

THE CHILDREN OF MEN

screenplay

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OVER BLACK, a news report:

TV VOICE

...the world was stunned today by the death of Diego Ricardo, the youngest person on the planet...

INT. CAFE -- DAY

Men and women standing, looking up. Sad and hopeless. Their middle-aged faces bathed in the pale light of the television they are silently watching.

TV VOICE

Baby Diego was killed in a bar fight in Buenos Aires after refusing to sign an autograph...

A man enters the coffee shop, making his way through the people: THEO FARON (55). Detached, unkempt, scruffy beard, glasses, Theo is a veteran of hopelessness. He gave up before the world did.

TV VOICE

He was born in 2005, the son of Marcello and Sandra Ricardo, a working class couple from Buenos Aires....

Theo wedges his way to the counter. He orders:

THEO

Coffee. Black.

Next to him, a 50-year-old woman stares up at the TV, cradling a small dog, tears rolling down her face. Theo waits, glancing at the old plasma TV without much interest.

ON TV: The face of "Baby" DIEGO (18), the most famous boy in the world, a fair-haired teenager who has never lacked anything, smiling a practiced smile.

TV VOICE

Baby Diego struggled his entire life with the celebrity status thrust upon him by being the world's youngest person.

ON TV: Stock footage of Diego's life. His baby portrait... video footage of Diego learning to walk... Diego (8), at his first communion... Diego (14), ambushed by paparazzi...

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TV VOICE

Different accounts suggest that Diego spat in the face of a Zed who asked for an autograph, which began the fight that ended in his death. The Zed was lynched by the angry crowd shortly thereafter.

Theo's coffee arrives. He lays exact change on the counter, and starts to make his way out. Passing through the crowd. Other people crying. Two grizzled POLICEMEN sip coffee, watching the news.

TV VOICE

Diego, the youngest person on earth, was 18 years, 4 months, 2 days, 16 hours and 8 minutes old.

Theo leaves the cafe.

EXT. CAFE -- DAY

Theo walks out with his coffee, facing the day. People walking along quietly, bundled up. Some with dogs. It's cold. It's wet. It's sad. It's London.

SUPER: LONDON, 2024 A.D.

A short distance from the cafe, Theo sets his coffee cup atop a post box. Slow traffic rolls past. Mostly "old" cars, '08 models, some older. A couple of '18's. Motorized rickshaws scoot around the edges. A double decker bus passes with metal mesh on the windows. Bicycles.

A billboard, showing a stern-faced leader flanked by the idealized profiles soldiers and policemen: "KEEPING ENGLAND ALIVE". Surveillance cameras on lamp posts and building sides with tiny disclaimers: "For Your Protection."

Theo takes out a flask from his pocket, unscrews the top, about to pour it into his coffee, when behind him --

KA-BOOM! A BOMB EXPLODES inside the cafe, blowing out the windows, rocking the ground.

Theo reels with the blast, knocked off balance...

Smoke pours through the shattered facade of the cafe. Wails of PAIN, as people stagger out, covered in residue, holding their wounds, bleeding. A woman missing an arm.

Theo regains his balance, shell-shocked, holding his ears.

FADE TO BLACK.

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TITLE: "THE CHILDREN OF MEN"

FADE IN:

INT. TRAIN -- DAY

Through a train window covered by steel mesh, a billboard passing by: "GIVE HUMANITY A HAND - GET A FERTILITY TEST"

Theo rubs his ringing ears, watching the desolate green landscape.

POCK! POCK! Projectiles smack against side of the train, the steel mesh protecting the windows. Theo looks:

A gang is hurling rocks and bottles. 20-year-old males, some with painted faces -- these are ZEDS. The youngest generation on earth, nothing to lose, it all ends with them.

After throwing their load, the Zeds recede, disappearing behind a billboard: "IS YOUR NEIGHBOR A TERRORIST? REPORT ALL SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY."

VOICE

Fucking Zeds. Hurl a few rocks, crawl back into their cracks.

Theo looks back to the train. Two middle-aged COPS face him on the opposite seat, commuting home after a long day.

COP 1

It's our fault. We indulged the whiney pricks for too long. The last generation. End of the line. Big deal.

(gestures to Cop 2)

Rick's boy, he's what, 20? He got dealt the same hand. He didn't quit. Good boy, that Scottie. Joined the force, what, a year ago?

COP 2

Uh huh.

Cop 2 fumbles with something in his hand: a strip of pills.

COP 1

Two weeks ago, he and some other rookies walked into a Zed ambush. A real zedding. Outnumbered, two to one, three to one -- hell, seven to one! When we got there later, the floor was covered with blood. Blood and teeth. Zed's teeth. And the rookies...not a bloody scratch.

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COP 1 (CONT'D)

They pummelled the pissant Zeds. You could almost feel sorry for them. Those Zeds have numbers, but no discipline, no technique. And more important, no pride.

COP 2

Yeh.

Cop 2 pops one of the pills into his mouth.

COP 1

Pride. That's what set us apart. That's why England's still alive. Look at the rest of the world. It's hell out there.

Theo looks out the window. Graffiti on a wall: "LAST PERSON TO DIE PLEASE TURN OFF THE LIGHTS".

EXT. TRAIN STATION -- AFTERNOON

Theo steps off the train. Policemen patrol the platform, some with German Shepherds. He looks around, spotting an older man across the way. He walks toward him.

JASPER

Hey, amigo.

JASPER PALMER was young in the 60's, and has refused to let go of his youth ever since. Thick glasses, wispy beard, long hair, he is probably the coolest 75-year-old on the planet.

THEO

Hi, Jasper.

The two old friends greet each other warmly.

THEO

How's it going?

JASPER

Quite groovy. Quite, quite groovy.

EXT. RURAL ROAD -- DUSK

Abandoned fields with ruined farms, exhausted barns that look like scarecrows.

A car crosses, its headlights cutting through the darkening blue, passing machinery rusting on the fallow land. A Volvo sedan, circa 2009, not mint but still reliable.

JASPER (OFF)

Many get killed?

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THEO (OFF)
I don't know. Fuck, the place was packed.

JASPER (OFF)
Who set the bomb?

THEO (OFF)
Fuck knows. My ears are still ringing.

JASPER (OFF)
You mean the "eeeeeee"?

INT. JASPER'S CAR - DRIVING -- CONTINUOUS

Jasper watching his mirrors, navigating the sparse road.
Theo in the front seat, massaging his ears.

JASPER
(continues)
..."eeeeeee"?

THEO
Uh huh.

JASPER
You know, pigs are planting most of them.
Then they blame Foogies, the 5 Fishes, or
whoever they want.

THEO
Right after it went off, there were some
wounded, crawling out. A bloody woman,
holding the hind of a dog. And the
people on the street, walking by.

JASPER
What did you do?

THEO
I left.

A beat.

JASPER
I'm glad they missed you, amigo. Losing
you and Baby Diego on the same day would
be too much grief to bear.
(off Theo's look)
You did hear about Baby Diego.

THEO
You kidding me?

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JASPER

They say he was completely wasted.

THEO

Baby Diego was always wasted.

JASPER

He was a wanker.

THEO

Yeah, but he was the youngest wanker on the planet.

JASPER

Quite true. Quite, quite true.

Theo smiles. The headlights illuminate a wooded area.

EXT. WOODED ROAD -- DUSK

The Volvo slows down, and makes a left turn, going off the road, stopping in front the woods.

Jasper and Theo get out. Jasper walks to the middle of the empty road, looking both ways.

JASPER

(starting a joke)

So there's this supper. Scientists and wise men, you know, Human Project, that sort of bullocks.

THEO

(rolling with it)

Yeah...

Assured the coast is clear, Jasper walks toward a row of bushes in front of the trees, illuminated by the headlights.

JASPER

They're throwing around theories about the ultimate question: how is it that human beings haven't had babies in 18 years?

Theo walking with Jasper toward the bushes.

JASPER

The biologist blames genetic experiments that altered DNA. The environmentalist says that pollution and bio-experiments poisoned the water. You know, the typical jada jada.

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Jasper removes one of the bushes -- it's not rooted.

JASPER

A New Age bloke claims Mama Nature is merely protecting herself.

Theo removes another bush. This is a false hedge, hiding a tiny dirt path behind it.

JASPER

Then they all look at this English scientist, who hasn't said a word, he just keeps eating.

Jasper stops Theo.

JASPER

They ask him, "So, what do you think? Why don't people have babies anymore?" The English bloke looks at them, he's chewing on a wing...

(thick English accent)

"I haven't a clue," he says. "But this stork is quite lovely, isn't it?"

Jasper playfully hits Theo.

JASPER

Waaah! You get it -- he's eating a stork!

THEO

(smiles)

Stork. That's funny.

EXT. DIRT PATH -- DUSK

Through the woods, Jasper's car crossing the dirt path, the headlights on.

THEO (OFF)

How's Janice?

JASPER (OFF)

She's lovely.

INT. JASPER'S CAR - DRIVING -- CONTINUOUS

Jasper navigates the dirt path carefully.

JASPER

(sighs)

Tends to wander off occasionally.

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JASPER (CONT'D)

I found her last week on the other side of the brook. Mud all over her nightgown, shivering a death of cold, poor thing.

THEO

I'm sorry.

JASPER

When she's her normal self, she's been mentioning it. Quietus.

THEO

Quietus?

JASPER

She feels worthless. She feels a burden to me. When she's lucid, she remembers what we used to be.

Through the windshield, in a clearing in the trees, visible in the last light of day: a low-tech, jury-rigged eco-house, complete with primitive solar panels and a grass roof.

INT. JASPER'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The Stones' "Ruby Tuesday" plays. JANICE (70) sits in a chair, staring ahead. She was young in the 60's, and now is old. The light is gone from her eyes, her face a blank mask.

JASPER

Hi, Sweetie.

Jasper kisses her. Janice does not react.

JASPER

Theo's here. He came for a little visit. Theo, remember? Your Rebel With a Lost Cause?

Jasper motions Theo over.

THEO

Hi, Janice.

No response from Janice. She is staring at a wall of photos. Her lifetime frozen in images. A shrine to her past.

JASPER

She's not always like this. She's in and out.

INT. JASPER'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Jasper and Theo at the kitchen table, eating vegetable soup.

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JASPER

A couple weeks ago, I came on this Dutch bloke, lost out back in the woods. Poor soul, wasn't much left of him. Remember the pictures of those starving wretches in Ethiopia? Same thing, only blond. He said he'd escaped from Bexhill. They dug a tunnel under the fence and came over, 200 of them. Mostly French, Spaniards...

(emphasis for Theo)

...a few Americans. They were crossing no man's land. Soldiers caught them. Lined them up, shot them down. 200 hundred refugees. Unarmed. Bam. Just like that. Keeping England Alive. It didn't make the news.

THEO

Not surprising.

JASPER

Somehow this bloke escaped, got through no man's land, got over that hill. I gave him some food. Amigo, he told me some spooky stories about what's happening in Europe. Atrocities you'd never believe. And the look in his eyes.

Jasper eats a spoonful of soup, looking at Theo.

JASPER

It's sick. What humans can do to each other.

Theo ponders a potato.

JASPER

I offered to hide him. He refused. Said he had to get to London. Said he had friends there. He left. All the way to London, no papers.

THEO

He won't make it.

JASPER

I know.

They both eat a spoonful of soup.

JASPER

But I'd like to think he would.

INT. JASPER'S GREENHOUSE -- NIGHT

A make-shift affair, grow lights coaxing marijuana plants into bloom. Theo and Jasper chill, Jasper rolling a joint.

JASPER

Business has been slow. Daddy government gives pills and anti-depressants as part of your ration...

(shows joint)

...and the Buddha is still illegal! Most of my weed now goes to Bexhill. A bloke buys it from me and smuggles it over. Guess what he does. His real job.

THEO

Border cop.

JASPER

Bravo. He smuggles it through no-man's land.

Jasper fires a joint.

JASPER

(offers Theo a hit)

Want some?

Theo shakes his head.

THEO

Jasper, you're taking the whole thing too personally. In 80 years, humanity will disappear. So what? Ninety-eight percent of the species that roamed around earth have gone extinct.

Jasper takes another hit.

THEO

The dinosaurs had a pretty good run of it. Now it's our turn. What would we be so damn special? Just because we left behind a few interesting piles of rocks?

JASPER

And some books. Some really awesome books. And those really smashing symphonies.

Theo nods.

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CONTINUED:

JASPER

Dylan.

The two men smile and fall quiet.

JASPER

We made a bullocks of the whole thing,
didn't we? Maybe God is ready for a
little peace and quiet.

INT. JASPER'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Janice still staring at the wall. Theo comes to her. He takes the hair brush she is holding. And begins brushing her long gray hair.

Among the photos on the wall, one taken at a demonstration catches Theo's attention: a younger Janice and Jasper, locking arms with Theo, defiant and long-haired, and a young woman with the same attitude. Theo carries a 2-year-old boy in a baby backpack. A placard for "Global Democracy" can be read behind them.

INT. THEO'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Through a window, we see identical functional apartment buildings on a foggy morning. Next to the window: an old plasma wide-screen TV displays the time.

A digit changes -- 8:30. The TV turns on.

ON TV: A woman reads the morning news. War torn streets. Militia's marching. Citizens watching fearfully out their windows. A 50-year-old soldier in fatigues and beret, a Dixie flag flying behind, gives a speech to a crowd in front of the ruined facade of Camden Yards.

TV VOICE

...the American city of Baltimore fell to the Southern Alliance after months of furious street battles. It is seen as the biggest setback to the national government since the invasion of Northern California by the Oregon Alliance. The national government in D.C. has steadily lost popular support since its bombing of Cincinnati seven years ago in an attempt to eradicate militia strongholds.

Reflected in the window: CLICK! a light on a side table goes on. A form gets up slowly, sitting up on a bed... it's Theo, shaking out the cobwebs, his head foggier than London.

EXT. STREET -- DAY

Seven people, men and women, standing with their hands up against a brick wall. Police dogs growl and sniff at their heels. Policemen linger behind them.

THEO (OFF)

All the past historical events, the so-called facts, flow to one point...

Theo walks past. He's dressed for the day in a worn tweed jacket, a leather pack strapped over his shoulder.

THEO (OFF)

(continues)

...which we call the present.

EXT. UNIVERSITY -- DAY

Theo enters a gate fringed with barbed wire.

THEO (OFF)

(continues)

And then there are all the events which have yet to occur...

Not the grand halls of Oxford, rather, a cluster of one-storey concrete buildings, circa 2000.

THEO

(continues)

...the future.

INT. UNIVERSITY - SECURITY GATE -- DAY

A security machine swallows his leather case as Theo stands with his arms spread, a Guard frisking him.

THEO (OFF)

(continues)

The moment where the past and the future meet is the tip of both cones.

INT. LECTURE ROOM -- DAY

Theo, somewhat animated, draws two "V" cones on a black board, the tips touching each other.

THEO

(continues)

This tip is not only a moment. It's a perception, and there are as many perceptions as people on this planet.

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Theo faces the sizeable lecture room, three quarters empty. Students stare back at him blankly. People in sleeping bags in back. A man snores in the front row, his pants wet, the urine dripping to the floor.

THEO
Any questions?

EXT. STREET -- DAY

SIRENS, screaming from police cars, racing by, disappearing into the distance.

Theo walks on the sidewalk. A billboard, soothing graphics, blue on blue: "QUIETUS -- you can find relief."

The sidewalk strewn with trash, lethargic breeze. A young couple, embracing, kissing in the open.

Theo walks by, leather case over his shoulder. He's holding a book, reading as he walks: "Salem's Lot" by Stephen King.

The young couple breaks their embrace. They begin to follow Theo from behind. He does not notice, reading about a boy who got himself locked inside a vampire's room.

The couple follows, pulling ski masks over their heads.

As Theo approaches the corner, a van appears on the street, skidding to a stop, blocking his path. He slows down...

A motorcycle comes from behind, skidding to a stop, blocking his street side. Theo pauses, confused --

The ski masked couple upon him, he pulling out a burlap sack, she pulling out a pistol.

And the van door slides open, showing a masked man holding a semi-automatic gun.

Theo reacts, backing away --

The woman sticks the gun into his ribs, whispering an order:

WOMAN
Quiet.

The burlap sack comes over Theo's head. She shoves him through the van door.

The motorcycle revs, ready to go. The man hops on behind.

The woman jumps into the van, the door slides shut.

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The motorcycle peels off in one direction.

The van tears off the other way.

INT. KIDNAPPER'S ROOM -- DAY

Blackness.

VOICES

Not so tight...bring some water... put
your hood on...

The burlap sack comes off. Newspapers glued on the walls,
covering them over. Theo is cuffed to a chair. A light
shines in his face. A Tall Man in a mask holding it.

TALL MAN (LUKE)

You are under the jurisdiction of the 5
Fishes. Your basic human rights will be
respected. You will be expected to keep
this encounter confidential. To ensure
this, you will be under constant
surveillance, as you have been for the
last two months. The 5 Fishes have eyes
everywhere. Do you need water?

Theo nods, cotton-mouth.

TALL MAN (LUKE)

Water.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Are the handcuffs necessary?

TALL MAN (LUKE)

Unfortunately, yes.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(an order)

Uncuff him.

TALL MAN (LUKE)

I don't think --

WOMAN'S VOICE

Do it.

The Tall Man gestures. A Short Man (PATRIC) goes behind Theo
and begins unfastening the cuffs. Another hooded man gives
him a glass of water.

A woman in a mask approaches, walking with a limp.

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