

Chapters of a Messianic Lion

Jason Klein

A mentally ill Ultra-Orthodox Jewish man goes on a journey of self discovery in a world of prophets, prostitution, love, and death.

Imagine struggling with religious and sexual identity within a deeply repressive community. You're looking for guidance after running away to a new city. Life had been centered around scripture; and now you're left with no discernable skills or education. Undiagnosed mental health issues disrupt day-to-day living. Then you're "found" (Seemingly) by someone saying they're your friend. Eventually, his ulterior motives come to the surface. Where to turn to now? Stuck between being on the streets, or returning home and being disowned and excommunicated.

The basis of this story has been told in a multitude of ways. The lonely stray, naively goes off to the city with aspirations beyond his grasp, and is left broken. However, my film is distinctive, highlighting a small group of people who aren't represented in film very often. Hopefully as we read the script, we can empathize with the lead, as he tries to tackle these overwhelming issues.

The film is about Ari, a mentally ill, young, ultra-orthodox Jewish man (early 20's). He's run away from his community in Brooklyn, to Philadelphia, in search of David Lynch (the filmmaker). After watching his films compulsively over and over again at the public library, (not access to the internet or movies at home.) he feels the movies speak to him. Through his delusions and hallucinations he has come to believe Lynch is a prophet. **His** prophet. Ari reveals all this information to a charismatic, attractive, slightly older man, Larry (antagonist), who gives Ari a place to stay and shows affection and love. This is short lived however, when this affection quickly turns into manipulation, and gas lighting, pushing Ari into a world of sex trafficking.

Initially very affectionate towards Ari, Larry doesn't seem to judge him for his manic religious ranting; he seems to love him unequivocally. A romantic relationship blossoms, subsequently leading to Ari's heavy drug use as Larry's "love" turns; reflecting his ulterior motives.

Complicating this situation is the secret that Larry holds over Ari's head as he fills him with tremendous guilt; the reason Ari left NY. Ari had a hidden boyfriend Benny, who jumped off a bridge around the same time, as the two of them were to have arranged marriages.

Until Act 3 most things go poorly for Ari. Larry keeps him pumped full of so many drugs, causing him terrible medical issues. In addition, the fear and guilt twists his mental health further. His religious identity is in shambles. Through delusions his beliefs shift and he constantly asks himself questions from the Torah and the Talmud. "Can I still be a Jew if I'm gay." "Am I Job...he suffers and loses everything. Maybe I'm the re-embodiment of him"?

Around page 50 we are introduced to Allen. With existential questions plaguing Ari, he runs off on his own through Philly only to come upon a reformed synagogue where he meets Allen; a gay cantor for the shul.

Allen genuinely cares for Ari. They converse about religion, sexuality, and Hashem (God). Allen makes Ari feel content and somewhat healthy, thus the story takes a semi positive turn we believe.

The film ends with Ari overdosing on GHB. Larry skips town, leaving Ari severally emotionally and physically damaged. However Allen comes through as a beacon of support. A golden light, the promise of hope; offering to get him mental health support within a safe environment. Living with him and working at the reformed shuel.