nightgown and what looked like a strange shoulder cape, made of feathers, was fiddling with different-coloured cables. These were enclosed by a small, grey box at the side of the tomb. He closed the box and pressed the button on the front. He straightened his back and, with his right hand, brushed his collar-length, curly, blonde hair out of his eyes. The entrance stone appeared to levitate and then, with a low, whirring noise, moved to the side.

A hundred paces away, a sentry woke up, with a start. Grabbing his spear, he rushed to the front of the tomb and shouted. "Oi, you can't do that. Put that back! I'm... I'm warning you."

The figure in the white gown turned towards the Roman. The soldier noticed the sword in the man's right hand. Was it a man? Was it a woman? Was it right to make such binary judgements, even in first-century Judea?

[Yes. Call me transubstantiophobic or whatever but I'm payin' a ridiculous numbah o' pipers around here and yous'll all play whatever god-damn toon I tell ya to play. Get on with it! Next thing, yous'll be tellin' me I should have some non-European actors in this malarkey. - Producer]

Flames were leaping from the sword. The soldier stared, open mouthed, and exclaimed "Stop or I'll hurl!".

[I'm feeling slightly nauseous myself and we're not very far in. - Dir]

At that, the gowned entity leapt thirty feet into the air and the soldier fainted. Jeez Beyond saw his chance and burst out of the tomb, having refashioned his shroud into a toga. Roman attire was considered the height of fashion, that century. On the back [the back of Beyond? - Script Ed] was a life-size picture of his body. [The things they expect me to create! - Costumier.] I don't how that got there. Anyway, using a nine-foot-long wooden post as an improvised surfboard, Beyond slid down the mount of olives...

[Not according to our map. Is Jeez Beyond licensed to "mess-iah around" with topographical features? Wasn't he starting out at the bottom? How can he travel downhill? - Screenwriting Adviser, Geography]

...which was actually a mountain of olives.

[Tell that damned geography adviser that he'll keep his nose out, if he knows what's good for him. No one is sure where Beyond's "secret underground base" was. The clue is in the name: it was secret. We're not making a historical epic, here. What are we're doing with geography advisers, anyway? There are more people working on this picture than there are cigars in the factory I own in the Dominican Republic. Before long, one or two people are goin' to be takin' a very short economics class, over at the personnel manager's office.- Producer]

In exasperation, the olive farmer threw his headdress on to the ground and his wife berated him, loudly.

Four black chariots, each driven by a Roman soldier, appeared on the horizon. They were greeted by sinister developments in the soundtrack. The soldiers wore the typical dress of the Roman Army, except that, from their sandals to their helmets, the outfits of these legionnaires were black.

Beyond abandoned his post [A serious offence. - Military Adviser]. Beyond jumped off his post, flipped it up, grabbed it and rammed it into a conveniently placed hole in the road. [Jerusalem isn't all that handy for anywhere but I suppose you're entitled to express your opinion of it, more generally. - Geog Adv]

The first chariot thundered along, at 70,000 paces per hour. The horse swerved but it was too late. The chariot somersaulted. Beyond looked over his shoulder and said "I never did like vaulting horses. He was cracking the whip, while I am cracking a quip."

[Hey, Script Editor, the othah t'ree chariots are comin' right at him. Don't ya think It would be bettah if he were to forget the witticisms for a moment and focus on gettin' away from these maniacs? - Producer. Oh, and by the way, I've still got my eye on you, geography guy.]

The first chariot and horse tumbled through the air, accompanied by the noise which villains in ridiculous action films make, when they fall off the tops of cliffs. There was an implausible explosion of animal tissues and a splintering of timber. What was left was an intermingled pile of mangled pieces- of horse, driver and chariot. The horse's whinny grew slower and lower in pitch, until it could no longer be heard. Moments later, the horse and driver were reassembled and walked away, as if nothing had happened. But, in that part of the World, at that time, such occurrences were commonplace and need no further examination, here. Let's return to the action.

The second and third chariots had avoided the obstacle which Beyond had placed in the road. Just as they were passing it, Jeez Beyond of the Sacred Service, number "00-AD", was addressing a hastily assembled multitude of admirers. Pointing in the general direction of the wrecked chariot, he told them "That would have made anyone truly cross." The crowd cheered.

In a corner of the village square, an old man wearily added some small, white, wooden rectangles to a board which had been made to hold them. [Not hymn again. - Script Ed] On each of the rectangles was a number in black. The board, affixed to a wall, showed “CLXVII”. This was the number of puns which Beyond had inflicted on the villagers since the previous Thursday (and he had been missing, presumed dead, for two days).

Beyond was some kind of hero. Perhaps he was so in their eyes only but this was veneration. At the mere mention of his name, some went weak at the knees. It was no exaggeration to say that Beyond’s popularity among the locals bordered on worship. He was “Mr Suave” [Will he be needing another fake passport? - Props Mngr], often cutting a dash in his, er, long, white evening robe.

[It would be reasonable to assume that distribution of GQ and “Vogue Hommes” had not then begun in that region. - Wrdrbe Mstrss]

After a bit of rough and tumble with opponents, he could attend a formal event, such as a wedding or temple gathering, and look immaculate. [It depends on what your conception of “immaculate” is. - Script Ed]

[I see no theological issues. Bless you all, by the way. I just want to say what an invigorating reworking of the story this is. - Rev Tim Trend, Studio Chaplain, Chapel of the Feature Presentation]

Beyond was spotless to the last. [Curses! - Studio Dermatologist]

Although this was first-century Judea and everyone ought to have been speaking Latin, Greek or Aramaic, Beyond spoke a language which no one in the Levant had ever heard before but, somehow, everyone could understand it. He didn’t even have to shout, use his hands or speak really slowly.

Beyond untied a donkey from a tree at the side of a house... [Ooooh, much, much too dangerous. Donkeys shouldn’t climb trees, although this one appeared to be using a rope. They do say that they’re quite intelligent. - Dir] ...quickly performing a minor food-or-health-related miracle for the owner, in exchange for its use.

A shapely woman with a revealing gown [“revealing” by the standards of the Islamic State perhaps- Costumier] and small headdress appeared on the roof of the house opposite. [I was thinking. Isn’t a revealing gown something that a spy’s accomplice should never wear, unless the aim is disinformation? - Script Ed]

“Well, look who it is!” she hollered. “I was wondering where you had gotten to. Wait at the Mount Olive House, you said. I’ve been roasting my butt off, in this tent of a dress.”

Despite the fact that it was to be another nine hundred years before the arrival of the Vikings in North America and about fourteen hundred before the birth of Amerigo Vespucci, she had a drawling, sing-song, southern-California accent.

[Don't worry. It'll be fine. Listen. Isn't she a luvverly goyl? If only I weren't married to Mrs Burlarsi... Anyway, we'll call it "a Samaritan accent". - Producer]

This was Magdalene Swoon, a former worker in the notorious Samaritan kind-gesture business, [See? Works great. I told ya! - Prdcr] who was slowly being accepted by Judean society.

[I hate to mention this but "Magdalene" probably means "from Magdala". That was about forty miles from Samaria. - Historical Adviser.]

[Absolutely historical! Do I look as if I'm laughin'?! This is goin' to be a pitchah, not a letchah, so forget the triviah. - Producer]

"Don't just stand up there like a... caryatid. Get down here and jump on!" shouted Beyond.

Normally feisty, Magdalene did as she had been told. Where Beyond was concerned, she was faithful; religiously obedient even. To her, Beyond was a god, although she wouldn't dream of telling him. She didn't want him to become bigheaded. [except when commemorated in stained glass - Dir]

The donkey cut across the rough, steep terrain that was sandwiched between sections of the road; rocky land on which vehicles couldn't be driven. The chariots kept to the road, which zigzagged down the hillside.

[Er, has the screenwriter never heard that Roman roads are straight? - Script Ed]

The Romans approached a bend. The leading chariot was travelling at breakneck speed and carried straight on. It went through a wall and crashed through the roof of a temple in the village below. The driver survived and, miraculously, he was unharmed, but, after a few seconds of awkward silence, he was stoned to death by the congregation. In their defence, they would later claim that they had only been obeying an order issued by their enraged priest. Occasionally, there were people whom not even Beyond could save.

Two chariots remained in the chase but Beyond had a few tricks up his voluminous sleeve. He raised his left arm slowly and pointed backwards, in the direction of the leading chariot. A thick fog descended- in the middle of a bright, April day. The third chariot also crashed at the next bend- into a wall which bore an ironic advertising slogan in Aramaic.

[Subtitles will be provided. The audience will chortle. The producer will be delighted. No one will remember my vital role in the making of this cinematic treasure. - Film Ed]

["I wouldn't be too sure about the chortle. You can cut out a lot of the useless bits, before we print, can't you? Should get the whole thing down from four hours fifty to around ninety minutes. - Prdcr.]

Just then, a trained eagle appeared over the road. It banked... [on Beyond not being invincible? It should have read the script...ures. - Script Ed] ...to the left, until it was tailing the donkey. [I think I may have seen that game at a tabernacle fete. - Script Ed] Madgalen poked Beyond in the back.

She shouted (over the inexplicably loud flapping and squawking of the eagle) "The people in the village said you were their saviour. So, how about saving us from that... thing?"

Beyond and Magdalene were nearing the final stretch of the road, the lowest part, which ran alongside the grass bank, just above yellow-grey shore of the Sea of Galilee. Beyond shouted "Here, take the reins. I need to do a spot of engineering, on the hoof."

"Hurry up! We're never going to outrun a chariot or an eagle, on a straight road."

Beyond leant right over the saddle as a circus rider might have, his hands almost touching the ground. Magdalene could hardly believe her eyes. He was fitting a strange, shoe-like contraption to each of the donkey's feet, in turn. All the while, the donkey was moving at more than 5,000 paces per hour. [What Beyond was attempting isn't physically possible, with the animal in motion. A donkey doesn't have a spare leg for use in such situations. - Stunt Co-ord] Once Beyond had finished fitting the donkey's marvellous, wheeled shoes, it began to roll down the hill.

"Is that it? Is that the extent of your technical wizardry? Je-eez!"

"Yes, what?", snapped Beyond, sitting upright. "In your patience, possess ye your souls! I haven't finished. There's something else I need to fit." He removed two enormous tubes from a bag which seemed too small to hold them. These he harnessed to the donkey, one on each side.

[Well, they are beasts of burden. You've only ever seen them on beaches and model farms. It's incredible, the amount of stuff they can carry, actually, but don't say too much, in case the animal-rights brigade kick up a fuss. - Veterinary Adviser]

[Just so as you know, people, that isn't an actual brigade. - Military Adviser]

“Now, we’re cooking on gas or soon will be. Pull out the candle holder from the saddle. Don’t touch anything with the end. It’ll be hot.”

“You don’t say.” shouted Magdalene.

Before he could set alight whatever it was he was going to set alight, the fourth chariot came into view, a few hundred paces behind them.

“Oh My Dad! Hang on a minute! Here, hold the candle!” ordered Beyond. Folding out a blade from the multifunction cross which hung around his neck, he cut through large hessian sacks which were slung on the donkey’s flanks. Four dozen highly polished, spherical pieces of hard, dark stone fell on to the road. Beyond climbed down, gave the donkey a shove and then jumped on again.

Seconds later, the horse and chariot hit the rocks, span out of control and ended up in the water.

“They were bowled over.” said Beyond, looking pleased with himself.

Beyond’s donkey, now behaving like a supermarket trolley [another everyday object in first-century Judea- Script Ed] had rolled out of trouble but Magdalene Swoon was worried.

“What about that one?”. With her head, she motioned towards a fifth chariot which she had heard before she had turned to see it. It was several hundred paces behind them but coming up fast. Its wheels straddling the centreline of the road’s summum dorsum, the top layer of hard stone slabs which acted as the wearing course.

“There shouldn’t be a fifth chariot.”

“Why?” Magdalene often found it hard to understand Beyond. [She’s been finding it hard? What about the poor people who are trying to read this? - Script Ed]

“It was not foretold. Five symbolises the grace of G and his mysteries. He has promised to reveal them to me, when I get through the Senior Sacred Service Selection System. Last time, there was a real snake on the SSSSS interviewing panel.”

“There’s always one, isn’t there?” said Magdalene.

“Five also signifies the animal nature of man but not death. That’s four. Oh, no, it’s in Chinese numerology that four equals death. Ahhhh... There is so much to take in, at all those blasted training courses. I mean nobody can be expected to know everything, well, except G. Why couldn’t they just have one system of myth and

superstition for everyone? There are thousands and the number is increasing, all the time.”

At last, Beyond was able to use the candle, to light the long, stiff, ropes which projected out of the base of each tube, although the candle was a bit shorter than it had been when he'd first asked Magdalene to hand it to him and her hands were now covered in wax. The fuses hissed and spat.

[and were given a high mark by one of the panel members in the Senior Sacred Service Selection System? - Script Ed]

“Oh, that interview! I thought I had it nailed.” muttered Beyond. Then, there was a deafening roar and the bewildered but docile donkey surged forward. Beyond and Magdalene were jolted by the powerful acceleration of the rocket-boosted beast.

“Hold on tight!” shouted Bumf. The donkey had a top speed of about 780,000 paces per hour. The SPQR may have been an enemy of the Sacred Service [Naw, take that out. American audiences know nothing about English soccer. - Prdcr] but Beyond had reason to be grateful to them. They certainly knew how to build roads.

[Don't mention the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, a fresh-water system, and public health. By the way, it has to be said that “sanitation” and “a fresh-water system” are covered by the “public-health” category and shouldn't really have been included on the list, in the first place. - Copyright Editor]

A loud boom was heard by fishermen on the lake. It momentarily diverted the eagle from its course. The charioteer tried to catch up with Beyond but had no chance. The Roman's axles caught fire, his wheels came loose and his horse had a heart attack. He was thrown into the lake but was not injured. Moments later, the horse seemed to be unhurt too.

[What sort of bad-ass action hero is Beyond? All his victims make astonishing recoveries. You can ask an audience to suspend disbelief for only so long. - Script Ed]

“How do you stop it?” screamed Magdalene. [I don't know. The author has been writing rubbish like this for years. - Script Ed]

“Prayer.” replied Beyond, smirking.

Magdalene was not quite as sanguine. “Listen, buddy, this is a no-smirking fright. What does prayer have to do with it? Prayer? I ask you!

“Yes, that's more or less what prayer is but, obviously, I can't answer my own. I need to appeal to a higher authority.”

“We’re running out of road. We’re going to hit the lake and drown!”

[A tragic love story. The goyl croaks before they can fish her out. The guy is k.o.’d and, when he comes round, he’s heartbroken. I like it. Good box office. This picture is goin’ places. And so am I. See ya when I get back from my villa in the Bahamas, in four weeks. - Producer]

“Relax. I’ve got it under control.” Beyond closed his eyes and bowed his head, murmuring words that Magdalene wouldn’t have heard in normal circumstances and these were not normal circumstances. [You don’t say! - Script Ed]

[“The narrator sounds like a jerk. Why can’t he shut up? When this becomes a proper screenplay, I hope they’ll let us do our lines and go home. “ -Ginger-Lee Siddown, resigned to career death after playing “Magdalene”]

[Watch it, missy. Some of your fellow luvvies are ‘doing’ too many lines, of a different sort, and are lucky to have any work. As far as you’re concerned, I’m the omnipotent one, around here.” - Screenwriter]

Magdalene shut her eyes too but not because she was praying. She was expecting to die in a horrific, rocket-powered, roller-skating donkey/ swimming accident.

[I hope Beyond had installed a nose cam, for the benefit of the insurance company. Oh, wait, none of it’s real, is it? Sorry. - Head of Legal]

But nothing happened. After it had passed through the gap in the wall at the entrance to the beach and over the sand, the rocket-donkey had kept going.

“What the...?” Magdalene had never seen anything like it or heard anything like it. [Any more complaints about my cues and I’m off. - Composer.]

“Don’t refrain from swearing, on my account.” said Beyond. “I’m very broadminded, you know. It tends to be the minor operatives in the service who are rule-bound fanatics.”

“What... is this?” Magdalene gasped, as she opened her eyes and beheld two colossal, white-and-turquoise walls of seawater. Both were three hundred feet high. One was five hundred paces from the donkey’s port side and the other five hundred from its starboard.

[I need to check how wide the Sea of Galilee is. - Geog Adv]

[Don’t bother: you’re fired. - Asst Prdcr]

The donkey was flying along a monumental avenue of gently cascading water. This corridor had been cut through the lake, as if some mad giant had been given an unfathomably large magic jigsaw as a midwinter-festival present and had started using it, to slice up large bodies of water in the Middle East.

[Yeah... Yeah... Not great, is it? I should have something for you by the start of next week. - Asst Script Ed (Similes)]

“Very impressive, Mr Jeez Beyond. You certainly have friends in high places but do you realise we still have company?”

“When one is in the Sacred Service, one is never alone.”

“No, no, flapping, squawking company with damned good eyesight.”

Beyond saw the Eagle. With the donkey travelling at such a high speed, the eagle had fallen behind but it had gained height. Now that the donkey’s rockets were faltering, the distance between eagle and donkey was narrowing. The eagle might be able to swoop on Beyond and Magdalene at 150,000 paces per hour.

[Might not want to give away what’s goin’ to happen next. Yeah, anyway, about the whole “paces per hour” thing. It’s no go. Americans and Brits won’t be able to divide by a thousand and the rest of the World will be pissed off because they’ll be sitting in movie theatres, dividin’ by five thousand and then multiplying by eight, when all they wanna do is watch the bad guys gettin’ wasted. Screw historical flavour! - Asst Prdcr, aka “Prdcr’s Fvrte Nphw”, btw]

“Don’t worry, starling. I guarantee it’ll soon be at the end of its tether.”

The eagle dived down to their level, intent on sinking its talons into Beyond and Magdalene, but, when it was only twenty cubits behind them, the immense sheets of water collapsed on top of it and it vanished into the lake.

Beyond flipped open a panel on one of the donkey’s front panniers and started tapping into it, muttering as he did so.

“M... K... 3... 6... K... J... V...”

“Another gizmo? What does this one do? Make bagels?” asked Magdalene.

[Good, good. The Jewish market is always important.. - Asst Prdcr]

“It’s a directional aid, in case the donkey gets lost. Another two thousand years and everyone will have one of these.”

An ethereal choir sang “Gloria!”. Three seconds later, the same sound was heard again. It continued, every three seconds. Beyond fumbled on the left-hand side of the saddle and from a pouch produced what looked to Magdalene like a two-horned drinking cup. He seemed to press a metal band on it and then placed one horn to his ear. He began to speak.

“Beyond here... Yes, will do... Right, see you then.” He replaced the horned device in the pouch. “Who and what was that?” asked Magdalene.

“Oh, that was HQ.” replied Beyond. “I knew who was calling, before I answered.”

“How? Is it that gift of prophesy you were telling me about?” She was puzzled. She was usually puzzled. Beyond tried to explain.

“When someone wants to speak to me from a distance, through the, er, horn thing, he just has to tap his own horn the correct number of times. An invisible signal is sent through the air and my angelic choir sound tells me when it’s time to answer. I knew it was HQ. Only they have the number.”

“But isn’t your horn speaker thingie of limited use, if you can speak to only one person?”

“Yes but I was receiving a lot of nuisance and marketing calls. They were trying to tempt me with special offers, the crafty devils.”

“I find that hard to believe. There can’t be too many of those horns in existence.”

“More than you’d imagine. In fact, I was beginning to think that I everyone knew the number of the beast. So, I had it changed, from 616 to 666.”

“Will I get to meet your boss? I know I used to be a Samaritan but a girl can change. Would you put in a good word for me?”

“No need to fret. It’s like a family firm. Now’s a good time to head for a debriefing.”

“I didn’t know you were wearing any, under that get-up.” It was Magdalene’s turn to smirk.

“It’s true what they say about what a dead man wears under his shroud.”

“I’ll try not to think about that. What’s this big bag of bed linen, on the rear? Were you planning to take me away for the weekend again? I’m done with haystacks and barns. I demand a suite in a decent hotel.”

“The standard of accommodation isn’t something about which I’ve ever worried. Pull the cord and you’ll find out what it is.” replied Beyond.

The inquisitive Magdalene pulled and an enormous white parachute sprang out. It soon filled with air.

“Isn’t it a bit conspicuous?”

“Sacred Service Regulations stipulate white for this time of year.”

The camera zoomed out and we could see that the donkey was heading towards a brilliant, white light. On the parachute, there was a huge chi-rho monogram. The donkey began to slow, noticeably.

[The shot started to shrink, until it looked as if it was being viewed through a telescope. The parachute motif was then transferred to the purple background of the opening titles. - Title Designer]

[The first four bars of the title song could be heard, as the shot shrank and merged with the graphics of the title scene. Title sequence: song, “The Wages Of Sin Is Death (Unless Ye Repent And Accept Me As Your Saviour). Words by Lovely Repose. Music by StJohn Baptistry. Performed by Seeya Easter. - Composer]

[On screen, beautiful, two-dimensional angel silhouettes flew back and forth, performing loops and somersaults. A black-and-white Beyond floated upwards into shot, turned to one side and held out a cross at some unseen sinner, using both hands. Nonsense of this sort continued for about three and a half minutes. Don’t forget my credit either, “Title sequence by Maurist Brother”. - Title Designer]

[First scene, main body of picture. - Film Editor]

Beyond and Magdalene found themselves surrounded by endless, fluffy clouds. Ahead lay a set of ornamental gates, not unlike the ones which announce to passing travellers the existence of a large country estate but these gates were much more lustrous. Their glimmering-white bars and scrolls dazzled Magdalene’s eyes.

Beyond pressed a button on the right-hand side of the donkey’s saddle. The gates opened with a supernatural smoothness. Trumpets heralded his arrival. Magdalene couldn’t see any trumpeters and had to assume that this was yet another gadget; a novelty doorbell.

She noticed that, on the right-hand pillar, there was a metal plaque with a mirror-like finish. On it, the name of a company, “Universe Experiments Unlimited”, had been engraved in capital letters. This was the cover name for the Sacred Service, a ruse

which would satisfy the curiosity of prying mountaineers, over-ambitious balloon enthusiasts and the like.

[Were there a lot of those in the Middle East, in the first century? - Script Ed]

Beyond spotted a colleague, as he drew up in the creature park, a short distance past the gates.

“Apologies for parking the beast here, P!” said Beyond, cheerily, “I know how you like to keep your section spick and span.”

A somewhat agitated figure in a pure-white robe seemed to have lost something in the shrubs. He stopped fussing, looked up and addressed Beyond.

“Never refer to anything as ‘the beast’, in these parts, 00 AD. So, you managed to get your ‘sorry ass’ here, in one piece? That’s a start.”

“The old DBS isn’t going too well.” said Beyond. “She was making a fair amount of noise, on the way up. You could take a look, some time.”

“The Donkey Bray Silencer? I was hoping to have a word with you about that. It’s perfectly simple. If you could spare me a thousand ages...”

“Not now, P, if you don’t mind. Is M in?”

“Yes. She’ll be glad to see you. You know how she worries.” P then spoke to Magdalene, as if Beyond wasn’t there. “Good day, miss. Beyond is is a law unto himself; what we call a loose canon. You can’t take anything he tells you as gospel. I hope you haven’t picked up too many bad habits.”

“This is my best one, well kinda.” replied Magdalene, touching her dress for emphasis.

Beyond and Magdalene set off to see the Chief. They felt as if they were floating up the staircase and along the landing, so nebulous was the floor covering.

[I want to emphasise that it was the carpet which was nebulous, not the organisation’s philosophy or any member of staff. Phew! - Head of Legal]

At the end of the corridor, there was a door and it was ajar. In this realm, it was possible for one object to be two different things at the same time but I mean that the door was slightly open, not that it was a glass container for holding jam. [That joke proves creationists wrong. It has to have been written before 4004 BC. - Script Ed]

Without entering the room, Beyond was able to form a perfect mental picture of the layout. [He was “forming a mental picture”? I know how he feels. - Dir] The woman sitting at the desk, with her back to the window, was startled but knew what it meant, when a halo landed on the stand opposite her.

“Hoopla!” Beyond stepped into the room, holding something behind his back.

“Jeez! What a lovely surprise!”.

“No one expects the saintish resurrection.” said Beyond.

“OK, I’m not sure why that’s funny but, you say it is... Oh, and you brought my favourite flowers- white roses.”

M’s delight spread all over her face. She had a weakness for a particular milk-based, whipped desert but wiped off any trace, before Beyond really noticed.

[Another Limey joke. Do you guys honesty still eat things like that? God! I’ll have to see if they still make “Virgin Delight” in the States. Guys, guys, when I said that product placement would help our finances, I was thinking in slightly more ambitious terms! Cars, watches, phones, perfume. Get the idea? Ah, my Third Assistant Lackey, I mean “Director”, has looked it up on the Internet. Turns out they do make it. Some English creep with a beard and his own island bought the rights. Who is he? Hmm, from what it says on Wickedpariah, he would make the basis of a great villain, er, not that any of our characters bears any resemblance to any person... yadda, yadda. - Asst Prdcr]

M continued to sit at her desk and quickly slid the bowl under her typewriter’s dustcover. “There’s a vase in the corner, dear. I don’t have any water but you’re a great improviser.”

Beyond arranged the flowers and was able to cut the thorny stems without scissors. The memory of torture at the hands of the underworld figure, Lu Cifer, made him shudder. If it hadn’t been for vespers, he would surely have perished.

He placed the flowers near the window, behind M. She noticed that there was now crystal-clear spring water in the vase.

“Well, it’s a similar principle to the wine trick..” he announced to his audience.

Magdalene, standing behind the door, entered the office hesitantly and noticed the roses. She spoke to Beyond first. “When did you stop to buy those? I’m pretty sure I didn’t seem them on the donkey.”

M continued speaking to Beyond. “I wasn’t expecting you until later but... He will know that you’re here. And this angel must be Magdalene. I don’t get to meet many of Jeez’s girls. He doesn’t bring all of them home. Do you, Jeez? He thinks his old M doesn’t know what he’s getting up to.”

“M...”. Beyond’s brow was furrowed. He was almost begging for mercy. He started to blush. M was enjoying herself.

“Aw, now I’ve gone and embarrassed him.” M laughed.

At moments like these, Beyond almost wished that a big hole in the Earth would open up and that he could fall into it. Then again, he’d recently had an experience very like that and it hadn’t been at all pleasant. He didn’t want to visit another secret, undercroft base, anytime soon. On the other hand, it had been child’s play to cause the headquarters of SATAN to overheat. The facility had been encircled by several rings of fire, within seconds. Many of the complexes he attacked burst into flames but, in that case, it had been especially easy to start the conflagration. Unlike the others, the base belonging to SATAN (Sunken Angels Toiling for the Almighty’s Neutralisation) wasn’t reduced to ash and rubble, in less than two minutes. This was a first. It easily withstood the ferocious heat. “A mystery indeed.” Beyond had thought, afterwards. “They must have some fiendishly clever scientists working for them.”

He turned his head towards Magdalene and then back towards M. He didn’t take his eyes off the latter for more than two seconds.

“Magdalene, this, as you may have deduced, is M.”

M stood up, moved to the front of her desk and offered her hand to Magdalene. “Where are my manners? There was I, sitting like a statue. Delighted to meet you, my dear.” said M.

“Likewise.” Magdalene smiled, as she greeted M. “I can tell you’re very fond of Jeez. You seem to tease him nearly as much as I do. Honestly, you’re like a surrogate mother! Is M your code name?”

“Wellll... with Jeez, it started as a nickname of sorts, when he was younger, but it is actually my initial. On formal occasions, they stick ‘B V’ in front of it. That’s my rank, although there are plenty of male chauvinists in this establishment who think that I couldn’t possibly deserve it.” M rolled her eyes and, for comic effect, said “possibly” in the way that Mae West would have [if Mae West been around in 27 AD - Dir].

Her soft Toronto accent...

[Uh, ya gotta keep the pedants happy. Make that “Tiberias accent”. It’s probably similar. - Asst Prdcr]

Her soft Tiberias accent, her pale-blue suit and a double row of white pearls- showing that she had joined the elite section of the service by planning and completing two successful apparitions- were a perfect match for her personality. In the office, she rarely covered her hair but, when engaged in feast work, she had been seen wearing various items of headgear.

[Boy, she mustn’t eat too much at these feasts. She looks incredible for her age. Millenarians, the key demographic for this movie, might call her a “VEIL”, a “Veritably Enchanting Image of a Lady” - Asst Prdcr]

[Er, it actually stands for “Virgin’s Effigy I Laud”. - Script Ed]

Most people who met her immediately felt a sense of serenity and peace but no one in the Records Branch knew much about her background or personal life. It was believed that other sacred services had females who performed similar roles.

[Whaaaaaaat? There can be only one “Sacred Service” and one “M”. I am starting to think that parts of this film will be a little disrespectful towards Christianity. - Studio Chaplain.]

[Nonsense. The wife of Saturn is similar, although obviously not mythical , as the Virgin Mary is, and far superior. Have you never heard of “Special Ops”? - Studio Hellenistic Priest]

The booming voice of an irascible [Surely “erasable”? - Script Ed] authority figure interrupted this pleasant exchange but the intercom wasn’t visible. Here was another riddle for Magdalene.

“When all the chit-chat is over, Mrs Marypinny, send in Wonderful Counsellor Beyond and Miss Swoon, would you?”

M looked at Beyond. “I think that means He will see you now.”

A white, button-tufted, leather-covered door opened and Beyond stepped forward, entering the holy of holies. He gestured for Magdalene to follow him.

She was now asking herself “How, in the name of Jehoshaphat, do they keep the white drapes in this place so clean? Ah, but laundry work was never my strong point. Some people are cut out for it, I guess.”

“Good to see you, F. You know who this is.” said Beyond.

M may have been a mother figure but 00-AD thought of G as a second father, despite the latter's superficially captious manner. Beyond approached the Chief of the Sacred Service, as he usually did; in the full knowledge that breeziness, and an eagerness to display knowledge of so many different fields [such as potters' fields? - Dir] were apt to draw sarcastic responses from the older being.

[Er, He isn't older, according to Trinitarian theologians. - Scriptural Continuity Ed. Sorry, I just got in. Did I miss much?]

[You must be joking. - Script Ed, Dir, Film Ed etc]

However, Beyond was aware that the Chief admired the determination, bravery and eternal resourcefulness of his top operative, and viewed with a little envy [Not sure about "envy" either. - Scriptural Continuity Ed] Beyond's easy manner with people of all backgrounds [except rich misers who wouldn't change their ways and loansharks and that archvillain in the desert who tried to bribe him into joining his evil organisation. - Script Ed]. The omniscient, old supremo knew that, in spite of the generational barrier created by the Almighty's old-fashioned, absolutist morality, his flippant and comparatively liberal protégé had the deepest respect for him.

"I knew about Miss Swoon. quite some time ago." said G, initially avoiding direct eye contact. As he spoke, he was tapping out the contents of his favourite censer into the oversized ashtray on his desk.

Being unfamiliar with etiquette on this side of existence and regarding G with awe, [Aw! - Dir] Magdalene wondered whether she should curtsy. Beyond sometimes referred to the imposing figure, seated in front of her, as "the old man". G was well aware of the habit.

"How do you do, F? I've read so much about you."

"It's customary to address me as 'G', Miss Swoon, but I'll forgive you, on this occasion." G's smile was genuine. He was already taking a shine to Magdalene.

"But he just called you 'F'."

"That's because, to me, he's 'S'." said G, patiently, as if his statement were the most natural thing in creation.

"This place is more than a little confusing for a newcomer." said Magdalene. "Are there any more letters I need to learn?"

"There's HS." offered Beyond.

“That’ll be the the Health and Safety Adviser, right?” asked Magdalene, relieved that she finally heard something familiar. “You could really use some training from him, Jeez.”

Beyond smiled sarcastically; screwing up his eyes a little and turning his head slightly to one side.

“Not exactly, Miss Swoon,” said G, “but there are certain details of our missionary work which we can’t reveal to those who lack the necessary sanctity clearance. I’m sure you’ll understand, eventually.”

G was trying to be firm, without completely dispelling the air of avuncular friendliness which he tried to exhibit towards young people. Behind his kind, laser-blue eyes lay a sadness. Eons ago, he had wanted a daughter but his wife, Asherah, had been cruelly edited out of his story.

“The Chosen”, one of several groups self-centred extremists originating in the Sinai Peninsula, had been designated as a terrorist group and rounded up by the fearsome Neo-Babylonian Secret Police. For reasons which are still not clear, its members had expected the Sacred Service to intervene.

They blamed G personally for their incarceration and were determined to exact revenge. However, a direct attack on the elusive Chief of the Sacred Service would have been too difficult. They therefore took aim at his wife, scratching around for any records and chipping away at his beloved Asherah, until there was barely a remnant left. In the end, just one letter was all it took, to change her completely. She vanished and was never seen again. [outside archaeology departments - Script Ed]

Until his physician had ordered him to reduce his intake, G had continued to enjoy his wife’s signature dish, fatted calf, at his club, Bleat’s. He still inflicted his preferred drink (a cheap Anglican wine, which Beyond dismissed as “instant Burpingly” and G called “the Incinerator”) on visitors to his country house, on the borders of Berkshire and Surrey, “Quaffinhock”.

[I’ll let that one stand. It’s true that a number of very powerful figures have mansions in the area. - Script Ed]

However, the host who had taken Asherah’s place as the organiser of official functions was not comparable. There was definitely something missing but although G’s mood was sometimes vengeful, he knew he couldn’t rely on tablets.

[Tell me about it! The predictive text is putting my head ashtray. Sorry. I wasn’t making fun of Jeez Beyond’s speech. That should have been “astray”. - Script Ed]

At around the time of his wife's disappearance, colleagues- close relatives among them- had been demoted in a purge of the organisation, though, to this day, many regarded them as saintly.

Until the advent of Beyond, G had had one consolation: he had seen his arch-rival defeated. Tyr Ian Melkart, alias "B A 'Al' Sur" had been at the centre of a notorious child-sacrifice ring, which the Sacred Service had chased across north Africa. The final confrontation had ended in carnage. [Surely "Carthage"? - Script Ed] If G hadn't already been awake, Melkart would have given him many sleepless nights.

The price of liberty was high and, all these years later, it was still being paid by the ageless Almighty. In his inner sanctum, on a table to the right of the door, sat a reminder of his long service- a highly detailed, two-cubit-long model of the Remorse, a Rampage-class ark whose construction he had commanded.

[You know, er, it's so funny that you should mention that. While working for an Armies of the Israelites information stone-carving unit just after World Flood 2, I happened to see one of the Remorse's sister ships, the Recurrent. It was shortly before she sank. She went down like a basalt bireme, as we used to say. That image really stuck with me. Where was I? Oh, yes, the Recurrent. Coincidentally, it was at around that time that I came up with a few ideas which I later used in the screenplay of the first Beyond film, "Dampier Noah" and several hundred others since. - Risky Maybomb, Screenwriting and (Suspended) Animation Consultant, Go On Productions, aged 4,094 and a half.]

G felt as if the responsibility of the World had been placed on his shoulders and, now, these things were set in stone. Was it any wonder that, in what he regarded as early middle-immortality, his beard and hair had already turned white? Yet, he couldn't afford to be bitter. He alone was in charge.

It was a great comfort to him that 00-AD was certain to come back from every mission, no matter how long or arduous it might reveal itself to be.

Jeez Beyond will return...

[One day, maybe, but probably not when that guy with the sailing cap and sandwich board I saw hanging around outside the studio entrance, last week, says he will. - Dir]

As I was saying, Jeez Beyond will return in "Beyond: The Cowl of Duty".

[Wouldn't ya know it, folks? Our holiday was cut short by a hurricane. What, in the name of Aten has been going on here, in my absence? That's it! You're all fired, except my nephew. I'd never hear the end of it from Sis. - Producer]

Richard Middleton, February 2019