

# DEATH & CINEMA

by Jason M. Jones

"In the end, Pasolini was a victim of his own characters."

—Michelangelo Antonioni

*Like Alejandro, I have a tendency to become obsessed with artists I admire. I have the good fortune to understand the fundamental difference between fantasy and reality, but I've always been curious about what would happen if I didn't. "Death & Cinema" is the result of that curiosity.*

A few men had talked about it—a heavy metal musician even claimed he'd do it at a concert that past Halloween—but only one person had the guts to stage his own death, and that was Alejandro's hero, Pier Paolo Pasolini. Maybe no one could prove he staged it, but that's why the act was so brilliant: he'd elevated suicide to the level of theater and made it art. Some claimed a hustler had killed him, but how could it be murder if he wanted to die?

"You were a lot more fun when your favorite filmmaker was Woody Allen," Tony told him.

"He might not be funny," Alejandro replied. "But Pasolini's real."

And that's what mattered these days—not humor, which in the past had got him laid—but integrity, vision. "He knows about human nature."

But most of his friends, including Tony, couldn't understand how someone once smitten with *Annie Hall* now admired *Salò*, which many critics claimed was the most immoral film ever made. They also found it odd that Alejandro now wore horn-rimmed sunglasses and adopted Pasolini's vocal inflections, but he was obsessive and he'd been that way as long as they'd known him.

That afternoon, Alejandro and Tony were having lunch at a diner. Both were first-year film students at the city college, and they were arguing about Alejandro's beloved Italian auteur again.

"But don't you see that we're all fascists at heart? We're all these violent creatures!"

"I don't need a movie to remind me."

*"All kinds of crazy shit about murder and rape and deprivation."*

Tony's mother had been killed two years before in a robbery, but Alejandro was too self-involved to remember. While working the jewelry counter, she'd been shot in the chest, but his friend was more interested in fiction, and Tony didn't mention it.

"See Saló, that's real depravity, that's the darkness in everyone."

Tony had seen the film once, and he didn't need to see it again. In it, a few Italian noblemen take underage boys and girls to a castle and make them perform obscene sexual acts and eat feces. It wasn't exactly Citizen Kane—in fact, it was terrible—but then, in the past five months, Alejandro had become anti-canon and his esteem for a movie grew with the number of broken taboos.

"Could you at least take those shades off if you're gonna bark at me all afternoon?"

"I'm not barking. I just tell it like it is."

"Like it is? Can you honestly tell me you like to see kids screwed up the ass and people eating shit?"

"People eat shit everyday. Maybe not literal shit, but metaphorically..."

"Christ, do you hear yourself?"

"Don't take the Lord's name in vain..."

In addition to being homosexual, Pasolini was Roman Catholic, and Tony couldn't help but laugh.

"Since when do you care about that type of thing?"

"I've always been religious."

"Okay, we have to get the check," Tony said. "I don't know how much more of this I can take."

But Alejandro didn't smile once.

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Tony and Alejandro had grown up on the same street, and they'd been friends since they were three years old. They went through every rite of passage together—getting drunk and stoned for the first time, learning to drive—and though Tony had sex before Alejandro, his boy wasn't too far behind him. The two were like brothers, and Alejandro's behavior made Tony concerned enough to tell his dad at dinner.

"Honestly, I think Al might have cracked," he said over meatloaf. "You should hear the things he's sayin'."

"What kind of things?"

"All kinds of crazy shit about murder and rape and deprivation. I can't keep up with him. You know how he is. He's into this filmmaker, and he tries to do everything the guy did. He wants to be just like him."

"The boy's always been off."

"Not like this..."

"Remember as a kid when he used to write his favorite stars? He didn't write short notes about how much he loved their work. He wrote them long detailed letters about his family and his dog and his cats, and nothing ever came of that. Or remember that time he saw Karate Kid and wore his ninja pajamas all summer long? He's always had a vivid imagination. What makes this different?"

"It's almost like, he doesn't admire the man, Dad. He wants to be him. It's scary. The guy was a Roman Catholic, a Communist, and a homosexual, and he was murdered."

