

FADE IN:

INT. A CHAPEL - THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - SUNSET

A CLOSE-UP of a gorgeous STAINED-GLASS WINDOW portraying the exalted figure of Christ and His Church.

The LIGHT through the stained-glass window dancingly descends to bathe gently over:

CARDINAL LATINO MALABRANCA, an old, sickly priest, Dean of the College of Cardinals, who kneels before an altar.

A faraway door flies open, causing a walkway of light to pierce the darkness. In this doorway looms the brooding silhouette of CARDINAL BENEDICT CAETANI. His voice echoes in the chamber as if coming from God himself:

CAETANI

What, Malabranca? Still praying?

Malabranca groans like a tired ship encountering troubled seas.

CAETANI

My dear Malabranca. You're like a persistent beggar knocking with eternity at the door to God's almshouse. Every time you hit the floor, it's a toss-up over whether the Lord or your knees groan the loudest.

Caetani, audibly cherishing his wit, closes the chapel door - darkness again descends.

Like a hovering ghost, he strolls towards Malabranca, his feet TAPPING menacingly on the floor.

CAETANI

Tell me, Malabranca - whatever are you praying for this time?

MALABRANCA

I am praying for God to send us a blessing that will bring this wretched conclave to an end.

CAETANI

It would be more realistic to pray for a pillow for your knees. That way you could talk to God less agonizingly, and thus more frequently, and thus make up ten

(MORE)

CAETANI (CONT)

times over for wasting one little prayer on a pillow.

Caetani steps into the light: he is a brilliant, Machiavellian, severe-looking man in his late 50's.

MALABRANCA

I'd rather have a pope than a pillow.

CAETANI

So would I. But a pillow is more realistic. I fear God's cardinals produce more questions and fewer answers than His theologians.

Seeing no peace in sight, Malabranca rises, with Caetani's aid.

MALABRANCA

It's these family squabbles: the Orsinis and the Colonnas; the Colonnas and the Orsinis. The two behave as if they're the only families on the face of the Earth. Everyone else is a child sired by a wayward member of their houses. I only pray God will lead us to a pope on whom both the Orsinis and the Colonnas can agree.

Suddenly, JAMES STEFANESCHI - an amiable, minor ecclesiastic from a noble family - bursts through the chapel door. The walkway of light rushes in along with him.

STEFANESCHI

Cardinal Malabranca! The King of Naples and Sicily has just arrived. He waits without.

CAETANI

Without what?
(To Malabranca.)
Sicily, presumably.

A shadow bathes Caetani and Malabranca in darkness. KING CHARLES II OF NAPLES looms in the chapel doorway.

KING CHARLES

Two years, my lord cardinals.

INT. A RESTING HALL - THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - SUNSET

KING CHARLES

Two years have passed since Pope Nicholas died. Two years have come and gone without any new pontiff being crowned. And for those two years Christians the world over have yawned and waited and wondered why: Why must we wait? Why do you dally? And why dally here?

Caetani appears behind the King.

CAETANI

There is plague in Rome, Sire.

KING CHARLES

It's 1294, Cardinal Caetani. There's plague everywhere. But none has it greater than a popeless Christendom. May I remind you that it took God only seven days to create the world?

CAETANI

God, Your Majesty, had no kings to please.

With a drop-dead glare, the King steps aside: the large room is clogged with Caetani, Malabranca, and the nine other Cardinals of the Sacred College.

Among them stand one very thin cardinal (CARDINAL NAPOLEONE ORSINI) and one very fat one (CARDINAL PETER COLONNA) who visibly detest one another.

As for King Charles: he is about 40, suspicious, frail, and hobbled by a slight limp. Now, and seemingly always, he is surrounded by a swarm of Retainers.

While the King continues his lecture, Servants circulate the room and distribute goblets filled with wine.

KING CHARLES

Your wit is not a shovel that can dig you out of this grave, Cardinal Caetani. It is time to declare for Christendom a pope. Let us solve this now with a roll call by cardinal.

(Calling out.)

First: Cardinal Cholet.

MALABRANCA

Cardinal Cholet is on his deathbed, Sire.

CAETANI

Still. God simply can't make up his mind.

KING CHARLES

In that, He seems to be following a fashion.

CAETANI

Then I humbly suggest Your Majesty retire to his palace until the fashion runs its course. Until then, like any other subject, you must await our papal pronouncement. Kings wait for cardinals, not cardinals for kings.

MALABRANCA

Caetani, tread lightly.

CAETANI

As I do always, Malabranca. You need not worry. I am an admirer of the King of Naples.

KING CHARLES

And Sicily.

CAETANI

And Sicily, yes. I admire greatly your duty to Mother Church, Sire. As her faithful servant, you cannot bear to see God unrepresented on Earth. For, after all, a Church without a pope is a Church unable to bestow moral and legal legitimacy upon certain elusive crowns floating around the black markets of Europe.

The King turns to stone. Weightily, he speaks:

KING CHARLES

Caetani, I am the King of Naples and Sicily.

MALABRANCA
Caetani, please.

CAETANI
Yes, yes, Malabranca. I suppose I
misspoke most grievously.
(To King Charles.)
Your Majesty, I apologize.

The King accepts this guardedly.

CAETANI
(Taking a glass
of wine in hand.)
To cement my apology - a toast.

Malabranca, the Cardinals, and the King raise their glasses.

CAETANI
To the most glorious and
Christian king of Sicily... James
of Aragon.

The King's eyes widen in wrath.

EXT. BEFORE THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - SUNSET

The King and his Retainers charge through the front gate of the
palace towards a band of horses just beyond.

Scampering behind: a distraught Malabranca, a Cheshire-cat
Caetani, and the other Cardinals.

MALABRANCA
No! Your Majesty! Your Majesty!

The King and his Retainers gallop away. Caetani waves goodbye
with child-like playfulness.

MALABRANCA
Your Majesty!

The cry ECHOES in the deserted streets of Perugia as the King
and his Retainers disappear into the distance.

Caetani, like a demon descending, pops up behind the distressed
Malabranca and grins.

CAETANI
I thought that went rather well.

EXT. THE LEDGE ATOP MOUNT MORONE - SUNSET

The cliff rests atop a steep and beautiful mountain in Naples. Nearby is a cavernous mouth that opens into a cave.

GIOVANNI, an ambitious mystic, aged about 40, wearing dirty beggar clothes, emerges from the cave. A MESSENGER, dressed similarly, follows him in serene silence.

Together, the two men walk silently along the cliff until Giovanni stops both himself and the Messenger.

A tiny, ugly, primeval hut sits in the distance, bathed in an oddly celestial light.

Giovanni indicates that only he can move forward from here and reverently draws near the hovel.

INT. THE HUT ATOP MOUNT MORONE - SUNSET

Giovanni enters, spies someone in the shadows, nods a respectful 'hello,' and moves closer.

Slowly, a soiled, trembling HAND, with overgrown fingernails, reaches out, gives Giovanni a rolled-up piece of paper, and gently blesses him.

Giovanni takes the paper, half-bows, and exits the hut.

EXT. THE LEDGE ATOP MOUNT MORONE - SUNSET

Giovanni emerges and hands the paper to the Messenger.

MESSENGER

To Perugia?

Giovanni nods.

GIOVANNI

Be quick about it, brother.

The Messenger nods and hastily continues on his way. As he begins to descend the mountain slopes:

JACOPONE DA TODI (V.O.)

There is a moment in every age
when ages have to end. This
period is such a moment in time.
For those who lived it, it was
the beginning of an end. For you
who live after, it is the end of
a beginning. Regardless, it was a
time when clocks stopped, reset,
(MORE)

JACOPONE DA TODI (CONT V.O.)
and then started again. This is
the story of The Man From Morone.

MEDIEVAL CHURCH MUSIC up.

ROLL INTRODUCTORY CREDITS.

EXT. THE ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

BEGIN MONTAGE:

A) The Messenger climbing down the slopes of Mount Morone.

CREDITS.

B) The Messenger running through a lush river valley.

CREDITS.

C) The Messenger running through a field dotted with farmhouses.

CREDITS.

D) The Messenger running along the castle-mottled shoreline.

CREDITS.

E) The Messenger running over terrain framed by mountains.

CREDITS.

F) The Messenger running up a mountain to a city at its summit.

CREDITS.

G) The Messenger running through the city in question (Perugia).

CREDITS.

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. BEFORE THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - DAY

FINAL CREDITS.

The Messenger runs up to the front gate of the palace. He stops to catch his breath, then knocks.

After a pause, Stefaneschi appears at the gate. The Messenger responds by raising up the letter.

INT. AN ATRIUM - THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - DAY

The Cardinals loiter about, resting after breakfast. Orsini and Colonna quarrel and squawk like agitated parrots.

Examining this, Caetani and CARDINAL HUGH SEGUIN walk and talk:

SEGUIN

A familiar feast of wrangling,
Caetani.

CAETANI

Familiar? My dear Seguin, I have witnessed this same after-dinner combat for some twenty-four months. After the first twelve, I had memorized every phrase. After the second twelve, I now know every syllable. And by the end of the next twelve...

SEGUIN

We shall have a pope.

CAETANI

My dear Seguin, that kind of hope puts distillers out of business. The war between the Colonnas and the Orsinis is as ancient as sin and almost as fun.

SEGUIN

Well, it does us little good today. Caetani, we desperately need a pope. Let us say a compromise candidate were found...

Caetani reacts with lilywhite innocence.

SEGUIN

I have spoken with the neutrals among us. They are prepared to consider your candidacy.

CAETANI

Good God. I can't believe it. I don't know what to say, except... how wise.

Stefaneschi bursts through a door in the atrium.

STEFANESCHI
My lord cardinals!

INT. THE MAIN HALL - THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - DAY

Malabranca excitedly waves a letter in his hand. The Cardinals and Stefaneschi assemble before him.

MALABRANCA
Praise God! Guess from whom I
have received a letter?

They stare blankly.

MALABRANCA
Peter of Morone.

At first: nothing. Slowly, Caetani sprouts a smirk.

CAETANI
The quack?

MALABRANCA
The hermit.

CAETANI
Your mentor.
(To the Cardinals.)
The old man who lives in a cave
atop the mountain of Morone with
his band of merry mendicants. I
gather because he wants to be as
close as possible to our Lord.
But then the fact that this dirty
little man is still alive in his
eightieth year indicates that God
is not as eager for his company
as he is for God's.

The Cardinals laugh. Malabranca flinches as if he were struck.

MALABRANCA
Peter of Morone is a great man,
Caetani. He is a great man
untouched by sin.

CAETANI
Which only proves sin has a sense
of smell.

More laughter.

MALABRANCA

You are unfair, Caetani. Peter of Morone is a saint among sinners who takes the Lord to his heart and these trimmings to the fire. He lives in isolation so that he may forever ponder God's greatness; he dresses in rags because he is ashamed to wear satin when so many live in poverty; and he is covered in dirt because he is not ashamed to immerse himself in the ground from which man sprung.

CAETANI

Then I shall look forward to the day when God orders him replanted. Perhaps a new pontiff will spring up in return.

MALABRANCA

That is precisely what the great man wrote me about. He predicts divine vengeance upon us all if we do not soon choose a pope.

CAETANI

Divine vengeance? Will the wine turn back to water? A more horrible vengeance I could not possibly imagine.

The Cardinals laugh again. Wounded, Malabranca moves to leave, but then suddenly stops. A thought having occurred to him, he turns and proclaims:

MALABRANCA

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I elect Peter of Morone the new pope.

The laughter coughs and dies.

INT. A CHAMBER - THE ROYAL CASTLE AT NAPLES - NIGHT

King Charles sits in a chair like a captivated tot. BARTHOLOMEW OF CAPUA, his Bismarck, stands before him.

The DIN OF MUSIC in the background indicates the proximity of a festive banquet. The King has been plucked from the festivities to hear some news. His response:

KING CHARLES

Who?

BARTHOLOMEW

Peter of Morone, Sire.

The King just stares.

BARTHOLOMEW

So I am told, Your Majesty.

The King continues to stare.

BARTHOLOMEW

That's what I said.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE MAIN HALL - THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - DAY

COLONNA

Cardinal Malabranca, did I... did you... are you...

ORSINI

Serious?

MALABRANCA

Why not, my friends? Why not Peter of Morone? Has anybody here anything to fear from him?

The Cardinals consider each other.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. A CHAMBER - THE ROYAL CASTLE AT NAPLES - NIGHT

KING CHARLES

Peter of Morone? The one who dresses in rags? The one who lives on that mountain?

Bartholomew nods weightily.

BARTHOLOMEW

I fear so, Sire.

KING CHARLES

You fear rightly. This Peter person is a madman.

BARTHOLOMEW
 A madman, Your Majesty, who calls
 your kingdom 'home' and Your
 Highness 'king.'

The King thinks on this for a moment.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE MAIN HALL - THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - DAY

MALABRANCA
 What say you, Cardinal Colonna?

Colonna looks around tentatively.

COLONNA
 I? Well, I... I...

Colonna's glance rests on Orsini. A series of thoughts gallop
 through his mind.

COLONNA
 I say the choice is positively...

ORSINI
Brilliant.

COLONNA
Quite brilliant.

ORSINI
 I said it first. May that be made
 quite clear to our new pontiff.

MALABRANCA
 (To the others.)
 And what say the rest of you? Is
 it yes or no?

CUT BACK TO:

INT. A CHAMBER - THE ROYAL CASTLE AT NAPLES - DAY

KING CHARLES
 (Contemplating.)
 The mystic from Morone as
 pontiff... My subject...
 (A beat.)
My pontiff.

Thoughts dancing in his head, the King rises and paces.

KING CHARLES
 You know, Bartholomew, I pity
 this poor man Paul...

BARTHOLOMEW
 Peter, Your Majesty.

The King turns and glares: "Yes, thank you."

KING CHARLES
 Yes, well, be he Peter or Paul, I
 pity him still. He is but a
 simple, isolated, naïve recluse
 who knows next to nothing of the
 land beyond his cave. No doubt he
 will need a good friend to guide
 him along the peril-filled path
 of the outside world. Now, who
 better to do this than his own
 sovereign? Does not a king have a
 duty to his subjects?

BARTHOLOMEW
 A duty Your Majesty has never
 once shirked.

KING CHARLES
 And one which I will continue to
 treasure among my traditions.
 Yes, I will aid our friend
 Peter. Poor, poor Peter.
 (Smirking.)
 Poor, poor...

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE MAIN HALL - THE PALACE AT PERUGIA - DAY

MALABRANCA
 Caetani? Well? May we have your
 vote? Is Peter of Morone our
 next pope, or not?

The other Cardinals look to Caetani and confront there in his
 countenance a breathless pause.

Gradually, Caetani, like an uncertain flower, blossoms a
 salesman's grin of agreement.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. A CHAMBER - THE ROYAL CASTLE AT NAPLES - NIGHT

The King now stands beside a window.

KING CHARLES

Smile, did he? Yes, I wager he would. But Caetani knows only the smile of the serpent. A serpent that's newly defanged. That is, for now.

The King's delight sputters.

KING CHARLES

We must reach the new pope before the Church does.

(To Bartholomew.)

Quickly, Bartholomew. Prepare an expedition to Morone. We haven't a moment to lose.

Bartholomew bows and rushes out.

KING CHARLES

(Staring out the window.)

My father always said the frontline soldier gets the best of the plunder.

Through the window, from the darkness of the night, emerge:

EXT. THE SLOPES OF MOUNT MORONE - DAY

The slopes leading up to the cave atop Mount Morone mirror the topography of crumpled paper.

A struggling train of Church Officials - the Papal Delegation come to greet the new Pope, led by Stefaneschi - climb bit-by-bit up the wall of rock.

DUARTE and FELIPE, two Servants in the procession, have sat down for a rest. A shadow descends upon them:

STEFANESCHI

Come along, you two. It's time we were on our way.

DUARTE

Now, Stefan, have mercy.

FELIPE

This mountain has beaten me.

STEFANESCHI

Well, I'll be beating you, too, if you don't climb.

FELIPE

In that case, I'll die right here. It won't take you as long to get my body down.

DUARTE

Besides, where are all the cardinals? Aren't they supposed to be doing this business?

STEFANESCHI

Yes, they are at that. But that isn't the point. The point is that they're not and we are.

FELIPE

The point is that they don't go where they can't get a warm bed and a bagful of jewels.

DUARTE

Hey, look at that!

Duarte points: a sweating Colonna is scrambling up the mountainside below as if gold resided at its summit.

FELIPE

It's Cardinal Colonna.

STEFANESCHI

(Waving.)

Your Grace! Your Grace!

Colonna looks up and waves.

Stefaneschi gestures to Duarte and Felipe to assist Colonna. Annoyed, they scramble down the mountainside.

For a moment, Stefaneschi considers the great height of the mountain - and the future of Christendom.

Hearing a loud wheeze, he then turns to find Colonna one rock below him, held up by Duarte and Felipe.

STEFANESCHI

Good day, Your Grace. What are you doing here?

COLONNA

(Breathlessly.)

Well, I... I just thought... I decided... to join... to... eh...

Understanding nonetheless, Stefaneschi extends a hand to the Cardinal. Colonna gratefully accepts the aid and soon stands level with Stefaneschi.

STEFANESCHI

Does Cardinal Orsini know you're here, Your Grace?

COLONNA

Good heavens, no!

A DISTANT FIGURE appears on a rock on the other side of the mountain and cries out at the Papal Delegation.

COLONNA

Christ!

Stefaneschi crawls onto a higher rock to get a better look.

COLONNA

Well? Is it that weasel Orsini?

STEFANESCHI

No, Your Grace. Worse. It's the King of Naples.

KING CHARLES (O.S.)

And Sicily!

EXT. THE SLOPES OF MOUNT MORONE - DAY (LATER)

Two groups stand stalwartly on opposite sides of a flat slab of rock: first, Stefaneschi, Colonna, and the Papal Delegation; second, King Charles and his Retainers.

For a moment, both groups face each other like armies upon a battlefield. After a pause, Stefaneschi breaks the ice:

STEFANESCHI

Your Majesty, I take it we're here for the same reason.

KING CHARLES

Are you on your way down or up?

STEFANESCHI

That's for God to decide.

The King is not amused.

COLONNA

We're on our way up, Your Majesty.