

Millennium Bug 2 - The Loose Ends Tribunal

By

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Cast of Characters

<u>Judge Clacker:</u>	Presiding Judge of the Loose Ends Tribunal
<u>Bailiff:</u>	The clerk of the court
<u>Andrew Shound:</u>	A newshound
<u>Minister Minister:</u>	Minister of Anachronisms
<u>Dr. Hyphen Woo:</u>	A scientist
<u>Harriet Wolff:</u>	The crown prosecutor
<u>Fitzclough:</u>	Ben Greenbelt's solicitor
<u>Bigamy:</u>	A techno-nerd with an unfortunate name
<u>Incest:</u>	Another nerd
<u>Sodomy:</u>	A third nerd
<u>Constable Hines:</u>	A time-cop
<u>Ring Girl:</u>	Trim-buttocked, that's what I'd call her
<u>Sarah Connor:</u>	Spooky Connor, the terminator exterminator
<u>Gosper:</u>	The author of this play
<u>Stage Manager:</u>	The stage manager of this production
<u>Ionesco, Beckett, Stoppard:</u>	Playwrights, Gosper's accomplices
<u>Jogger, Aunty 1, Aunty 2, Taxi Driver, Spanish Waiter:</u>	Assorted red herrings

ACT I

Scene 1

A courtroom. JUDGE CLACKER seated at the desk, an empty witness stand, and a gallery stand where sit SHOUND, WOO and MINISTER. The BAILIFF stands near the Judge's desk.

Enter RING GIRL, carrying large cards. She parades across the stage displaying the cards one at a time. The cards read:

ACT 1, SCENE 1

THE LIDCOMBE COURTHOUSE

THE YEAR IS 2077

IT'S ALL DOWNHILL FROM HERE

[AN ELECTRIC BELL LIKE THAT USED IN BOXING MATCHES IS
HEARD.]

JUDGE CLACKER

(Mutters)

...lowest common denominator...
(Clears throat.)

Pause.

(Clears throat pointedly.)

Pause.

Ahem.

BAILIFF

(Looking up, realising it is his cue
he winks at the judge.)

Ahem.

JUDGE CLACKER

That is you, Bailiff.

BAILIFF

Next case, right.

JUDGE CLACKER

Bailiff!

BAILIFF

Yes your wot?

JUDGE CLACKER

Please.

(CONTINUED)

BAILIFF

Er...

JUDGE CLACKER

May we begin?

BAILIFF

Oh! Sorry...

(He stands.)

I'm new here. Still not used to the power.

(He claps twice and the lights go off.

He claps once and they come on again.)

Wicked.

(He claps three times briskly.)

All rise! Court is now in session. Justice Clacker presiding. First case is the State versus Heya Gosper, Benjamin Greenbelt, the Lidcombe Players and the Lidcombe Star Theater, being charged with recklessly and negligently allowing loose ends to infiltrate and corrupt a dramatic production.

SHOUND

It's a scoop!

MINISTER

It's a scandal!

WOO

It's interesting, but statistically irreverent.

JUDGE CLACKER

Silence in court!

BAILIFF

Thank you your majesty. Now then where was I? Oh yes, the charges. It is alleged that the defendants did knowingly and with malice aforethought create a production so rife with loose ends that it damaged the very fabric of space-time.

JUDGE CLACKER

Where is the representative of the accused. Mr. Fitzclough, Ben Greenbelt's solicitor?

WOO

(Consulting a sheaf of papers)

Running late.

JUDGE CLACKER

What is that?

WOO

The transcript, your excelsior.

JUDGE CLACKER

Transcript of what?

WOO

The trial.

JUDGE CLACKER

What trial?

WOO

Well, this one of course.

MINISTER

Scandalous!

SHOUND

Libelous!

WOO

This bagatelle? Pah.

JUDGE CLACKER

Silence! Who are you?

WOO

I'm the Doctor.

JUDGE CLACKER

Whose doctor?

WOO

In a manner of speaking, yes.

Pause.

JUDGE CLACKER

You're not...

WOO

I am. Doctor Woo, at your service.

JUDGE CLACKER

(relieved)

For a moment I thought... never mind. At any rate, it is against the rules to bring the transcript of the trial into the trial. That would create all kinds of...

SHOUND

Loose ends?

MINISTER

A... vortex of some kind?

JUDGE CLACKER

... confusion. Let us have it.

(BAILIFF takes the transcript from WOO and gives it to the JUDGE, who flicks through it quickly.)

You don't say... you don't say...

BAILIFF

Are they guilty?

JUDGE CLACKER

It doesn't say.

(He puts it aside.)

Right then...

(At that moment FITZCLOUGH enters.)

FITZCLOUGH

Sorry I'm late. I missed my bus because I was totally absorbed in this file.

(He holds up a bulky manila folder)

JUDGE CLACKER

What is in the file?

FITZCLOUGH

(Tips a bunch of nails out of the folder)

Nails, mostly. It's a nail file.

SHOUND

(Writing)

I'm using that.

MINISTER

Been done.

SHOUND

Suit fined in nail file suit!

MINISTER

What suit? You just made that up.

SHOUND

Please. I'm a reporter, not a tailor.

JUDGE CLACKER

Silence! I will have order in this court. Shut it!

SHOUND

Court orders airtight nail file suit nailed shut!

MINISTER

That's quite good. I like that one.

JUDGE CLACKER

Silence!

(Pause)

Thank you. Please try to contain yourselves. Now then, who are you, sir?

FITZCLOUGH

Fitzclough, your spine. Ben Greenbelt's solicitor.

JUDGE CLACKER

Ah, good. Then we may begin. Bailiff, if you would summarise the charges once more?

BAILIFF

Yes your district. The state alleges that Ben Greenbelt, alias Heya Gosper, possibly in collusion with Tom Stoppard...

FITZCLOUGH

Objection.

BAILIFF

You can't object to the allegations.

FITZCLOUGH

I do.

BAILIFF

Those are the charges! They are not open to -

FITZCLOUGH

I object to them.

BAILIFF

Why?

FITZCLOUGH

You may well ask.

BAILIFF

I do ask.

FITZCLOUGH

Just as well.

JUDGE CLACKER

Approach!

Fitzcough approaches the bench.

What is the nature of your objection?

FITZCLOUGH

Stoppard, your chastity, is a myth. A frictional character, like Hercules or Sigmund Freud. It is wrong on several levels to include him in the official charges.

BAILIFF

I'm sure he is real. I saw an interview with him on tri-D.

FITZCLOUGH

Fraudulent.

JUDGE CLACKER

Crown investigators met the man.

FITZCLOUGH

Apocryphal.

JUDGE CLACKER

The libraries are full of his works. He won an Oscar!

FITZCLOUGH

Allegedly. Your noggin, it would be a mistake to refer to an arguably imaginary figure in the statement of charges.

JUDGE CLACKER

(Thinks for a moment.)

Well you are arguing. Sustained. We will no longer refer to Stoppard. Bailiff?

BAILIFF

Very well. We allege that Gosper created many loose ends, strands of space-time which are still unraveling. A secondary charge, that of plagiarism, will also be considered. A further charge of construction and use of an unlicensed time machine will be examined.

JUDGE CLACKER

Mr. Fitzclough, do you object?

FITZCLOUGH

(absently)

What? Oh... yes, all right.

JUDGE CLACKER

On what grounds?

FITZCLOUGH

(trying to catch up)

Er... all of them.

JUDGE CLACKER

Overruled. Now then, if the clerk of the court would bring in the prosecutor?

BAILIFF

The prosecutor's asleep.

JUDGE CLACKER

Well you'd best wake her up then hadn't you?
(BAILIFF exits, returning immediately with WOLFF.)

BAILIFF

May I present Miss Wolff, the prosecutor.

WOLFF

(Rubbing eyes.)
I had the most peculiar dream...

JUDGE CLACKER

Well come to, we've a trial to endure.

WOLFF

... You were all nothing but a pack of cards...

JUDGE CLACKER

Alright, you aren't in Aliceland anymore.

WOLFF

Sorry your highlands. I confess that I am greatly relieved. While everyone in court was losing their heads I realised that I have grown quite attached to mine.

JUDGE CLACKER

Clerk please.

BAILIFF

(shouts)
Silence in court!

JUDGE CLACKER

Thank you.

BAILIFF

Silence!

JUDGE CLACKER

Yes thank you. (to WOLFF) He's on work experience.

WOLFF

Oh, what school?

BAILIFF

Grammar.

WOLFF

Sorry, *which* school?

BAILIFF

Also Grammar. Now, according to my Cliff Notes, it is your turn to say stuff.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection! This could be a mistrial.

JUDGE CLACKER

Why?

FITZCLOUGH

If the clerk needs Cliff Notes on court procedures...

BAILIFF

Oh no, it's okay your shilling. These are actually the Cliff Notes on the production, not the trial.
(pause)

JUDGE CLACKER

I'll let this go for now, but I warn you all that I have a low tolerance for this self-referential nonsense.

SHOUND

Scoop! Judge refers to self as nonsense!

JUDGE CLACKER

No I didn't.

SHOUND

Denies nonsensical self-reference! Affirms reference to non-self. Newshound selflessly delves into non-selves inference amid deference to deft defence while shelving the precedents of the bench's stance!

MINISTER and WOO applaud.

JUDGE CLACKER

Stop! That is enough! I said stop it. Who are you, anyway?

SHOUND

My name is Shound, your Grace. Andrew Shound of the Real Estate Gazette.

FITZCLOUGH

Oh, are you related to old Shound, the editor?

SHOUND

My uncle. I'm the new Shound.

FITZCLOUGH

You're the news... oh I see. Very good.

JUDGE CLACKER

Alright that is enough. Now why would the Real Estate Gazette be covering this trial?

SHOUND

Oh, we cover everything. It's all relevant to house prices, you see, which is about the only thing our readers care about. That and interest rates, they are obsessed with those.

JUDGE CLACKER

And how would these proceedings possibly affect either?

(CONTINUED)

SHOUND

Well, with house prices it is always up. Most of our readers own houses and they like it when prices go up. Makes them feel like they are floating, I guess.

WOO

They use the equity to buy boats.

SHOUND

That's correct. Nobody wants to feel like they are underwater on their boat purchase.

WOO

Unless it was a submarine.

SHOUND

Yes. You can bet that if house prices fell then submarines would go through the roof.

JUDGE CLACKER

What about interest rates?

SHOUND

Very little so far, but it might pick up later.

JUDGE CLACKER

I meant mortgage rates.

SHOUND

Oh, sorry. They depend on the angle of the story. See if the story is about how there is a housing shortage and home buyers might miss out then rates are low and affordable. On the other hand, if the story is about how prices are sky high and there are no buyers, then we usually try and blame the central bank by saying that the cash rate is too high.

JUDGE CLACKER

And the strewth?

SHOUND

The strewth is that interest rates have very little to do with anything. I think I'll say that they are on the way up so buy now before you miss out.

WOO

That doesn't make sense.

SHOUND

Sure it does. When interest rates go up, housing becomes less affordable. Therefore house prices also go up. So a house is cheap now and you should get on the ladder before you miss out. Unless you are an investor, in which case rents are likely to rise so you should buy now in order to cash in on rising yields, tax concessions and capital gains.

WOO

That also makes no sense.
(pause)

JUDGE CLACKER

Shall we resume the trial, or does everybody have to rush out to an auction now?

(Pause)

I was joking. We will resume the trial. (To WOLFF)
Counsel, would you like to present the Crown's case?

WOLFF

With pleasure. You will note that the defendant is not present. As clear an admission of guilt as any.
Case closed.

FITZCLOUGH

No it isn't!

WOLFF

Why not? He can't defend himself can he? Let's just hang him now and we can all go home and watch Laura Norder.

FITZCLOUGH

Have you gone mad?

WOLFF

Objection! Your dibs, this man called me names.

JUDGE CLACKER

Sustained. The defence will not be so offensive. The Crown will not be so defensive.

WOLFF

Deal.

JUDGE CLACKER

And we will conduct a proper trial, in absentia.

WOLFF

Why don't we do it here?

JUDGE CLACKER

Yes, here will be fine.

FITZCLOUGH

It's Latin. It means that you can try the defendant in his absence.

WOLFF

Well I tried, but you didn't let me.

FITZCLOUGH

Try him fairly.

WOLFF

Oh. That's different. (To audience:) The prosecution will show that whatever the charges are, are true, and that the defendant, if that is his real name, is guilty of said charges, and furthermore did really do it, to wit, the thing that the charges charge he did, ipso facto, a priori, habeus corpus ad nauseum. The defense will claim that it is a crock. But it isn't a crock. They are a crock. In summary: our case is a lock, it's as firm as a rock and the guy in the dock is as guilty as Spock.

WOO

Why is Spock guilty?

WOLFF

Oh please. Those guilty ears?

WOO

Pointy. Spock had pointy ears.

WOLFF

Not *Doctor* Spock.

JUDGE CLACKER

Very well. Would the defence care to summarise their case?

FITZCLOUGH

Er... that fruit in the suit is as mad as a coot?
Also my client is innocent.

JUDGE CLACKER

Fine. We will reconvene after lunch for the prosecution witnesses.

End of scene 1.

Scene 2.

An empty stage. A thick layer of smoke covers the floor. MINISTER stands center stage. Enter RING GIRL, carrying her scene cards. They read:

ACT 1, SCENE 2

NEW TECHNOLOGY, THE MIND-MELD

ALLOWS WITNESS TESTIMONY FROM INSIDE THEIR MIND

... IT'S TECHNICAL.

NEXT WITNESS, THE MINISTER FOR ANACHRONISMS

MINISTER

(Looks around and notices the audience.)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MINISTER (cont'd)

Ah there you are. I'm glad you could make it. Not much point if you weren't here. First mind-meld? My second but the first as a real witness. Fractious! Sorry. Brr. Cold.

(Gesturing around:)

This... is my mind. My memory, anyway, and not what it used to be.

(He indicates the air in one direction and then another)

My wife! So beautiful. Don't you agree? My other wife. A mistake. Ah, my old school, St. Toffeebottoms. The house where I grew up. Daddy was rich, Mummy was good looking. All that.

Enter WOLFF.

WOLFF

What did he do, your Daddy?

MINISTER

He was a mining industrialist. Lodestone, mostly.

WOLFF

And what was his name?

MINISTER

Magnus.

WOLFF

And would you say that he was a generous man?

MINISTER

Oh yes, very.

WOLFF

And your mother's name was Mary, isn't that right?

MINISTER

That's right.

WOLFF

So would it be fair to say that your Mummy Mary married Magnus, the magnanimous magnet magnate?

MINISTER

(After a brief pause)

Yes.

WOLFF

Your witness.

(Enter FITZCLOUGH, brandishing a sheaf of papers.)

FITZCLOUGH

Do you know what these are?

MINISTER
No.

FITZCLOUGH
(Throws them away.)
Shame. I was hoping you could tell me. They were in my case, you see.

MINISTER
Well, maybe they pertain to *this* case.

FITZCLOUGH
I wouldn't wish to speculate on that. No, it seemed to be a play of some kind.

MINISTER
In fact that happened to me recently...

FITZCLOUGH
That's odd. (to WOLFF:) I don't suppose you...

WOLFF
(Woodenly)
No... I haven't seen a script.

Pause.

FITZCLOUGH
Now then. You have said that your father was an industrialist. Did he own a factory?

MINISTER
Yes, several.

FITZCLOUGH
How many exactly.

MINISTER
Four.

FITZCLOUGH
And isn't it true that each factory had forty workers?

MINISTER
They were all the same design.

FITZCLOUGH
And was there an incident one April Fool's Day involving a prank, a practical joke that went wrong?

MINISTER
Yes, I remember that. It was in building number four.

FITZCLOUGH
Perfect. And involved the foreman.

MINISTER

Yes, Fred. It was a minor fall.

FITZCLOUGH

I put it to you that on the first of the fourth, 2044, the foreman Fred fell fairly fishily to the firm foam on the fourth floor of factory four.

MINISTER

Yes, except for the fishy part.

FITZCLOUGH

But there were magnets involved.

MINISTER

Yes, I.. No! It was in the break room.

FITZCLOUGH

And it involved a pie? A fish pie?

MINISTER

No. A cream pie.

Enter JUDGE CLACKER.

JUDGE CLACKER

What did I miss?

FITZCLOUGH

A cream pie.

JUDGE CLACKER

Really? Curse this buggy mind-meld technology. Alright, carry on.

FITZCLOUGH

Your witness.

WOLFF

Alright then, so there were some shenanigans with a pie. A bit of break room slapstick. Does that mean that the production was stopped?

MINISTER

No.

WOLFF

And the worker involved, the patissier, was fired?

MINISTER

No! It was just a harmless prank.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection! Relevance!

JUDGE CLACKER

Sustained. the prosecution will keep the facts relevant to the case. The defence will stop poking tongues. Let us try to conduct this trial like adults, shall we?

WOLFF AND FITZCLOUGH

(together, like chastised schoolboys)
Yes, your warship.

JUDGE CLACKER

Good. And that is enough pointless alliteration as well.

(he takes some pills from his pocket
and pops a couple.)

It is driving me batty.

WOLFF

It's his mind.

JUDGE CLACKER

Well just try to keep it on task.

(He turns to the audience.)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, this mind meld technology we are using is not without its issues. Please try to be impartial and remember that what you see and hear is largely coloured by the personality, beliefs and perceptions of the subject, in this case Mr. Minister. The prosecution will resume.

WOLFF

Mr. Minister? I though you were a minister.

MINISTER

I am. I'm the minister of Anachronisms.

WOLFF

Never heard of it.

MINISTER

No, it's new.

WOLFF

And what is the ambit of your department?

MINISTER

Well, ever since time travel was invented there have been anomalies, items popping up in timezones where they don't belong.

WOLFF

You mean like antiques.

MINISTER

Yes, except with no signs of aging and with no clue as to how it got there, unlike heirlooms. More like a drinkable Merlot.

WOLFF

I see. I'm sure somebody in the jury understands your opaque wine reference as well.

MINISTER

It means I don't like Merlot, but more importantly that they don't age very well. If you stumble across a drinkable Merlot that is older than say ten years old, you should call my department immediately.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection! I happen to like Merlot.

JUDGE CLACKER

Sustained! I do too. The jury will disregard that statement.

WOLFF

What else can you tell us about these objects?

MINISTER

They might also come from the future.

WOLFF

Like a futuristic gadget of some kind?

MINISTER

Maybe. Those are usually from Sweden. More like a drinkable Pinot Grigio. You see -

WOLFF

Yes, yes. I do know a *little* about wine. Now then, can you explain how your department came into being?

MINISTER

Well, after Greenbelt invented his time machine -

FITZCLOUGH

Objection! That is a question before the court!

JUDGE CLACKER

Sustained. Please leave out the time machine.

MINISTER

After Greenbelt invented a device that -

FITZCLOUGH

Objection! I know Ben. he isn't smart enough to be an inventor. No inventor, he. Couldn't invent his way out of a wet paper bag. No. Objection.

JUDGE CLACKER

Sustained.

MINISTER

After Greenbelt -

FITZCLOUGH
Objection.

JUDGE CLACKER
Sustained.

MINISTER
Greenbelt -

FITZCLOUGH
Objection!

WOLFF
Objection!

JUDGE CLACKER
Sustained and sustained! Please stop badgering the witness. Mr. Minister, please continue, without making reference to the arguably fictitious evil genius Ben Greenbelt if you can.

MINISTER
I'll try. Well sir, Lucy Lankshaft set up my unit herself, after a series of unfortunate events.

WOLFF
It was terrible, but hardly called for a whole department. Just don't watch it.

MINISTER
Not the movie, not even the books, which were marginally better.

WOLFF
Lands abound.

MINISTER
I mean some things happened, a lot was said, many witnesses on the night, and... yes I'm pretty sure your client was at the center of most of it. There was a time machine, loose ends, loose women, three walls, a sociopathic theater critic, spoonerism, plagiarism, satire and parody!

JUDGE CLACKER
Nerds!

Enter three nerds wearing business shirts and glasses.

NERD 1
Yes your bishop?

JUDGE CLACKER
Look at all this smoke. Can you do something?

NERD 1 (cont'd)

It's true! I can see you have trouble believing that a respectable bespectacled like me was once a member of a sect like the Association for Computing Machinery. But I was.

NERD 2

We all were, until you went bonkers.

NERD 3

Yes, we were all fired, remember?

NERD 1

Yes well those days are behind us. Anyway, who is to say that we didn't deserve it?

NERD 2 AND NERD 3

(together:)

Us!

NERD 1

Software Engineering, now there's an oxymoron.

NERD 3

What's an oxymoron?

NERD 1

It's like "Mooooo".

NERD 2

Information Technology.

NERD 1

Mooooo. Quality Control.

NERD 2 AND NERD 3

Mooooo!

NERD 3

Project Management.

Pause.

NERD 1 AND NERD 2

Moooooo!

NERD 1

Alright, back to work. Excuse me Mr...

MINISTER

Minister.

NERD 1

Sorry, Father. Where is the A.C. unit in here?

MINISTER

I'm not sure there is one. It's my mind.

NERD 1

Yes I know but usually they have one.

MINISTER

I don't know.

NERD 1

Well can you imagine one?

MINISTER

Umm... I don't think so, no.

NERD 2

Doesn't think, doesn't know. That is half of the trouble right there.

NERD 3

What is the other half?

NERD 2

That is the rest of the trouble.

NERD 3

I see your point. If -

NERD 1

Will you two shut up? Please forgive them. They have a rare neurological condition called Doritos Syndrome.

NERD 2

It makes us act corny.

NERD 3

And cheesy. Corny and cheesy.

NERD 1

Underneath it all they're just crumbs. The condition tends to remove their inhibitions, causing them to say all kinds of inappropriate things. Keeping them on task is a full time job.

NERD 2

Overpaid.

NERD 1

Enough! Father, would we have your permission to bring a portable unit in here?

MINISTER

I suppose so...

NERD 1

Very well. Come on you cowards.
(They exit.)

JUDGE CLACKER

Well, that was peculiar.

FITZCLOUGH

No more so.

JUDGE CLACKER

Point taken. Well, we can continue -
(He is interrupted by the reentry of
the nerds.)

NERD 1

Not so fast! Sorry, not you your spanner. These
clumsy oafs. Do you know how much this machine costs
in Zimbabwean currency?

(The subordinate nerds are wheeling in
a large electronic device resembling
an oversized telephone.)

Here we are then.

FITZCLOUGH

That's an air conditioner?

NERD 2

Of course. What did you expect, something the size of
three rooms?

(They all laugh.)

No, we use that one for... smoking... tobacco...

NERD 3

Where's the outlet?

NERD 2

There isn't one, idiot.

NERD 1

Most politicians have little real power. Just switch
to battery power.

(NERD 2 and NERD 3 pick up bats
hanging off the machine and start
whacking it.)

FITZCLOUGH

What are they doing?

NERD 1

That's called battery power. What, don't you get it?

FITZCLOUGH

That's terrible.

NERD 1

It isn't a baby seal. Besides, it's working. Look!
(He picks up a hose coming from the machine and starts waving it around. Air is coming out of the hose and as he moves it around it displaces the smoke. the smoke gradually clears, revealing that the stage is littered with empty wine bottles. There is also a body.)

WOLFF

What's this then?

MINISTER

Just litter.

WOLFF

Here's a body!

MINISTER

Er... that was here when I got here.

WOLFF

Well you can see how this looks.

FITZCLOUGH

It looks dead.

JUDGE CLACKER

Call the police!

Before they can do anything, HINES enters, carrying a notebook and pencil.)

HINES

Alright nobody move. Shoosh. Before you say what you were about to say allow me to answer. I... am Constable Hines. I am responding to a call you are about to make, something about finding a body?

JUDGE CLACKER

That's right.

HINES

Okay that is cleared up. You better call the police now then in order to ensure that this can had shall have already will be going to have had happened.

NERD 1

We were about to leave. We can call you on the way out if you like.

HINES

Very well.

(The nerds leave with their machine.
On the way, NERD 1 shouts at HINES.)

NERD 1

Help! A body! Help, police!

HINES

I suppose that will have worked. After all, I am here, am I not?

JUDGE CLACKER

Difficult to say, given that we are conducting a mind-meld. You could be a figment of this man's imagination.

WOLFF

As could the corpse. We need you to establish the strewth, one way or the other.

(HINES looks at WOLFF suspiciously.)

HINES

By hook or by crook, eh?

(He writes something in his notebook.)

Ethics. Unacceptable. Fortunately there is a third option available to the modern law enforcement agent. Indictio ad absurdum. In the immortal words of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, when you have eliminated all the usual suspects, the murderer must be...

(rounding suddenly on WOLFF)

You!

WOLFF

(Shocked)

What? That's absurd. I -

HINES

Stop right there. Of course it isn't you. Your reaction speaks volumes. If it had been you your reaction would have been more like...

(rounding suddenly on FITZCLOUGH)

You!

FITZCLOUGH

What? Stop this ridiculous charade.

HINES

Oh, it's no charade. Pardon me, but did I call you? Or did you call me?

FITZCLOUGH

I don't think we called you.

HINES

Your nerds shouted "Help, police!"

FITZCLOUGH

Maybe they meant "Help police", as in the police need help.

HINES

Ah. That is possible. And it so happens that I have an assistant. May I introduce the lovely Ring Girl.

(Enter RING GIRL, carrying a box with a star and moon painted on it.)

Everyone, Ring Girl. Ring Girl, these are the clients.

(He indicates MINISTER)

... except that guy, he's the killer.

(WOLFF, FITZCLOUGH and JUDGE CLACKER look at MINISTER with suspicion and start to close in on him. Meanwhile HINES takes an accountants visor out of the box.)

For my next trick, I will attempt to balance the national budget.

(He puts on the visor and starts to write furiously on his notebook.)

...carry the two...

JUDGE CLACKER

Alright, no sudden moves and we won't get hurt.

WOLFF

The jig is up, vile murderer... and/or plea bargaining manslaughterer!

FITZCLOUGH

I say take the plea.

MINISTER

I'll take it. As to your fee?

FITZCLOUGH

Just imagine it's free.

MINISTER

Pro-bono, I see.

WOLFF

For the record, the charges are man one and three.

HINES

...Divide by the seed of un-minus infinity...

JUDGE CLACKER

As to the deed, how do you plead?

MINISTER

Guilty as sin as I see I can't win.

FITZCLOUGH

Then it's settled. The witness is unreliable.

WOLFF

Deal.

(They shake hands.)

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE CLACKER
Bailiff!

(Enter BAILIFF.)

BAILIFF
I have a name, you know.

JUDGE CLACKER
I thought your name was Bailiff.

BAILIFF
It is. I'm not a bailiff though, I'm a clerk.

FITZCLOUGH
I thought it was "clark".

BAILIFF
No, Clark's on leave.

FITZCLOUGH
Isn't a bailiff also a "clark"?

BAILIFF
I'd like to hear you say that to his face.

HINES
...Finished. The answer is ninety three.

JUDGE CLACKER
Okay that's enough. Clerk Bailiff Whatever, escort
the prisoner to the cells.

BAILIFF
With pleasure. I find these mind-melds really creepy.
(BAILIFF leads MINISTER out.)

MINISTER
I regret nothing! Except my indiscretions.

BAILIFF
No, they are unacceptable.

Pause.

HINES
Hey, that's my job! Quick, Ring Girl!

HINES and RING GIRL rush offstage.

Pause.

FITZCLOUGH
How do we get out of here?

WOLFF
Beats me.

They look around, perplexed.

FITZCLOUGH

What's that?

(He picks up HINES' notebook, which
HINES has dropped in his rush.)

It's that policeman's notebook.

JUDGE CLACKER

What does it say? maybe it's a clue.

FITZCLOUGH

(reads:) Milk, eggs, bread.

WOLFF

No help there.

(to JUDGE CLACKER:)

How do we get out of the mind-meld?

JUDGE CLACKER

Seems there is a glitch. I've got an idea. Let's try
this...

(they huddle together while the judge
explains his plan in whispers.)

Blackout.

Scene 3.

*A park. JUDGE CLACKER, BAILIFF, WOLFF and
FITZCLOUGH stand onstage, looking around. Enter
RING GIRL carrying the scene cards as usual.
They read:*

ACT 1, SCENE 3

A PARK DOWNTOWN

THE COURT HAS ESCAPED THE MIND-MELD

JUDGE CLACKER

Well getting out of that was by far the most
interesting thing that has happened so far.

FITZCLOUGH

Yes. I never knew that teeth really had skin, but
after escaping by it, I demur.

WOLFF

I concur.

BAILIFF

Me three. Why are we in the park again?

JUDGE CLACKER

It is a beautiful day. After our claustrophobic
experience in Minister's mind, I think we can all use

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE CLACKER (cont'd)
the air. We will continue the trial out here if it
please the court. And it do.

BAILIFF
Do what?

JUDGE CLACKER
Do please.

BAILIFF
Please do what?

JUDGE CLACKER
I mean please please me.

BAILIFF
I don't think that is appropriate.

JUDGE CLACKER
Continue the trial if you please. Call the next
witness.

BAILIFF
Yes sir! Next witness! Next witness! Calling the next
witness!

STAGE MANAGER
(offstage)
Get the next witness.

BAILIFF
Yes, get the next witness.

Pause.

JUDGE CLACKER
That's you.

BAILIFF
What? I'm not a witness, am I?

JUDGE CLACKER
No, I mean you have to go and get them. Counsel?

WOLFF
The prosecution calls Doctor Hyphen Woo.

JUDGE CLACKER
(to BAILIFF)
Now you go and find Dr. Woo.

BAILIFF
(to the audience on the way out:) Dr. Woo. I know
what you're thinking, but I'm not saying anything.
I'll leave it for someone with a little less
self-respect.

FITZCLOUGH

Wait a second, Bailiff.

(to WOLFF:)

Wasn't your next witness supposed to be Dr. Watt?

WOLFF

Who?

They both pull out sheafs of papers from pockets and start riffling through them. The papers end up strewn everywhere.

FITZCLOUGH

Er... Watt?

WOLFF

Who is Watt?

FITZCLOUGH

Who is?

WOLFF

Yes.

FITZCLOUGH

So Watt is Dr. Who.

WOLFF

What?

FITZCLOUGH

Yes.

WOLFF

No!

FITZCLOUGH

Not?

WOLFF

Not!

FITZCLOUGH

But Watt's on second.

WOLFF

No, no, Woo's on second, and Watson third.

FITZCLOUGH

Watson? No Watt?

WOLFF

No, what?

Pause.

FITZCLOUGH

(making notes:)

No Watt, Woo second, Watson third. I think I have it.
Bailiff, please bring in Dr. Who.

WOLFF

Woo!

FITZCLOUGH

Woo.

BAILIFF exits and enters immediately with WOO.

BAILIFF

Your name is Doctor Hyphen Woo?

WOO

Yes.

BAILIFF

How do you spell Hyphen?

WOO

With a dash.

BAILIFF

It's one of those posh hyphenated names.

WOO

Correct.

BAILIFF

Do you swear to tell the strewth, the whole strewth
and nothing but the strewth?

WOO

No, no and no.

BAILIFF

Why not?

WOO

Given that the strewth is unknown and arguably
unknowable, promising to reveal it is disingenuous at
best. With regards to scope, a claim to know the
strewth in its entirety is essentially fraudulent.
Finally, limiting myself to only the strewth would
preclude me from uttering a variety of useful
grammatical constructs that have no intrinsic
strewth-value, such as if, and, but and error.

BAILIFF

You have to tell the strewth.

WOO

You want the strewth? You can't handle the strewth!

WOLFF

Alright Bailiff, I think we can all agree that science is golden.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection! I don't agree with that at all!

JUDGE CLACKER

Overruled. Doctor Woo, would you lie on purpose?

WOO

No.

JUDGE CLACKER

Not under any compulsion or pressure to say that?

WOO

No.

JUDGE CLACKER

So you are speaking freely.

WOO

Yes.

JUDGE CLACKER

Lying now?

WOO

No.

JUDGE CLACKER

Compelled to?

WOO

No.

JUDGE CLACKER

Lying freely?

WOO

Yes.

JUDGE CLACKER

Gotcha!

WOO

I mean no. You tricked me!

JUDGE CLACKER

Yes very well. Mr Fitzcough, science may not be golden but I think we can all agree that it is silver or at least, nickel. This man seems honest enough.

FITZCLOUGH

He looks shifty to me. I suspect his motives.

WOO

Harsh words, for a lawyer.

FITZCLOUGH

I beg your... permission to treat as hostile?

JUDGE CLACKER

(Sighs.)

Oh very well.

FITZCLOUGH

You're a big stinky old jerk.

WOLFF

Oh please.

FITZCLOUGH

You aren't from Whoville and you don't drive a Targa.
You're a big phony.

WOO

I'm not Dr Who. I'm Dr *Woo*.

WOLFF

I think we had covered that.

FITZCLOUGH

If you're so smart, what have I got in my pocketses?

WOO

Your hands!

FITZCLOUGH

(pulling them out quickly.)

Wrong.

WOO

Alright then... is it a copy of *The Hobbit*?

FITZCLOUGH

(Pauses sheepishly.)

... yes ...

(he pulls the book out to show
everyone)

I have been reading it on the bus on the way to work.
It's very good.

JUDGE CLACKER

Overruled.

Enter THE SURVIVALIST, a parody of Bear Grylls.

SURVIVALIST

(to audience:) I'm going to show you how to survive
in the most inhospitable terrain, in some of the
worst places on Earth. This week I'm here in Lidcombe
to try and make it out of one of the municipal parks

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SURVIVALIST (cont'd)

that dot the suburb. I'll have to rely on my wits, local knowledge and as usual my willingness to eat the most disgusting items that the crew can spot rather than just spearing a coney.

BAILIFF

According to my Cliff Notes, this was bound to happen.

WOLFF

Yes, all of my park trials have been farces.

FITZCLOUGH

How many have you done?

WOLFF

This is my first.

SURVIVALIST

(to audience:) If you listen closely you can hear the gibbering of the local primates. It almost sounds like it makes sense.

(He listens.)

FITZCLOUGH

I've done a church. That was odd.

WOLFF

My strangest was a pier. We all objected a lot.

FITZCLOUGH

I'll bet.

SURVIVALIST

(to audience:) Ah but one thing the big apes can teach us is how to survive in their domain.

JUDGE CLACKER

Order in court!

WOLFF

Thank you your flatulence. Doctor Woo, what is your field of speciality?

WOO

Fields. Yes, indeed, and specialities. I have six degrees... of separation. But my main research focus right now is on chronological influxions.

SURVIVALIST

These are obviously the weaker members of the tribe, left here to starve. Ah... lets's move on.

JUDGE CLACKER

We can hear you, you know.

(CONTINUED)

SURVIVALIST

There's a clearing over here, and that means the crew will have made camp and found something for me to eat. I hope you've already eaten because you're about to see something truly revolting.

He exits, muttering about the crew and their baked beans.

JUDGE CLACKER

Where were we? Chronological influxions?

WOLFF

Yes. Could you define that in layman's terms?

WOO

They are disruptions in the normal flow of time and space. Commonly known as vortexes, they are any type of temporal block, sink, spiral, detour, gyre, gimble, frink or fuzz.

WOLFF

And once more, in terms that a layman might understand?

WOO

(sighs.)

You may know him as Eddy.

WOLFF

Oh?

WOO

Eddy's in the space/time continuum.

WOLFF

Is he? Oh, right. Good!

WOO

I study their nature, their causes and their effects.

WOLFF

I see. Not really. And what have you learned?

WOO

Well, it is clear that time travel has made it more difficult to know the causal relationship between events. In some cases it is even impossible to definitively state that one even "came before" another, in our conventional understanding of precedence.

WOLFF

And for laymen?

WOO

Put simply, before time travel we used to think we knew which came first, the chicken or the egg.

WOLFF

Well, what laid the egg?

WOO

The chicken.

WOLFF

And what did the chicken hatch out of?

WOO

Prior to time travel, we would have said "the egg" and we'd be here all day. Now we think it possible that the chicken itself could have meddled with space time, creating an egg-laying poultry variant by splicing the genes of some prototypical ancestor, such as the lesser flightless clucking platypus.

WOLFF

Amazing.

WOO

Yes. Now although we cannot see the eddies, we can surmise their existence by the anachronisms, or anomalies, that we detect - in this case the infinite loop of chicken progeny plus the mysterious absence of fossils of the clucking platypus.

WOLFF

You mentioned anachronisms. We heard something about these from the last witness. His examples all seemed to revolve around wine. Plus he is a convicted killer and his testimony is unreliable. Would you be so kind as to provide us with another example?

WOO

Well, say you lost your keys one day. You then realise that your car is missing. We used to say that someone probably took the keys and stole your car. Nowadays we often find that you never had a car, and we advise people to look for any signs of a bicycle, or possibly a bus ticket.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection!

(holds up a bus ticket.)

I catch the bus out of choice, not because my car was stolen.

JUDGE CLACKER

Sustained. Doctor Woo, could you give us another example that does not involve the contentious issues of public transport, wine or chickens?

WOO

Well, memory lapses, deja vu, denial and other Freudian phenomena are often clues as well. But for a concrete example, let us take house prices. We used to think that house prices were largely reflective of the fundamentals of supply and demand, disposable income, rental yield. However, by having an eye open for time distortions, and by using Google Alerts, it became apparent that we were seeing the effects of time travel.

WOLFF

What did you find?

WOO

We deduced that at some point around the turn of the last century, prices became irrationally dislocated from these fundamentals. Prices spiked astronomically, like solar flares. The Millennium Bug destroyed most of the evidence, but we are fairly sure that from average prices of around three or four times median income, prices suddenly soared to something like three *trillion* times income.

WOLFF

Is that even possible?

WOO

Just check out the prices here in Lidcombe sometime. A three bedroom govvie will cost anything up to million trillion Zimbabwean wotwots.

WOLFF

But isn't the wotwot ludicrously inflated?

WOO

True, but it is, at least, still hard currency. By comparison, our own economy is so leveraged that each so-called dollar is really backed by three trillion actual dollars of actual debt. It is to make this point that I choose to pay all my utilities bills with real, hard semi-trailer cars full of wotwots.

WOLFF

Cold hard cash.

WOO

If they are refrigerated lorries, yes.

WOLFF

And you believe this was caused by time travel?

WOO

In this case we know it to be fact. A real estate agent copped to the whole scam. Here's how it works. First you need to convince everybody that prices are going to rise so you get some real frenzied activity

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WOO (cont'd)

in the market. It does cause prices to rise a little bit due to the increased demand. But to get a really good year on year growth what you do is go forward in time and sell futures of houses at current prices, plus commission.

WOLFF

Could you clarify that?

WOO

Okay, next year prices are up 10 percent, right? Just assume it's true. So you buy a house now, then travel forward in time and sell the house to an investor "off the plan". That means that you promise to give them the house the year after, when it is finished. They are happy with that, because they only want to flip it in a year when it goes up again. You get the ten percent plus commission. Then imagine their delight when you turn up with an investor from the year after that, meaning that they can turn their profit immediately. You get a commission again. And by continually drawing forward this demand, you can keep raking in commissions while the investors keep flipping the house for the capital gains. Of course, that tends to drag up the price of similar houses.

WOLFF

So it is a Ponzi scheme.

WOO

Kind of, except that in a Ponzi scheme you need fresh suckers to pay off the existing "investors". In the elastic space-time asset bubble commission scheme you only need two investors, continually flipping the house to each other for ten percent gains while you get a commission on each transaction.

WOLFF

Isn't that unsustainable?

WOO

In fact it is. But the elastic nature of space-time allows you to get away with it for quite some time before it all blows up.

WOLFF

Right then. I think that is clear enough. Now what can you tell us about Benjamin Greenbelt? Was he a time-traveler?

WOO

Of course, he invented the time machine.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection!

WOO

According to his patent application anyway.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection your noodle. There is no such patent application at the patent office. I checked.

WOO

Ah but there is at the department of patents at the Society for Evil Geniuses, Mad Scientists and Mortgage Brokers.

WOLFF

(producing a document:) And is this a copy of said application?

WOO

I believe it is.

WOLFF

Thank you. Your witness.

FITZCLOUGH

Would you like a glass of water?

WOO

Yes, I am thirsty.

FITZCLOUGH

The witness seems confused. We are in a park, not in the courtroom. There's no water out here.

WOO

There's a pond.

FITZCLOUGH

Do you know what frogs do in there? No thank you.

WOO

Well you offered.

FITZCLOUGH

Am I on trial here? No sir. Just who do you think you are, anyway?

WOO

I'm Dr. Woo.

FITZCLOUGH

That is who you are. I'm asking who you think you are. Eh?

WOO

I don't -

FITZCLOUGH

Do you think you are Who? Dr. Who? Eh?

WOO

Of course not. I think I am Woo, which I am.

FITZCLOUGH

Did you never ask yourself "who am I"?

WOO

Of course. All scientists at some point -

FITZCLOUGH

Then turned it around, removing punctuation to arrive at "who I am"?

WOO

Yes, but -

FITZCLOUGH

And finally, dropping all common terms and solving for x, with a shriek of glee, a fiendish cackle and a cry of "Eureka!" you prance around the lab shouting "I'm Dr. Who! I'm Dr. Who!"

WOO

(aghast:) I never did that.

FITZCLOUGH

(pulls a video tape from his pocket)
Perhaps this will refresh your memory. Surveillance footage. We have it right here on this... probably one hundred year old video tape. Shall we play it for the court?

WOO

No! Alright, I admit it. But all scientists do that now and again.

WOLFF

Objection! Your nibbles, we were not notified of this evidence.

FITZCLOUGH

That's because it isn't evidence. It's just an old tape. Very old.

WOO

You... you were bluffing?

FITZCLOUGH

That's right.

WOO

Wow. Well played.

FITZCLOUGH

Thank you. Your turnip, I move that the testimony of this witness be stricken from the record as he is clearly unreliable, thirsty and confused.

JUDGE CLACKER

Overruled. He's an interesting character. Ask him more about this housing investment opportunity - er, I mean scam.

FITZCLOUGH

(sighs)

Very well. Dr. Woo, you seem to know a lot about the housing market. Do you also know much about furnishings?

WOO

Well, I'm an armchair expert.

FITZCLOUGH

I thought so. Soft furnishings.

WOO

Upholstered, yes.

FITZCLOUGH

So you know all about cushions.

WOO

Cushions?

FITZCLOUGH

Bless you! Now then, as to the housing market, most of the numbers you've given us relate to free-standing houses. How would you rate the market for apartments?

WOO

Flat.

FITZCLOUGH

What about for houseboats?

WOO

Buoyant.

FITZCLOUGH

Caravans?

WOO

Rolling along nicely.

FITZCLOUGH

Tents?

WOO

Need support.

FITZCLOUGH

Towers?

WOO

On the up and up.

FITZCLOUGH

Studios?

WOO

A sound investment.

FITZCLOUGH

Granny flat?

WOO

(shakes his head)

Just super.

FITZCLOUGH

Park bench?

WOO

Fine, with cushions.

FITZCLOUGH

Cushions?

WOO

Bless you! Ha ha!

FITZCLOUGH

Well played. What about holiday houses at the beach?

WOO

No dice. According to my calculations on rising sea levels, they'll all need to be restumped and raised by...

(he pulls out a calculator and does some math)

... roughly three hundred and seventy five meters.

FITZCLOUGH

So let us get this straight. The property market is irrational.

WOO

It is a theater of the absurd.

WOLFF

Like this one.

JUDGE CLACKER
Counsel?

WOLFF
Sorry... objection!

JUDGE CLACKER
On what grounds?

WOLFF
Like this one!

JUDGE CLACKER
Sustained.

FITZCLOUGH
But you can't think Mr. Greenbelt had anything to do
with the housing bubble.

WOO
I wouldn't wish to speculate on that.

Pause.

FITZCLOUGH
Touche. Permission to treat as hostile?

JUDGE CLACKER
Okay.

FITZCLOUGH
You're a jerk. Nothing further.

JUDGE CLACKER
The witness is excused.

*BAILIFF leads WOO away. Enter a JOGGER, puffed
and checking his watch.*

JOGGER
What's all this? Trying to jog here.

JUDGE CLACKER
A bit of al fresco justice.

JOGGER
Mafioso, is he?

JUDGE CLACKER
Who?

JOGGER
Al Fresco.

JUDGE CLACKER
No, it just means outside.

JOGGER

The law.

JUDGE CLACKER

What?

JOGGER

Outside the law. This guy, Frisco Al or whatever.

Enter two AUNTIES pushing a pram.

JUDGE CLACKER

No, we're just holding the trial outdoors.

JOGGER

(to the AUNTIES)

Does that make sense to you? Trying outdoors instead of outlaws?

AUNTIE 1

What is, dear?

JOGGER

These guys are holding a trial.

AUNTIE 2

Ooh! A trial? I'll try some!

AUNTIE 1

We'll all try it. What have you got, sweetie?

JOGGER

It isn't that sort of trial. You know, a court case. Some mafia don called Frisco Al.

AUNTIE 1

Sounds dangerous.

AUNTIE 2

Yes, I'd try him.
(they cackle.)

AUNTIE 1

You know who I would try?

AUNTIE 2

Who, darling.

AUNTIE 1

That Baskin-Robbins.

AUNTIE 2

Oh, yes. Frightfully naughty. And Homer Hudson too.
(they cackle and start to leave. The baby starts crying. The AUNTIES stop to coo and cluck a bit and the crying dies down.)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

AUNTIE 2 (cont'd)

They're so adorable when they cry.

AUNTIE 1

So true. Pinch her thighs a little bit more.

AUNTIE 2 pinches the baby and the cries pick up. Satisfied, they leave.

JOGGER

I better get on too. If something interrupts my exercise I ...

(glances at his watch)

... oh no!

WOLFF

What is it?

JOGGER

(clutching his chest:)

Heart rate... dropped below... one twenty. Must ... make it... to gym...

The JOGGER collapses, dead. WOLFF checks his pulse.

WOLFF

He's dead.

FITZCLOUGH

I wonder who Jim is.

WOLFF

Probably his cardiologist.

FITZCLOUGH

Hm. Maybe.

JUDGE CLACKER

There are too many distractions out here. The birds and the bees, cackling old aunties and dying joggers. We'll take a short intermission and resume indoors.

Enter RING GIRL bearing a single card. It reads:

INTERMISSION

Lights out.

ACT IIScene 1

An empty stage. Enter RING GIRL, carrying her scene cards. They read:

ACT 2, SCENE 1

THE TRIAL CONTINUES...

...THE DEFENCE...

...WITNESSES...

AH STUFF THIS.

After showing that last card she throws the cards away and storms out.

Enter HINES, patting his pockets.

HINES

Did I leave my notebook here?

(He notices that nobody is there.)

Um... court guys? I...

(He notices the audience.)

Oh...

(He starts backing out slowly.)

I'll just... be going...

(He turns around and runs out.)

Enter GOSPER, playing Kermit the Frog.

GOSPER

And now, back by popular demand, the three computernerds. Yay...

(he exits)

Enter the three nerds.

NERD 1

Who was that? Did you hear someone?

NERD 2

No.

NERD 3

It wasn't me.

NERD 1

I know, it was someone else.

NERD 3

It's just that you always blame me.

(CONTINUED)

NERD 1

I don't mean that. I heard someone speak.

NERD 2

It could have been you then. You're always trying to speak.

NERD 3

I'm learning. It's harder than it sounds.

NERD 2

That's true but you are a slow learner.

NERD 3

Your motherboard.

NERD 1

[raising a hand] Ssh! Now did you hear that?

NERD 2

I heard you say shoosh.

NERD 3

I thought I heard someone giggle. Maybe it was Gosper.

NERD 1

What do you mean?

NERD 3

He's meant to be coming.

NERD 2

Who's Gosper?

NERD 3

Who isn't Gosper?

NERD 1

Shh!

[FX: Gunshot]

[NERD 1 has been shot in the arm. He clutches at it. The other nerds crouch down looking for the source of the shot]

NERD 1

Owww! My arm!

NERD 2

Who's shooting?

NERD 3

Who isn't shooting?

[FX- Gunshot]

[NERD 3 has been shot in the chest and dies immediately]

NERD 2
Ah. Help! Murder! Haa-ahp!

[Enter Gosper, carrying a pistol]

GOSPER
That won't do you any good.

NERD 2
Says you. Help!

NERD 1
Alright number two. Listen, whoever you are, just take what you want and let us go.

NERD 2
There you go, bossy to the end.

NERD 1
What?

NERD 2
Forget it. (To GOSPER:) Just finish him off and let us go.

GOSPER
That's funny. Nobody is going anywhere.

NERD 2
I'm nobody! I am. He is always saying so.

NERD 1
I am not.

NERD 2
Are.

NERD 1
I said you were nothing.

NERD 2
Yeah. Remember what I told you? How nothing's sacred?

NERD 1
Yeah that was funny.

GOSPER
Do you know what? You guys aren't funny at all. You just aren't working out for me.

NERD 1
What do you mean?

GOSPER

I mean BANG!

(he shoots NERD 1 and yells "BANG!" at the same time. NERD 1 dies quickly.)

NERD 2

(with hands up)

Why are you doing this?

GOSPER

Good help is hard to find.

GOSPER shoots NERD 2 who dies slowly and dramatically.

Enter HINES, gun drawn.

HINES

Okay don't move!

GOSPER

Great. Clouseau the Younger. I had to break the fourth wall, the time barrier and every rule in the book to get rid of you. Now you're back, or at least you will have been back.

HINES

Alright citizen I will need to ask you to cease and desist with the inane chatter.

GOSPER

Cease and desist you.

HINES

(Surveying the scene:)

What's it all about, eh? Why'd you do it? Was it self-defence? Start talking, if I was you. And don't... don't... line.

GOSPER

Spare the horses.

HINES

That's right, don't spare the horses. Wait a sec, how did you know what I was going to say?

GOSPER

I always imagined that you would be a bit more... I don't know. Prim.

HINES

I find you confusing and a bit frightening. Hold still for a moment.

(He searches for his notebook in vain, holding his gun with his armpit.)

GOSPER

Here, use this one.

GOSPER hands HINES a notebook. HINES accepts it and starts writing, gun still clamped in his armpit.

HINES

Let's see now, boilerplate, boilerplate, time and date. Umm...

GOSPER

(Looks at his watch and gives the correct time.)

HINES

Of the...

GOSPER

(Gives the correct date.)

HINES

Thank you. Umm... I, Constable Hines, blah blah... mischief afoot, or feet, never quite sure, boilerplate etcetera, gunfire etcetera. Boilerplate... a... strange man. Blah blah, middle aged blah blah etcetera. Estimate two to four dead bodies, cause of death unknown, possibly plague.

Meanwhile Gosper has started to walk off, shaking his head sadly.

Wait, you!

GOSPER

Why, what's the point.

HINES

There will be plenty of time for you to explore your existential woes down at the station.

GOSPER

What, the petrol station?

HINES

What?

GOSPER

What? There's no station. Check the catalogue.

HINES

The...?

GOSPER

Read your script. We never get there.

HINES

Just wait a minute. I'm trying to figure this.

GOSPER

You'll never figure it. You don't get to. I only allow you to continue bumbling your way through scene after scene after scene, oblivious to reality, towards your pre-ordained doom.

HINES

Doom? Could you clarify that? It sounds ominous.

GOSPER

(Walking up to HINES)

Alright, I'll explain it for you, since you insist on being so thick-headed.

(He points out the audience.)

See them?

(HINES looks at the audience. GOSPER slaps him.)

HINES

What was that for?

GOSPER

Snap out of it. It's over. They're pulling the plug.

HINES

Line.

GOSPER

I'm not an actor though. I'm ex -

HINES

Extemporising! Yes!

GOSPER

You are as thick as two bricks. Don't you get it?
It's game over.

HINES

Oh, it's no game. You are in some serious trouble,
young man.

GOSPER

I give up.

GOSPER starts to leave.

HINES

Stop! Stop!

HINES shoots at GOSPER but GOSPER ignores it. Suddenly GOSPER turns and points his finger like a pretend gun. He "shoots".

GOSPER
BANG!

HINES dies slowly and dramatically.
Still the best at that, I have to admit.

Enter RING GIRL.

RING GIRL
Ladies and gentlemen, Sir John Gielgud!

GOSPER
I'm not Gielgud.

RING GIRL
What?

GOSPER
I'm not even a knight, not yet.

RING GIRL
But Gielgud's supposed to be in this isn't he? The Daily Schlockpile said it was a Gielgud comedy.

GOSPER
It said feelgood comedy, and the only reason it said that was because I wrote the article myself.

RING GIRL
I must have misheard. I have all the papers read to me because I -

GOSPER
- can't actually read. I know. I wrote you that way. Charmingly dumb. You don't mind, do you?

RING GIRL
Actually it seems awfully clever. I don't really understand it though.

GOSPER
Don't worry, it's overrated, understanding. Shall we?

They exit arm in arm.

RING GIRL
You really are an evil genius.

GOSPER
I wouldn't lay claim to being a genius.

RING GIRL
Evil?

GOSPER
Just lucky, I guess.

Lights out.

SCENE 2

A bare stage. JUDGE CLACKER, BAILIFF, WOLFF AND FITZCLOUGH stand facing the audience.

WOLFF

Where are we? Not another mind-meld?

JUDGE CLACKER

I don't think so. They usually feel a bit more, I don't know. Mind-y. And meldy.

FITZCLOUGH

I agree. They are hard to describe but you can somehow tell when you are in one.

JUDGE CLACKER

Oh yes, and there's usually a Ring Girl. Where's the Ring Girl?

BAILIFF

That's true, I miss seeing the Ring Girl.

JUDGE CLACKER

Ring Girl! Ring Girl. Ring Girl? Oh well. There must be some reason why we are here.

WOLFF

I can imagine one.

JUDGE CLACKER

What's that?

WOLFF

Isn't it obvious? Greenbelt has trapped us here in one of his vortex thingies.

FITZCLOUGH

Objection!

JUDGE CLACKER

Look stop that. there's no point, is there?

FITZCLOUGH

Alright but it isn't Greenbelt. Vortexes are not really his cup of... he couldn't vortex his way out of a... it's a bit too much sand for his... If anything it might be Gosper.

JUDGE CLACKER

Maybe you should tell us what you know about this Gosper character.

FITZCLOUGH

That's just it. He isn't a character. Not like us, anyway.

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE CLACKER
For the laymen?

FITZCLOUGH
He's bland, he's... two dimensional. He's like an archetype or something.

BAILIFF
Archetype?

FITZCLOUGH
He's like the essence of... the Author.

FX: Jungle drums.

BAILIFF
You mean like he's a god or something?

FITZCLOUGH
Not exactly, but he is handsome, I mean stop it! Narcissistic.

BAILIFF
Nasty...

FITZCLOUGH
Vain. Glorious. Stop it! Vainglorious. I... get out of my head! I can't... I mean, no, I love him. Once you have felt his power you just have to... umm... take it door to door...

FITZCLOUGH trails off, an idiotic grin on his face.

JUDGE CLACKER
And Greenbelt?

FITZCLOUGH
Well look. Greenbelt's just this guy, you know?

WOLFF
So what, you expect us to just stand around in this vortex and, what?

JUDGE CLACKER
Wait?

WOLFF
For him? For Gosper?

FITZCLOUGH
I don't know. It wasn't my idea.

BAILIFF
Seems like we're always waiting around for something. Why not Gosper?

WOLFF

No! I mean, yes and no. There's something else troubling me, something that I can't quite put my finger on.

BAILIFF

About the Ring Girl?

WOLFF

No. What's with you?

BAILIFF

Well, I'm nineteen.

WOLFF

Oh I see. Carry on. No I mean about this vortex, or whatever.

JUDGE CLACKER

Well take your time.

WOLFF

We were sent for.

FITZCLOUGH

Yes, Gosper sent for us.

WOLFF

He sent us up.

FITZCLOUGH

He sold us out.

WOLFF

Yes! He did for us!

FITZCLOUGH

To be precise: we are done for.

JUDGE CLACKER

Alright that's enough of that tintinnabulation.

WOLFF

Can't you feel it? That sense of...

FITZCLOUGH

Compulsion?

WOLFF

Yes. Determinism.

JUDGE CLACKER

Nonsense. I believe in free will.

WOLFF

Free? As in free beer? Or a free lunch? Because TANSTAFEL, you know. There

FITZCLOUGH
Ain't.

WOLFF
No.

FITZCLOUGH
Such.

WOLFF
Thing.

FITZCLOUGH
As.

WOLFF
A.

FITZCLOUGH
Free.

WOLFF
Lunch.

FITZCLOUGH
I didn't know you knew that.

WOLFF
Oh yes, I've been saying it for years.

FITZCLOUGH
Shall we discuss it further? Let's do lunch.

WOLFF
Good idea. My shout.

FITZCLOUGH and WOLFF exit arm in arm.

JUDGE CLACKER
Well they managed to escape.

BAILIFF
They seem quite smitten.

JUDGE CLACKER
Yes, no doubt they are off to crash the economy by
having babies instead of apartments. Shall we try it?

BAILIFF
I'm not sure I...

JUDGE CLACKER
I mean to escape. Yes?

*They march toward the wing arm in arm but are
wheeled around by the force of the vortex. They
try the opposite direction but the same thing
happens.*

JUDGE CLACKER

Well that didn't work.

BAILIFF

Maybe if we try on the spot, then we might get somewhere.

JUDGE CLACKER

It makes an insane kind of sense.

BAILIFF

More insane than sense but let's try.

They march on the spot.

Is it working?

JUDGE CLACKER

(looking around)

Well we are getting somewhere, but no more so.

BAILIFF

Assuming we were somewhere before.

JUDGE CLACKER

Sine qua non.

BAILIFF

Qua qua qua what?

JUDGE CLACKER

Latin. Qua qua qua non non no better off than we were.

BAILIFF

I still didn't get the hey nonny nonny bit.

JUDGE CLACKER

I suppose they don't teach Latin anymore.

BAILIFF

Only Igpay Atinlay.

JUDGE CLACKER

What?

BAILIFF

That's all the latino I know. Oh and cerveza. Por favor. Un, dos. Dos Cervezas.

JUDGE CLACKER

What?

BAILIFF

Dos cervezas por favor!

Enter a Spanish waiter carrying two bottles of beer on a tray.

WAITER

Si señor. Aquí estan tus cervezas.

They take the beers and he exits.

JUDGE CLACKER

Well he made it out okay.

BAILIFF

He made out fine.

JUDGE CLACKER

I wonder why. What is the significance of the waiter?

BAILIFF

Maybe we should serve drinks.

JUDGE CLACKER

Yes, I... No! Maybe we should wait.

BAILIFF

Just wait? That's it? Wait for what?

JUDGE CLACKER

I don't know. Maybe something will happen.

They stare out over the audience.

BAILIFF

Nothing ever does.

They drink their beers.

What was that?

JUDGE CLACKER

What?

BAILIFF

I thought I heard something.

JUDGE CLACKER

It could have been him. He might be coming, finally.

BAILIFF

Does he have to come?

JUDGE CLACKER

He said he would. At least I think he did. When he sent for us. The years have not been kind to me. Ah, I used to have such vim.

(points toward the audience (the 4th wall))

I could have kicked down that wall and we could have got out of here! Now I just have gray hair and an endless thirst.

They drink their beers.

BAILIFF

At least we have beer.

JUDGE CLACKER

But no justice. Beer but no justice, that is the human condition in a nutshell. Just us.

BAILIFF

Chin up old man, I mean your whiskers.

JUDGE CLACKER

I used to get some respect around here. It was always "Your Worship" when I had my judging mojo flowing. Now it's something new every time.

BAILIFF

I thought that was odd. I was just copying everyone else.

JUDGE CLACKER

There must have been a point, a moment where I stopped caring. I used to run a tight ship! I think I stopped caring.

BAILIFF

Well you're still one up on me. I never cared.

They drink their beers.

JUDGE CLACKER

You must care about something.

BAILIFF

No, not really.

JUDGE CLACKER

Life, love, work, money, something.

BAILIFF

Meh.

JUDGE CLACKER

What are you, a Buddhist?

BAILIFF

No. I was raised Apathetic Agnostic.

JUDGE CLACKER

What's that all about?

BAILIFF

I don't really know and I don't really care.

JUDGE CLACKER

Sounds just right for you then.

They drink their beers.

BAILIFF

So we just seriously wait for Gosper to show up or something.

JUDGE CLACKER

I suppose so. I... wait a minute! Of course!

BAILIFF

What?

JUDGE CLACKER

I do know some Spanish. Cuenta. Cuenta por favor!

Enter the Spanish waiter bearing the tray. He takes the bill from the tray and after they put their bottles on the tray he hands the bill to JUDGE CLACKER and leaves.

BAILIFF

What's that?

JUDGE CLACKER

La cuenta. The bill. That's all I got from my trip to Argentina all those years ago. That and the tango.

BAILIFF

He'll show up. He just has to.

JUDGE CLACKER

Why?

BAILIFF

I don't know, i just feel it. Something's got to give.

JUDGE CLACKER

Does it have to?

BAILIFF

There must be something we can do. Don't you believe in free will anymore?

JUDGE CLACKER

I do, so what?

BAILIFF

So do something. Get us out of here.

JUDGE CLACKER

I don't know what else to try.

BAILIFF

Well try *something*. Do something unexpected.

JUDGE CLACKER

Alright, I'll give a little speech. Nobody would expect *that*.

BAILIFF

Is that the best you've got? I could do better than that.

He starts mime-pounding on the 4th wall.
If only I could smash through this... force... field.
It's like a force field.

JUDGE CLACKER

(Mimes pressing his palms against the wall)
More like a force wall.

BAILIFF

That's it! I know what it is! It's the fourth wall.
We studied them in school.

JUDGE CLACKER

The fourth wall.

BAILIFF

They're designed to keep actors distracted so we can study them. This one seems to be malfunctioning.

JUDGE CLACKER

You mean like a television screen?

BAILIFF

Almost exactly like one. That means there could be actors behind there, if only they could hear us.

They both start pounding on the "wall".

JUDGE

BAILIFF

Help! Help!

JUDGE CLACKER

It's no use. They'll never hear us.

BAILIFF

Even if they could, they might not help us. Actors.
They're a cowardly lot.

JUDGE CLACKER

Weak?

BAILIFF

Indifferent. Too self-absorbed to be of assistance to a real person.

JUDGE CLACKER

I heard that asking for your money back can sometimes help.

BAILIFF

Maybe on pay-TV but I doubt it will help us. This is almost definitely free-to-air.

JUDGE CLACKER

How can you tell?

BAILIFF

It's the quality of the programming.

JUDGE CLACKER

There's nothing for it then. We'll just have to wait it out.

BAILIFF

It's so boring!

JUDGE CLACKER

We could play cribbage.

BAILIFF

How do you play it?

JUDGE CLACKER

Well we need a deck of cards and something to keep score.

BAILIFF

Well, no cards, so i guess that's out.

JUDGE CLACKER

We could try to play it in our heads. We can do an open hand until you get the hang of it. See, I'm imagining that I'm shuffling the deck.

Pause.

BAILIFF

Well?

JUDGE CLACKER

You have to cut.

BAILIFF

It just won't do, it's just not good enough. It's not just boredom anymore, it's real! Tangible.

(he pants.)

I think I'm having a panic attack.

JUDGE CLACKER

I just got two for his heels. Now it's your turn.

BAILIFF

It's palpable. I'm scared.

JUDGE CLACKER

So then you peg it like this...

BAILIFF

I need my Ventolin!
(he wheezes)

I...

JUDGE CLACKER

Everyone has problems. It's your turn.

BAILIFF can't breathe and clutches at his chest.
That was naive, you see. I get fifteen for two. Are you going to concentrate or not?

BAILIFF dies in a heap. JUDGE CLACKER finally realises that something is wrong.

It does feel a bit mind-meldy in here. Is this *my* mind? I'm sure that explains most of it. Smush! I need my lollies.

(he takes a vial from his pocket and shakes it: empty.)

I'm out of lollies. If only I had a broom so I could tidy up this mess.

(he means BAILIFF's corpse.)

But what's the point, anyway? Asthma's not contagious, is it? I had a list of things that are, things to watch out for. I used to have a lot of lists like that, like the one for going out. Everyone I knew, their faces and names. Heh heh. The other one with *my* name and address on it for those nights on the jolly juice, eh? But I don't think asthma was on there. If he had herpes, now that would be something to watch out for. Or geometric progression, you don't want that. Those were the main two... Mother always said, don't french-kiss girls with cold sores and stay away from creaking, groaning corpses that grow in an alarming manner. You aren't growing are you boy? I hope not. Brrr. Makes me shudder. Is it cold in here?

FX: A creaking, groaning sound.

What was that? I heard a noise. Could it finally be Stoppard, I mean Gosper, at last? Or does he have more lunacy for me to endure? He has to show up eventually. It's his tour de force. His masterpiece. His day in the sun. He just has to show up.

(He mime-pushes the 4th wall.)

Maybe he's out there. In a cushy seat, eh? Hey! I want out! I can't take it anymore! I need my lollies!

Enter SARAH, carrying a futuristic assault rifle. A nerf cannon would be ideal.

SARAH

That's enough.

JUDGE CLACKER

Saved by the belle!
(He notices the gun)
Nelly!

SARAH

It's Sarah.

JUDGE CLACKER

Sarah, thank Gosper. I mean God, I was getting worried. Stuck in this vortex or whatever, without my justice lollies. Smush!

SARAH

Justice lollies?

JUDGE CLACKER

Yes. Xanax, zoloft, prozac, valium and MDMA. They keep me focused on justice and more able to cope with the irritations of working with lawyers all day.

SARAH

Aren't they all anti-psychotic meds?

JUDGE CLACKER

Yes, you would say that, wouldn't you? As if I needed any more proof... all trying to make me... to get me to take those things.

SARAH

Well I think you might need them.

JUDGE CLACKER

Of course I need them! Who are you anyway?

SARAH

I told, you, it's Sarah. Sarah Connor.

JUDGE CLACKER

Not Spooky Connor, the terminator exterminator?

SARAH

(wincing)
That's what they call me.

JUDGE CLACKER

Your friends do.

SARAH

Do what?

JUDGE CLACKER

Sarah, but my friends call me Spooky.

SARAH

You've got some strange friends.

JUDGE CLACKER
I meant you.

SARAH
(coldly:) I'm not your friend.

JUDGE CLACKER
(taking an interest in the gun:) That is an impressive piece of hardware.

SARAH
(warmly:) This, my friend, is the Metric Halo Vortex Buster 3000. It packs a mean wallop. It has more functions than a cell phone, most of them lethal.

JUDGE CLACKER
Is it street-legal?

SARAH
It's street-lethal. In fact it was designed by Lethal himself.

JUDGE CLACKER
That psychopath?

SARAH
That's right, Lethal Leigh Matthews, the Essendon Bomber. Designed it for us cheap, too. Only two cartons of cigarettes and a prepaid Virgin mobile.

JUDGE CLACKER
That's horrible!

SARAH
Look, it's just business. Do you want the machines to win?

JUDGE CLACKER
I'm not sure I...

SARAH
We're at war here, Mister! It's hard-headed decisions like that that keep you alive in your bed at night. Leigh's lung cancer, his SMS addiction, just prices that had to be paid.

JUDGE CLACKER
I suppose.

SARAH
You suppose so? You suppose so. Oh. Alright then.

JUDGE CLACKER
I'm having a rough trot. Smush!

SARAH

Something you ate?

JUDGE CLACKER

No, I'm just having a tough time with this case.

SARAH

What case? Where? Was there a case? Nobody touch it.

JUDGE CLACKER

Court case. I'm Judge Clacker.

SARAH

Oh. Who's on trial?

JUDGE CLACKER

No, Who isn't.

(he sighs.)

I doubt anyone can make sense of it now.

SARAH

I bet you're right.

JUDGE CLACKER

Nobody would take that bet! Smush! All our money is tied up in real estate and we can't even bet on a sure thing!

SARAH

Isn't real estate as safe as houses?

JUDGE CLACKER

Or is it a house of cards?

SARAH

How's that?

JUDGE CLACKER

Not out! Smush!

SARAH

You aren't making a lot of sense, especially the smush bit.

JUDGE CLACKER

It's my lollies, I needs my lolly.

(he growls at her.)

Smush! Grrr.

SARAH

You better back off before I smush you with this oversized novelty nerf gun.

JUDGE CLACKER

I thought it was a -

SARAH

I'm being real here for a second.

JUDGE CLACKER

I get it. I get it.

SARAH

This thing will smush a hole in you the size of Uranus.

JUDGE CLACKER

What are you, eight?

SARAH

Just keep your distance, okay?
(she gestures at the corpse)
Who is that?

JUDGE CLACKER

Clerk of the court.

SARAH

What's he doing? Sleeping?

JUDGE CLACKER

He might be dead, smush! he smush!
(clears his throat)
He had an attack.

SARAH

(looking around in alarm)
Attack? They're here already?

JUDGE CLACKER

Who?

SARAH

The rowboats.

JUDGE CLACKER

What?

SARAH

Rowboats from the future. They'll stop at nothing.

JUDGE CLACKER

(looks confused)
Are you right?

SARAH

Isn't it?
(she peers offstage)
Line?

STAGE MANAGER

(loudly from offstage:)
Robots!

SARAH

(back to business)
Okay it's robots not rowboats. That does answer a few questions I was going to raise at the next *script meeting!*

(those last two words were loud and directed at STAGE MANAGER.)

JUDGE CLACKER

I'm lost, lost. I'm all at sea.

SARAH

(leveling the gun at him)
In a rowboat?

JUDGE CLACKER

(holding two imaginary weights)
Sense, nonsense. Sense, I think, prevailed here at one time. I had right. I had weight. Smush.

SARAH

(starts talking to a device on her wrist)
Getting maudlin here now...

JUDGE CLACKER

(hefts left and right fist in turn)
The iron will. The kind word.
(he punches the air with "the kind word")
Smush!

SARAH

(as though he had said "shush")
Don't smush me when I'm talking.

JUDGE CLACKER

Smush! Smush!

SARAH

Stop it. Stop!

JUDGE CLACKER

Smush it. Smush!

Pause.

SARAH

Smush it!

JUDGE CLACKER

Stop it!

SARAH

(to her wrist device:)
He seems to be regressing. He's barely eight years old anymore.

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE CLACKER
You are.

SARAH
Practically all he can say is "smush".

JUDGE CLACKER
I want my zoloft.

SARAH
... which could mean shush or maybe smash.

JUDGE CLACKER
I need my xanax...

SARAH
Possibly both...

JUDGE CLACKER
... Ritalin for my HDTV...

SARAH
... Or even more possibly neither...

JUDGE CLACKER
Even a jelly baby! Proloft? Panax?

SARAH
... Hard to say, probably unimportant.

JUDGE CLACKER
(trying to claw at her:) Picodin? Pachyderm? Placebo?
Peri-peri? Well what do you have?

SARAH
(Brushing him away:) Nothing! Back off, creepy old
dude. My agent never said nothing about this.

JUDGE CLACKER
Help me, I want my Mummy.

SARAH
(to her wrist:) He definitely has geometric
regression, worst case I have seen. I'll try and get
him back on task. Hey! Judge! Can you try and focus
for a second?

JUDGE CLACKER
... Smush?

SARAH
Groans. How am I supposed to clear that addled old
pickle-barrel he calls a mind?
(pause)
Well? Line?

Pause.

STAGE MANAGER
(from offstage)
She exposes her breasts!

SARAH.
Hm. What?

STAGE MANAGER
She exposes her breasts!

SARAH
I don't think so. What else have you got?

STAGE MANAGER enters, brandishing a script.

STAGE MANAGER
How many times, Ella?

SARAH
It's Sarah.

STAGE MANAGER
I'm being real for a second.

SARAH
I'm in character.

JUDGE CLACKER
Smush!

STAGE MANAGER
Brew.

SARAH
What?

STAGE MANAGER
He's meant to say "brew".

SARAH
Why?

STAGE MANAGER
Look!
(waves the script around without showing it to her.)
It says right here in the stage directions that Clacker falls apart more and more during this scene. As well as "smush", he starts saying "brew".
(he consults the script)
Let's see... he says "brew", you say "what?", he says "smush". You say, "maybe you could try a new teapot".

SARAH
What?

JUDGE CLACKER
Smush.

SARAH
Hang on, what? A teapot.

STAGE MANAGER
That's right. Mm hmm. Yes, a teapot.

SARAH
why would I even say that?

JUDGE CLACKER
Brew.

SARAH
I'll brew you.

STAGE MANAGER
I don't know. I guess Gosper thought it would be funny.

SARAH
Well it isn't.

STAGE MANAGER
I don't know, it has something. Brew, teapot. I don't know.

JUDGE CLACKER
I get it! Brew!

SARAH
There's nothing to get! No clever juxtaposition, no double entendre, no dissociation of word and meaning, no unexpected twist of logic, not even a wretched pun! It has none of the elements of comedy at all!

STAGE MANAGER
Alright, no need to shout.

JUDGE CLACKER
I get it! I get it!

SARAH
I get that Gosper's lost his marbles.

STAGE MANAGER
(snaps his fingers)
Maybe he kept them in a teapot! Eh?

SARAH
No, that's worse.

STAGE MANAGER
Weak?

SARAH

Ambitious.

JUDGE CLACKER

Smush! Brew!

SARAH

Does smush even mean anything?

STAGE MANAGER

Sure it does. Gosper told me it means "smoosh".

SARAH

As in?

STAGE MANAGER

You know, to moosh things together.

SARAH

You mean mush.

STAGE MANAGER

Same same, but different. Like a mashup.

SARAH

Oh.

JUDGE CLACKER

Smush, smush. Brew, brew.

SARAH

He's getting worse. What can we do?

STAGE MANAGER

Well, we could hold a script meeting.

SARAH

Can't we just get him his meds?

STAGE MANAGER

We could try.

(to random people in the audience)

Excuse me sir, do you have any xanax? Madam, could you spare a zolofit for the bus-ride home? Mate, could I trouble you for a... no it's no use. They seem to have taken them all already.

SARAH

Why the greedy...

JUDGE CLACKER

Smush!

SARAH

That is so selfish.

STAGE MANAGER

We could call an ambulance.

SARAH

I'll call a cab cause a cab'll come quicker.

(she speaks into her wrist device)

Taxi to the Star Theater in Lidcombe please. Name of Smush.

(she pauses, listening.)

Gosper has a taxi booked for Smush? Great. Thank you.

(to JUDGE CLACKER)

Seems you have friends in high places. The taxi will be here surprisingly soon.

Pause.

STAGE MANAGER

Well, I -

He is interrupted by the sound of a ships bell ringing five times [ding-ding, ding-ding, ding], possibly other nautical sounds. Enter a row boat with a taxi sign on it.

TAXI DRIVER

Taxi for Smush?

STAGE MANAGER

That was fast.

SARAH

Wait a sec! A rowboat? I knew it!

(She opens fire on the boat.)

Evil shape-transforming-shifting ascii-loving love-hating rowboat from the future! Die!

TAXI DRIVER

(taking cover behind an oar:) Stop! Stop!

JUDGE CLACKER

Smush! Smush!

STAGE MANAGER

Hold up, Ella.

SARAH

(still shooting:) Overblown toaster!

STAGE MANAGER

Ella!

TAXI DRIVER

Stop it! You're a nut, Ella!

SARAH

Like I haven't heard that before.

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE CLACKER
Brew! Brew!

SARAH
Shut up!
(She fires a few more rounds at the boat)

TAXI DRIVER
(holds up an oversized propeller)
It's just a prop, Ella!

SARAH
That's terrible.

TAXI DRIVER
(Holds up an oar)
Oar is it? Eh? Ella?

SARAH

*If you haven't got a fella,
and your belly's kinda swella,
and you have a funny smella
like a piece of gorgonzella
that's just rife with salmonella
do you think you're Cinderella?
Are you red like a rose, Ella?
Can you dance a tarantella?
Can you play upon a cella
or a jazzy pianella?
do you spray it when you yella?
Will I need a beach umbrella
when I'm talking to you Ella?*

JUDGE CLACKER
I thought it was Sarah.

SARAH
I thought it was smush.

STAGE MANAGER
Maybe he's having an attack of lucidity.

TAXI DRIVER

It could be a stroke... of good fortune.

STAGE MANAGER

Quick, get him in the taxi.

(They bustle him over to the boat)

There you are Alec.

JUDGE CLACKER

Is nothing sacred?

STAGE MANAGER

Not you! Get in!

They get him into the boat.

SARAH

(indicating the corpse:) What about this guy?

STAGE MANAGER

What about this guy? Who is it?

SARAH

Don't you know, Mister I-read-the-stage-directions?

It's Clark.

STAGE MANAGER

Who?

SARAH

Clark Court.

STAGE MANAGER

(consults the script)

What happened to him? Oh, you mean Bailiff.

SARAH

He had an attack.

STAGE MANAGER

Of lucidity?

SARAH

Possibly.

STAGE MANAGER

In character?

SARAH

Wouldn't know. Should I shoot him?

STAGE MANAGER

How would that help?

(pauses briefly)

I know.

(pause)

Oh look, it's Ring Girl!

(pause)
And she's in the nicky nacky noo nah!

SARAH
What?

STAGE MANAGER
She's buck naked!
(pause)
Nothing. He's dead. Get him in the boat.

They bustle BAILIFF over to the boat and manage to get him in.

TAXI DRIVER
Where to then?

STAGE MANAGER
The old mad one, I don't know. Nobody knows where he lives. If he has another bout of clarity you can ask him. The young dead one could, in theory, be left out for the hard rubbish collection. Or in the back rows somewhere.

TAXI DRIVER
Righto.

The taxi/boat exits.

STAGE MANAGER
Now where were we?

SARAH
I'm not flashing my boobs just because you said so.

STAGE MANAGER
Not me, it's in the script.

SARAH
It isn't!

STAGE MANAGER
Right here, look at the stage directions.

SARAH
Oh, I never read those.
(pause)
Line!

STAGE MANAGER
(rolling his eyes:) My agent said...

SARAH
My agent said I didn't have to.

STAGE MANAGER

(by rote:) Why?

SARAH

Well I'm not... line.

STAGE MANAGER

In.

SARAH

In... line?

STAGE MANAGER

Them.

SARAH

Them. Is it? Am I?

STAGE MANAGER

(to audience:) Every night.

SARAH

That's not right, is it? Every night?

STAGE MANAGER

Of course it is.

SARAH

Don't I say "line" first.

STAGE MANAGER

No, after.

SARAH

So I missed it? Can we go back?

STAGE MANAGER

I'm afraid it has passed.

SARAH

Start from where I say "line" the first time.

STAGE MANAGER

No.

SARAH

Go on.

STAGE MANAGER

No.

(Pause. Sarah has missed her cue.)

I'll tell my -

SARAH

Agent! I'll tell my agent.

(pause)

(CONTINUED)

STAGE MANAGER
Line.

SARAH
Line!

STAGE MANAGER
Line.

SARAH
What?

STAGE MANAGER
Yes, I'm afraid "line" and "what" is pretty much all you get to say from now on. Tell *that* to your agent.

SARAH
What?

STAGE MANAGER
Your agent.

Pause.

SARAH
...Line?

STAGE MANAGER
What again.

SARAH
What, again?

STAGE MANAGER
Exactly.

Pause.

SARAH
Line?

STAGE MANAGER
I've had enough. Script meeting! Script meeting!

At this point the rest of the cast enters except for GOSPER, STOPPARD, IONESCO AND BECKETT. In a smaller troupe where most actors play multiple roles some of the following may be cut. The spirit of it is that each actor has some objections to the script regarding their own character(s). The STAGE MANAGER generally defends the script as written and other actors also play devil's advocate. I encourage a bit of ad libbing in this scene. I mean more so than usual. The meeting gets rowdier and rowdier until it is pretty much just rhubarb at the point where GOSPER enters.

STAGE MANAGER

(to SARAH:) You have to read the stage directions.

SARAH

(Shrugs)

I don't get them.

JUDGE CLACKER

Smush? What's with "smush"?

STAGE MANAGER

It's just nonsense. Filler. Like forsooth.

FITZCLOUGH

What happened to me? What about *my* witnesses?

WOLFF

We only had lunch.

HINES

What about me? That was weak.

FITZCLOUGH

Solid death sonny.

HINES

Thank you.

STAGE MANAGER

You're Gosper's patsy.

BAILIFF

Why wouldn't I have my puffer on me?

JUDGE CLACKER

Why should you. Does it matter?

TAXI DRIVER

I'm asthmatic and I always carry mine.

MINISTER

Pinot Grigio is a nice wine.

STAGE MANAGER

So?

MINISTER

That whole scene needs work anyway.

SHOUND

The newshound could have had more stage time.

STAGE MANAGER

Shound is a red herring.

SHOUND

How dare you.

WOO

The Doctor Who bit is tedious.

JUDGE CLACKER

The whole thing is.

RING GIRL

Well *I* like it.

SARAH

You would.

RING GIRL

Cow.

STAGE MANAGER

That's enough, you two.

NERD 1

What happened to our costumes?

NERD 2

They were cool.

TAXI DRIVER

We blew the budget on the boat.

NERD 3

Rowboat, robot. That's a fail.

NERD 1

Failboat. Couldn't afford a sailboat.

NERD 2

That's funny. Could we put that in?

STAGE MANAGER

No.

NERD 2

Lame.

SARAH

What about "nerf gun" and "earth gun" would that work?

STAGE MANAGER

No.

FITZCLOUGH

What if I was Rumpole of the Bailey?

WOLFF

I thought I could be that D.A. off Laura Norder.

BAILIFF

The first one had some sexy bits. Could we have more sexy bits?

STAGE MANAGER

SARAH

No!

JUDGE CLACKER

(muttering)

Smush is terrible.

RING GIRL

I want more lines.

HINES

Can we get doughnuts?

MINISTER

That mind meld thing is a loose end.

SHOUND

Red herring, am I? Well I never.

FITZCLOUGH

Nail file, that's my best line.

WOLFF

Oldest one in the book.

FITZCLOUGH

Yours are so fresh.

RING GIRL

At least you get some.

SARAH

We all know you got some.

RING GIRL

Cow.

HINES

Can we cut the bit with the jogger?

JOGGER

Can we have more about the jogger?

HINES

And those doting old aunties.

RING GIRL

Maybe that's the auntydote.

(But by this stage rhubarb reigns supreme)

(CONTINUED)

Auntydote! Hey! That's not fair!
(Nobody pays attention)
That's my big joke! Auntydote! AUNTYDOTE!

Enter GOSPER.

GOSPER
ENOUGH!

Everyone freezes. GOSPER strides to center stage, followed by IONESCO, BECKETT and STOPPARD in that order. The latter three stand close together throughout, and wear signs around their necks bearing their names.

GOSPER
(In a justifying tone:) It's coming along.

IONESCO
It's weak.

BECKETT
It's indifferent.

STOPPARD
It's derivative.

GOSPER
(surprised) Well I knew *that*. That's Stoppard 101!

STOPPARD
True, but spurious.

IONESCO
You give your actors too much free rein. There is a saying in Romania: "an ass with free rein does not follow a script very well."

BECKETT
Romanian sayings are the worst.

GOSPER
I don't encourage ad-libbing.

IONESCO
I don't mean that. Attacking the fourth wall is good, but when the cast forget that they are only actors, well, the game is over.

BECKETT
I still say you went too far with the fourth wall. There is a saying in France: "excuse my French".

GOSPER
Qua qua qua?

BECKETT

Yes alright. You should sally around the fourth wall without breaching it. When Gielgud played Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*, which I wrote without any help from me...

GOSPER

Gielgud, Gielgud. The deader you get, the better he was.

BECKETT

Being dead makes everything better. You'll see.

STOPPARD

That's terrible! Being alive is what makes life worth living!

BECKETT

(shrugs)

Depends on the liver. And the prostate of course. Which reminds me. You have too many women playing male parts. It's just wrong.

GOSPER

I don't have any.

BECKETT

What about that judge? Was that a man?

GOSPER

It's just unlucky that I'm even here, helping out. I'm not involved in casting or directing this thing. I only wrote the thing.

IONESCO

If you can call it that.

GOSPER

(pauses)

A thing.

IONESCO

Yes! It is barely a thing. Do you know what would make it more of a thing?

GOSPER

What?

IONESCO

More rhinoceroses. Now that would be something.

STOPPARD

All your plays have rhinos in them.

IONESCO

No they don't.

(CONTINUED)

STOPPARD

Well all the ones I've read did.

IONESCO

There was one.

STOPPARD

That was the one then.

BECKETT

(to GOSPER) You aren't making much of a point with it.

IONESCO

What I was getting at before is that the actors should act it completely naturally while the world around them devolves into absurdity.

BECKETT

That's right. Having them just go mad is a real cop-out.

STOPPARD

I thought that was funny. Smush! The psychotic judge.

BECKETT

I know who you meant.

IONESCO

That was the worst of it. You had it entirely backwards.

BECKETT

Yes. The acting became absurd while the world around was completely rational.

STOPPARD

Oh please. A giant nerf gun?

BECKETT

Well how would it have improved the scene, to have a real gun?

STOPPARD

I helped out on that scene.

IONESCO

You want to write yourself into everything, Kaufman.

STOPPARD

I never have done that.

BECKETT

I'm not sure he's really an absurdist. His works don't really hit that mark. You could have got someone else, Genet maybe.

IONESCO

Yes, or Albee.

GOSPER

I didn't think you would be seen dead on the same page as Albee.

IONESCO

Yes, you're right. Shakespeare then.

STOPPARD

Shakespeare? His plays aren't absurd!

IONESCO

Absurder than yours.

STOPPARD

I never even claimed to be an absurdist.

BECKETT

Not unjustly. Yours are just silly and self-indulgent. Not really Absurd.

STOPPARD

Absurd is just a label a critic put on you. I don't care if I'm lumped in with that.

BECKETT

You should care. It is the finest label a fashionable absurdist can wear!

IONESCO

He isn't even dead.

STOPPARD

You think you can raise the ridiculous to the sublime.

IONESCO

Can and do.

STOPPARD

Did and dead.

BECKETT

He's got you there, Ian.

IONESCO

Stop calling me Ian. It's Mr. Esco to you, Beckett.

GOSPER

Look you two, can you work in?

BECKETT

Hmmph.

GOSPER

It's supposed to be you two against me and Stoppard here.

IONESCO

Alright alright.

GOSPER

You three are my heroes, you know. Can you help me improve it?

STOPPARD

Not possible. It is perfect.

BECKETT

Give it a rest, Ring Girl.

STOPPARD

You are.

BECKETT

Too many characters. What, twenty? Too many.

GOSPER

Okay. Maybe I'll cut one of the playwrights.

BECKETT

No.

IONESCO

(pointing left, right and then stage rear)

I think you should have a door here, here and a window there.

GOSPER

Yes, yes, I see.

(pause)

I don't see. Why?

IONESCO

Well you might have a front door for the mailman to knock at.

GOSPER

There's no mailman.

BECKETT

You just let them come and go as they please. You should make them knock.

STOPPARD

Yes, it *is* more dramatic.

GOSPER

Alright, I'll see about a door. What else?

IONESCO

From the other door might extend a giant pair of constantly growing legs belonging to the dead possibly ex-lover of the woman.

GOSPER

What woman?

IONESCO

Er...

GOSPER

This sounds suspiciously detailed.

BECKETT

Of course, it's from Amedee.

GOSPER

What?

IONESCO

Yes! To be precise, Amedee is the play of mine that you should copy more.

GOSPER

I'm not trying to copy anything!

BECKETT

Yet you manage to plagiarise everything.

GOSPER

That would be quite an accomplishment. In fact, given the time constraints, I've had to cherry pick.

STOPPARD

You had most of my catalogue. No wonder you had me sue you in the first one.

GOSPER

That's not the point. Cherrypicking is just fair use, it's just a conversation. Look, I didn't mean to copy or steal anything. It just happened that way. I never set out to satirise, to attack, infuriate, confuse, offend or threaten anyone. It just slipped out. I didn't want to spark riots in the stalls, a brawl, get people talking or kissing or killing. Truth is I don't care what they do, what they think. They might call me a genius, a lunatic or a pompous baboon for all I care! Clap, cheer, boo, throw tomatoes, it's all the same to me. If they are entertained, have a chuckle, leave happy, well good for them. But am I responsible for their mental state?

IONESCO

Yes you are.

BECKETT

Completely.

STOPPARD

I have to agree.

GOSPER

You're all wrong! It's just a coincidence if their emotional states tally with the action onstage. There's no magic to it, no trickery. It's not highlighting the absurdity of this or the existential outrage of the other. It's not about stealing the best jokes, it just happens that ripping someone off blind is the sincerest form of flattery. But even that is a happy accident. It's theater of the absurd! It isn't about anything!

IONESCO

I get it. I get it.

GOSPER

Or to put it another way, it *is* about anything.

IONESCO

I don't get it.

GOSPER

There's nothing to get! *That's* the only point. That there's no point. Be confused. Be amused. Be offended. Be yourself. Be something else. Be, or don't be, that is the answer.

STOPPARD

Good one.

GOSPER

But there's no question! I know, I'll go see a play. *That* will solve all my problems. Happy, happy. Chance. Fluke. Not my problem.

STOPPARD

They might ask for their money back.

GOSPER

Why? They paid to get in here, to escape from reality, from the unbearable... liposuction of being... the harsh concrete of... meaning. Its constant rubbing against their soles. Scratching at their awareness, a scratch they can't itch, a ball they can't bust, like a housing bubble that just won't pop! A drag, a draw, a drain, a sink, a sloth, a screw. Twisting, screwing them back into the dust! Giving them hope? What a scam! Make them laugh? Why try? They'll laugh when they are good and ready. They'll come if there's cake, an intermission. They'll waste their time, this way or that. Waiting for Gosper, Godot or God, to be cheered up,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GOSPER (cont'd)

enlightened or depressed. No! No! They never saw it, they'll never see it. They'll go home and chop their wood, carry their water, never seeing it, never knowing it. The strewth! Cold hard facts! Honesty, integrity; absolutes like that have no place here on this absurd stage. I can't help them. I won't help them. All I wanted. Yes! All I ever wanted. And I got it, I got what I wanted before any of this. No, it was more than time, just something to do on the bus on the way to work. I did it, I had it, right in the palm of my hand. They'll judge, they'll scoff, go home to their piles of wotwots, flick on the tube and sink back into nirvana, into ignorance, into bliss. I got what I wanted. I wanted... a day in the sun? That was a fluke, too. No, it was simple. You know? A play. That's all. I just wanted to write a play... a play alright? A play! Do you see?

(to audience)

See? This play! You saw it. You can't unsee it. Right there in black and white. Now you get it. If you can ever get it you can get it now. That's all, all you get. Show's over, go home. The play's the thing! That's all! That's all there is! And you, you are all in it. Your lines are as surreal as ours, and then some. You lot are trapped in my vortex along with them. In my play! *My play!*

(He sinks to his knees and shakes his fist at the heavens)

My playyyyyyyyyyyyyy!

Curtain.