

The JOB INTERVIEW

Scene / DP:

A room illuminated by one light. Two chairs, a small table between them. A curtain backdrop is meant to suggest another room behind it. Two men are seated in the chairs, facing one another at an angle of about 60 degrees. There's a coffee mug in front of the older man and a beer bottle in front of the younger. The older of the two is to the audience's left. The two men are dressed casually, but the younger man's dress suggests a degree of sloppiness totally absent from the older man's. The older man has a file folder on his lap. As the curtain rises, the audience is meant to understand that they are viewing a conversation already in progress. The older man is speaking.

... so that's what we'd be expecting of you, Larry. We at Corporate think it's a great opportunity for someone like you, kind of floundering through life without too many skills to be a big success at anything, no firm goals or beliefs to motivate you ... yes, we think you'd fit the bill perfectly.

Larry (squirming slightly):

Look, Mr. Asmodeus - am I pronouncing your name correctly? - when I found your job offer on Craigslist I thought it was a goof. Really. I'd had a couple of beers and figured what the hell, let's see what these clowns are all about, so I responded. I didn't really mean to ...

Asmodeus (with a smile):

Ah, but you did respond. And then when we asked you all those questions, you responded again. Then we set up the interview, and here you are. So why all the second thoughts now? Corporate doesn't view that kindly, and I might as well tell you that it's my rear end on the line as well as yours. Know what I'm saying?

Larry (soothingly):

No, no - don't get me wrong. I think the job offer is really cool. You guys train me for a couple months, pay me loads of money, set me up with a pad and any women I want, booze and drugs any time, and then eventually there's a press conference announcing that I, Larry Smith, am the Anti-Christ. I get it. It's just that ...

Asmodeus (impatiently, with a hard unpleasant edge to his voice):

Just what, Larry?

Larry:

... it's just that I still don't get why you had to advertise for the job. God knows ... (A slams hand on table and glares at L.) Sorry - I forgot. You-Know-Who knows that I was never big on religion or catechism or anything like that, but from the little that I knew about the Anti-Christ I sort of figured he'd be somebody well-known and

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powerful who could get a lot of people to follow him. Maybe a rock star or a politician. But instead you're sitting here talking to me, and as far as I can tell, you're serious.

Asmodeus (*intensely, leaning towards L*):

You bet we're serious. I'll let you in on a little secret, a secret that doesn't leave this room, and for once I'm telling the honest truth: your stupid little planet doesn't have much time left. The Competition notified the Chief a few days ago that humanity's time has run out. The Chief of course told Corporate, and naturally they were thrilled to hear that the Competition was throwing in the towel, so to speak, but frankly they weren't quite ready, and there's been a lot of scrambling around. Legal has been putting in 24- hour days going back over the ancient texts to figure out where we go from here.

Larry:

The End of Time - wow! That's gotta be a disappointment for you guys - you seemed to be doing such a wonderful job running things up here and now the show's about over.

Asmodeus:

You can stop with the juvenile sarcasm, Larry. Our deal with the Competition allowed us to do just that - run things up here, I mean - always of course under the (makes air quotes) control of the Competition. Kind of like what happened in the Book of Job ... you've read that, of course?

Larry:

... uh ... I started to but I didn't get very far with it. Somebody said they were going to make a video game of it so I figured I'd wait.

Asmodeus:

I know World of Warcraft is important to you but you should make it a point to read it. A lot of people who have read it are scandalized by the way Our Illustrious Predecessor (*bows head slightly*) goes strutting around getting You-Know-Who to let him do horrible things to poor Job. But the fact of the matter is that You-Know-Who needs us ... it's a yin and yang situation. No light without some dark, right?

Larry (*stifles a yawn*):

... uh ...

Asmodeus:

Sorry - I didn't mean to get so philosophical. Hey, watched "Bowling for Dollars" recently?

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Larry:

If you don't mind, let's get back to what I would be doing for you guys if I decided to do this Anti-Christ thing.

Asmodeus:

Certainly. But before we get too far into that, are you in the mood for sex?

Larry (*obviously caught off-guard*):

... uh ... sex? Now? Here? With ... uh ... who? Not

Asmodeus (*chuckling*):

No, silly. (*Snaps fingers, girl appears from behind back curtain. You can't know for sure, but she could be a redhead. She has six-inch heels and a raincoat on. She walks seductively over to L's side of the table, stands in front of him, and slowly opens the rain-coat.*) Yeah - that's what I'm talkin' 'bout!

Larry (*eyes wide, gives impression of sweating profusely, speaks in gasps*):

Can I ... is she ... holy crap ... yeah, sure ... uh ...

(A snaps fingers again, girl buttons up raincoat and exits quickly behind back curtain.)

Asmodeus (*with sinister smile*):

Of course you'd like to have sex. After all you're a normal healthy male, right? But you see how easy it is for me to take control. Our research (*taps folder on table*) on you is pretty complete. That was just a basic demonstration - three billion human males would have acted the same way as you did under the circumstances. But there's other information in here that ... shall we say, sets you apart ...

Larry (*obviously very uncomfortable; speaks quickly, with patently false bravado*):

Sure, that was easy. Beautiful women - let's see, Adam and Eve, right? One of your pals - maybe even you - curled around the tree hissing something about fruit and being like God ... (*A again slaps table and glares; L continues undaunted*) ... so you take a basic human instinct and turn it against us. Big whoop. We call it blackmail up here. Doesn't always work, though, does it?

Asmodeus (*suavely*): You're right - not always. But our Corporate Research folks are always working at refining our techniques. Their latest buzzword is "trigger mechanism" - we have to pinpoint that element in each human soul that's the weakest, then attack it. So far the lust thing works best, but pride, greed, and envy work pretty well too. (*Slaps table in frustration.*) I just wish I had had the benefits of all this new research two thousand years ago. If only ...

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Larry:

What happened two thousand years ago?

Asmodeus (looking into middle distance as he reminisces):

No harm in telling you, I suppose. I was just a Junior Demon at the time, fresh out of boot camp. For some reason Corporate decided to assign me to the task of tempting ... Him. I complained, said I wasn't ready, but no, they wouldn't listen. His regular case-worker is on another assignment and we need you as back-up. The guy's been in the desert forty days, they said. Tired, hungry ... no way He can resist you, they said. And once He succumbs, we are in business. Big time. Nothing more to worry about. And a big kick downstairs for you too, they said. Well, as I said, I was young and ambitious ...

Larry (eyes closed, struggling):

Yeah ... I seem to remember hearing about this ...

Asmodeus (continuing as before):

... maybe too ambitious. But I figured with Corporate's help, I could actually accomplish the task. Of course part of the problem was that I didn't know much about Him at the time, and Corporate wasn't exactly honest in filling in the details ...

Larry (chuckling):

Gee, what a surprise!

Asmodeus:

... so I figured I had a vaguely demented Jew to deal with, highly thought of by the Competition but nothing special. That was it. I had no idea - none - that this guy was claiming to be the Son of You-Know-Who. So I find Him in the desert and start my spiel per the script that Corporate had provided. You must be hungry - turn these stones into bread. Didn't work. Come up with me into the mountain and I'll arrange for you to be the world's biggest cheese. Again a bomb. Finally - and I think Corporate really screwed it up with this one - I take Him to the roof of the Jerusalem Temple and ask Him to throw himself down. Again He looks at me as if I'm crazy - which by now I probably am - and quotes me yet another pithy little passage from the Competition's field manual. That's it, I'm thinking - I'm out of here. What a disaster. I swear I could hear those bastards at Corporate laughing their horns off. When I filed my report with the Chief later on, I asked why the heaven they didn't send me out with the redheaded Raincoat Lady you saw before. "That wouldn't have worked either," the Chief said. When I started to squawk, he hit me in the head with a piece of brimstone - discussion over.

Larry:

We kind of got off the topic of my job situation ...

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Asmodeus:

Indeed we did - I sincerely apologize. Well, as Anti-Christ you'll be working with a lot of famous and beautiful people who will help you in your main task of seducing the entire human population to join us. Our mission - from the very earliest days of *(bows head piously)* Lucifer and the First Team - has been to take as many souls away from the Competition as we can. Once we have them, we allow them the perfect freedom of being terminally unhappy for the rest of Eternity. That's really what Hell is all about. Oh, there are a few demons, flames and pitchforks around for the traditionalists, but what we're really into is Separation. Revenge and separation - Corporate's two favorite "mission descriptions".

Larry:

Should I be taking notes?

Asmodeus:

Not yet - I'll tell you when. Anyway: now that Time is coming to an end, you as Anti-Christ will be responsible for implementing Corporate's mission to get as many stupid humans to "come aboard" - that's another one of Corporate's favorite euphemisms - so that we can finally thumb our noses at the Competition. It's a game, really, with billions and billions of souls as the pieces, and the way we figure it, whoever has the most pieces at the end of the game wins. See? Not so complicated after all, right?

Larry (*dubiously*):

... so I'll have all these magic powers that You-Know-Who's Son didn't fall for, but you're telling me that somehow they'll help convince people to follow me. Plus I get loads of face time on television. In the process, however, I give up my own soul and become the Spiritual Leader of billions of losers whose arrival in Hell will make you and your pals insanely happy as you give the finger to the Competition.

Asmodeus:

Well, yes, that's the basic idea, although of course you're putting it rather crudely. For example, we refer to them as "free spirits" rather than "losers". And you seem to be forgetting the perks we talked about earlier ... and yes, that delightful Redheaded Raincoat Lady is among them.

Larry:

Will everyone know I'm the Anti-Christ? I mean, will there be like a big media buildup to this, or is some sneaky thing that only you and Corporate and I know about? And if that's the case, why should I bother? How far is "Hi, ladies - my name's Larry Smith and BY THE WAY, I'm the Anti-Christ!" gonna get me in a bar?

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Asmodeus (*reaching into folder, taking out sheet*):

Have a look at this - it's Corporate's preliminary breakout campaign. It will be finalized as soon as Legal gets done with their research, but right now I'd say it looks pretty impressive. See what you think.

Larry (*reading*):

Lead-off press conference at the United Nations. Leno, Letterman, Oprah. Guest host on Saturday Night Live. Eventual appearance before Congress. My own weekly update right after 60 Minutes. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, everything. Week of R & R courtesy of Hugh Hefner. Dancing with the Stars ... ?

Asmodeus:

I did say preliminary. But that will give you an idea of where we want to go with this. And of course you'll have plenty of help, especially at the ceremonies we have planned where all your new followers get their "Mark of the Beast" tattoos and free "I'm With the Anti-Christ" tee shirts. How cool will that be? The World Series, the Superbowl, and the Olympics will look like retirement home birthday parties by comparison. Think of it - coverage on every media channel in the world. All the fame that you ever wanted. (*Wipes non-existent tear from eye*) And all in such a good cause ...

Larry:

The only thing that still bothers me is what my relatives and friends are going to think. Some of them are still naive enough to get really bent out of shape when they find out what I've decided to do with my life ... especially my sister who teaches kindergarten Sunday School school in Ohio.

Asmodeus (*stands up, walks around behind L, puts hands paternally on L's shoulders*): Larry, Larry ... you almost disappoint me, son. Is this the time for scruples of any kind? Don't you know those relatives and friends will drop you like a hot rock when the time comes? They're ancient history, pal. Let your sister in Ohio waste her last days slobbering over You-Know-Who and that self-righteous Son of His. You can't concern yourself with her. You gotta start making plans with your new friends now. And there will be so many of them ...

Larry (*caught up in the moment*):

No more sin or morality or ethics or rules or laws to worry about. Anything I want to do, I can do. I make the decisions. Nobody to push me around. (*To A*) It sure sounds like a good deal - John Lennon would have loved it!

Asmodeus:

Oh, he did, he did. (*Briskly*) Of course it's a good deal. Would I lie to you?

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L:
... uh ...

Asmodeus:

Okay, okay, wrong question. What I should have asked was "Why would I lie to you?" Look, I've been as honest as I can, laid all our cards on the table for you. I won't say Corporate is desperate, but they were complacent. They didn't expect the End Time for another hundred years at least. Nobody ready for the Anti-Christ role, so they place the ad that you answered. We got a lot of responses, mostly from politicians and academics, one or two musicians, but we figured it would be better to get someone that nobody knew, a cipher, somebody that we could shape to our design. We checked you out, you seemed to be a good fit, not really too good or too bad, right in the middle. Lukewarm. Non-committal. English major, 2.76 GPA. Votes our way when he votes at all. No time for You-Know-Who ...

Larry:

I did check the "spiritual but not religious" box on your form.

Asmodeus (*unheeding*):

... has several interesting websites bookmarked. In short, the perfect foil for our requirements.

Larry:

... uh ... thanks, I think. (*Ironically*) I'm really happy I meet all your criteria.

Asmodeus (*with an ingratiating smile*):

No, thank you for giving our offer your consideration. (*Smile disappears*) OK, Larry boy - crunch time. Do we have a deal or not? I've gotta know today. There's a lot of paperwork involved, and we can't waste any more time.

Larry:

Well ... okay, I guess. (*Aside*) I wonder what poor old Sister Benedicta would think of this ...

Asmodeus (*jumps out of chair, clearly alarmed*):

What ... what was that you just said? That name? Sister ... ?

Larry:

Sister Benedicta. She was a Dominican nun who taught me catechism in parochial school when I was a kid. She passed away a while back, I think. Why?

Asmodeus (*agitated, riffling furiously through folder, throwing sheets on table and floor in obvious agitation*):

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Sister Benedicta ... you never mentioned her in your application or preliminary interviews.

Larry:

Truth is I never thought of her until now when you starting saying all those things about my character. I always thought she was disappointed in me, coming from a good family and all. "Larry Smith, I worry about you," she used to say. Even when I got to be a wise-ass teenager it kept bothering me - why was she worried? After all, I wasn't really a bad kid ... but I guess I wasn't a very good one either. I always wondered why she cared ...

Asmodeus (ignoring L's ruminations; muttering while continuing to dig through the folder):

Obviously Corporate didn't know ... Benedicta ... I can't believe this ... *(To L)* Excuse me while I make a call.

(A stands up and goes towards back curtain while taking a cellphone from pocket and dialing. We can't hear the conversation but hand gestures and body language tell us that A and the party at the other end are angry. With a final yell of "Oh, go to Heaven" A claps the phone shut and returns to his chair. He manages to compose himself.)

Look, I have to apologize. There's been a terrible mistake. You are obviously unsuited for this job and you shouldn't ever have made it this far in the interview process.

Larry:

I won't pretend I understand. Two minutes ago you were ready to sign me up and now I'm getting the bum's rush. All because I mentioned Sister Benedicta ...

Asmodeus (angrily, shouts):

Look, will you stop saying that name? Even the dumbest Demon Apprentice in Hell learns real fast that those old nuns are bad news for our cause, and Benedicta is one of the worst. We know she died and went to Heaven twenty years ago but now - just freakin now while I was on the freakin phone - the idiots at Corporate who should be keeping track of this stuff find out she's been praying for you. Praying to You-Know-Who and a bunch of His pals to keep you safe, keep you out of our clutches. *(Laughs bitterly; with increasing agitation)* So of course He knows - because she knows - that we've asked some fool who belongs to Him - and is too stupid to know it - if he wants to be the Anti-Christ. Another one of His precious little jokes - He thinks wasting our time is hysterically funny, especially if He can get a nun involved. *(Jumps out of chair and roars at L)* Get out of here - now! Go back to your pathetic little sins and your obnoxious nuns and your sister in Ohio. You're disgusting. *(Terrified L hurries*

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out. A rushes after him, shouting and throwing the file folder after him) Have a nice Apocalypse, you asshole! (Takes deep breath, spritzes some breath spray, smooths hair, speaks to someone offstage) Lilith, send in the next candidate, please. (Gets up to greet someone arriving from stage right unseen) Ah, good afternoon, Senator. What a pleasant surprise! (Curtain as A, with hand extended, goes to meet guest)

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