

IN THE PENAL COLONY

Adapted for the stage

by

Adam Martin

Copyright © 1998
by Adam Martin

PENAL COLONY/PRIMARY THEMES:

The main inspiration to update and adapt this short story was derived from a Bhuddist koan which simply states "What were you like before you were born?"

The adaption is a sort of hyper-Kakfa, in which layers of his other famous stories are veiled into the main plot.

THE GATE: There is the twist on "The Gate" parable at the beginning in which the soldier has spent the whole "war" guarding the gate instead of passing through it. i.e. you're waiting at a door for someone to arrive at a party, you give up, go inside, and you find the person you were waiting for got there, say, two hours before you did, and the person is on their way out from the party, because they figured you never showed up.

THE HUNGER ARTIST: Something that's always bugged me about staging plays is meal scenes. I just decided, fuck it, forget all the silverware and plates and fake food, and all the crap the stage hands will have to set, and just have the characters having a conversation over drinks. And it works in accord with The Hunger Artist, food isn't enough, and what the characters are really starved for are answers or at least ideas and inspiration, and it's only in hindsight they realize that food is secondary. In this adaption, the characters all sit down for dinner, wait for it, stuff happens, they all leave the dinner table, and dinner is still never served.

THE METAMORPHOSIS: Not too much to say here, except Soldier, like Gregor, goes from ignorance to awareness, but he gets it in the nick of time. He nails it.

THE PENAL COLONY: Much of the text from the original short story is in the play. However, It doesn't happen in the same sequence. Rather, it happens where I felt characters within the modified plot were motivated to say it, while keeping to the Kafkaesque. The short story serves as a plot within the plot of the play. The play is a symbolic loop of the short story.

THE TRIAL: In the Penal Colony, the protagonist is just a passive explorer. But, in The Trial, he is subjected to a trial for a vague crime. This protagonist to me was more compelling. I used it as a template for Soldier with an optimistic ending.

SECONDARY THEMES:

ALIEN: I've always been intrigued by the worlds of H.R. Giger, and always wanted to weave something of his creative slant into a show. I think there is a lot of crossover between Giger's art and Kafka's writing. However, this subplot only serves as subtle background, and helps illicit a surreal landscape, rather than a cheesy Kafka meets sci-fi. I'm not expecting anything expensive or blatant. In the short story The Penal Colony, the Commandant is some long dead legend of sorts. Though the whole story takes place before birth, I felt making him into God would be boring. The whole idea is that Soldier doesn't know what is making him, all he knows is that it's happening, it's happening fast, and he is conscious of it.

ALIEN FOREFATHERS/INVADERS: The whole concept is rather silly. However, it makes life interesting and I enjoy the creep factor. Why worry about alien invaders when we already have reptiles like scorpions, or insects that can do ten, twenty, or thirty times the damage with 1/10 or even 1/30 of the mass, or diseases like cancer, or airborne viruses that requires little or almost 0 mass? All diseases and organisms came from "outer space" and are "alien".

AMWAY: Pyramid schemes are founded on what I call "scam logic". I thought this would be a great opportunity to weave in what I really think about this practice, and I wrote it in such a way that it still serves the plot. If there is any message in this adaption, it's simply not to allow yourself to become a sucker, and to be adroit in weird circumstances like The Trial, so that you don't end up dying like a dog.

DOJANG: A martial arts term. Simply put, The Hunger Artist theater is a dojang. It is a world that only exists in the fabric of time when the people who function in it are present.

FUZZY LOGIC: It's basically a reworking of The Eisenberg Principle: By observing something, you alter what it is you are observing, so what you are left with are deductions derived from sense impressions. Household appliances are all designed with fuzzy systems. You turn things "HI" or "LOW" in response to what you want to compensate for.

MEME: An infectious idea that acts in much the same way as a virus. It can be harmful, helpful, or neutral. A meme only serves to reproduce itself, much like the monster in "The Thing" with Kurt Russell. If it propagates faster than the host it destroys itself or goes dormant in, say, cold storage. If it propagates too slow it is rooted out by other memes. All memes have to assimilate at some point. If the Black Plague killed all humans, then the epidemic would have no one left to kill. A retro-meme is simply common sense, wits, or your crap detector.

MONAD: A term applied by mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz around 1686. Simply, the smallest unit of matter, part idea and part object, that contains all the intelligence necessary to create a life system of any proportion, be it thought, soil, human, or solar system. Like people, no two

monads are exactly alike, much like soap bubbles, or snow flakes.

PARALLEL UNIVERSE: I believe in them, but I won't press the issue. I only define it as I understand it. When you get up in the morning, all the possible combinations of what you do as you go through your day are actually occurring "now". The reason you don't see it, is because you see "now" as your "true present", and your alter-self sees it's day as it's "true present". What divides you from your infinite selves going through time "now" is that you are all "figments of your imagination" relative to all of your "true presents". Your "true present" itself is a form of time warping just enough so that you can make just enough sense of what the hell is going on. If you could see your infinite selves going through time a second earlier and a second later, it would probably look like the effect you see when you look into opposing mirrors and you see a tunnel of faces spiral into infinity. Great to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there.

RELATIVITY CRASH COURSE: (1) Your household clock does not tell you "the time". What it really tells you is your "trajectory" or "coordinates" "relative" to the sun by way of measurable "units" called "seconds". This is not time so much as it is a convenience or fuzzy system. (2) The only way to measure the exact position of your car is to remove the speed of the car. The only way to measure the exact speed of your car is to decide which two points are relevant in space time. You always have to sacrifice one measurement for the other. What you end up with is non-linear explanations that can only be understood through intuition.

WWII: I kept it anachronistic, though the decorum resembles WWII, there are contemporary references. It's a war we all know and the look, feel, ethereal romance, haunting, and nostalgia of this war is somehow etched in everyone's

minds. Especially, with our parents. So, I thought it would be appropriate.

ZENO OF ELEA: (495?-435? B.C.): Essentially, the Greek logician who probably drove Aristotle to pull out his hair in clumps with his paradoxes, which essentially revolve around the famous legend about a man who travels half the distance to a door and never gets there, mathematically. Based on this notion, Zeno argued that Motion cannot exist because an object in motion has to reach the midpoint of it's destination in order to get to the other point, and since it has to keep reaching the midpoint of each midpoint, mathematically, the object never moves. In essence, Aristotle believed the world could be explained with math and logic, while Zeno served to stump him.

Any sufficiently developed technology is indistinguishable from magic.

Arthur C. Clarke

CAST OF CHARACTERS

- SOLDIER: The protagonist. Made genuine through authentic suffering. He is not punished; he is tempered. A man in earth-toned military uniform, akin to WWII.
- CAPT. MORTEMIR DEBUNK: Soldier's censor. A man in regal blue uniform akin to WWII. A figment of Soldier's imagination that never physically suffers, but serves as Soldier's lamplight through odyssey. The daffy game hunter of the imagination.
- PRATTLE GLAMWAY: The antagonist. His motives always serve his vanity. Dressed as a flashy promoter of sorts. Mad royalty.
- MISS ATTIC: A young, ditzy starlet, perhaps dressed like Veronica Lake, kind but gullible, prey to the ruses of Prattle Glamway's vanity. A mad woman in the attic.
- DESIGNER: The heroine. The 'apparatus' as inferred by Captain Debunk.

An attractive woman in emerald green gown with emerald complexion. On one wrist is a latch to which the 'Harrow' is later applied. The actual Harrow is a Gigeresque mechanical hand, akin to H.R. Giger's art in the Alien films.

JANUS:

Messenger and pagan god of gates, perhaps the war time French Girl. At once an archetype, and yet only a piece in a bigger puzzle. She passes Soldier through the womb of his odyssey.

PRISONER OF WAR:

(Madman) The mad for mad's sake. The one who tries to sneak fate by exposing himself before exposed. Neither right nor wrong, merely another degree of sanity. Dressed in prisoner of war clothes.

BEAST (SFX):

The unseen beast that keeps Captain Debunk's imagination engaged in much the same way Debunk keeps Soldier's imagination engaged. Closing the circle of the Chinese Character Box.

Scene

Soldier's gate that leads to the Penal Colony and beyond.

Time

Before birth.

SOLDIER'S GATE

(LIGHTS UP on SOLDIER, asleep at the gate, his post, with his rifle. We hear the strange sound of the monads putting the finishing touches on the set backstage, clanking, shuffling, weird shrieks and murmurs ((see the bedroom scene in "2001: A Space Odyssey" for reference if needed)) JANUS sounds off)

JANUS

(Offstage)

You're a mere catalogue of "hardships" and "breaks". You're the proven specimen of the average.

(SOLDIER wakes, draws his rifle)

SOLDIER

Who goes there?

JANUS

(Offstage)

I am Janus. The guardian of gates.

(JANUS enters. SOLDIER looks her over)

SOLDIER

Janus was a man, according to Greek mythology.

JANUS

The Greeks have been wrong, before. The dangers of miscasting are considerable. You pass into the world through women, not men.

SOLDIER

Your papers?

(Holds up his rifle)

Or I'll be forced to shoot.

JANUS

You wouldn't be if you hadn't fallen asleep at your post.

SOLDIER

No one is to pass beyond this gate without my authorization. Your papers.

(JANUS paces the area, aloof to SOLDIER's threat)

JANUS

You're famous for being no one in particular. Your appeal consists in our half understanding why you were good casting. Moreover, you are neutral on all issues in the face of extravagant expectations.

SOLDIER

(Cocks his rifle, aims)

Your papers!

(P.O.W. enters, whacks SOLDIER with a wooden club, takes his keys, escapes through the gate, slams it shut. SOLDIER gets up, tries to open the gate by force but it's locked tight. SOLDIER panics for fear of incrimination)

SOLDIER

(Panicky)

That's all the evidence they need! To find me asleep at my post! But, you saw that I was awake... didn't you? Surly, I will be lashed! What will become of me before the Law?

JANUS

Nothing. Anyone who passes through a gate other than his own unravels reality as we know it. No Janus. No soldier. No nothing. You won't exist to receive a lashing.

SOLDIER

Whose gate was that?

JANUS

It was only meant for you.

SOLDIER

(Stunned)

You mean... all this time I've been guarding the same gate I was supposed to pass through?

JANUS

And I was meant to administer final judgement for the monads.

SOLDIER

And where were you to be found to administer final judgement?

JANUS

Scrambling towards a gate identical to yours. A man slipped past the soldier at that gate, and beyond a woman slipped past another soldier, guarding yet another gate.

SOLDIER

So, you haven't fulfilled your... contract?

JANUS

I was awake at my post. However, I was allotted more posts than I could monitor. There is an error in the system.

SOLDIER

An error... in the imperial message, perhaps?

JANUS

Yes. An error in the imperial message. No matter which gate I ran to, another was violated, and I was caught having to go one way or another at the midpoint, until I realized something was malfunctioning, and it was my fate to let all gates go critical.

SOLDIER

What possessed you to come to my gate if you knew it was hopeless?

JANUS

I don't know. I somehow knew the way to this gate in the shadows. But, that's beside the point. The imperial message has malfunctioned, and it is for that reason reality must unravel as we know it. It will only take a moment.

(JANUS Sits yoga style in the center of the stage awaiting all things to vanish. We hear the sound of some horrible "solar storm", as if the the world around them is falling to pieces. SOLDIER has an epiphany, shrugs JANUS)

SOLDIER

Wait! Let me go! Let me find that man and return him here.

JANUS

No. The end transmission is that you go no further. If nothing else, I will fulfill my contract as programmed.

SOLDIER

Consider this, Janus. If that man continues through my gate... nothing exists.

(Beat)

And if you do nothing... nothing exists. So, what have we got to lose if we've already lost?

JANUS

It seems we're on the horns of a broken radius.

SOLDIER

I am trustworthy, and I am adaptive. I can't prove it. I can only proclaim it.

JANUS

You would do all this, knowing that when you return to the gate, your fate is the same? That you go no further?

SOLDIER

To never know where your imagination leads you is worse than wondering where it may have led.

(JANUS ponders for a moment)

JANUS

All right, soldier. I will let you pass. But, remember. You are getting off on the wrong foot. You are compounding the unnatural circumstance. What you find may be worse than not existing at all.

SOLDIER

Do I have a time limit?

JANUS

There is no time. Only shadows. Your only chance is that your pace exceeds our ability to follow.

(JANUS concentrates for a moment.)

JANUS

(Continued)

Pass now soldier.

(SOLDIER exits, then returns momentarily)

SOLDIER

(Grips Janus' arm with reassurance)

I'll be back.

(SOLDIER exits through the gate. The "solar storm" subsides. LIGHTS OUT. JANUS exits)

CAPTAIN'S COURTYARD

(LIGHTS UP on SOLDIER lying feverishly on a cot. We can hear the "monads" clanking and murmuring backstage, as if putting the finishing touches on the set.)

CAPT. DEBUNK sounds off backstage,
having a conversation with the monads,
as if trying to persuade the elders of
something)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Offstage)

Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Please! Please! I can
hardly hear myself think above all this chatter!

(Beat)

Look, no one's arguing that an error in the
imperial message did not occur. The issue at hand
is how are we going to allow for adaptability?

(CAPT. DEBUNK enters with a large roll
of comical blueprints, a bottle of
brandy, paying SOLDIER no bother, as
SOLDIER tries to sit up and adjust his
focus)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued; gazing up and around)

Gentlemen, you did elect me as emissary, and to
revoke what you have proclaimed would only stand
to unravel... well... this very conversation. Can
we merely assume that you've had a change of...

(Beat)

Look, I'm not trying to incite an argument. In
the end, we only know that things change. Have a
heart. Let me give it a whirl...

(The "monads" taper off)

SOLDIER

Who were you talking to?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Ah, you're awake! I intercepted a transmission
and found myself invited to join in. Captain
Mortimer Debunk at your service!

(CAPT. DEBUNK extends his hand.
SOLDIER tries to sit up to greet him,
still too weak, he falls back in the
cot.)

CAPT. DEBUNK, chuckles, sits before a bucket of water and gingerly applies water to his face and hair. Nearby is a crate of fresh apples)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

These uniforms are too heavy for the tropics. But, they mean home to us. We don't want to forget about home!

SOLDIER

How did I get here?

CAPT. DEBUNK

You were marooned on the shoreline. It was a quite a spectacle really. Your lifeboat smashed against the rocks, and your body flailed into the sea like a sack of potatoes.

SOLDIER

And you saved me?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Most certainly. There was a typhoon. The wind was whistling through the palms like air raid sirens. I only happened to see you go under out of the corner of my eye, somewhere beyond my peripheral view. I saw something flesh colored. Something out of place in the fabric of the waves hitting the rocks.

(Beat)

I thought to myself, 'I may be drunk... but that's a fellow man!'

(Offers an apple from the crate)

Have an apple.

SOLDIER

I don't recognize your uniform.

CAPT. DEBUNK

I don't recognize yours. Go on. Take the sustenance.

(SOLDIER takes the apple, studies it for a long while)

SOLDIER

(Suddenly suspicious)

Ah, the apple is laced with truth serum!

CAPT. DEBUNK

For goodness sake, soldier.

(CAPT. DEBUNK takes a bite of the
same apple)

You see? I'm not affected. Now, you try.

(SOLDIER is convinced, digs in
voraciously)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

Help yourself to the crate. Or would you prefer I
sample them all before you dig in?

(SOLDIER shakes his head, chomping
away)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

Well, if we can agree on anything at this
juncture, it's that trust is earned.

(CAPT. DEBUNK unrolls the blueprints.
All sorts of enlarged renderings
that depict torture devices of
say mideval times are depicted,
along with renderings by H.R. Giger.
He manically darts over them with his
eyes)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

Now just take a look at this machine! Read the
scripts!

SOLDIER

(Peering in)

I can't.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Holds drawings closer)

Try taking a closer look at it.

SOLDIER

I told you, I can't make out these scripts. The notation... the nomenclature is... alien.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Flipping through diagrams)

This apparatus was invented by our former Commandant. We who were his friends knew even before he died, that the organization of the colony was so perfect...

SOLDIER

Colony?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Chiming along)

... that his successor, even with a thousand new schemes in his head, would find it impossible to alter anything, at least for many years to come.

SOLDIER

How many years?

(Glancing about)

These facades appear ancient. I can't discern any of the inscriptions.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Chiming along; referring to scripts)

It consists of three parts. In the course of time each of these parts has acquired a kind of popular nickname. The lower one is called the 'Bed'. Completely covered with a layer of cotton wool.

SOLDIER

Is it furniture?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The upper one is the 'Designer'. Wherein we find all the cogwheels, gears, springs, bells and whistles that control the movements of the...

SOLDIER

Abacus.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Beg your pardon?

SOLDIER

It's a bean counter. A calculating device.

(CAPT. DEBUNK gazes at SOLDIER a moment, shakes off his comment, as if rudely interrupted)

CAPT. DEBUNK

And this one here that moves up and down is called the 'Harrow'.

SOLDIER

The Harrow?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Yes, the Harrow. A good name for it. The needles are set in like the teeth of a Harrow. There are two kinds of needles arranged in multiple patterns. Each long needle has a short one beside it. The long needle does the writing, and the short needle sprays a jet of water to wash away the blood and keep the inscription clear.

SOLDIER

Surly, this is a surgical device.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Paying Soldier no bother)

Blood and water together are then conducted here through small runnels into this main runnel and down a waste pipe into the pit. You were saying?

SOLDIER

I said... surly this is a surgical device.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, in the old days the writing needles let drop an acid fluid only found in remote parts of

the universe, which we're no longer permitted to use.

SOLDIER

(Uneasy)

Universe?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Did I say universe? Slip of the tongue. I was speaking figuratively. What I meant to say was hemisphere.

SOLDIER

Earth?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Indeed.

SOLDIER

I see.

(Clears his throat)

So if it's not furniture, bean counter, nor surgical device...

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Inferring prenatal gestation)

Well, the script of the Harrow can't be a simple one. The turning point is reckoned to come at the end of three months. So there have to be lots and lots of flourishes around the actual script. The rest of the body is reserved for the rest of the embellishments. When it finishes the first draft of inscription, the layer of cotton wool begins to roll and slowly turns the patient over to give the Harrow fresh space for writing.

SOLDIER

Why do you say... patient?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well... it's appropriate. Meanwhile, the raw part that has been written on lies on the cotton wool, which is specially prepared to staunch the bleeding and so makes all ready for a new deepening of the script.

(SOLDIER detects that the device may be used on him. He grows ever more uneasy)

SOLDIER

Look. I don't remember killing anyone. I am a soldier. Which means I was probably in a war where I saw action and most likely shot at other people with my rifle. We can just assume I killed somebody, and I'm sorry things turned out that way. It was never out of spite or for personal gain.

(Grim silence)

CAPT. DEBUNK

Who's to say your telling the truth?

SOLDIER

What I'm trying to communicate to you captain is that I'm telling the truth the best I can remember.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Who's to say your memory is telling the truth?

SOLDIER

(Losing his cool)

Then what you son of a bitch!

(Suddenly salutes)

Sir!

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Chuckles; remains at ease)

As you were, soldier. Your mind is a jumble. Sometimes when you strangle the parrot in haste, you strangle the message. That's what I'm here for. To formulate a better question when you can't.

(Beat)

Maybe you're not here because you killed anybody? Maybe you're not here because you've done anything right or wrong? Maybe you're just here to relax and see how things go? Take it on the chin and have a brandy.

(CAPT. DEBUNK pours SOLDIER a drink, hands it to SOLDIER. SOLDIER glances at an oval portrait on an easel. The portrait is turned backwards so no one can see what's on the other side. He rises to inspect it, able to balance at this point)

SOLDIER

(About to flip the portrait)

May I?

CAPT. DEBUNK

By all means.

(SOLDIER flips over the portrait. It is the face of a Gigeresque alien that looks semi-human. Beneath it, an inscription in alien language. SOLDIER adjusts his focus, thinking he's not seeing the painting properly)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

There's nothing wrong with your focus.

SOLDIER

Who is that?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The former Commandant. That's his self portrait.

SOLDIER

(Uneasy)

Surly, your Commandant was exaggerating his... appearance?

(CAPT. DEBUNK inspects the portrait with great attention, shakes his head)

CAPT. DEBUNK

No... Don't think so... Perhaps, he painted it in a drunken stupor?

SOLDIER

Perhaps, we can agree that it's merely the way he interpreted himself... while he was drinking.

CAPT. DEBUNK

We can agree on that.

SOLDIER

He designed the apparatus?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Indeed.

SOLDIER

Did he combine everything in himself? Was he soldier, judge, mechanic, chemist and draughtsman?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Indeed he was. I was the former Commandant's assistant in all matters and know more about the apparatus than anyone.

SOLDIER

What is that peculiar language beneath him?

CAPT. DEBUNK

It says, 'Incoming Data, Slash, Prophecy, Slash, the Commandant will rise again and lead his adherents from this house to recover the colony. Have faith and wait, Slash, End Transmission.'

SOLDIER

He's dead?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Quite. Slash. Quite. The Commandant always used to do the explaining, but the new Commandant always shirks his duties.

SOLDIER

And when would I meet him?

CAPT. DEBUNK

You won't. That's what shirking's for. My guiding principle is that Guilt is never to be doubted.

SOLDIER

I didn't want to have to ask, captain. But, if I am in fact a prisoner of war and this is not a surgical device...

CAPT. DEBUNK

Oh, your referring to these tattered and flappy diagrams! No, no, no. I would never subject a human being to something so... mideval.

(Beat)

The cogwheels in the apparatus are badly worn. It creaks a lot when it's working. You can hardly hear yourself speak. Spare parts are difficult to get here. Both the Bed and the Designer require an electric battery, and without electric current, how can one hope to make an inscription?

SOLDIER

What exactly is inscribed on the flesh?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, that's simple really. The sentence.

SOLDIER

Does the victim... patient... know his sentence?

CAPT. DEBUNK

No.

SOLDIER

He doesn't know the sentence that has been passed on him?

CAPT. DEBUNK

No. There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body.

(Beat)

There is a store for which spare parts are kept for repairs of all kinds and I have taken charge of the machine money myself. I've made some modifications. Strapless modifications.

SOLDIER

May I see the apparatus?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Certainly. When it arrives.

SOLDIER

It isn't here?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Oh, no. It's entirely outsourced. The spare parts that were of no use to me were of use to other facility managers, who in turn were not at all reluctant to barter in exchange for research and development. What really did it were the...

(Pats his breast pocket)

Scripts themselves. Relevant drawings made by our former Commandant. Modified by me.

SOLDIER

May I see them?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Proudly patting breast pocket)

No... These you may not see.

(CAPT. DEBUNK pours SOLDIER a drink)

SOLDIER

Has anyone ever escaped from here... if you're at liberty to provide that information.

CAPT. DEBUNK

There is a rumored escapee.

SOLDIER

A rumored escapee? How did he do it?

CAPT. DEBUNK

No one knows. In life, wherever you go, there is always a 'rumored escapee'. Someone who allegedly made it outward and upward. But, the person you imagine him to be is never what he is really like or what he is really going through. He's just the rumored escapee.

SOLDIER

Well, if I'm not to be the one to be subjected to this apparatus, than who...

CAPT. DEBUNK

Why are you in such a hurry to break out? You just got here, old boy. Why, in fact... everyone is just arriving.

SOLDIER

Everyone?

(Sound of a CARGO PLANE)

SOLDIER

(Continued; looking up)

Where's that plane coming from?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Looking up)

Right on schedule! There it is. You see it? The crate with a parachute?

SOLDIER

Yes. Is that your advanced technology?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Chuckles)

Technology is the knack of so arranging the world so that you don't have to experience it... No, it's not technology. It's time for supper in the teahouse!

(The BEAST roars and growls offstage.

CAPT. DEBUNK grabs a rifle)

Stay close to me. The teahouse isn't far. And bring the bottle!

(SOLDIER snatches up the bottle.

CAPT. DEBUNK and SOLDIER exit.

The BEAST Continues to roar and growl.

We hear the sound of CAPT. DEBUNK

"firing" rounds of ammo with his rifle)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Offstage)

Do you see it?! Do you see it?! Thrashing behind
the trees?!

SOLDIER

(Offstage)

It must be twenty feet tall!

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Offstage; Further down hall)

Twenty-five!

(CAPT. DEBUNK can be heard "firing"
off more crazed rounds of ammo)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued; Offstage)

Soldier! Cut behind me and dash to the entry!
Heeeee's a big one!

TEAHOUSE

(CAPT. DEBUNK "fires" again and again.
The BEAST subsides. SOLDIER enters.
Moments later, CAPT. DEBUNK enters)

SOLDIER

Did you kill it?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Glancing offstage)

He's limping. That only means he'll be waiting.

SOLDIER

What if he smells the food?

CAPT. DEBUNK

No... He's a smart one. He'd rather let me come
to him. He just gets cocky every once in a while.

(SOLDIER and CAPT. DEBUNK go to
the table. Nothing has been set)

SOLDIER

Are we early?

CAPT. DEBUNK

It would appear so. That's why I told you to bring the bottle. Have a seat.

(Beat)

Damn beast. Can't seem to lick it.

(SOLDIER sits. CAPT. DEBUNK lays down his rifle, removes two glasses, pours drinks)

SOLDIER

You've known this place a long while. You must have had some rather fascinating experiences.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The most fascinating one involves the new Commandant.

SOLDIER

Oh?

CAPT. DEBUNK

I suppose I wasn't entirely truthful about his fate. But, if you can't let it hang out here...

SOLDIER

Let it hang out.

CAPT. DEBUNK

He was a bit of a martyr, you see. I remember him standing their naked, setting the perfect example.

SOLDIER

Naked? The perfect example?

CAPT. SOLDIER

Well, if you want others to do your bidding, you have to do right by your own. Morale was failing among the adherents. And so, in all his... well I wouldn't exactly call it glory... he subjected himself to the apparatus to receive his sentence, so that he may continue leading by example.

SOLDIER

And what example did he ordain?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, that was the trouble really. As I said the cogs were worn and so forth. I threw the switch upon his command and...

SOLDIER

And what?

CAPT. DEBUNK

I hesitate to describe it. It was at once grisly and so... erotic.

SOLDIER

Erotic?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Getting mildly turned on)

The Harrow was no longer writing. It was only jabbing, and the Bed was not turning the body over, but only bringing it up... quivering against the needles... and then something... snapped... and the entire apparatus fell silent... and... stopped...

SOLDIER

And then it started up again?

(PRATTLE GLAMWAY and MISS ATTIC come the entrance. They only listen in on the rest of the conversation.

CAPT. DEBUNK and SOLDIER are not yet aware of their presence)

CAPT. DEBUNK

No... It... Attacked... Blood was... flowing in a hundred streams. Not mingled with water. The water jets too had failed to function. And then... the last action failed to fulfill itself. The body did not drop off the long needles. Streaming with blood, it went on hanging over the pit without falling into it.

(Beat)

The Harrow tried to move back into position. But, it seemed to notice that it had not yet got rid of its contents.

SOLDIER

The apparatus malfunctioned.

CAPT. DEBUNK

I don't know. That's what I kept looking for in the face of the corpse. It was as if it had been in life. No sign was visible of the promised redemption. The lips were firmly pressed together. The eyes were open. The look was calm and convinced. The apparatus fell silent again.

(Beat)

And as I reached to shut the Commandant's eyes... there was the brief and sudden whine of a single... remote... cog... and through his forehead went the point of the great iron spike!

MISS ATTIC

My god!

(CAPT. DEBUNK and SOLDIER turn to PRATTLE and MISS ATTIC standing in the entry)

CAPT. DEBUNK

Soldier, permit me to introduce Mr. Prattle Glamway and his wife...

PRATTLE

Mistress.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Mistress. Miss Attic.

(PRATTLE and MISS ATTIC sit at the table. CAPT. DEBUNK pours them drinks)

PRATTLE

You never said anything about a spike through the forehead!

MISS ATTIC

And you promised to escort us, captain. There's something moving around in that brush, and it ain't at all human!

CAPT. DEBUNK

My apologies, Miss Attic. I was distracted. Besides, the beast only tangles with me, and as for the spike through the forehead, I've explained to you as with the soldier, that medieval torture is not in keeping with my agenda.

PRATTLE

(Intrusive)

What exactly is your agenda, captain?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Jocular)

My agenda? You're dead either way?

MR. PRATTLE

Ah, so your a nihilist.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Meaningless is derived from a series of meanings. Therefore, even meaningless means something.

MR. PRATTLE

Ah, so you're an existentialist.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Essence precedes existence? No. No one's ever proven that either.

(Beat)

Moreover, no one has ever proven that a thought is of human origin. All we know for certain is that this... idea ... mimics human nature... regenerates... and that's all it does. A thinking substance in a jacket of trace elements.

MISS ATTIC

My soul is a thinking substance. I can feel it when I go through life.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Good for you Miss Attic.

MR. PRATTLE

(Getting testy)

Hold the chariots.

(Beat; to CAPT. DEBUNK)

Are you trying to tell us that the human species was borne of some extraterrestrial life form?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, there is the theory of the monad. The smallest unit of matter in the universe that contains within it all the pure intelligence necessary to create a world and the inhabitants within it.

MR. PRATTLE

Well I've got my own bit of logic, captain. I'm gong to assume that you are in fact insane, so we can all have the benefit of being wary, whenever you expound at the dinner table.

CAPT. DEBUNK

All I'm saying Mr. Glamway is that just because a species is intelligent it does not follow that it is of human origin. It neither negates nor detracts from consciousness. It may be that consciousness is the same for all species of intelligent life and humans behave according to a syntax, species of flywheel, or meme... that they can comprehend.

PRATTLE

Preposterous. The thoughts I have are mine, because I said so. I will merely assume this is hell and have my wits about me.

CAPT. DEBUNK

This is a dojang, Mr. Glamway. A murmur in time's fabric where like species interact. We could be a group of camels being observed by an audience of camels.

MR. PRATTLE

Don't insult my intelligence.

CAPT. DEBUNK

You needn't worry, Mr. Glamway. Since no one has ever effectively determined what intelligence is, there's really no effective way to insult it.

MISS ATTIC

People just have feelings and sometimes they get hurt. Animals have feelings too.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Yes, Miss Attic. Two organisms of the same species will always interpret each other as people, and everyone else as other animals. It's encrypted. It's how camels know they are camels and humans are other animals.

PRATTLE

Maybe you're one of those monads? Some thing that has brought us here to put us under a looking glass.

CAPT. DEBUNK

If I were a monad, Mr. Glamway, I wouldn't need to bring you here, and at the same time make my presence known. No. I'm a facility manager.

PRATTLE

Then you're one of those mimes.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Meme, Mr. Prattle. An infectious idea that behaves in the exact same way as a virus. One could argue that all viral properties constitute thought.

PRATTLE

So, you admit to being a meme.

CAPT. DEBUNK

I'm a series of memes, and all present exist in memetic interludes.

MISS ATTIC

They dance.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Yes, Miss Attic. That's very precise of you.

MISS ATTIC

I try to be precise with my mind. Sheesh, it's the only one I got!

CAPT. DEBUNK

You have no idea how greatly your interference is appreciated.

MISS ATTIC

You know what, captain. You're kinda funny and all, but you're too plaintive to be insane.

MR. PRATTLE

(Demeaning)

You don't know what "plaintive" means.

MISS ATTIC

Well, it just sounds like a word that describes the captain.

SOLDIER

I get the context, Miss Attic. And your usage of the word is exact. I would aspire the captain to being plaintive as well.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Blame it on the brandy.

MISS ATTIC

(To SOLDIER)

I love it when men use the word "aspire". They just go together.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Blame that on the brandy too.

MR. PRATTLE

I use the word 'aspire', and you never fall all over me with kisses.

MISS ATTIC

Well, that's why I kiss you in the first place,
so you never have to say it.

MR. PRATTLE

(Perplexed; gazing into his drink)

Oh.

MISS ATTIC

(To SOLDIER)

How dashing and regal this all is! Even with that
monster out there!

SOLDIER

I would concur, Miss Attic.

PRATTLE

(To SOLDIER; Leery)

Horning in on my girl, eh?

SOLDIER

I don't require horns, Mr, Glamway.

PRATTLE

You must be the wise guy of the bunch.

SOLDIER

Wisdom is being pleased with yourself. But,
that's not wisdom. That's you just being pleased
with your self.

MISS ATTIC

(To SOLDIER)

You talk like a chess player! How sexy!

MR. PRATTLE

(Losing his cool)

That will do Miss Attic!

MISS ATTIC

Sorry.

CAPT. DEBUNK

You're instincts are always correct, Miss Attic.
It's your problems that mislead you.

MR. PRATTLE

(To CAPT. DEBUNK)

Shut up.

(To SOLDIER; Rude)

So, you're a soldier? Decorated hero? Or did you shoot yourself in the foot to escape duty?

SOLDIER

I don't know. I only remember.

MISS ATTIC

What exactly do you remember? It intrigues me.

PRATTLE

(Demeaning)

You don't know what "intrigue" means.

SOLDIER

It suits the context.

(PRATTLE goes to accost SOLDIER.
CAPT. DEBUNK swiftly intervenes)

PRATTLE

Now, see here pal...

CAPT. DEBUNK

Mr. Glamway?

(Beat)

It's your turn to shut up. Sit down.

(PRATTLE festers, sits down)

MISS ATTIC

Keep talkin', soldier. Keep talkin' so I don't feel so hungry.

SOLDIER

I'll tell it to you the best I can...

(SOLDIER rises, paces with his drink in reverie)

SOLDIER

(Continued)

I remember... a concentration camp.

(Beat)

I remember telling someone not to throw himself into the electric fence because if he did, he would never know how his life ended.

(Beat)

I remember telling someone that suicide doesn't negate the fact that you lived in the world.

MISS ATTIC

And then?

SOLDIER

That soldier committed suicide anyways, Miss Attic.

I remember trying to get a good nights sleep, doubting my own advice, and how trying to provide hope through logic doesn't always help. I remember living in moment to moment compartments. Standing in front of the electric fence and appreciating a cigarette in silence, thinking to myself that I may never know this form of appreciation again. And I was... somehow... for a brief moment... just very happy.

MISS ATTIC

Were you thinking of throwing yourself into the electric fence?

SOLDIER

I was, Miss Attic. And then something occurred to me. My own advice. I deduced that by letting the clock run out, I could at least give myself the benefit of letting my alternatives run out.

MISS ATTIC

What did you do to keep your mind from goin'?

SOLDIER

I built a house.

MISS ATTIC

Inside the concentration camp?

SOLDIER

No. In my head. I selected the materials with great care and with each passing day I constructed a little more. There's a bay window that opens up to the sea.

(Beat)

And in this house that I built in my head I resolved a relationship that went awry, and I realized why it would have never worked out, and I felt better about that.

(Beat)

Strangely, in the concentration camp, I was able to resolve problems that I would never have been able to resolve in domestic life. And then I lay down one night. And then I was here.

MISS ATTIC

Did they torture you?

(Grim silence)

SOLDIER

They tortured others. That was the worst part. You just lie awake wishing they'd go into shock. And they never do soon enough. When you hear another human shriek loud enough, you...

MISS ATTIC

You what?

SOLDIER

I found a metal pipe in the bunks. I made a pact with another prisoner of war. Each night we would trade off. He would knock me unconscious, and then I would do him the honors the following night, and the only way we could go through with it was if we pretended the other... were the enemy... and we both knew that if we hit each other too hard and didn't wake the next dawn, well... you take your chances... Miss Attic.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Raising his drink)

You take it on the chin, old boy!

SOLDIER

We always looked away when we did it. Never looked each other in the eye, except when we sealed the pact.

PRATTLE

What happened to this man?

SOLDIER

Lost to obscurity. Someone I used to know.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The human mind is far more adaptable than we give it credit for. Maybe that's what wonder is?

SOLDIER

Wonder is what brandy does.

MISS ATTIC

Maybe the man wonders about you?

SOLDIER

Perhaps.

CAPT. DEBUNK

He fits the description of a man rumored to be exiled somewhere else. Far from here. All that matters is that he probably wonders about you.

SOLDIER

The shame is what gets to me. The shame of what we did.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Sometimes shame and ingenuity are the same thing.

SOLDIER

Well, that doesn't help.

(CAPT. DEBUNK goes to SOLDIER, rests his hand on his shoulder to console him)

CAPT. DEBUNK

There are many different species of love. Some people don't even live to know one. Some have yet to be discovered.

MISS ATTIC

(Emphatic)

I love it when you don't have the words, and someone else says exactly what you're trying to say. It's as if someone reached out of the darkness and gently put their hand on your private parts.

MR. PRATTLE

(Aghast)

Miss Attic! Really!

MISS ATTIC

Well, it's true. It's true for me. If I said it any other way, I'd be lying. Sheesh!

SOLDIER

I like the way you tell the truth, Miss Attic. It makes me wonder and think of other things.

MISS ATTIC

Is that a good thing?

SOLDIER

(Holds up his drink)

My private parts salute you.

MISS ATTIC

Gee, that's neat. I love it when I say things that make private parts salute me!

PRATTLE

(Rattled)

That will do Miss Attic! Remember what I told you about keeping up appearances! The less you talk, the better we look!

MISS ATTIC

Oh yeah. I have to maintain my image.

(To OTHERS)

You know. Feed my dress.

SOLDIER

Feed your dress?

MISS ATTIC

Why sure. Mr. Glamway always thinks on different levels. The more time I spend with Mr. Glamway, the more people think I think on different levels. But, I really don't. But, don't tell anyone. Sheesh!

SOLDIER

What line of work are you in, Mr. Glamway?

PRATTLE

Line of work? Oh, nothing really. This and that.

CAPT. DEBUNK

You're a con man?

PRATTLE

That's where I have you, captain. You see where all confidence men in the end. Everyone comes with two halves of a coconut, and the little black ball is either under one half or the other.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The little black ball?

PRATTLE

Why the image captain. The image we are trying to uphold through posturing. And with the element of decorum you yourself utilize a series of spider and fly tactics to preoccupy us with...

CAPT. DEBUNK

Product placement?

PRATTLE

Precisely.

SOLDIER

You still haven't told us your occupation.

PRATTLE

(Mounting with cockiness)

Not so fast, gentlemen. You see, I'm a bit of a thinker myself. If I were to give that away, it would be like the captain here giving away why we are all in the penal colony.

CAPT. DEBUNK

I never said "penal colony", Mr. Glamway.

PRATTLE

Do you have to?

(Beat)

Unlike the captain, I do provide an answer. Like most human beings, I am a soft seller.

SOLDIER

What's the con?

PRATTLE

Con? Why there's no con, gentlemen. If there were, I would simply steal your wallet and not even go to the trouble of all the bluff. And as for the image...

MISS ATTIC

Tell 'em Prattle. Tell the talk you told me when I was a down and out singer in a saloon and nobody wanted me, and they just slept with me for fun. Tell 'em!

SOLDIER

Yes, do tell.

CAPT. DEBUNK

That's what the feast is for.

(Wherein PRATTLE lays down the con game)

PRATTLE

Very well.

(Beat)

An image is synthetic. It is planned. Images are reputed virtues that can be owned, and the owner must constantly reassert his ownership.

(Beat)

An image is passive. It is at once congruent with reality and yet vague enough to serve unpredictable future purposes.

SOLDIER

Like a white lie?

PRATTLE

(Ignoring SOLDIER's remark)

An image is disposable. For it multiplies in abundance and travels faster than thought. It serves it's purpose best by appealing to the senses.

MISS ATTIC

(As if reciting from a soap ad)

The "Skin You Love To Touch"!

PRATTLE

An image is neither true nor false. It can never really distinguish anything. It must alter the truth in the nicest possible way.

(Beat)

Like any other pseudo event, the image becomes all the more interesting the more we try to...

MISS ATTIC

Debunk it!

PRATTLE

Precisely.

(Beat)

We however, know better. That's why we all stand to make a profit.

(Wherein he drops the sinker)

Why be a salesmen when a well presented product is one which draws the consumer into the picture? Like this one...

(Holds up a bar of "Pyramid Soap")

Pyramid soap... simply... something to wash with.
And it appeals to both genders...

(Big TV smile)

And we all know it's soap, so you already know
you'll be clean.

SOLDIER

How do we stand to make a profit?

PRATTLE

It's simple, really. You buy the products from me
at a low low price, and get others to sell the
products for you at a low low price... at say a
mark up of ten or fifteen percent. Everyone who
sells the product makes a profit.

SOLDIER

Does anyone ever actually use the product... that
is... for it's intended purpose?

PRATTLE

Why certainly. To make a profit. We all know it's
soap...

(Big TV smile)

So, you already know you'll be clean!

SOLDIER

Well, if you're so smart how come you're not rich?

PRATTLE

(Frustrated)

Because I suddenly found myself here!

(Composing himself)

Just an obstacle. Nothing that a positive mental
attitude can't overcome.

CAPT. DEBUNK

This terrain is nothing but raw material. Part of
the joy is the process of hunting for it.

PRATTLE

Raw material? Well, I know what materials to
look for. In fact I'll think I'll go look for it.
If you won't corner the market, I will.

(PRATTLE exits)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(To PRATTLE)

Watch for the wild animals.

PRATTLE

(Offstage)

Propaganda!

SOLDIER

May I ask you a personal question Miss Attic?

MISS ATTIC

Why sure. I'll permit any man to ask me questions that make me talk more.

SOLDIER

Do you love Mr. Prattle?

MISS ATTIC

Oh, sure. He says I have something special. Isn't that what love is? Something special? And he's gonna make me a star with that something special. And he says that you can never really attain that something special. But, he says if anyone can get close enough, it's me. Me! Me of all people! Can you believe it?!

(Beat)

And he says I have a beautiful body, and he says with all the money he's gonna make all I have to do is walk into a room and keep my mouth shut and people will think I'm mysterious, and he always says love is mysterious. So, how can I go wrong if don't know what I'm doing or thinking as long as it's mysterious?

(CAPT. DEBUNK and SOLDIER pause with their jaws dropped)

SOLDIER

Well, that's quite a mysterious response.

MISS ATTIC

Wow, it really works!

(There is the sound of a WILD ANIMAL. PRATTLE enters with the rear of his pants in shreds, his bloomers exposed)

PRATTLE

My ass! Look at my ass!

MISS ATTIC

I'm looking at your ass as hard as I can, Prattle. Honest I am.

PRATTLE

Is it bleeding! Did the beast cut me!

MISS ATTIC

No, Prattle. All I can see are your bloomers. And that's quite a sight.

SOLDIER

Would you like some soap, Mr. Glamway?

MISS ATTIC

(With sincerity)

We all know it's soap... so you already know you'll be clean!

PRATTLE

(To MISS ATTIC)

Oh, shut up!!

MISS ATTIC

I was just trying be special.

PRATTLE

Come Miss Attic! We're returning to our courtyard!

CAPT. DEBUNK

I will assist you.

PRATTLE

Leave us be.

CAPT. DEBUNK

You might need the rifle.

PRATTLE

I don't need a rifle.

(Shadow boxing to show off)

These fists are lethal weapons. I just wasn't expecting that beast to pounce that's all. But, now I'm ready for him!

(PRATTLE exits shadow boxing. MISS ATTIC follows)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(To SOLDIER)

In other words, he can't fire a rifle.

(Yelling aside)

Stick to the walls the same way I led you! Do not to trust to the foliage, Mr. Glamway!

PRATTLE

(Offstage)

I know all that!

(PRATTLE and MISS ATTIC exit. Suddenly, there is the sound of a "horrible mechanized creature" thrashing through the jungle, coming towards the dinner table. SOLDIER and CAPT. DEBUNK turn towards the sound with alarm, as MISS ATTIC and PRATTLE come rushing back in, and hide behind a tree or prop)

PRATTLE

What on god's green earth is that?

(The "mechanized sound" subsides. DESIGNER enters. She is a sultry, mysterious woman in a sleek gown, One hand is covered with a wrist length glove. The other is severed at the wrist, to which is attached a round metal latch of some sort. DESIGNER sits at the head of the table)

MR. PRATTLE

(Excited)

Well! What have we here?!

CAPT. DEBUNK

Allow me to introduce... the Designer.

(PRATTLE extends his hand to the
DESIGNER)

MR. PRATTLE

I'm Prattle Glamway. I'm a bit of a designer,
myself.

(DESIGNER looks dead ahead, pays
no bother to PRATTLE)

MR. PRATTLE

(Continued)

Is the lady deaf or dumb? Well, I guess it goes
without saying, in my line of work, the prettier
they are the less intelligent.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady speaks to me telepathically. I am her
humble interpreter.

MR. PRATTLE

Come now, captain. You cannot read someone's
thoughts. You can only outguess them if you hope
to make a profit and a hero that people will pay
money to see.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady says for someone who manipulates images
with such rigor, you don't seem to be taking this
at all well.

SOLDIER

(Low whisper; to MISS ATTIC)

He's out of his element.

(MR. PRATTLE goes to SOLDIER, glares into the side of his face. SOLDIER looks into his drink on the verge of snickering)

MR. PRATTLE

(Hovering over SOLDIER)

You're skating on very thin ice, mister!

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady wishes for you to be seated, Mr. Glamway.

MR, PRATTLE

You tell the lady, I don't take orders from ladies!

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady says, neither does she. Sit down Mr. Glamway.

(PRATTLE festers, finally sits)

SOLDIER

(Low whisper)

Captain. Is this your modification?

MR. PRATTLE

(Butting in)

What was all that at your end of the table?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The soldier was merely commenting on the lady's... way about her.

MR. PRATTLE

(Cocky)

So was I.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Your emotional flourishes are duly noted.

MR. PRATTLE

(To DESIGNER)

And to what do we owe this visit?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady merely wishes to sit and observe the guests without being too intrusive.

MR. PRATTLE

Intrude! By all means, intrude!

CAPT. DEBUNK

(To SOLDIER)

The lady overheard your tale about the concentration camp. She reveals that she was moved.

SOLDIER

I'm just glad it's over. But, thanks just the same.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Annoyed)

The lady says, "you're welcome".

MR. PRATTLE

I was talking about interesting things, too. Around the same time the soldier was.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady admits that you were.

MR. PRATTLE

Thank the lady for her hospitality.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady knows you are grateful.

MR. PRATTLE

What else does the lady know?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady knows that she does not know, and that's how she knows.

MR. PRATTLE

I suppose brandy and Eastern Mysticism do mix after all.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady notices that Miss Attic is rather quiet and awkward as she sits in the far corner.

MISS ATTIC

I'm not quiet and awkward. I'm just listening.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Just as the lady thought. She appreciates a woman's touch, regardless of the outcome.

MISS ATTIC

Thanks, I guess.

CAPT. DEBUNK

The lady says you guess too much, and out to assume that your instincts are correct, regardless of the outcome.

MR. PRATTLE

(Butting in)

I'm that way a lot. In my line of work you have to be.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Rolling his eyes)

The lady, knows Mr. Prattle. The lady knows.

MR. PRATTLE

Well, if I am boring her, two can play that game! There's something to be said for a man who knows when to exit. I won't sit here and be insulted. I won't move into that square. You see, I'm a bit of a chess player myself. I'll take a walk on the shore. That way none of you can have at me.

(Suddenly, P.O.W. rushes in with a club PRATTLE, who in turn collides with MISS ATTIC, sending them back, cowering back startled. The back of P.O.W.'s shirt is shredded to where we can see the word 'MAD' written on his back in bloody letters. DESIGNER remains still, looks dead ahead)

P.O.W.

(To the DESIGNER)

That's the trick! That's the trick! Condemn yourself before she condemns you!

(SOLDIER goes to P.O.W., tries to restrain him. P.O.W. is to swift, whacks SOLDIER on the head with his club. SOLDIER falls to the ground. CAPT. DEBUNK remains calm, begins to chuckle)

P.O.W.

Laugh it up, captain! I got you all beat! All you gotta do is find a tree with branch sticking out and back into it and just let it all sink in! But, none of you have the guts! You'd rather stretch it out! You all think you're so smart with your diction and manners, and you're already dead! Dead! Do you hear me?! Dead!

(CAPT. DEBUNK just keeps chuckling, really rubbing it in to get a rise out of P.O.W.. P.O.W. clubs CAPT. DEBUNK over the head with a few swift blows, but CAPT. DEBUNK remains unaffected, just keeps on cackling, eyeballing his drink as if he just heard a funny joke. P.O.W. whacks CAPT. DEBUNK again. It's pointless. CAPT. DEBUNK just keeps cracking up. P.O.W. finally becomes unnerved with CAPT. DEBUNKS completely oblique reaction to his violence. P.O.W. goes to DESIGNER, raises the club)

P.O.W.

Maybe I outta hit her?! Just whack her over the head until her brains fall all over the place!

CAPT. DEBUNK

You said it yourself, old boy. You've already got us all beat. If you strike the Designer, you only stand to be hunted by me so that I can forever laugh in your face.

(CAPT. DEBUNK cackles with mounting laughter. P.O.W. becomes fearful and flees. He turns to SOLDIER)

CAPT. DEBUNK

On your feet, soldier.

(SOLDIER rises, sits back down at the table)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued; to PRATTLE)

Our madman may go on to corner the market by finding the raw materials before you do.

PRATTLE

Blast! One can only hope that time is ample in that blackness!

(MR. PRATTLE scurries off)

MISS ATTIC

Prattle! Wait!

(MISS ATTIC exits. SOLDIER rises)

SOLDIER

I'll see myself back to my courtyard. I'm not worried about the beast.

CAPT. DEBUNK

You're sure?

SOLDIER

I'm certain.

(SOLDIER turns to go. DESIGNER suddenly speaks)

DESIGNER

If you know what to do with information, I speak freely.

(SOLDIER turns to DESIGNER, surprised
that she has spoken)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Slings his rifle; tipsy)

I'll leave you two alone. I'm in a tracking mood.
I'll lick that beast, yet.

SOLDIER

You're going to hunt at night in that condition?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Is there any other way?

(CAPT. DEBUNK exits chuckling at his
own jest)

DESIGNER

(Raising her mechanical wrist)

Does the modification disturb you?

SOLDIER

No. I've seen that sort of thing before.

DESIGNER

Something else troubles you?

SOLDIER

Oh yes, you're telepathic.

DESIGNER

Not with you so easily.

SOLDIER

Don't go to the trouble.

DESIGNER

Something you didn't divulge to the others?

SOLDIER

Yes. Before, the concentration camp. The truth
is, I let myself get captured.

(Beat)

I found a young boy who was wounded by enemy
fire. I knew he would bleed to death, but I

carried him through the trees anyways. Doing what his mother might have done. Hoping he would think I was carrying him home.

(Beat)

I thought of trading places with that boy, and then I realized that if that boy were me, he would do the same. We would just keep trading places, forever... and ever.

(Beat)

From then on, I didn't believe in anything. And then I was guarding a gate. But, I can't recall the exact sequence of events. Was I a young man assigned to my first post? Or an old and feeble officer assigned to my last?

(DESIGNER rises as if in a trance)

DESIGNER

I have to go.

(DESIGNER exits. SOLDIER hesitates for a few moments, then resigns to follow

DESIGNER. Suddenly, JANUS enters)

JANUS

Soldier. How soon we forget. The man was just here and he wasn't even familiar to you.

SOLDIER

(Gradually recognizes her)

Why do I know you? My mind is going.

JANUS

Janus. We had a contract. The man who passed through your gate. Remember?

SOLDIER

Oh, yes. Now, I remember. But, now you've passed through my gate. What have you done? What are you doing to my fate?

JANUS

New orders, soldier.

SOLDIER

Follow Designer?

JANUS

No. Follow Prattle Glamway and Miss Attic. Use the same exit. Stay close to the walls and do not trust to the foliage. You will come to a fork. Go left. You will come to a gate that the captain left unlocked. The gate will lead to the shore. The Designer has gone to the right. If you follow in that direction, then the universe will unravel as we know it.

SOLDIER

What do I do when I get to the shore?

(JANUS exits. SOLDIER pauses, then exits)

THE SHORELINE

(MISS ATTIC enters through the gate, swigs a bottle)

MISS ATTIC

Prattle? Prattle? Come out wherever you are. I got a bottle!

(SOLDIER comes to the gate, stays low. PRATTLE enters. SOLDIER ducks out of sight as PRATTLE passes him and enters through the gate)

PRATTLE

Blast. I lost him.

MISS ATTIC

You're too paranoid Prattle.

PRATTLE

Do you even know what "paranoid" means?

MISS ATTIC

Nope. Especially when I drink. You know something? We never had dinner. Say, I'm feeling frisky. You should feel frisky too.

PRATTLE

No. I'm in no mood for that.

MISS ATTIC

You don't think I'm pretty anymore?

PRATTLE

Is that all you can think about? Is how pretty you are? Aren't you in the least bit concerned with our dilemma?

MISS ATTIC

What's the difference, Prattle. I mean one moment, I'm sleeping with guys who make fun of me and the next moment I'm with you. C'mon take off your shirt. I want to kiss your chest. You know how I like to do that.

(MISS ATTIC tries to pull up
PRATTLE's shirt. He deflects
her advances)

PRATTLE

No, I don't want to take off my shirt. Sex isn't everything.

MISS ATTIC

You never said that before.

PRATTLE

Well, I'm saying it now.

MISS ATTIC

(Suddenly suspicious)

Who is she, Prattle?

PRATTLE

Who can she be Miss Attic? There's only you and...

MISS ATTIC

The Designer. Is that where you went? Is that why you were gone so long?

PRATTLE

No! I told you I was looking for the madman. Have I ever lied to you?

MISS ATTIC

Well, that depends. I mean you never hit me. I guess that could be the same thing.

PRATTLE

It is, and let's just leave it at that.

(P.O.W. rushes in and rips PRATTLE's shirt off, exposing his back. The word "VAIN" is inscribed in big red letters. P.O.W. runs off laughing maniacally)

PRATTLE

You bastard!

MISS ATTIC

What is that on your back? Is that human blood? Did you do that?

PRATTLE

(Fibbing)

Yes, Miss Attic. Yes. I was making fun of myself. It's a joke. Great men are self-effacing.

MISS ATTIC

(Unrelenting)

I saw how you looked at her across the table. I may not know anything about big words, but I saw it! I saw it! And I remembered it too!

(MISS ATTIC exits in tears)

PRATTLE

Miss Attic! It's not safe in that wild! It's not...

(Suddenly ponders; chuckles)

... safe... Yes, go on my dear. Go on running in tears. Lose your way and become ever more hysterical in the darkness, straight into the gaping jaws of that beast.

(Insidious)

You're right. I did look at her across the table, and I know many big words. The Designer is indifferent. But, she'll come around. They always do. They always do. Yes, I'm a bit of a thinker myself.

(PRATTLE puts on his shirt, straightens himself out. SOLDIER enters with cool caution)

SOLDIER

Hello there.

PRATTLE

Soldier. What a pleasant surprise. You found the open gate.

SOLDIER

That I did.

PRATTLE

Well, this predicament is wretched, but the shoreline is quite beautiful on a night like this.

SOLDIER

Certainly is. Where's your lady?

PRATTLE

What business is that of yours?

SOLDIER

Just making conversation on a night like this.

PRATTLE

Of course. She's sound asleep in her courtyard.

(Wherein SOLDIER drops a stealth and well-placed ruse for a ruse)

SOLDIER

I know. I saw to it that she was sleeping soundly as I passed along the walls.

(SOLDIER walks a little past PRATTLE, stares out at the ocean in silent delight as to how PRATTLE will worm his way out of this one)

PRATTLE

(Clears his throat)

You did?

SOLDIER

Why of course. Unless, I mistook another woman for your own?

PRATTLE

The Designer? In our courtyard?

SOLDIER

(Grinning smugly)

Well, there was a woman in it. That's all I can proclaim. And if it wasn't Miss Attic, I wonder where on earth she could have gone to, and why you're not with her.

(Beat)

It's none of my business. It's just that a woman in the wild is entitled to the protection of a man, much like yourself.

(The TWO chuckle smugly)

PRATTLE

The truth is, she's having a pee. The brandy.

(Beat)

You know, it's none of my business, really. But, if Miss Attic is having a pee, and there are no other women on the island, what was the Designer doing in our courtyard?

SOLDIER

Just saw to it that the woman was sleeping soundly.

PRATTLE

When was this?

SOLDIER

Just now.

PRATTLE

Just now?

SOLDIER

Yes... just now.

PRATTLE

(Thinking he's going to score)

Well, I'd better be getting back to that courtyard. You never know when a mysterious woman will wake from nightmare and require my creature comforts.

(PRATTLE starts off)

SOLDIER

Oh, well she left.

PRATTLE

Left?

SOLDIER

I took a second glance and she was gone.

PRATTLE

I see. You know... funny girl this Designer.

SOLDIER

Indeed. I'm kind of taken by her myself.

PRATTLE

Well, I don't mean to rain on your parade but the fact of the matter is that Miss Attic and I are not getting along at all well, and well the Designer and I... we...

SOLDIER

We what?

PRATTLE

(Inferring intimacy)

Well, you know... You know.

SOLDIER

Oh, that.

PRATTLE

Yes, that. If you go to the right at the fork in the walls, that's where her lair is.

(Tedious silence)

SOLDIER

She didn't mention you. But, I don't take that at all personally.

PRATTLE

Mention me?

SOLDIER

In your courtyard... Where we sort of... consummated... a relationship of our own.

PRATTLE

You don't mean to say? Oh, so you too!

SOLDIER

Me too.

PRATTLE

Well, if two men can share the same woman, all the better! What was she like? From your end?

SOLDIER

I don't kiss and tell. Good night.

(SOLDIER exits)

PRATTLE

(Cheerily; to SOLDIER)

Good night!

(Bitterly; to himself)

God dammit!

(PRATTLE exits in a huff)

THE LAIR

(DESIGNER enters and sits in her throne and waits in silence.
CAPT. DEBUNK enters, responds to her telepathic messages)

CAPT. DEBUNK

The monads are in agreement?

(DESIGNER nods. CAPT. DEBUNK removes a tray with a layer of fine fabric. On it lies the grim mechanical hand that attaches to DESIGNER's wrist, or Harrow. Something akin to a Freddy Krueger hand, with blades, needles, surgical tubing for blood and water spray, etc. She takes the Harrow and attaches it to her wrist)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

And Janus did not oppose them?

(DESIGNER shakes her head)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

Well, seems I'm part of an alliance after all.
Never did snare that wild beast.

(DESIGNER smiles at CAPT. DEBUNK as if saying something)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

I know, Designer. I know. The event horizon always encroaches before I can get another shot off. Still can't hit an elephant in the ass.

(CAPT. DEBUNK glances past the gate)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

Don't worry. He'll be here. His befuddlement with Prattle and all that business about the two of you together will distract him to your lair.

(CAPT. DEBUNK crosses to another exit, where the lair lies offstage)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued; Glances into the lair)

It was Miss Attic you were expecting, wasn't it?

MISS ATTIC

(Offstage)

Prattle?! Prattle?! What are they doing to me?! Prattle?!

(DESIGNER nods, gazes at CAPT. DEBUNK as if asking if she is prepared for her sentence)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

Oh yes, she's spread out naked on her stomach, atop the Bed, just as you had foreseen it.

(DESIGNER smiles, exits into her lair. CAPT. DEBUNK bides his time with his rifle slung over his shoulder and a glass of brandy. We hear the grim sound of the "apparatus". MISS ATTIC lets out a horrible scream. Moments later, she crawls in, her clothes back on, her mascara running from the tears of pain)

CAPT. DEBUNK

It wasn't what you thought it was going to be, was it, Miss Attic?

MISS ATTIC

No... That's why I screamed. That's why I always scream.

(SOLDIER enters)

SOLDIER

What was that shriek?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The event horizon, old boy. The event horizon.

SOLDIER

What did you do to her back?

CAPT. DEBUNK

I didn't do anything, soldier. The Designer did all the work.

(SOLDIER gently unzips MISS ATTIC's dress. There is nothing inscribed)

SOLDIER

There's no sentence. Why did she scream?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Because, that's her sentence. Nothing. To never know what she did wrong in exchange for kindness and devotion. She was just startled.

SOLDIER

Should the lady be hearing this?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Oh, she's heard it all before. It's been told to her all her life by the likes of aimless pool players, flim-flam artists and con-men. But, now it's familiar to her, isn't it Miss Attic?

MISS ATTIC

Yes. It's familiar to me now.

CAPT. DEBUNK

You see? She was just startled into knowing better the next time. That's all.

(P.O.W. enters, clubs CAPT. DEBUNK on the head to which CAPT. DEBUNK cackles as he is struck on the head.)

P.O.W. lunges for SOLDIER, but before he can get a blow in, CAPT. DEBUNK shoots him dead)

SOLDIER

Why did you kill him? I could have held my own.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Madness has served it's purpose so that your journey may continue, soldier.

SOLDIER

You don't feel any pain. You always laugh. Why is that?

CAPT. DEBUNK

I'm a figment of your imagination, old boy. I'm a character in a play. I don't suffer. I merely rearrange to your advantage. Often times, the hero in your life is the narrator hunting the beast within the protagonist.

SOLDIER

(Puzzled)

And Prattle? His crime was vanity and his punishment was... instant gratification?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Oh yes. The business about him rolling around in the sheets with the designer.

SOLDIER

Yes. I lied to him on the shore. But, did he lie to me?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, of course old boy. You see, the Designer has no reproductive organs. There's no way to penetrate her. It's all part of the image. Prattle's image.

(PRATTLE enters)

PRATTLE

Did I miss something?

CAPT. DEBUNK

You missed everything Mr. Glamway. And the lesson will be repeated until it is learned.

PRATTLE

Repeated?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Now, why don't you and Miss Attic return to your courtyard.

(PRATTLE sees the dead P.O.W.)

PRATTLE

What happened to that man? Is he shot? Is he dead?

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Frosty)

I have an itchy trigger finger, Mr. Glamway. Don't make me scratch.

(PRATTLE hastily snatches up
MISS ATTIC, and they exit)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

Now, it's your turn, soldier. The Designer awaits.

SOLDIER

You're my friend. You're my enemy, and then you confound me. Oh, what's the use? I may as well go forward.

(SOLDIER goes into the DESIGNER's lair. We hear the grim sound of the "apparatus". But, there is no scream. Rather, we hear DESIGNER humming to herself, as if in a warm bath. The humming subsides. SOLDIER enters shirtless, carrying his shirt in one hand. On his back is the bloody inscription 'F')

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, how was it old boy?

SOLDIER

I don't remember any pain, or the event of the inscription. It all happened while I slept.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, most of your fate is sleep. If you were to receive it all at once, you could not withstand your lifespan.

SOLDIER

What sentence is the letter 'F'?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Well, that's your fate. The first letter is 'F'.

SOLDIER

How is fate a crime?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The more intelligent a thing is the more there is to comprehend. You will suffer for that. You will pay a price before the Law.

SOLDIER

But, the madman is dead. What purpose would it serve to return him to my gate?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The answer is in the question. There's no need to return him now. He's dead. He doesn't make it.

(SOLDIER puts his shirt back on)

SOLDIER

Do you know something?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Yes?

SOLDIER

It's here that I feel normal. I'm used to this unnatural world now. I know how to suffer in it.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Sorry, old boy. You have to return to your gate.
Janus is waiting.

SOLDIER

But, if I don't take the madman...

(DESIGNER enters)

DESIGNER

You'll take me.

SOLDIER

You?

CAPT. DEBUNK

While you were out and about, new orders came in
above our heads. They always change.

SOLDIER

Janus is expecting me to return with Designer?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Oh yes. The imperial message almost didn't get
through. But, I was keen enough to intercept the
transmission, the distraction almost got my head
bitten off, blasting away in the dead of night,
the wayward buffon that I am, but I had the
feelers out, always do.

SOLDIER

There's something I have to know.

CAPT. DEBUNK

Anything.

SOLDIER

What war was I was in? Why can't I remember?

CAPT DEBUNK

(Hearty chuckle)

You haven't been born yet, old boy. All those
things you said and did were metaphors of what
you will endure and become wherever you go.

(Beat)

They're your parents, struggling in the world, hoping to meet, and they must have met, or else your stay would not be coming to an end.

(Beat)

Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so disproportionate to its ends... and so does every new life.

SOLDIER

Will I remember this. Will I remember you? You were kind to me in the end.

CAPT. DEBUNK

No... and yes. Simply put, you'll always be struck with the double irony of remembering and amnesia.

(Beat)

The question isn't how you will die. Rather, what were you like before you were born? You can always formulate a better question. It is the Calculus of shadows.

SOLDIER

Screen memories. You're talking about screen memories. What of Designer? Does she become human?

CAPT. DEBUNK

She becomes the way you treat people in the world of technology.

SOLDIER

What about the others?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Soldier, your gestation is at an end.

SOLDIER

When do I get another letter on my back?

CAPT. DEBUNK

You'll just have a moment of clarity, and one day you'll have an 'E' on your back just like me.

SOLDIER

You've been through all this before?

CAPT. DEBUNK

The F-word is always on duty.

SOLDIER

Will I know what to do with this technology?

CAPT. DEBUNK

Just be a good person. All the events that have transpired just sort of lead up to that. There's really no getting around it.

SOLDIER

(To DESIGNER and CAPT. DEBUNK)

I'll remember you the way I remember you for as long as I can.

DESIGNER

We'll be observing through other means.

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Hoisting his rifle)

In the wild, animals don't survive with love, they survive by cheating. There are those who share to cheat and those who cheat to share. Cheat to share soldier. Cheat to share... Be just.

(SOLDIER salutes captain. CAPT. DEBUNK chuckles)

CAPT. DEBUNK

(Continued)

And stop doing that. People will get the funny idea you'll do anything they tell you to.

(CAPT. DEBUNK exits. The "monads" begin clanking and murmuring again offstage. JANUS enters at the gate, opens it)

JANUS

Hurry now. Before, they change their minds.

(SOLDIER and DESIGNER exit arm in
arm. BLACKOUT)

END OF PLAY