

LATTER-DAY SHAKEDOWN
Excerpt

Screenplay by
Scott Robert Waldvogel

Story by
Scott Robert Waldvogel
& Matt DeMartini

FADE IN:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

A clean, pressed and folded shirt is sitting on a motel bed. Next to it, a black clip-on tie.

A man stands shirtless in the middle of the room. With his neat hair, black pants and thick-rimmed glasses, he will come to be known as THE MORMON (30s).

THE MORMON (V.O.)
I am tasked with bringing sinners
unto the Lord.

The Mormon takes his white shirt and puts it on, button by button. He moves deliberately, a bit uptight. A black briefcase sits on the bedside table next to the Gideon Bible.

The Mormon checks his look in a motel mirror, clipping on his tie and ensuring his hair is perfect.

THE MORMON (V.O.)
But how does one make the world a
better place when so many have lost
their way?

The Mormon grabs his briefcase, walks to the door, and steps outside. The Bible is left behind.

EXT. CITY STREET

The Mormon walks down the street purposefully, case in hand. Urban decay surrounds him. People not quite scraping by.

THE MORMON (V.O.)
There is no God here. What do you
do when even the good men smile as
they pick your pocket?

Walking toward him from the opposite direction is a similar-looking man with wire-rimmed glasses and a white shirt. He is JOSEPH FRANKLIN (late 20s).

THE MORMON (V.O.)
A man's reputation wouldn't
recognize his character if they met
each other on the street.

Joseph and The Mormon glance at each other briefly, but neither seems to really notice the other. They walk on.

EXT. LOW-RENT APARTMENT COMPLEX

The Mormon reaches a low-rent apartment complex, and he knocks on the very first door. He straightens his tie.

A tough-looking thug named MIKE (late 30s) opens the door. Seeing his well-dressed visitor, he rolls his eyes.

MIKE

Two in one day?

The Mormon simply smiles and pops the latch on his briefcase.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Look, I told the other guy, I don't give a fuck about my "personal relationship with Jesus." If one of you knocks on my door again...

Mike lifts up his shirt, showing a gun tucked in his waistband.

The Mormon looks down at the gun.

Then he takes a much larger pistol from his briefcase, points it at Mike's head and fires.

Blood splatters. A thump as Mike's body hits the floor and a ping as the bullet casing lands nearby.

Calmly, The Mormon licks his fingertips and reaches down to pick up the casing. Still hot, it sizzles as he places it and the gun back in the briefcase.

The Mormon glances at the blood drops all over his clean white shirt, and sighs.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Back in his motel room, The Mormon puts his bloodstained shirt on a hanger and walks over to the closet.

THE MORMON (V.O.)

I am tasked with bringing sinners
unto the Lord.

He opens the closet, and places his shirt next to a half-dozen others, all equally bloodstained.

THE MORMON (V.O.)

And I am very good at it.

The closet is closed, a button is buttoned, his hair is straightened, and The Mormon is out the door once again, closing it with a resounding bang--

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "Latter-Day Shakedown"

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - DAY

In a small apartment filled with half-unpacked boxes, a wrinkled white shirt is lying in a box marked "Moving Clothes." Next to it, a Jehovah's Witness pamphlet: "A Guide to Witnessing."

SUPER: "Two Hours Prior"

Joseph Franklin stands wearing a white t-shirt, his hair messy from the night's sleep. He puts on his glasses and starts reading his pamphlet.

JOSEPH

Hello. I am "name." Can I talk--.
Er, hello, I'm Joseph Franklin. Can I talk to you about your personal relationship with the Lord?

INT. BATHROOM

At the mirror, brushing his teeth, but still reading.

JOSEPH

(through toothpaste)
"People have a fundamental need to understand the world in which they--
(spits)
--live. To that end, everyone goes through life wrestling with three very simple questions... One: Who am I and what is my purpose?--"

INT. BATHROOM

Now in the shower, with one hand out keeping the pamphlet dry.

JOSEPH

"---Two: Is there a God, and if so, what is God like?--"

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT

Putting on his tie awkwardly with one hand while reading.

JOSEPH

"--And most important, three: What does God have to do with me and my purpose? May I take a moment and try to help you find those answers, sir or ma'am?"

Joseph smiles at himself in a circular mirror on his wall.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Positive response.
(back down at pamphlet)
"Yes, I'd love to come in." Or...

He looks back up at the mirror.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Negative response.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - JOSEPH'S REJECTIONS

A series of doorways frame their occupants' reactions.

--A MAN opens his front door and is immediately dismayed by what he finds there. He closes his door with a...

MAN

Not interested.

--Another slams his front door closed in immediate panic.

--Mike the thug just glares threateningly...

MIKE

Get the fuck off my doorstep.

--A matronly HOUSEWIFE comes to the door balancing a mixing bowl and a tie-dye clad toddler...

HOUSEWIFE

I've got this one and twelve more kids to take care of, I don't need--
(toddler knocks bowl over)
Damn it--

--And an OLD MAN just screams at him in anger...

OLD MAN

No! Nooo!

EXT. FRONT DOOR - DAY

...and a door slams shut. Joseph's face falls sadly.

As he lowers his head in disappointment, Joseph sees stains on his shirt from the toddler's bowl earlier. He sighs.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Joseph changes into a clean blue shirt, a bit downtrodden.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Joseph leaves his apartment, walking into a small, garden-like courtyard. He mutters to himself.

JOSEPH

...personal relationship with the Lord? Hello, my--

But as he mutters, a young woman with caramel skin named MARIAM (late 20s) exits the apartment next door. She wears a hijab.

MARIAM

Oh, hey. Are you the new tenant?

Joseph wheels around, surprised, and blurts out quickly--

JOSEPH

Hello, my name is Joseph Franklin, can I talk to you about your personal relationship with the Lord?!

Joseph seems petrified in place. She stares at him for a moment before speaking.

MARIAM

...So, I've got your mail.
(holds out letter)
You may already be a winner. It's got my apartment number on it for some reason.

JOSEPH

(dying of embarrassment)
Oh, uh...

(MORE)

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Probably a mistake on the change-of-address form... My twos kind of look like threes.

He takes his mail and pockets it. She studies him for a second.

MARIAM

Jehovah's Witness, huh?

JOSEPH

Yeah, I... Sorry I bothered you--

MARIAM

No, it's fine. I get funny looks too, sometimes.

JOSEPH

(points at her hijab)

Well yeah, but you could always just take that off, though.

Mariam is put off by the comment. Joseph seems to realize he's offended her, but he is at a loss for words.

MARIAM

...I'm gonna go, then. I'll let you know if I get more of your mail.

JOSEPH

Thanks... And hey, maybe then we could have that talk about God.

(an awkward pause)

That was a joke. We don't have to do that.

Mariam nods incredulously. A small girl, ISABEL (5) peeks around her leg timidly.

MARIAM

Isabel, scoot. Alright, well... I'm gonna go back inside now.

And the door closes. Joseph walks away, kicking himself in embarrassment.

EXT. INNER-CITY KINGDOM HALL - DAY

Joseph steps off the bus in a bad part of the city. He walks past an old, worn-out sign outside a building: "Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses." But the "a" in Hall has been spray-painted over with an "e."

INT. PHILLIPS' OFFICE - DAY

In a small office, BROTHER PHILLIPS (60s) is packing his belongings into boxes. A knock at the door.

PHILLIPS

It's open.

Joseph enters the room tentatively. Brother Phillips never stops packing.

PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Brother Franklin. Weren't you going to be out in service today? What's wrong?

JOSEPH

I was, but I just... I've been having some trouble.

Joseph takes a seat as Phillips nods.

PHILLIPS

Tell me.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

Where I came from, everyone knew each other. Even if they didn't share our faith, people would invite you in just to say hello.

(hesitantly)

But the kind of people who live here... they're just so hostile. Criminals, deviants and nonbelievers. Trying to reach them, I feel like I'm climbing up a hill of loose sand.

PHILLIPS

It's true there aren't many Jehovah's Witnesses in this town, Brother. We'd have closed our doors if you hadn't volunteered to take my place.

JOSEPH

Are you sure you have to go?

Brother Phillips stops packing and puts a hand on Joseph's shoulder.

PHILLIPS

Joseph, the Lord puts us where he wants us to be, and he chose to put you here. I have faith that you will bring our good news to this city in ways I never could. That is your task.

JOSEPH

But if I can't? If they do close the Kingdom Hall? What then?

Phillips thinks for a moment.

PHILLIPS

Then I think the people of this city will be lost.

EXT. INNER-CITY KINGDOM HALL - DAY

Joseph exits the building, deep in thought.

But he is being watched by two shadowy figures in a van nearby, their faces unseen.

Joseph sits down at the bus stop. He takes a moment and bows his head. He does not notice as the van pulls slowly forward.

JOSEPH

Lord, I am here, and I am listening. Help me to spread your message. Show me how to reach the people of--

Then he sees the van as it stops in front of him. The side door slides open, revealing only darkness inside.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Er... hello?

There is no response from the darkness. Joseph stands.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

You really shouldn't park here. This is a bus stop--

But strong arms reach out and grab Joseph, pulling him forcefully into the darkness.

The door closes and the van speeds away.

I/E. VAN

A tall, muscular figure struggles with Joseph in the back, and we get our first good look at the van's smirking driver, TEDDY (30s).

INT. BAR - DAY - PREVIOUSLY

SUPER: "One Hour Prior"

Teddy has a beer in hand as he sits at the counter. He is arguing with the bartender, RUSSELL (50s), who glares back.

TEDDY

...But let's say you go down to a gun show and get a good deal tomorrow. So what? A gun owner's more likely to get shot by his own gun than he is to shoot a criminal. So you're right, crime's up in the city. But unless you're a gun enthusiast-- a "firearm connoisseur" if you will-- getting a shotgun for the bar is a stupid fucking idea.

Teddy rests back on his stool. Russell stares with contempt.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

I'm not leaving until you say it.

Russell seems unwilling to answer. Finally, bitterly...

RUSSELL

You're right, Teddy. I shouldn't get a shotgun for the bar.

Teddy laughs and drinks his beer, basking in victory.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)

You gotta be an ass about being right all the time, Teddy?

TEDDY

Yes.

He drops some cash on the counter and walks out.

EXT. BAR

Teddy exits the bar where DEREK (30s), a mountain of a man with a put-upon scowl leans against a car.

DEREK
What happened?

Teddy looks at him in confusion. Then it dawns on him...

TEDDY
Huh? Oh! Shit, I forgot!

They both go back inside.

INT. BAR

The bartender looks up as Teddy and Derek start trashing the place, overturning chairs and breaking all sorts of stuff.

RUSSELL
Hey! What the hell are you doing?!

TEDDY
What I came here to do, before you got me sidetracked! When you renovate your bar with borrowed money, you gotta pay that money back!

Russell looks at the approaching thugs with a sudden realization.

RUSSELL
You work for Ramsey now, Teddy?
What would your father say?

TEDDY
He'd say "You should have paid back the goddamn money, Russell."

And Derek punches Russell in the face.

EXT. BAR - DAY

As Teddy and Derek exit the bar, Teddy gets a phone call.

TEDDY
This is Teddy... You serious?
(to Derek, with a smile)
Somebody shot Mike!
(to phone)
Yeah, we're all done here, we can handle it... You got a picture of the guy who did it?

I/E. VAN - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

Joseph Franklin struggles as a cloth bag is pulled over his head. Derek zip-ties his hands, then forces him into a side-facing seat in the back of the van.

Derek takes out a phone and looks at a photo of Joseph on it. It looks like it came from a security camera.

TEDDY

He got ID on him?

Derek takes the letter from Joseph's front pocket.

DEREK

Just junk mail. It's gotta be him, though.

Derek tries to climb up into the passenger seat, but he is far too big to pull off that maneuver in transit.

TEDDY

What are you doing? Stop that!

DEREK

I don't like sitting in the back.

TEDDY

It's a ten minute drive! Goddamn.
(shakes head in disbelief)
Text the whale.

Derek scoffs bitterly, but takes out his phone.

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Mass is just getting out at a big-city Catholic church. The most powerful and affluent citizens are all dressed in their Sunday best.

A few are crowded around a man with greying hair and a mustache, who smiles as the old ladies shake his hand. He is HAROLD RAMSEY JR (early 60s). An ELDERLY WOMAN is talking.

ELDERLY WOMAN

...And we're having a special raffle to benefit the soup kitchen, and if you could buy a ticket...

RAMSEY

(holding her hand)
Of course, Mrs. DiAngelo, I'll buy a dozen.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh Mr. Ramsey, you're such a dear.

Ramsey looks down the steps. A very wide, nervous-looking man stands by a fancy black car. He is JONAH (40s), and he holds up a cell phone for Ramsey to see.

RAMSEY

If you'll excuse me.

I/E. RAMSEY'S CAR - DAY

Ramsey closes the door behind him and adjusts his suit. He speaks to Jonah, who is sitting in the driver's seat.

RAMSEY

What the fuck is it?

JONAH

They got him.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Joseph, head still covered, lands on his knees in the middle of an old warehouse. The lights are dim except for an office window overlooking the warehouse floor.

INT. WAREHOUSE OFFICE

Ramsey and Jonah stand up there, looking down at the hooded figure. Ramsey is calm, but Jonah seems perpetually on-edge.

RAMSEY

(calmly)

You're sure this is the guy, Jonah?

JONAH

Yeah, yeah. Neighbors said he looked like some kinda Mormon.

RAMSEY

A Mormon?
